

YOUTH, PEDAGOGY, & LOVE: A CRITICAL PRAXIS OF THE BODY

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Youth are unable to vote, are denied basic civic liberties, and face a world of increasing poverty and unemployment and diminished social opportunities to make their voices heard as they witness a growing culture of violence, with its assault on public life, deteriorating cities, and a seeming indifference towards civil rights.
Henry Giroux

Estranged labor...estranges humanity from its own body, as it does the external, natural world, as it does...[our] mental existence...[our] human existence.
Karl Marx

The human body constitutes primacy in all material relationships and this seems most clearly evident in the lives of youth. Yet the materiality of the youth bodies is often subjected to a politics of erasure within public schools, where all notions of teaching and learning are reduced to mere abstractions. Often in traditional forms of education there is an aggressive attempt to engage the mind as an independent agent, absent of both individual and collective emotions, sensations, yearnings, fears and joys. Yet, it is the body that provides the medium for our existence as subjects of history and politically empowered agents of change. But, as Peter McLaren (1999) reminds us, “bodies are also the primary means by which capitalism does its job” (p. xiii). We are molded and shaped by the structures, policies and practices of domination and

exclusion that violently insert our bodies into the alienating morass of an intensified global division of labor.

In *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body*, Sherry Shapiro (1999) contends that “any approach committed to human liberation must seriously address the body as a site for both oppression and liberation” (p.18). Yet, seldom is the significance and place of the body made central to discussions of emancipatory pedagogy. As a consequence, educational efforts to reinvent the social and material conditions within classrooms and communities do not closely consider the significance of the body in the process of teaching and learning. That is, unless the discussion turns to the policing of youth or “classroom management”—a convenient euphemism for both the covert and overt control of youth’s corporeality. Meanwhile, many classrooms and community settings exist as arenas where knowledge is objectified and abstracted from its concrete reality. Youth are then expected to acquiesce to an alienating function, which artificially severs their body from its role in the construction of knowledge and connection to the world. Hence, the production of knowledge in schools, for example, is neither engaged nor presented as a historical and collective process, occurring within the flesh and all its sensual capacities for experiencing and responding to the world.

YOUTH AS INTEGRAL HUMAN BEINGS¹

The notion of engaging youth as embodied and integral human beings has received limited attention. Instead psychosocial discussions tend to over-emphasize the role of subjectivity or over-psychologized notions of the self or self-esteem, at the expense of critical development and collective consciousness. The limitations of this approach are tied to the manner in which the “self” is objectified and reified by those working with youth. There is no sense that the “self” that they perceive within the culturally irrelevant and boring context of a classroom, is the same “self” that functions in the more meaningful milieu of the home and the community. My past work as both a therapist and an educator blatantly

exposes the misguided assessment of youth by schools that are hell-bent on diagnosing the malaise of youth as an individual problem. What is denied here is that the real problem is inextricably tied to the structural conditions and relationships of public schooling, which function to subordinate the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual faculties of youth bodies.

This reticence to engage the body can also be tied to historical tendencies to ignore a material analysis of schooling and the larger societal structures that shape public school life. This inadvertently sidelines affective and relational needs of the body that must endure, resist, and struggle to become free from the ideological and corporal entanglements that domesticate youth.

As educators and cultural workers we cannot deny that the body is enormously significant to the development of youth' critical capacities. Yet, often missing in discussions of critical praxis is a more complex understanding of our humanity, in which the body is central to critical formation. Paulo Freire, particularly in his later works, attested firmly to this significance of the body in the act of knowing. "I know with my entire body, with feelings, with passion and also with reason" (1995, p.30). "It is my entire body that socially knows. I cannot, in the name of exactness and rigor, negate my body, my emotions and my feelings" (1993, p.105). This is, in fact, what is asked of youth every day.

