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Contemporary educational criticism: A critique

Books, Susan Marie, Ed.D.

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U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM: A CRITIQUE

by

Susan Books

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Approved by

David E. Purpel

Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dissertation Adviser David E. Purpel

Committee Members Mary Ellis Gibson

Mary K. Wakeman

Svi Shapiro

Lutz Mengert

7-8-92

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This dissertation explores issues in the theory and practice of contemporary educational criticism that have arisen in the wake of the breakup of the curriculum field in the 1960s and 1970s. This upheaval, I argue, reflects a broader questioning across the humanities and the social sciences that has challenged the legitimacy of critics' claims to authority and has eroded the boundaries of disciplinary critique.

The dissertation develops a critique of John Mann's model of curriculum criticism and critiques the practice of educational criticism as exemplified in works representative of the dominant strains of contemporary educational criticism: 1) the geopolitically- and culturally-focused criticism of texts such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education's A Nation at Risk and Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind, and 2) the critical pedagogy literature, which critiques the anti-egalitarianism of critics such as Bloom and the NCEE.

Conclusions are 1) that for educational critics to recognize implication in their own criticism would improve the practice across the political spectrum by highlighting the fundamentally relational and so moral nature of this work, and 2) that using Paulo Freire's thought as a metaphor for educational criticism would improve the practice by helping to shift the focus from the need to legitimate this work to the need to socialize it.

For Mom, who always helps

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INTRODUCTION

In putting pen to paper, or today, more accurately if less euphoniously, touching finger to keyboard, women writers gain access to their subjects by beginning a meditation on the meaning of the subject. The canonical example in Women's literature, is, of course, A Room of One's Own:

> The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light.

Such meditations are followed not infrequently by the woman writer's announcing the impossibility of her project:

> I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfill what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer -- to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantlepiece for ever ... I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon these two questions -- women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems.

So what does the woman writer do instead? She changes the subject, of course.

-- Jo Anne Pagano

Pagano (1992) goes on to say that what looks like changing the subject isn't necessarily that. It may be a way of showing "the tyranny of large Subjects, the tendentiousness of grand conclusions, and the presumptuousness of those who take on Subjects to draw conclusions -- nuggets of gold for our mantlepieces" (p. 107). Virginia Woolf, for example, doesn't change the subject of women and fiction so much as show how it is made.

I began this dissertation, I admit, with just such presumptuousness. I intended to assert that human suffering in the world has attained obscene proportions; that, given this reality, nothing should take precedence over the need to work as thoughtfully and diligently as possible to alleviate the misery; and that, consequently, educational critics should throw their particular energies and insights into the struggle against the persistence of unnecessary suffering. My own contribution to this effort was to have been to help define the practice of educational criticism in such a way as to discredit criticism not aligned with the struggle against such suffering.

That is what I intended to do, but it is not what I have done -- which is not to say that I have come to believe that educational criticism ought not be aligned centrally with the struggle against human suffering. On the contrary (and arguments about "the tyranny of large Subjects" notwithstanding), I believe this work should be so aligned.[1] However, the

value of delineating a concept of educational criticism or of constructing a theoretical framework that, at a definitional level, requires this no longer seems so clear to me.

Indeed, a whole host of unwieldy questions arose for me that called into question what was to have been my whole project -- questions such as these: Given that suffering is bad (a proposition on which I believe there is widespread agreement), what does this imply about the actual work of educational criticism? Ought educational critics merely announce and/or denounce the suffering apart from concerns about the persuasiveness of their announcements and denouncements? Or, ought they, either instead or also, contextualize the suffering and trace its etiology to show readers where at least they think the suffering comes from and how it relates to their lives? That is, ought the project of educational criticism be essentially explanatory? Or, ought critics self-consciously try to persuade others to engage themselves in the struggle in which, as far as they are concerned, their own work is grounded? And, if so, how is this done -- through denunciation and/or explanation or through attempts at consciousness-raising?

I also did not deal directly with these methodological questions, in part because all sorts of unwieldy emotions (frustration, anxiety, feelings of being hopelessly lost in an artificial world) welled up and got in the way.

Thrown back on myself in this way, I learned (again) that the questioner really cannot be factored out of the question. Consequently, I now believe that what I initially envisioned as a dialectic between the work of educational criticism and the persistence of unnecessary suffering should instead be seen as an interplay among the actual work of criticism, the social reality of suffering and injustice, and the critic her or himself.

This dissertation, therefore, reflects my effort to gain some understanding of issues of educational criticism and responsibility, to hold together intellectual insight and physical and emotional pain, and to come to terms with the uncomfortable realization that theoretical exploration not only can stray a long way from the flesh and blood of human suffering, but can even provide a certain escape or diversion from the pain of it all. As I simultaneously have become increasingly familiar with some fairly sophisticated theory (critical social theory, literary theory, and epistemological conundrums) and with the worsening plights of those who suffer most in this society (poor children, beaten-down women, people of color, old people with no money) I have struggled to hold together intellectual interests and moral sensibilities that have seemed at times to drift dangerously apart. Gaining some understanding of the ideological constructs that prop up systems of injustice and responding to the depths of pain and hopelessness that constrain the lives of so many people is not

necessarily the same thing. As Jonathan Kozol (1991) remarks about a class of "gifted" students discussing issues of justice, it is often true that "questions of unfairness feel more like a geometric problems than a matter of humanity or conscience" (p. 127).

Where does this leave educational criticism? Ought educational critics frame the "questions of unfairness," solve the "geometric problems," or speak to their own and their readers' consciences? My students often ask, with annoyance and even anger, why some of the educational critics whose writing they read do not "go teach in the schools themselves" -- the not-very-subtle suggestion being that those who stand on the outside and complain, however insightfully, don't help. Such a response to educational criticism can, of course, be called "resistance" and left at that. But I don't think it should be. I believe the annoyance and anger that educational criticism (especially the good criticism) sometimes provokes in students reflects a legitimate insistence that criticism should answer for or justify itself and come to terms with its function in the broader society and culture.

This question of the social function of criticism and of the social responsibility of the critic is, of course, hardly new. It is, however, a question that takes on a heightened significance as educational criticism becomes redefined as a form of social and cultural criticism -- which, I argue in Chapter 1, is what has happened, in practice if not yet in theory.

The effort to reconceptualize educational criticism takes place in the context of a sweeping intellectual ferment across the humanities and the social sciences. As disciplinary boundaries have been eroded and the social constructedness of the subjects they were supposed to contain exposed, ideas about what critics actually critique also have come under scrutiny. Looming behind such questions are, among other paradigmatic theorists, Antonio Gramsci, with his ideas about the importance of the organic intellectual, and Michel Foucault, with his thoughts about the significance of the strategic intellectual. Both constructs have influenced the development of educational theory and criticism.

I situate my own questions about educational criticism in the context of Gramsci's and Foucault's ideas about what intellectuals ought to be doing (i.e., their social function), so let me, briefly, review their thoughts about intellectual work. Gramsci's (1971) notion of the organic intellectual rests on a distinction between those intellectuals whose work is self-consciously integral to the social and political struggles of the day and those whose activity, on the surface at least, seems unrelated to such activity:

> In the first place there are the "traditional" professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relations and

> conceals an attachment to various historical class formations. Secondly, there are the "organic" intellectuals, the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong (p. 3).

Gramsci's great insight, for me, is that we all could function this way, that is, as organic intellectuals (assuming, of course, that Gramsci meant to include the women we still prefer to call "men" in his project). Intellectual work is not something reserved for the few, but rather, at some level of consciousness, is work shared by all:

> Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher," an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (p. 9).

Consequently, since all people potentially are intellectuals, "the problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists therefore in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development" (p. 9). But who is to do this critical work of elaborating the intellectual activity that already exists? Presumably those organic intellectuals who see themselves in the role of teacher -- and here, it

seems, is where Foucault takes issue with Gramsci's conceptualization of the task of the intellectual.

Foucault (1977) counterposes a notion of the strategic intellectual against that of the universal intellectual, which, he suggests, is what lies behind the idea of "an 'organic' intellectual acting as the spokesman for a global organisation" (pp. 125-26). He explains:

> For a long period, the "left" intellectual spoke and was acknowledged the right of speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice.... To be an intellectual meant something like being the consciousness/conscience of us all.... Just as the proletariat, by the necessity of its historical situation, is the bearer of the universal (but its immediate, unreflected bearer, barely conscious of itself as such), so the intellectual, through his moral, theoretical and political choice, aspires to be the bearer of this universality in its conscious, elaborated form (p. 126).

Intellectuals are no longer called upon to play the role epitomized "by the writer, the bearer of values and significations in which all can recognise themselves" (Foucault, 1977, p. 128). Rather, the scientific expert stands as the exemplar of a new intellectual function:

> The figure in which the functions and prestige of this new intellectual are concentrated is no longer that of the "writer of genius," but that of the "absolute savant," no longer he who bears the values of all, opposes the unjust sovereign or his ministers and makes his cry resound even beyond the grave. It is rather he who, along with a handful of others, has at his disposal, whether in the service of the State or against it,

> power which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life (Foucault, 1977, p. 129).

Foucault's great insight, for me, is that the question to be asked may not be how best to raise the consciousness of others (or unmask ideology or win what Cornel West calls the hermeneutic war), but rather where the real battles over power, which is to say "truth," are being fought:

> The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousness -- or what's in their heads -- but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth (p. 133).

I understand this as a call for political relevance. If what counts as true is a function of who has the largest nuclear arsenal, I think Foucault is saying, this is where intellectuals must situate their work.

The literary/social critic Terry Eagleton (1983) acknowledges a debt to Foucault, and takes as his starting point the politically strategic orientation Foucault advocates: "As far as the object of study goes, what you decide to examine depends very much on the practical situation" (pp. 210-11). Eagleton has done for literary criticism what, I argue in Chapter 1, needs to be done for educational criticism -- which is, first, to call into

question the idea that there is "an object named literature," which critics are invited to critique, and then to question a conceptualization of criticism that defines this work accordingly. It is not true, Eagleton argues, that literary critics critique literary texts and so concern themselves only with literary matters -- in part because what counts as literature is always thoroughly implicated in social and political decision-making. Similarly, in the field of education, there is no such thing as "an object named school" or "education" (only the socially constructed ideas about what will count as school or education) and so no such thing as an educational criticism that concerns itself solely with narrowly defined issues of schooling and education.

As insightful as Eagleton is about the critic's implication in political matters and about the political significance of the critic's work and as helpful as he therefore is in the effort to reconceptualize educational criticism, he ought not be appropriated wholesale, I argue in Chapter 4. For one thing, Eagleton remains bound by a political consciousness that, I believe, ultimately inhibits the power of his criticism. In these times of mass cynicism and despair, we need a language that evokes a consciousness wholly alternative to the world as it is -- a world dominated by concerns with competition, hierarchy, and enemies, and so a world where struggles over gaining, maintaining, or resisting power require our almost constant attention. We need a critical language that, as the

theologian/social critic Walter Brueggemann (1978) puts it, both energizes and dismantles, a language that inspires us to create a new and better world as we recognize that the world we are living in is not at all the world we ought to have created. This the biblical prophets understood well:

> The proper idiom for the prophet in cutting through the royal numbness and denial is the language of grief, the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral.... Grief and mourning, the crying in pathos, is the ultimate form of criticism, for it announces the sure end of the whole royal arrangement (Brueggemann, 1978, p. 51).

For Brueggemann, the language of grief is a visionary language in the sense that it evokes an alternative consciousness, a consciousness in which the world as we know it not only should not continue but cannot continue.

Secondly, Eagleton's model of criticism as political struggle presumes a consciousness of affiliation -- with either social movements or institutions that support the intellectual work of criticism. However, both assumptions seem hard to justify in the American context where most people do not even vote, much less participate in political opposition, and where the idea of tenure and the academic freedom it supposedly brings is unthinkable outside the confines of colleges and universities. If being politically active and/or on a faculty is the precondition for writing criticism, this work is,

almost by definition, a specialty reserved for the few. I argue that we therefore need either to reconceptualize the work of criticism, using a metaphor other than that of political struggle, or (and this perhaps amounts to the same thing) to redefine what "the political" means. We need a model of educational/social criticism that speaks to people like June Jordan (1987), who writes of her struggle to see herself as a social critic at a time in her life when the whole idea of choosing one's work seemed preposterous:

> As a mother without a husband, as a poet without a publisher, a free-lance journalist without assignment, a city planner without a contract, it seemed to me that several incontestable and conflicting necessities had suddenly eliminated the whole realm of choice from my life.... What I could not see was how I should go forward, now, in any natural, coherent way (p. 20).

Reading Jordan, I want to tell Eagleton that he is asking the wrong questions, or asking too few questions, or asking questions that are too constrained by notions of what political opposition is. At least as important as the question of how institutionalized critics can work more efficaciously (by avowing the politically strategic nature of their work, Eagleton would say) is the question of how noninstitutionalized discontents can speak and be heard.

Thirdly, Eagleton's model of criticism, to my mind, overlooks the educational dimension of this work. Here, I think we need to follow the

lead of Paulo Freire (1990) who writes so eloquently about the centrality of faith and hope to all educational work. There can be no real education, Freire argues, in the absence of a profound faith in people. Neither, I would argue, can there be any serious educational criticism without this faith. This is faith not that people will come to see the world as others see it, but rather faith in their capacity to cultivate their own critical consciousness -- that is, to become critics themselves. And the special role of the educational critic is perhaps just this: to educate people about the value not of criticism in general but of their own critical consciousness in particular.

Organizationally, this dissertation begins by situating the field of educational criticism in its historical context (Chapter 1). One of the effects of the reconceptualist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the break-up of the field of curriculum. Out of the radical questioning of those years came a renewed awareness of the need to situate issues of education and schooling in their social and cultural contexts and to recognize the significance of their social constructedness. Although this insight clearly has shaped the practice of educational criticism, at a theoretical level the implications of recognizing educational criticism as a form of social and cultural criticism have not been worked out.

To try to gain some insight into the theoretical dimension of a reconceptualized practice of educational criticism, I turn then in the second and third chapters to a critique of influential and important examples of educational criticism, critical texts that clearly do function as forms of social and cultural criticism: the National Commission on Excellence in Education's A Nation at Risk, Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and Henry Giroux's Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life. On the basis of my own critique of these texts (aided and abetted by others') and reflection on that critique, I try then in Chapter 4 to clarify some of the problems, tensions, and unresolved questions inherent in the practice of educational criticism and to lay the groundwork for a model of educational criticism in which "faith in the people" is central and, to borrow an insight from Toni Morrison,[2] the encounter between the work of criticism and the critic herself is taken into account.

As David Purpel (1989) has argued with respect to scholarship in general, the important question is neither what scholars' specialties can do for the broader society nor what the broader society can do for those specialties. Rather, the important question is, given the social and cultural realities of today, what needs to be done? Similarly, I would argue that the question with respect to educational/social criticism is neither how best to

construe the social function of this work (that is, legitimate it) nor how best to understand the constraints within which contemporary critics work (that is, rationalize their shortcomings). Rather, the important question is, given the social and cultural realities of today, what needs to be done?

However, in the course of writing this essay I have come to see that this is only one side of the question -- that the question of what needs to be done cannot fail to be shaped by another: Who am I who asks such a question? Or, who am I in relation to what needs to be done? After all, it finally is not logical inconsistencies, ill-conceived theory, dangerous discourses, or destructive rhetorics that infuriate us (and so prompt our critical texts), but people done wrong -- people we care about (or don't) and people with whom we share a world.