Unfortunately, however, the rubrics of traditional pedagogy assume that teaching and learning are solely cognitive acts. As such, educators and cultural workers need not concern themselves with the affective responses of youth, unless they are deemed as "inappropriate," at which time the psychologist or social worker is summoned to evaluate the "problem" youth. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that learning, as well as teaching, can be very exciting, painful, frustrating, and joyful. Freire (1998) often referred to these very human responses when he considered the process of studying. "Studying is a demanding

occupation, in the process of which we will encounter pain, pleasure, victory, defeat, doubt and happiness" (p.78) —all, affective and physical responses of the body. An important connection should also be made here to the arduous process that youth undergo in the development of critical consciousness.

Thus, to become *full subjects of history* requires educators and cultural workers to grapple with the fact that intellect is but one aspect of our humanity that evolves from the body's collective interactions with the world. And as such, this requires our willingness to engage with youth' bodies more substantively, in our efforts to forge a revolutionary practice of education. It is not enough then to teach and learn solely as an abstract cognitive process, where the analysis of words and texts are considered paramount to the construction of knowledge. Such an educational process of estrangement functions to alienate youth from "nature...the inorganic body of humanity" (Marx 1844), as well as from their own bodies and that of others. Hence, educators and cultural workers must create the conditions for youth to labor in the flesh, investing themselves materially, within their praxis and their struggle to reinvent the world. This is vital to a critical pedagogy of the body, given that:

[W]e learn things about the world by acting and changing the world around us. It is [through] this process of change, of transforming the material world from which we emerged, [where] creation of the cultural and historical world takes place. This transformation of the world [is] done by us while it makes and remakes us...(Freire 1993, p.108).

TEACHING IN THE FLESH

In our efforts to understand the process of teaching, learning has to be acknowledged as human labor that takes place within our bodies, as we strive to make sense of the material conditions and social relations of power that shape our particular histories. Only through such an approach

can educators and cultural workers begin to build an emancipatory practice of education where youth are not expected to confront themselves, and one another, as strangers, but rather as fully embodied human beings, from the moment they enter the classroom or other community settings. This is to say that a critical praxis of the body seeks to contend in the flesh with the embodied histories and knowledge of the disenfranchised, as well as the social and material forces that shape the conditions in which we teach and learn. As such, educators and cultural workers must render legitimate the manner in which youth read their world, without denying their own visceral responses—whether these be fear, confusion, doubt or anger. Instead, educators and cultural workers can create meaningful opportunities to grapple with the tensions that differences in worldview create. In this way, the bodies of youth remain central to the construction of knowledge and the development of critical consciousness.

Again, Freire (1993) speaks to the undeniable centrality of the body in the act of knowing:

The importance of the body is indisputable; the body moves, acts, remembers, the struggle for its liberation; the body in sum, desires, points out, announces, protests, curves itself, rises, designs and remakes the world...and its importance has to do with a certain sensualism...contained by the body, even in connection with cognitive ability...its absurd to separate the rigorous acts of knowing the world from the [body's] passionate ability to know (p.87)

But it is exactly this sensualism with its revolutionary potential to nurture self-determination and the empowerment of youth as both individuals and social beings that is systematically stripped away from the educational process of public schools and community programs. Conservative ideologies of social control historically linked to Puritanical notions of the body as evil, sensual pleasure as sinful, and passions as

corrupting to the sanctity of the spirit continue to be reflected in the rule-based pedagogical policies and practices of schooling today. The sensuality of the body is discouraged in schools through the prominent practice of containing and immobilizing youth bodies within hard chairs and desks that contain and restrict their contact with each other and the environment around them.

In the classical tradition, the sensual body is quickly subordinated to the mind, while ideas are privileged over the senses (Seidel, 1964). As a consequence, youth, who come from working class or cultural communities where the senses and the body are given greater primacy in the act of knowing and being, are often coerced into sacrificing their knowledge of the body's sensuality, creativity and vitality, in favor of an atomized, deadened, and analytical logic of existence. This may help to explain the higher tendency for mainstream educators in low-income communities to diagnose African American boys and Chicano boys as suffering from attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Root & Resnick, 2003).