CHAPTER I

THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM

> Theory on a dramatic scale happens when it is both possible and necessary for it to do so.... Theory is just practice forced into a new form of self-reflectiveness.... Like small lumps on the neck, it is a symptom that all is not well.
>
> -- Terry Eagleton

Rarely has so much been written about the public schools and their function in the broader American society and culture as in the last two decades. The wave of alarm as the economy of the United States has faltered amidst a jockeying for position in the so-called New World Order has combined with theoretical ferment across the social sciences and the humanities to produce what is perhaps an unprecedented amount of critical comment on our public schools. Given the central role these schools play, for good or ill, in training the nation's workforce, it is no surprise that along with a stalled economy has come a heightened interest in and concern about how well the pubic schools are doing their "job" of producing human capital. Also, given the central role the schools play, for good or ill, in preserving and transmitting the dominant culture, it is no surprise that with the scrutinizing of the concepts of truth and rationality (amidst suspicion that concealed within are the workings of power and

desire) has come renewed interest in and concern about how well the public schools are doing their "job" of transmitting a common culture. As the unemployment lines grow longer while the trade deficit grows, and as racial and ethnic hostilities increase while the nation becomes rapidly more multi-cultural, educational criticism takes on a heightened significance.

Yet, and surprisingly, there seems to be little clarity or at least explicitness on the part of the critics themselves about what educational criticism is. Answers to questions about the task and tools of educational criticism -- What should the educational critic be trying to do, and how go about it? -- are, of course, always implicit in the practice itself. A great deal of educational criticism, for example, construes the public schools, to use Samuel Freedman's (1990) metaphor, "as a bathysphere, tethered to the ship of society but bobbing peacefully undersea, somehow unaffected by whatever mutinies or hurricanes wracked the vessel" (p. 5). Such a view of the relationship between schooling and society produces a reductionistic criticism, which defines "educational" problems in such a way as to suggest solutions that require little change in either the existing institutional framework or the broader society and culture. For example, when critics point to test scores (still too low) and dropout rates (still too high) as the problems, they then can propose such simple solutions as standardizing or stratifying the curriculum. Although standardization leads to "teaching to

the test," this can indeed raise scores. Similarly, although stratification leads to institutionalizing some form of tracking, such a system can enable frustrated or completely alienated students to log in their time with a minimum of engagement -- them with the school and the school with them. However, when solutions like these are offered to problems defined accordingly, serious and necessary social and cultural critique is circumvented. The task of educational criticism in this vein is reduced, consequently, to providing insight into the technicalities of fine-tuning existing school policies and practices.

While such oversimplification and distortion of educational issues characterizes a great deal of contemporary educational criticism, a whole range of critical practice offers the public schools no such protection from the "mutinies" and "hurricanes" of the larger society and culture. As theoretical paradigms have been uprooted, disciplinary boundaries eroded, and the subjects they were supposed to contain exposed as social constructions, schooling and education also have seeped out from the classroom walls and opened themselves up to the critiques of such diverse critics as Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch Jr., William Bennett and Chester Finn Jr., Tracy Kidder and Samuel Freedman, and Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire.

As different as these critics are in their political orientations and in the form and style of their work (indeed, it seems odd to see their names in the same sentence), Bloom, Hirsch, Bennett, Finn, Kidder, Freedman, Giroux, and Freire nevertheless share, if nothing else, a critical perspective on the public schools as a social institution absolutely inseparable from its cultural context. They also share a conviction that these are times of grave social and cultural crisis. Although Bloom, Bennett, and Giroux, for example, offer quite different descriptions of our social ills (emphasizing cultural decay, the nation's economic problems, or continuing and pervasive social injustice, respectively), they seem to agree that this is no time for business as usual. In other words and in terms of the distinction Terry Eagleton makes between "criticism" and "critique," these critics agree that we need insight that in some sense points us beyond where we are and helps us respond to our very serious and very real social problems:

> "Criticism," in its Enlightenment sense, consists in recounting to someone what is awry with their situation, from an external, perhaps "transcendental" vantage-point. "Critique" is that form of discourse which seeks to inhabit the experience of the subject from the inside, in order to elicit those "valid" features of that experience which point beyond the subject's present condition (Eagleton, 1991, p. xiv).

Although serious educational critics across the political spectrum agree that what is wrong with our schools reflects in some fashion or is

related in some way to what is wrong in the broader society and culture, the implications of this for the theory and practice of educational criticism have not been explored deeply enough. This, then, is my project: through critique of the theory and practice of educational criticism to help construct a conceptual framework for this work or at least to clarify some of the relevant questions.

Educational criticism as a tradition surely can be traced back through the progressives and the work of John Dewey. My concern, however, is with the body of criticism that has grown out of the curriculum theory movement, perhaps best described by William Pinar (1975). In the preface to his anthology Curriculum Theorizing, Pinar divided the field of curriculum studies into three genres on the basis of the writers' focus and the function of the writing within the field itself: 1) traditionalist criticism, which (under Ralph Tyler's influence) focused narrowly on issues of practice in the interest of facilitating decision-making in the classroom; 2) conceptual empiricist criticism, which (under the influence of the behavioral and social scientists) investigated school phenomena in the interest of predicting and controlling behavior; and 3) reconceptualist criticism, which (under the influence of the humanities) explored the nature of the educational experience, including but not limited to school experience.

This third genre, an outgrowth of the reconceptualist movement, has given rise to a tremendous amount of broadly focused educational criticism. Such criticism, of course, also has come from outside the education profession. Scholars in other academic fields -- sociologist Stanley Aronowitz, for example -- as well as writers outside the academy -- cultural critic Jonathan Kozol, for example -- have made important contributions. Despite all this work, however, there has been little attempt to define the practice of educational criticism. Gail McCutcheon (1982) notes that although "most articles about educational criticism call for it ... few articles have discussed epistemological and methodological issues" (p. 174). She goes on to describe educational criticism as a kind of research "that causes us to form links between theory and practice" and to call for a collaborative critical practice, shaped by rejection of the assumption that "we can understand practice merely by watching events, without discussing them with the actors" -- a concept Patti Lather (1986) develops in her inquiry into the methodological requirements of an emancipatory approach to research in the human sciences (p. 174). More recently, Henry Giroux (1988a) has argued for an integration of "the central theoretical features of a postmodernism of resistance with the more radical elements of modernist discourse ... as part of a broader theory of schooling and pedagogy" (pp. 7, 25). Giroux's primary concern, however, is with the language and

conceptual categories of the discourse of educational criticism, not with issues of methodology and form. As far as defining the practice of educational criticism itself, the framework elaborated by John Steven Mann (1975) remains the model. Mann's essay on curriculum criticism lays the theoretical groundwork for the broader practice of educational criticism that has evolved out of the breakup of the curriculum field and the development of the reconceptualist movement.

The practice of educational criticism has now in some sense outrun its theory, which therefore needs analysis and critique. Toward that end I want to review and critique Mann's work -- to review his argument that the curriculum critic ought to look at curriculum as if it were a literary object and to critique this argument in light of developments ("upheavals" might be the better term) in the field of literary theory itself, which, to my knowledge, no one has explicated more cogently than Eagleton (1983). However, because I believe the difficulties and challenges of educational criticism reflect the difficulties and challenges of the broader practice of social and cultural criticism, I also want to consider the implications of some critiques of this broader critical practice -- specifically, Russell Jacoby's (1987) and Barbara Ehrenreich's (1989). I turn then in the second and third chapters to what I see as the two most important strains of contemporary educational criticism and critique representative texts as a

way of trying to gain insight into some of the problems and difficulties of this work.

In describing the practice of curriculum criticism Mann (1975) begins with the question of "what is involved in talking about curriculum as if it were a literary object" (p. 133). More specifically, he argues that curriculum ought to be seen as a "network of selections [that] constitutes an assertion of meaning -- a symbolic commentary upon life" (p. 134). The curriculum critic's task, therefore, is to disclose that meaning by explaining the design of a curriculum in such a way as to illuminate the nature of the influence it exerts. This is a methodology of moral discernment in the sense that it is grounded in what Mann calls the critic's personal ethical knowledge. The critic's "commitment is to disclosing those meanings that impinge upon his ethical knowledge ... meanings about which he believes ethical judgments are to be made" (p. 145). This is a methodology also of moral responsibility in the sense that the critic is to regard herself as in some sense related to the subject of her critique:

> Curriculum ... is a form of influence over persons, and disclosures of meaning in a curriculum are disclosures about the character of an influence.... The curriculum critic ... must regard himself as responsible to that influence, and must consider that influence from the perspective of his responsibility (p. 145).