Sexuality is also strongly repressed and denied within the four walls of the classroom, despite the fact that it is an ever-present human phenomenon. This is the case even at puberty, when youth's bodies are particularly sensitive to often heightened and confusing sensations. Many educators and cultural workers, who are not particularly comfortable with their own bodies, fail to critically engage questions of sexuality, beyond the often repeated cliché of "raging hormones" to refer to teenage sexuality. Consequently, youth are not only pedagogically abandoned, but also left at the mercy of the media and corporate pirates² that very deliberately and systematically prey upon the field of powerful bodily sensations, emotions and stirrings of youth.

In the slick world of advertising, teenage bodies are sought after for the exchange value they generate in marketing an adolescent sexuality that offers a marginal exoticism and ample pleasures for the largely male

consumer. Commodification reifies and fixates the complexity of youth and the range of possible identities they might assume while simultaneously exploiting them as fodder for the logic of the market (Giroux, 1998).

Frightened by their ambivalence and fear of youth' bodies, public schooling and even community policies and practices coerce educators and cultural workers into silence, rigidly limiting any discussion of one of the most significant aspects of our humanity. The message is clear; everyone, especially youth, are expected to check their sexuality (along with all other aspects of their lived histories) at the door prior to entering. This is so despite the difficulties and hardships that such silence creates for many youth in this country. Such silence results in the isolation and increasing rates of suicide among many gay and lesbian youth; that suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth; and that almost ten percent of high school students say that they have made a suicide attempt in the past.³ There is no question that schools, much like churches, act as moral agents that repress the truth of youth lives and closely monitor the participation of their bodies.

Missing is both the school and community's willingness to bring together the sexuality and intellectuality of youth in the process of their social and academic formation. This results in the severing of the body's desires and sensations from the construction of knowledge and consciousness, which interferes dramatically with youth' capacity to know themselves, one another, and their world. Similarly, such practices negatively impact youth knowledge of "the other," rendering them alienated and estranged to any human suffering that exists outside of the particular and limited scope of their identities, whether linked to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or skin-color (see Soelle 1975; Shapiro 1999).

Hence, it should be no surprise to learn that domesticating educational and community policies and practices, which abstract, fragment and decontextualize theories of teaching and learning, seldom

function in the interest of oppressed populations. Instead, youth are objectified, alienated and domesticated into passive roles that not only debilitate, but also sabotage their capacity for social agency. In so doing, the existing physical needs of youth are generally ignored or rendered insignificant, in an overriding effort to obtain their obedience and conformity to the oppressive policies and practices of public schooling and community programming.

Yet in spite of major institutional efforts to control the body's desires, pleasures and mobility, youth seldom surrender their bodies completely or readily acquiesce to authoritarian practices—practices which in themselves provide the impetus for resistance, especially in those youth whose dynamic histories are excluded within mainstream life (Shapiro, 1999). Instead, many poor, working class, African American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Native American, Asian American, Muslim, and immigrant youth engage in the construction of their own cultural forms of resistance that may or may not always function in their best interest. And more often than not, these expressions of youth resistance are enacted through their body—be it with their manner of dress, particular hairstyles, ways of posturing and walking, manner of speaking, or the piercing and tattooing of the body.