Mann (1975) makes an important contribution toward delineating a concept of educational criticism by insisting that because meaning comes with the territory of curriculum, curriculum criticism is a moral endeavor that entails responsibility. But there are some problems with his thought. To say that the curriculum critic's task is to disclose meanings about which she believes moral judgments should be made is to raise the question of whether the critic should include those judgments in the criticism itself. No, Mann concludes, but not without some equivocation:

> If the judgments are included, there is a danger that the critic's commitment to disclosing may become a commitment to persuading, and his criticism become advocacy....
>
> The danger if the critic does not make ethical judgments of the meanings he has disclosed is that the judgments may never be made, or may be made improperly. Still, considering the extent to which curriculum literature is dominated by advocacy and the frequent failure of the most enlightened advocacy to bring about enlightened reform, this second danger seems small next to the first. My tentative conviction is that the critic would do well to write his critique in dimensions that to him are of ethical import, thereby giving tools to the practitioner, and allow the latter the freedom to employ the critique, or the many critiques, as he and his colleagues who design curricula see fit (pp. 145-46).

Here, Mann draws a line between moral sensibility and political commitment. The critic is to proceed self-consciously from her own moral sensibilities, but not spell out their political implications. As Eagleton (1983) has argued, however, political commitment and moral sensibility

cannot be so easily separated. For,

> [G]enuine moral argument ... sees the relations between individual qualities and values and our whole material conditions of existence. Political argument is not an alternative to moral preoccupations: it is those preoccupations taken seriously in their full implications (p. 208).

Mann (1975) anticipated such criticism and offered his own self-critique. In comments accompanying the anthologized version of his essay on curriculum criticism, he speaks of the "clear-cut choice" he came to face: "either abandon the notion that curriculum work can have progressive social significance, or unequivocally embrace the Marxist analysis, with all it entails about class struggle, and apply it to the work of curriculum" (p. 132). In leaving the profession of education, Mann seems to have chosen the former course. However, in laying out the choice, he left behind a call to develop a curriculum criticism that takes seriously its own implication in political struggle -- a challenge that invites critique of Mann's own more aesthetically oriented model.

The heart of the problem, I believe, is the understanding of "curriculum" implicit in Mann's discussion of the how-to of criticism. Curriculum, for Mann, seems to be what most people think it is, a plan of study with its own integrity and boundaries -- a plan of study rich in "meanings" with significant moral import, but a circumscribable plan of

study nonetheless. Such a narrow notion of curriculum, however (and as we see in Mann's work), sets up a dialectic between the critic's "personal ethical knowledge" and the text that is the curriculum. A Marxist analysis, as Mann suggests, clearly would situate this dialectic in a broader social and explicitly political context and would critique the text from the perspective of its relevance to the particular social and political "struggles and wishes of the age" (Marx, 1975, quoted in Fraser, 1989, p. 113). To critique curriculum from this perspective is, of course, to practice what is clearly social and cultural criticism -- albeit on the subject of curriculum. More than this, however, such an orientation cannot fail to call into question the whole concept of curriculum as a circumscribable text. As the political dimensions of this text also come under scrutiny, its social and historical constructedness becomes clear. The task then becomes not so much to relate the meanings a curriculum supposedly contains to its social and political context, but rather to clarify the meanings of "the struggles and wishes of the age" as reflected or refracted in the text, which is itself, as Giroux (and others) would say, "a terrain of struggle." Such a reconceptualization of criticism situates the critic in the political struggle -- and so broadens considerably the critic's own sphere of responsibility.

As I said, no one, to my knowledge, has wrestled more diligently than Eagleton with questions of what such a critical practice (one that takes

seriously its own social and political implication) looks like. Eagleton's critique of literary theory, therefore, provides an important model for curriculum criticism. Eagleton (1983) deconstructs the notion of literature as a distinctive category of texts, then argues that literary theory, along with its purported subject, ought best be buried. In the process, he develops the theoretical foundation of a more responsible criticism -- one that subjugates method as well as subject to practical, strategic, political concerns:

> It is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to do, and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us to achieve these ends. Deciding on your strategy will not pre-determine which methods and object of study are more valuable. As far as the object of study goes, what you decide to examine depends very much on the practical situation... what you are practically trying to do (pp. 210-11).

The practice of literary criticism, Eagleton argues, can be defined neither in terms of its putative subject matter -- "an object named literature" -- nor in terms of its methodology (p. 204). For the host of literary critical methods can be used to analyze any number of "texts":

> If you have nothing better to do at a party you can always try on a literary critical analysis of it, speak of its styles and genres, discriminate its significant nuances or formalize its sign-systems.... So either literary criticism confesses that it can

> handle parties just as well as it can Shakespeare, in which case it is in danger of losing its identity along with its object; or it agrees that parties may be interestingly analysed provided that this is called something else: ethnomethodology or hermeneutical phenomenology, perhaps (p. 202).

In the face of such methodological promiscuity, literary critics must contextualize their practice and, in a gesture of intellectual honesty, recognize its political grounding:

> [A]ny body of theory concerned with human meaning, value, language, feeling and experience will inevitably engage with broader, deeper beliefs about the nature of human individuals and societies, problems of power and sexuality, interpretations of past history, versions of the present and hopes for the future. It is not a matter of regretting that this is so.... Literary theories are not to be upbraided for being political, but for being on the whole covertly or unconsciously so... (Eagleton, 1983, p. 195).

A morally responsible critical practice, therefore, must respond to social and political realities. This is a model of critical engagement, a concept elaborated by Gramsci and echoed by Foucault (1977), who juxtaposes the universal intellectual -- "the rhapsodist of the eternal ... who bears the values of all" -- with the strategic intellectual who puts her knowledge and power in the service of political struggle (p. 129).

Educational criticism invites a critique similar to Eagleton's of literary theory. Just as there is no such thing as "an object named literature,"

neither is there any such thing as "an object named education" or even "an object named curriculum" -- a set of practices or texts that exist somehow apart from their social and cultural context. Consequently, then, there is no such thing as an educational criticism that would critique issues of practice, policy, and curriculum in the public schools without simultaneously critiquing the social and cultural context of those practices, policies, and texts. As Michael Apple (1987) has said, not only must "any cogent critique of the 'quality of life' within schools ... also be a critique of the quality of life outside of schools" (p. 91). Also and more broadly,

> [A]ny critical act in an educational sense is by necessity an act that is critical of the dominant normative structure of the larger society. Educational criticism, hence, becomes cultural, political, and economic criticism as well (p. 90).

Just as the proliferation of literary theory in the last two or three decades can be seen as a response to the all-but-inevitable "crisis of the humanities" in late capitalist society, so too can the burst of educational criticism in the 1980s and 1990s be seen as a response to the all-but-inevitable "crisis of the state" in late twentieth-century America. Eagleton (1989) asks rhetorically, "How could the humanities not be in crisis in social orders where it is perfectly clear, whatever their own protestations to the contrary, that the only supremely valuable activity is one of turning a fast

buck?" (p. 29). Similarly, we might ask how the public schools could not be in crisis, given the reality of our labor market needs (a few technically proficient and knowledgeable professionals and a great mass of workers willing to work at low-wage, intellectually deadening jobs) and the persistence of ideals that have always been part of at least the discourse of educational reform -- freedom, equality, and democracy.

As a form of social and cultural criticism, educational criticism shares in all the difficulties and tensions that critics like Eagleton, Jacoby, and Ehrenreich have explored. Their criticisms of criticism (and critics), therefore, should tell us something about the challenges facing educational critics. Among the problems Jacoby, Ehrenreich, and Eagleton analyze are the academization of criticism and, related to this, issues of accountability -- difficulties that raise (again) the old question of the social function of criticism.

In a time when the gap widens not only between the haves and the have-nots but also between the well read and the poorly read, critics cannot avoid the question of who they are writing for and why. "The most important question we can ask ourselves as feminist critics," Lillian Robinson once said, "is 'So what?'" (quoted in Newton & Rosenfelt, 1985). Eagleton (1984) forces the same issue:

> Imagin[e] the moment in which a critic, sitting down to begin a study of some theme or author, is suddenly arrested by a set of disturbing questions. "What is the point of such a study? Who is it intended to reach, influence, impress?" (p. 7).

The absence of a viable public sphere throws into graphic and painful relief the growing chasm between the academy (the location of most critics, would-be critics, and potential critics) and the rest of the world. Jacoby and Ehrenreich, like Eagleton, speak to the question of how this situation came about. How is it, each asks in so many words, that we who would write social and cultural criticism have ended up essentially preaching to a relatively small choir? Although Nancy Fraser (1989) insists that the worlds of scholarship and of political struggle ultimately are not incompatible, she captures the tension well in describing herself as "someone who had once protested the war research of the 'New Mandarins' and tried to lure workers to study groups on Marxist political economy but who was now having to grade students and to publish or perish" (p. 3). Eagleton (1984), less focused on his own implication in the problems he describes, rails against a modern criticism that amounts, as he sees it, to little more than "a handful of individuals reviewing each other's books" (p. 107).

Jacoby (1987) traces the near-disappearance of more public-issue-oriented intellectuals and argues that would-be social critics have retreated into the professional havens of universities where they have concerned

themselves far less with public issues than with institutionalized specializations. This fleeing of the public sphere can be explained in social and economic terms. Corporate employees increasingly have replaced entrepreneurs, and higher education itself has become big business.

> These currents carried intellectuals from independence to dependence, from free-lance writing to salaried teaching in colleges. Between 1920 and 1970 the United States population doubled, but the number of college teachers multiplied ten-fold, rising from 50,000 in 1920 to 500,000 in 1970 (p. 14).

However, Jacoby emphasizes not this structural dimension of the near-disappearance of public intellectuals, but rather what he suggests is a moral failing: "Younger intellectuals have responded to their times, as they must; they have also surrendered to them, as they need not" (p. 237). Seeking the security and prestige of university positions, too many intellectuals have forsaken the broader public to advance their own careers, Jacoby suggests, and this has jeopardized "the vitality of a public culture" itself (p. 4). Without public intellectuals to produce it, a public discourse of social critique disappears.

It is important to ask, however, what counts as <u>public</u> in Jacoby's argument. Or, to put it another way, how public is or was the discourse now conspicuously absent? Jacoby acknowledges that the kind of broad, general argument he makes cannot be backed with hard data. The

discourse he is talking about, however, seems to be that which might be written by younger, public-issue-oriented intellectuals publishing in such periodicals as The New York Review of Books, Commentary, Harper's, Atlantic, and The New Yorker -- all well-respected publications with large circulations but not periodicals most people read. If the vitality of public culture is at stake, whose culture we are talking about matters.

Ehrenreich (1989) offers a vantage point from which to see this. In one sense, she makes the same argument in Fear of Falling that Jacoby makes in The Last Intellectuals. Ehrenreich traces a "retreat from liberalism" on the part of the professional middle class, which, she says, has adopted "a meaner, more selfish outlook" over the last three decades, and, like Jacoby, suggests that intellectuals seem not to care about others (particularly relatively powerless others) as much as they once did (p. 3). For Ehrenreich, however, this is primarily an issue of class consciousness:

> In our culture, the professional, and largely white, middle class is taken as a social norm -- a bland and neutral mainstream -- from which every other group or class is ultimately a kind of deviation.... Nameless, and camouflaged by a culture in which it both stars and writes the scripts, this class plays an overweening role in defining "America": its moods, political direction, and moral tone (pp. 3, 6).

The retreat from liberalism, Ehrenreich suggests, is the political dimension of a shift in consciousness, a growing awareness on the part of this "script-

writing" class that it constitutes not the norm but a not particularly well-liked elite. The "discoveries" of the poor in the beginning of the 1960s and of the working class towards the end of that decade (by professionals) along with the student rebellion of the 1960s "combined to convince an influential minority of the professional middle class that their class was, in fact, a very special group, an elite above the majority" (p. 10).

What Ehrenreich (1989) means by "the professional middle class" is "all those people whose economic and social status is based on education, rather than on the ownership of capital or property" (p. 12). This sector of the population -- at most 20 percent, Ehrenreich estimates -- constitutes the potential audience of public intellectuals, it seems. The actual audience, of course, would be smaller. My point is simply that what for Jacoby seems to count as public is in fact probably only a small sector of the population. In light of Ehrenreich's argument that serious thought about public discourse requires awareness of how class stratification and the consciousness thereof impinge upon critiques and analyses, I would qualify Jacoby's argument: Potential critics or public intellectuals have forsaken the professional middle class, leaving this class with a very conflicted and confused class consciousness.

From this perspective, the academization of criticism has to do not or not only with issues of focus -- that is, with which issues attract critical

comment and which do not. Also important is the process by which some issues come to be seen as worthy of critical attention and others don't -- which, of course, is inseparable from the process by which some people come to see themselves as social and cultural critics and others do not. I want simply to affirm what Ehrenreich suggests: that in a class-stratified society like ours what counts as the public interest is no longer, if it ever was, a function of public definition. As Eagleton suggests, criticism not written to speak to a public audience is only part of the problem. Also important is the absence of a way of engaging the public in social and cultural critique -- which, for Eagleton (1984), means political struggle towards a socialist transformation of society:

> Genuine political popularization involves more than producing works which make socialist theory intelligible to a mass audience, important though that project is; such a readership must be institutionalized rather than amorphous, able to receive and interpret such work in a collective context and to ponder its consequences for political action (p. 113).

In the void where such institutionalized critique should be serious questions of accountability arise. To whom or what is the social critic accountable and in what sense? Does Jim Merod (1987) overstate the case or are his sharp remarks much to the point?

> What authorizes the critic's work? What relation does critical writing have to the academy as a whole and to the society of which it is a part?... [H]abits of interpretive judgment remain safely unaccountable to everything except an extremely small realm, the self-contained area called Theory, a world that seems to have no political impact beyond its own professional realignments, little if any moral responsibility ... and an almost thoroughly unexamined institutional context (pp. 4-5).

Although neither Jacoby nor Ehrenreich speaks directly to this question of accountability, their critiques of the professional middle class in general and of intellectuals in particular suggest a perspective. Jacoby (1987) argues that "academic careers [have] undermined academic freedom" -- a paradox that "recalls an inner contradiction of academic freedom -- the institution neutralizes the freedom it guarantees" (p. 188-89). Consequently, "for many professors ... academic freedom [has] meant nothing more than the freedom to be academic" (p. 189).

Ehrenreich's (1989) discussion of the ethos of professionalism suggests that the "freedom to be academic" is also the freedom to enjoy one's work. The real plum of professional work, she says, is pleasure:

> Professions, as opposed to jobs, are understood to offer some measure of intrinsic satisfaction, some linkage of science and service, intellect and conscience, autonomy and responsibility. No one has such expectations of a mere job; and it is this, as much as anything, which defines the middle-class advantage over the working-class majority (p. 261).

However, power as well as pleasure distinguishes these intrinsically rewarding professional jobs from other, more boring and tedious ones:

> Relative to the working class, the holders of middle-class occupations are in positions of command or, at the very least, authority. Their job is to conceptualize, in broad terms, what others must do. The job of the worker, blue or pink collar, is to get it done. The fact that this is a relationship of domination -- and grudging submission -- is usually invisible to the middle class but painfully apparent to the working class (pp. 132-33).

Besides an inequality of power, then, there is an inequality in terms of moral agency, perhaps even more insidious, in the relationship between the professional-middle and the working classes. Professionals are busy. Their time is valued in a way that mere workers' time is not, and this in itself is "an essential insignia of status -- and a not entirely ineffective one":

> To have time and attention for others is to concede their importance. The upwardly mobile professional, rushing from one appointment or deadline to another, concedes nothing to those who are less harried and hence, obviously, less important (p. 232).