However, these acts represent not only forms of resistance but also alternative ways of knowing and being in the world, generally perceived by officials as both transgressive and disruptive to the social order of schools or communities. Such views of youth are exacerbated by what Henry Giroux (1998) contends is a “new form of representational politics [that] has emerged in media culture fueled by degrading visual depictions of youth as criminal, sexually decadent, drug crazed, and illiterate. In short, youth are viewed as a growing threat to the public order.” This is particularly evident in places like California where there has been a push to create laws that criminalize youth through harsh punitive punishment as adults, rather than contend with the social

conditions that negatively impact their lives. *The Center on Criminal and Juvenile Justice* report that:

A recent survey found that most adults believe that youth under the age of 18 account for a disproportionate amount of serious and violent crime in comparison to adults. The pervasive assumption that today's youths are more violent than past generations is leading to the gradual abandonment of a separate juvenile justice system. Instead, public policy efforts are underway to reduce or eliminate special distinctions for youths suspected of criminal behavior. These efforts are manifested in the growing number of states seeking to facilitate adult court transfers for youths who commit various categories of person and property crimes. In the past 6 years, 43 states have instituted legislation facilitating the transfer of youths to adult court.⁴

Seldom is the growing propensity to criminalize youth from low-income communities and punish them as adults linked to their problematic location in the process of capitalist accumulation. Hence, it should not be surprising that, as the gap between the rich and the poor increases, both the unemployment and incarceration of working class and racialized youth in the U.S. is on the increase, despite the fact that youth crime statistics have been on the decrease. According to the California's Task Force to Review Juvenile Crime and the Juvenile Justice Response "Not only were juvenile arrest rates lower in the late 1990s than at any time in the previous 25 years, those juveniles who were arrested were being charged with less serious offenses."⁵

Educators and cultural workers, whose bodies are similarly restricted, alienated and domesticated by their school districts, are under enormous pressure to follow strict district policies and procedures for classroom conduct. In informal interviews with male high school teachers, they report significant harassment from public school administrators if they touch students in any way. Teachers are expected

to remain distant and impersonal in their physical conduct with their students. Hugs or pats, whether emotionally comforting or academically affirming are frowned upon by school administrators.

What cannot be denied, of course, is that “a small but dangerous contingent of sexual predators lurks among the dedicated teachers on our nation’s classrooms.”⁶ What is even more disconcerting is the manner in which the structure of public schooling enables repeat offenders to continue teaching or quietly move to other districts, through its lack of public acknowledgement of the problem, along with its unwillingness to grapple openly with issues of sexuality among youth. The silence and repression of students’ experiences with teachers, as well as the disrespect so commonly afforded them when they attempt to air stories of disruption are also culprits in this tragedy.

Consequently, youth are left at the mercy of sexual predators in schools, while officials pussyfoot around the issues, rather than creating the conditions for both educators and youth to develop a critical understanding of sexuality and its healthy role in their lives. To accomplish this we must contend with the manner in which:

Our society retards the emotional growth of kids so their physical and psychological maturities do not coincide. Instead of scrambling explicit programming on cable and the New, blocking the distribution of condoms in school, and in every way making it difficult for kids to act responsibly, we should give them charge of their bodies. In the nationwide discussion about protecting kids from the sickos who prey on them, the kids are missing. And by refusing kids our trust, we encourage them to refuse us theirs.⁷

The problem of domesticated bodies is also at work in the dispensing of pre-packaged curricula, instead of employing more creative and critical approaches, grounded in the actual needs of youth. Given the impact of disembodied practices, educators and cultural workers

generally experience an uphill battle in meeting the districts' standardized mandates, which systematically extricate youth' bodies from their learning. No where is this more apparent than in low-income, segregated schools across the nation where teaching-to-the-test has become the curricula of choice.

As a consequence, many educators and cultural workers, consciously or unconsciously, reproduce a variety of authoritarian practices—in the name of classroom or group management—in efforts to maintain physical control of youth. Those who struggle in these repressive contexts to implement more liberating strategies are often forced to become masters of deception—saying what the principal or center director wishes to hear, while doing behind closed doors what they believe is in concert with a more democratic vision of youth education and intervention. Unfortunately, having to shoulder the hidden physical stress of such duplicity can drive some of the most effective educators and cultural workers away from their chosen vocation, irrespective of their political commitment. The experience of alienation that this engenders often becomes intolerable. While others, who begin to feel defeated, in frustration begin to adopt more authoritarian approaches to manipulate and coerce *cooperation*, while justifying the means in the name of helping youth succeed socially, academically, or as a good workers.