In this sense, the right to be too busy for others is only another way of talking about the power to demean.

This, as I see it, is the crux of "the freedom to be academic" -- the freedom to respond (or not) to something other than, something more important than, others' immediate needs and wants. Clearly, some things

are more important than others' needs and wants, but this only complicates the moral question: What things are more important than whose immediate needs and wants, and who ought to decide this? Ehrenreich avoids this moral question by, on the one hand, calling for intrinsically rewarding work for everybody and, on the other, all but condemning the ethos of professionalism -- the ethos, that is, of the one realm of work that does offer some measure of intrinsic reward. The real plum of professional work, it seems, is the right (freedom) to make moral decisions and judgments. While doctors are expected to decide, if a choice must be made, whose life is most worth saving, and scholars are expected to decide, since they can't study everything, what issues are most worth studying, secretaries are not expected to decide what assigned work is worth doing. My question is not whether everyone should have this moral autonomy (it seems clear enough to me that they should), but rather the relationship between this moral autonomy and prevailing relations of power.

The social-class structure Ehrenreich lays out -- the truly rich on top, followed by the professional middle class, the working class, and the poor-- leaves the professional middle class out of the loop in an important sense. The overall political project, Ehrenreich (1989) says, is the creation of a classless society: "Tax the rich and enrich the poor until both groups are absorbed into some broad and truly universal middle class. The details are

subject to debate" (p. 256). The role of the professional middle class in this redistribution of wealth and so of power, it seems, is to direct the downward flow. In this closed-system model of power and wealth, the professional middle class is asked to be more caring and less self-oriented, but not necessarily to relinquish any of its own power and wealth. It is perhaps not too much of an oversimplification to say that in this construction of social relationships the responsibility of the professional middle class is either 1) to persuade those with a great deal of power and wealth to give up some of it so that those with very little can have more or 2) to counsel the poor and the disenfranchised about how to get what they need and deserve.

This argument, of course, rests on a particular understanding of power and a related ethic of deserving bound up with a notion of moral autonomy. Just as some people supposedly deserve power and wealth and others do not; some supposedly deserve or can be trusted with moral autonomy and others don't or can't. This argument falls apart, however, if "power" is understood as something other than the ability and socially-sanctioned right to impose one's will on others. If the point is essentially a <u>redistribution</u> of power, the professional middle class can hold on to what it has and direct the downward flow out and around itself. However, if the goal is not reformation but rather transformation -- where the point is a

reconceptualization as well as a redistribution of power -- the professional middle class is implicated and its moral autonomy called into question.

This tension between the need to redistribute power and the need to rethink it altogether pervades the feminist struggle, and it is in feminist theorizing that I find the most insightfulness about what this tension means for related issues of moral autonomy and accountability. Consider, for example, Ehrenreich's (1989) argument that although enabling a few women to attain the economic power of their privileged male counterparts is finally not the point of the feminist struggle, neither are issues of economic power unimportant:

> Surely the aim of the struggle was not to propel a few women to the top of a fundamentally unjust hierarchy, in which most women counted for little more than cheap labor. Yet as many quite racial feminists came to realize, there is no way that an economically marginalized group can be expected to "wait for the revolution," letting moral purity compensate for certain poverty (p. 216).

Bell hooks (1984) is far less conciliatory -- or, depending on your perspective, far less realistic. "Women cannot gain much power on the terms set by the existing social structure without undermining the struggle to end sexist oppression," she says. For one gains money and power by and only by "embracing, supporting, and perpetuating the dominant ideology of the culture" (pp. 84-85). Hooks sets against a notion of power

as domination and control a notion of power as the creative and life-affirming ability to act. Many feminist theologians offer similar juxtapositions. Carter Heyward (1982), for example, sets side-by-side dunamis and exousia:

> "Authority" (exousia) is power that has been granted, power that is socially-licensed or allowed.... Occasionally, a person manifests a different kind of authority. Not having been granted exousia within the social order, she nonetheless manifests power -- dunamis: a power unmediated by official social legitimation. Dunamis is experienced by others as raw power, spontaneous, uncontrollable, and often fearful (p. 41).

Rita Nakashima Brock (1988) distinguishes power as dominance and erotic power:

> Our conventional understandings of power are colored by our experiences of life in societies of male dominance. From those experiences we come to believe that power is hierarchical and is demonstrated by dominance, by status, by authority, and by control over people, nature, and things. This may be the power we know, but it is not the power we were born with. The fundamental power of life, born into us, heals, makes whole, empowers, and liberates (p. 25).

Dorothee Soelle (1984) simply repudiates "male power," which, for her, "has something to do with roaring, shouting, and giving orders," and warns that identifying with any of this is "the worst thing that can happen to a woman" (p. 112).

If these women are right in suggesting that "power" needs to be rethought and not just redistributed, then the ethos of professionalism and the moral autonomy it promises must be called into question. If all power is relational, as Heyward and Brock argue, "moral autonomy" is a contradiction in terms. A relational notion of power implies moral accountability, not autonomy. In Jacoby's language, relational power implies not the freedom to be academic but the responsibility to be related.

Cornel West develops this notion of relational responsibility. West would seem to be just what Jacoby has in mind -- here is a brilliant man who sees no contradiction between the life of the mind and a public orientation. Indeed, the New York Times Magazine called West "Princeton's public intellectual" (Boynton, 1991, p. 39). West (1991) calls himself "more a cultural critic with philosophic training who works out of the Christian tradition than a theologian who focuses on the systematic coherency or epistemic validity of Christian claims" (p. xxix). And West (1989) clearly sees himself as an "organic intellectual" -- someone who "revel[s] in ideas and relate[s] ideas to action by means of creating, constituting, or consolidating constituencies for moral aims and political purposes" (p. 6). He explains:

> An organic intellectual, in contrast to traditional intellectuals who often remain comfortably nested in the academy, attempts

> to be entrenched in and affiliated with organizations, associations, and possibly, movements of grass-roots folk. Of course, he or she need be neither religious nor linked to religious institutions. Trade unions, community groups, and political formations also suffice (p. 234).

In stressing that organic intellectuals must be not only public-oriented but public-situated -- at the meetings -- West suggests a process by which the common culture Raymond Williams envisions -- one that arises out of broad participation in the creation of meanings and values -- might be formed. In so doing West perhaps bridges the gap between those who would upgrade the culture of the professional middle class and those who would enlist this class in the effort to enrich a truly public culture.

I say "perhaps" because I recall so clearly student responses to West's Prophesy Deliverance!:

> "This is no tract for the masses!"
> "Who is West writing for anyway?"
> "Along with whatever else he's doing, isn't he also letting others know how much fun it is to be a professor?"

I think these criticisms are much too harsh, but they do provide a needed focus on the issue of language. Among the barriers to a common culture sustained by a truly public discourse and criticism is the lack of a common language or, more specifically, the skewed distribution of language. Huge disparities of institutionalized education in this society go hand-in-hand

with those of wealth and power. Hooks (1984) is quite right to point out that

> Time and money have been expended creating resources for women scholars and academics to pursue and promote their work. While this effort is important, it should not have greater priority than the struggle to ensure that all women read and write (p. 109).

While the effort to raise the consciousness of the professional middle class and the effort to enrich public culture may not be incompatible, these struggles are not identical and ought not be confused. Similarly, and related to this, responding to issues and concerns identified with the public interest is not the same thing as being accountable to real people. When these distinctions are blurred, the particular power of the professional middle class, a power bound up with particular ways of thinking about responsibility and accountability, goes unscrutinized. The notion of accountability implicit in arguments like Jacoby's is class-based: It is would-be public intellectuals from the same professional middle class who judge and evaluate the work of their more widely published peers. Responding to public issues and concerns is, of course, much better than ignoring them, but until the process by which public issues are <u>defined</u> is broadened, those who frame the so-called public discourse are essentially talking among themselves in a class-bound, educationally stratified group.

Unlike Jacoby and Ehrenreich, Eagleton (1984) emphasizes not the failings of conscience and consciousness that contribute to such insularity but rather the constraints of social and political forces. In the absence of a viable public sphere, efficacious criticism is all but impossible, he argues. In such a context, critics must choose between social relevance and intellectual integrity.

> With the modern "stratification" of society and socialization of the state, with the transgression of traditional boundaries between private and public, the space of the classical public sphere rapidly dwindles.
>
> Criticism, then, has the unwelcome choice of preserving a political content, thus gaining in social relevance what it loses in a partiality disruptive of the very public sphere it seeks to construct; or of assuming a transcendental standpoint beyond that sphere, thus safeguarding its integrity at the price of social marginality and intellectual nullity (pp. 64-65).

Given such a dilemma -- Should we say what we think at the risk of alienating those we would persuade, and who is listening anyway? -- Eagleton urges critics to situate their work against the political forces that have created such an untenable choice: "Modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state; unless its future is now defined as a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all" (p. 124). Eagleton also, however, counsels humility. The political forces of late industrial capitalism put serious limits on criticism as an instrument of

social change:

> Socialist criticism cannot conjure a counterpublic sphere into existence; on the contrary, that criticism cannot itself fully exist until such a sphere has been fashioned. Until that time, the socialist critic will remain stranded between sage and man of letters, combining the critical dissociation of the former with the practical, engaged, wide-ranging activity of the latter (p. 114).

In the absence of a viable public sphere, social criticism remains insular -- a weak force for social and cultural change that tends to be inadequately responsive (in the sense of accountable) to the broader public.

In this bleak context, let me return to Mann's model of curriculum criticism -- a practice that proceeds through moral discernment grounded in the critic's personal ethical knowledge. Jacoby's, Ehrenreich's, and Eagleton's critiques of social and cultural criticism suggest several problems with Mann's model of criticism. First, in light of Jacoby's critique of public intellectuals (in their absence) and the class bias that reading Jacoby against Ehrenreich suggests, I would argue that the critic's own moral sensibility and ethical knowledge need to be subjected to critique and the critic's own biases thereby factored into the work of criticism -- a topic I will say more about in Chapter 4.

Secondly, in light of the critique Mann himself invites, I would argue that educational criticism ought to proceed dialectically with a focus not on

the text as text but on the text as reflection/refraction of its broader context. Educational critics need to be clear not only, as Eagleton (1983) suggests, about what they are trying to do but also about what needs to be done -- a question that social and political realities cannot "answer" but surely can frame. Without such a dialectical focus, critics remain accountable ultimately only to those whose social situation mirrors their own -- which leads, of course, to the insularity in which the "So what?" question arises. Without a broader sphere of accountability as well as focus, critics are left with no way finally to justify their practice.

CHAPTER II

THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM I: A NATION AT RISK AND THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND

Although educational criticism remains a poorly defined, embryonic and amorphous field, a substantial body of educational discourse exists that is at once serious and thoughtful in nature, critical in orientation, and political in function. Full review of this literature is beyond the scope of this essay. However, critique of some of the most influential and representative texts will, I hope, both illuminate the various kinds of educational criticism being written today and show up some of its problems and limitations.

For purposes of critique, I divide the field of serious contemporary educational criticism into two broad categories on the basis of general focus: 1) the economically- and geopolitically-oriented criticism exemplified in the national reform reports and, related to this literature, the more culturally-focused work of critics like E. D. Hirsch and Allan Bloom; and 2) the morally-oriented and explicitly political literature of critical pedagogy. Perhaps the best example of the economically- and geopolitically-focused educational criticism is the Reagan Administration's National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 report, A Nation at

Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, which was followed by a whole string of national reform reports.[3] A Nation at Risk, however, is the best known and arguably the most influential. Reports like A Nation at Risk have made the front pages of major newspapers, have been widely critiqued and commented on, and largely have set the terms of the most recent wave of educational reform in drawing a relationship (sometimes direct and sometimes indirect) between matters of schooling, primarily curriculum and school governance, and what are put forth as the nation's economic and political interests.

Closely related to this economically- and geopolitically-focused criticism is the politically compatible but more culturally-focused work perhaps best represented by Bloom's 1987 bestseller, The Closing of the American Mind -- a critique, in part, of the kind of economism that shapes reports like A Nation at Risk and a call for a return to the basics not of performance and productivity but of philosophical foundationalism. This criticism represents a shift in the public discourse of reform as Western culture (and its supposedly jeopardized status) rather than the nation's geopolitical and economic agenda becomes the focus of critique:

> Since the second term of the Reagan administration, the debate on education has taken a new turn. Now, as before, the tone is principally set by the right, but its position has been radically altered. The importance of linking educational reform to the

> needs of big business has continued to influence the debate, while demands that schools provide the skills necessary for domestic production and expanding capital abroad have slowly given way to an overriding emphasis on schools as sites of cultural production (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p. 24).

Although Bloom's book presupposes what in Hirsch's terms would be a fairly high degree of cultural literacy, it has been widely read (assuming such a conclusion can be drawn from the book's bestseller-list status). Despite the book's shortcomings, which I will speak to, it provides a well contextualized and historically grounded diagnosis of our undeniable social crisis -- complete with prescription: a back-to-basics, classics-centered, unapologetically elitist university curriculum.

Because the cultural literacy criticism is so politically compatible with the more economically focused reform reports, I see this body of criticism as a whole. And in the public discourse, I would argue, this is it. There is no compelling alternative to this form of educational criticism. In the professional discourse, however, the morally-oriented and explicitly political literature of critical pedagogy, a body of writing that has evolved out of the work and writing of the Brazilian philosopher of education Paulo Freire, offers a thorough critique and functions as an important alternative voice. As a form of contemporary educational criticism, critical pedagogy is distinguished by its bold and continuous affirmation of the centrality of

issues of justice and human emancipation to all facets of education, including educational criticism. Critics like Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) and Michael Apple (1990) have critiqued both the economism of reports like A Nation at Risk and the anti-egalitarianism of critics like Bloom. The critical pedagogy literature -- in my opinion the most important and useful form of contemporary educational criticism -- suffers, however, from its insularity. Written by and largely for a narrow spectrum of very well educated radical scholars, this literature lacks a significant public audience -- a situation that gives a muted ring to the ideals of genuine democracy that are so central to it.

In this chapter I will develop critiques of A Nation at Risk and Closing of the American Mind as a way, first of all, of affirming the importance of these influential texts. Both have been integrated into the professional as well as public discourse and, as I said, have helped set the terms of the contemporary debate on educational reform. Secondly, I focus on A Nation at Risk and Bloom's book because, especially when viewed together, they raise important questions about the practice of educational criticism. (I turn then in Chapter 3 to a critique of books written by Freire and Giroux.)

The most recent educational reform movement started with the publication of A Nation at Risk, a report that "prefigures, in uncanny

fashion, the host of issues that in time came to dominate our national dialogue on education reform" (Futrell, 1990, p. 259). The report's famous (many would say infamous) first paragraph draws a direct relationship between America's technological and economic strength and the nation's schools. First, there is the warning: "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (p. 5). Then, significant relationships are suggested and the threat contextualized: "What our schools and colleges historically have accomplished" is connected (as a cause and/or dimension of the problem) with these issues of global competition and, in turn, with "American prosperity, security, and civility" (p. 5). In short, the report construes the well-being of Americans as contingent upon the outcome of a cut-throat international competition -- a contest in which issues of curriculum and pedagogy are implicated. These relationships between, on one hand, the prosperity and security of Americans and the economic and technological competitiveness of America and, on the other, that competitiveness and the structure of schools are affirmed throughout the report.

Important here is not only the way the language of economic and technological competitiveness reduces and trivializes educational possibility, but also the way the language of war militarizes the relationship drawn

between educational possibility and the broader society. Our "mediocre educational performance," A Nation at Risk warns, amounts to an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" -- one that, if imposed from without, would be akin to "an act of war" (p. 5). In other words, recognizable, identifiable enemies without -- economically strong competitors who happily would do us in -- are aided by insidious, more amorphous enemies within -- "a rising tide of mediocrity" related to a "shoddiness" that afflicts "many walks of American life," including the schools (pp. 5, 11). In this sense, the report represents a call to arms -- an announcement that America is in trouble and that the schools essentially have been drafted into a multi-faceted war.