What cannot be overlook here is the manner in which authoritarian practices are designed not only to “blindfold youth and lead them to a domesticated future” (Freire, 1970, p.79), but also to alienate and estrange educators and cultural workers from their labor, as well. Concerned with the need to restore greater freedom, joy and creativity in their pedagogy, Freire (1998) urged educators and cultural workers to:

critically reject their domesticating role; in so doing, they affirm themselves ...as educators and cultural workers by demythologizing the authoritarianism of teaching packages [or

prescribed youth programs] and their administration in the intimacy of their world, which is also the world of [the youth with whom they labor]. In classrooms, with the doors closed, it is difficult to have the world unveiled (p.9).

A critical praxis of the body is also salient to rethinking university education, where there seems to be little pedagogical tolerance for the emotional needs of adult learners. “Somewhere in the intellectual history of the West there developed the wrongheaded idea that mind and heart are antagonists, that scholarship must be divested of emotion, that spiritual journeys must avoid intellectual concerns” (Lifton, 1990, 29). This tradition sets an expectation, for example, that professors and students compartmentalize themselves within the classroom, without any serious concern for the manner in which the very essence of university education is often tied to major moments of life transitions. That is to say that it is a time when many young people are being asked to make major commitments and material investments related to the direction of their very uncertain futures. Simultaneously, students are expected to engage their studies and research as objective, impartial observers, even when the object of their study is intimately linked to conditions of human suffering.

Freire (1993) argues that traditional academic expectations of the university affirm “that feelings corrupt research and its findings; [and affirm] the fear of intuition, the categorical negation of emotion and passion, the belief in technicism [which] all ends convincing many that, the more neutral we are in our actions, the more objective and efficient we will be” (p.106). Hence, college youth are slowly but surely socialized to labor as uncritical, descriptive, “neutral” scholars, dispassionate and removed from their intellectual constructions of the world. This results in scholarship conceived through a deeply alienated way of knowing where “values are restricted to a scientific definition” and knowledge becomes

the property of something separated from human emotions, feeling, and connection” (Shapiro, 1999, 40).

The sad and unfortunate consequence here is that such knowledge seldom leads youth to grapple with moral and political questions that might fundamentally challenge the social and material relations that sustain human suffering, in the first place. Hence, as Shapiro (1999) argues, “abstraction and exclusion break down relational understanding and bleed history dry, leaving the scars of separation” (39).

FORGING A CRITICAL PRAXIS OF THE BODY

As our consciousness becomes more and more abstracted, we become more and more detached from our bodies. One could say that a hidden function of public schooling is, indeed, to initiate and incorporate poor, working class, and youth of color into social and material conditions of labor that normalize their alienation and detachment from the body. This function is absolutely necessary for social control and the extraction of surplus labor, given that the body is the medium through which we wage political struggle and through which we transform our historical conditions as individuals and social beings.

Hence, the perception of youth as integral human beings is paramount to both questions of ethics and the development of critical consciousness. All aspects of our humanity, with their particular pedagogical needs, are present and active at all times—that is to say, that all aspects of our humanity are integral to the process of teaching and learning. Hence, to perceive youth (or even oneself) in terms of only the mind and only one way of knowing can translate into an objectifying and debilitating experience for youth, despite the intellectual and cultural strengths they might possess.

Hence, youth must be acknowledged as entering any context as whole persons and should be respected and treated as such. The degree

to which this is possible, however, is directly linked to how willing and able educators and cultural workers are to be fully present, as well as their capacity to enter into intimate and meaningful relationships with youth, parents, and the communities in which educators work.

For educators and cultural workers who aspire to a critical praxis of the body, the willingness to enter into relationships with youth that are respectfully personal and intimate is paramount. Such a horizontal view goes hand in hand with obliterating the debilitating myth that an impersonal and emotionally distant approach to engaging youth is more “professional or appropriate.” Similarly, the notion of being “professional” is also often tied to the belief that our relationships with youth in schools are not really part of the “real world.”

[Yet] what we do in the classroom is not an isolated moment separate from the “real world.” It is entirely connected to the real world and it the real world, which places both, powers and limits on any critical course. Because the world is in the classroom, whatever transformation we provoke has a conditioning effect outside our small space. But the outside has a conditioning effect on the space also, interfering with our ability to build a critical culture separate from the dominant mass culture (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.26)

For this reason, enacting a critical praxis of the body within the classroom or community work demands that educators and cultural workers be cognizant of the social, political, and economic conditions that shape their own lives and the lives of the youth with whom they work. In brief, these principles can be described as follows:

- Educators and cultural workers must engage the emotional and physical responses and experiences of youth, within the process of teaching and learning. These responses and experiences are engaged as meaningful indicators of strengths and

limitations that youth face in the process of their political formation and social consciousness.

- Knowledge is must be understood as a historical and collective process, emanating from the body's relationship to the world. Moreover, the body is primary in the construction of knowledge and development of moral political thought.
- The mind and its cognitive capacities must be understood as only one medium for the construction of knowledge. Hence, youth are seen as integral human beings, whose minds, bodies, hearts and spirits are all implicated in the process of teaching and learning. Moreover, pedagogical practices that integrate their bodies must reach youth in their innermost emotional and psychic centers, if we are committed to their emancipation. For example, practices of cultural expressions such as poetry, music, dance and theatre seem to have a powerful impact on the development of critical consciousness.
- The knowledge derived from the body's collective interactions with the world must constitute a significant dimension of a critical educational praxis. Classroom and community relationships, materials, and activities must reflect this knowledge with respect and cultural accuracy.
- Cultural practices ties to teaching and learning must be understood as a process of human labor that is intricately tied to the material conditions and social relations of power that shape classroom life. Hence the question of power and the uses of authority must be interrogated consistently.
- Knowledge construction is a collective, historical phenomenon which occurs continuously both in and outside of the school environment. To privilege school knowledge and

ignore the knowledge of their lived experience limits the capacities of youth to participate in the construction of knowledge and blocks confidence in their cultural knowledge and social agency.

- Educators and cultural workers must be committed to creating meaningful interactions and activities within classrooms and communities that support youth to grapple honestly with the tensions of differences in worldview, including racism, sexism, homophobia, class inequalities, and other forms of oppression which are at work in all communities.

- The knowledge that educators and cultural workers have of their own bodies, including their sexuality, is an important aspect to their ability to interact effectively and to competently educate diverse youth populations. Moreover one of the best ways to prevent sexual exploitation of youth is tied to self-knowledge of the adults who work with them. Which requires a healthy understanding of sexuality and the manner in which sexual exploitation and violence is often linked directly to unexamined frustrations, anxieties, rage, and insecurities. This also necessitates the breaking of silence so often associated with issues related to sexuality within schools.

- We need to keep in mind that acts of youth resistance tied to their bodies can signal meaningful alternative ways of knowing and relating to the world. Opportunities must be created for youth to reflect, affirm and challenge the meaning of these acts of resistance in their lives.

- Spaces must be created within classrooms and communities that permit youth to shape and control the actual conditions in which they exist. This includes the definition and execution of knowledge construction, aesthetics, politics, fashion,

voice, and participation in such a way that they are free to mediate and negotiate the manner in which social, political and economic power impact their daily lives.

- Decolonizing the body from educational and social constraints that limit and repress the development of social agency is a major intent within a critical praxis of the body. Educators and cultural workers must work together with youth to challenge those conditions of their labor within schools and communities that render youth passive and domesticate their dreams.

LOVE AS EMANCIPTORY PRAXIS

Forging an emancipatory praxis, then, is about bringing us all back home to our bodies in a world where it seems that every aspect of our daily life—birth, death, marriage, family, school, work, leisure, parenthood, spirituality, and even entertainment—is monitored and controlled.⁸ Under such a regime of power our bodies are left numb; alienated and fragmented, leaving us often defenseless and at the mercy of capital. The consequence is a deep sense of personal and collective dissatisfaction generated by a marketplace that cannot satisfy the human needs of the body—needs that can only be met through relationships that break the alienation and isolation so prevalent in our lives today (Brosio, 1994). Through integrating principles that sustain a critical praxis of the body, educators and cultural workers in concert with youth can create a political, cultural, and intellectual space in which such relationships can be established and nourished within the process of teaching and learning.

As such, it is absolutely imperative that in constructing principles for a critical praxis, we acknowledge that the origin of emancipatory possibility and human solidarity resides squarely in the body (Eagleton (2003). For it is through the collective interactions of integral bodies within the classroom that the possibility of critical moral thought can be

awakened. And it is such moral thought that places our collective bodies back into history and into the political discourse. Moreover, it is the absence of a truly democratic moral language and practice of the body that stifles our capacity for social struggle today. For example, many educators and cultural workers across the country bemoan, justifiably so, the conditions created by high-stakes testing and other accountability measures that negatively impact the lives of youth, as well as educators and cultural workers who work with them. Yet, there has been a failure among educators to communicate a clear and coherent emancipatory moral message to challenge the shallow moralism of the current administration's educational panacea—No Child Left Behind.⁹ In response, there are those that would argue that this is a direct result of educators and cultural workers' alienated complicity with the structure of educational inequality and the contradictions inherent in their lack of politics, within a highly charged political arena.

However, what I argue here is that life within schools and society requires the development of a moral political language that can safeguard the dignity and integrity of all human differences, intrinsic to a pluralistic nation. This is impossible to achieve without an educational praxis anchored to the needs of the body. For without a critical praxis of the body to enact the principles we embrace, any notions of a democratic education or democratic society become meaningless. Genuine democracy requires, then, the body's interaction with the social and material world in ways that nurture meaningful and transformative participation. It must exist as a practice in which human beings interact individually and collectively as equally empowered subjects.

Since we produce our lives collectively, any critical praxis of the body must engage oppression as "the starting point for the explanation of human history. This then becomes a materialist liberation, where explanations cannot be limited to any one oppression, or leave untouched any part of reality, any domain of knowledge, any aspect of the world" (Shapiro 1999, p. 65). For all forms of social and material oppression

block, disrupt and corrupt the fluid participation of oppressed bodies within the world, reifying exclusionary human relations in the interest of economic imperatives, without regard for the destruction to bodies left behind. Nowhere is this more evident than in neoliberal practices around the world, which have intensified both poverty and the dispossession of people.

When human needs such as food, shelter, meaningful livelihood, healthcare, education and the intimacy of a community are not met, bodies are violated. Violated bodies easily gravitate to whatever can provide a quick fix to ease the pain and isolation of an alienated existence. As such, a critical pedagogy of the body must seek to create the social and material conditions that can give rise to the organic expression of our humanity through principles inherent *in teaching as an act of love* (Darder 2004; Freire 1997, 1998).

Love as an emancipatory and revolutionary principle compels us to become part of a new, decolonizing and embodied culture that cultivates human connection, intimacy, trust and honesty, from the body out into the world. "With love we affirm and are affirmed. In the sociopolitical struggle against death from hunger, disease, exploitation, war, destruction of the earth, and against hopelessness, there is a great and growing need for our capacity to become 'body-full' with love" (Shapiro 1999, p.99). Love, in this context, also means to comprehend that the moral and the material are inseparably linked. And as such, our politics must recognize love as an essential ingredient of a just society. Love as a political principle motivates the struggle to create mutually life-enhancing opportunities for all people. It is a love that is grounded in the mutuality and interdependence of our human existence. This is a love nurtured by the act of relationship itself. It cultivates relationships across our differences, without undue fear. Such an emancipatory love allows us to realize our nature, in a way that allows others to do so as well. Inherent in such a love is the understanding that we are never at liberty to be violent, authoritarian, or exploitive (Eagleton 2003).

In accordance, Freire repeatedly argued that ethics is a significant place of departure, for both our private and public lives.¹⁰ Here, ethics constitutes a political question, which in the final analysis is also a moral one. For without morality our politics becomes an instrument of oppression. But morality here should not be confused with moralism. Eagleton (2003) argues that to be moral entails exploring the texture and quality of our sensations, ideas and practices—a process that we cannot surely accomplish by abstracting youth and ourselves from our social surroundings, from our cultures, or from our histories of survival. This requires we struggle to bring together the moral and political, the particular and universal, acknowledging that nothing can survive in isolation.

Moreover, it is through the collective struggle waged in our bodies that consciousness is born. The poet Muriel Rukeyser wrote “a true consciousness is the confession to ourselves of our feelings; a false consciousness disowns them” (p49). Ultimately, it is this disowning that leads to the corruption of the mind and the body. Such disowning is the outcome of an overabundance of undermining representations and images in schools, society, and the media that repeatedly tell poor, working-class, and racialized populations that their lives, as they are, are worthless—beckoning them in a million ways to abandon themselves daily, in the name of capital.

In these times of uncertainty, great moral courage is required to voice our dissent against public policies and practice that betray disenfranchised youth and communities, systematically rendering them disposable. To transform such conditions within classrooms and society, we need a critical pedagogy solidly committed to the body’s liberation as a sensual, thinking, knowing, and feeling subject of history. This would entail rewriting the body into our understanding of critical praxis, through calling forth the establishment of new conditions for both thinking and acting within schools and communities. Classroom

conditions that begin with the primacy of the body carry radical possibilities for reconnecting youth more deeply to their development as fully integral human beings. Most importantly, the body “is the material foundation upon which the desire for human liberation and social transformation rest (Shapiro 1999, p. 100)—thus, an essential dimension in the development of critical consciousness and the living of an ethical life.

ENDNOTES

¹ This article expands on the idea of “youth as integral beings” first presented in Chapter 3 of Darder, A. (2004). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*. Colorado: Westview.

² See the Frontline production of *Merchants of Cool* by Douglas Rushkoff, an incisive report on the creators and marketers of popular culture for teenagers.

³ See *Youth Violence—Quick Statistics* (2003) published by the **National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center**, an agency sponsored by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* and Federal partners working on youth violence.

⁴ See *Dispelling the Myth: An Analysis of Youth and Adult Crime Patterns in California over the Past 20 Years* a publication of the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice in San Francisco, California. <http://www.cjcj.org/pubs/myth/myth.html>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ See Zemel, J.E. and S. Twedt (1999). *Dirty Secrets: Why Sexually Abusive Teachers Aren't Stopped* in *The Post Gazette* <http://www.post-gazette.com/regionstate/19991101studies2.asp>

⁷ This is a direct quote from *Spin* magazine found in *Teenage Sexuality, Body Politics and the Pedagogy of Display* by Henry Giroux, which contains an excellent discussion of many of the points raised in this article.

⁸See Henri Lefebvre (1971) *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (London: The Penguin Press.

⁹ See Stan Karp's article *Equity Claims for NCLB Don't Pass the Test* in *Rethinking Schools* (Spring 2003). The article provides a great explanation about the shortcomings of the act. You can find the article and more information about Rethinking Schools online at: www.rethinkingschools.org

¹⁰See Paulo Freire writings: *Pedagogy of the City* (New York: Continuum,1993); *Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Continuum, 1995); and *Educators and cultural workers as Cultural Workers* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).

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