Therefore, while A Nation at Risk on one level focuses on the viability of the United States economy in world markets, in a broader sense it speaks out of and for a particular consciousness -- a consciousness of war in which competition is not only taken for granted but touted as the weapon of choice. This consciousness implies a worldview that explains the nation's economic problems (able competitors have capitalized on our sloth) and provides direction for our schools: Students need to learn not only particular technical skills but also an intensified spirit of competition, heightened by a fear of losing a very important battle. Given the state of the world, the state of the public schools, and the relationship between the

two, the report argues in so many words, educational institutions need to up the ante. High schools need to strengthen graduation requirements, colleges and universities need to raise admission requirements, students need to spend more time in school altogether, and those who want to teach need to compete more seriously both to enter and to remain in the profession. And for those who cannot or do not do these things, there is an ominous warning:

> The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life (p. 7).

This, I suggest, amounts to a announcement that the effective grounds of citizenship are shifting or have shifted. This is a warning that those who cannot or do not contribute to the "war effort" to strengthen the economic power of the United States will be politically as well as economically disenfranchised. Exactly what disenfranchisement means in the context of A Nation at Risk is not made clear. What the report suggests, however, is that the schools not only should teach particular skills, provide certain kinds of training, and certify who does (and does not) acquire these things, but also and in the process should or could function as

a mechanism for constituting and reshaping political society. In the context of an announcement that measurable knowledge and political rights will or should be more closely aligned than ever, the report's recommendations -- tougher high school graduation and college admission requirements and less tolerance of teachers unable or unwilling to produce the necessary amount of what the report calls "intellectual capital" -- amount to a plan for redrawing the effective lines of citizenship: Those who don't measure up can expect to enjoy neither the material rewards of success nor any significant degree of participation in the broader polity. To paraphrase the sentence quoted above: Those who for whatever reason fail to contribute adequately to the new economic order must realize they will become essentially second-class citizens. In sum, A Nation at Risk advances, through a rhetoric of nationalism and militarism, an argument for educational reform that evokes and speaks to fears that the nation's economic preeminence is in jeopardy. The call is for higher (and measurable) standards of achievement and more standardization of the curriculum, capped by a veiled threat of political disenfranchisement for those who don't measure up.

A moral critique of A Nation at Risk clearly is implicit in my description of its content -- a critique I want to explicate for two reasons. First, because the report has been widely read and discussed, and largely

welcomed (at least in the public discourse) as an important contribution to educational reform, the moral issues it raises warrant scrutiny in their own right. Secondly, I want to use my own critique to explore some of the questions that educational criticism raises when it functions as social criticism.

A politics of disenfranchisement, which, I have said, A Nation at Risk condones or even advocates, flies squarely in the face of all democratic notions of egalitarianism, of the dignity and worth of all people, and of our shared responsibility for decision making and governance. Only in a context of widespread fear (of poverty, of powerlessness, of losing something important) and the presumption of scarcity (of jobs, of opportunities, of material well-being) could such a politics have any credence, it seems. As Sheila Slaughter (1985) puts it,

> To preserve a satisfying standard of living for the future, ... the U.S. citizenry is asked [in A Nation at Risk] to sacrifice for the system, giving up chimeras of social conscience, such as full employment, educational equity, affirmation action. What makes the emotional logic the least bit convincing is fear: fear that too much has already been given to others (pp. 112-13).

Or fear, I would add, that scarcity is real -- that there no longer is enough to go around so that jobs and good educations for everybody are not possible -- and fear that beneath the veneer of nominal social civility lies

nothing more than a brutal war of all against all.

In speaking to these fears in a nationalistic, militaristic language that covers with a moral aura an international competition for wealth and power, the report evokes a particular way of thinking about scarcity and the ethics of resource allocation. A Nation at Risk reflects what I see as the logic of triage -- a metaphor the historian and theologian Richard Rubenstein (1983) uses to explain some of the horrors of human cruelty in modern times and a metaphor increasingly prevalent in the public discourse. I want to review Rubenstein's argument as well as instances of "triage" in the public discourse to try to clarify what I see as the critical moral dimensions of A Nation at Risk and to underscore the political significance of this way of thinking about scarcity.

Rubenstein (1983) traces a pattern in post-Enlightenment times of mass destruction of people legally defined by governments as "surplus populations" -- a term that refers to groups of people who for one reason or another come to have no viable role in their society and who consequently are regarded as disruptive forces that need to be controlled or removed from mainstream society altogether. A variety of control mechanisms have been used in such situations. Rubenstein explains:

> The least radical have involved revocation of the target population's customary rights of land tenure, as has occurred

> whenever peasants have been evicted in order to facilitate the shift from subsistence farming to the raising of a cash crop for the market. More radical programs have involved the segregation or incarceration of target populations. These have taken the form of the compulsory settlement in reservations, ghettos, almshouses, and concentration or slave-labor camps. Even more radical measures have involved expulsion from one's homeland.... The most radical form of population elimination is, of course, outright extermination (p. 8).

Viewed as a "solution" to the problem of surplus people, the Holocaust stands as simply the most extreme instance of a whole range of social-control policies, which Rubenstein describes as forms of social triage. The etymology of the word is important:

> [T]he word triage is of French origin and comes from "trier," to pick or to cull. It denotes "the action of assorting according to quality." In the eighteenth century it was used to denote the sorting of fleece pelts. It was also used in connection with the sorting and sifting of coffee beans. In the twentieth century triage has been given both a political and a medical meaning. The word has been used to refer to the sorting of whole classes of human beings "according to quality" (Rubenstein, 1983, p. 195).

Although "triage" has acquired a broader significance in the twentieth century, the word most commonly refers to "the screening and classification of wounded, sick, or injured patients during war or another disaster to determine priority needs and thereby ensure the most efficient use of medical and surgical manpower, equipment, and facilities" (Webster's II).

Rubenstein (1983), however, as I said, uses triage as a metaphor to explain the phenomena of surplus populations -- the products of a morally bankrupt economic rationality that holds nothing, including human life, sacred. Rather, in such a consciousness, human life "is simply another component to be calculated in amoral cost-benefit analyses" (p. 212). As almost daily, it seems, more layoffs, job cuts, and pending corporate "restructurings" are announced in this country, Rubenstein's 1983 warnings about America take on an eerie prescience:

> [I]f unemployment continues to increase, crisis-ridden government leaders may eventually feel compelled to reconsider the ways in which the problem is to be managed.... [I]n a period of acute economic hardship a future administration might conclude that mass unemployment and destitution no longer serve the national interest. If such a time ever comes, the problem of surplus people will admit of only two possible solutions: redistribution of resources and work opportunities or elimination of surplus people (pp. 207-08).

At the very least, Rubenstein says, "one must ask whether the bonds of community between Americans would be sufficiently strong to protect the poor in a crisis" (p. 213).

As a way of thinking about scarcity, triage puts at great risk the poor, the powerless, and anyone else who comes to be seen as an economic drain. A Nation at Risk reflects this logic in the sense that its call for higher standards and intensified competition, couched in a language of national

interest and military urgency, invites the sorting and selecting Ann Bastian et al. (1986) describe so well:

> By focusing on an economic bottom line, by narrowing their concern to accountability and basics, by ignoring the realities of inequity, the prevailing school critics do warn us of a grave social risk. But the risk they signal is that new standards of merit will become in practice new mechanisms of stratification and, ultimately, another means for pushing unwanted students out of the system (p. 22).

However, while triage helps explain the economic rationality implicit in A Nation at Risk, what seems most important are the limitations of the metaphor. Pulled out of the context of life-and-death decision-making on the battlefield, the logic of triage leads to "the adoption of a harsh, unfeeling, permanent posture toward the problems of population growth and resource scarcity" (Rubenstein, 1983, p. 197).

When used as a broadly descriptive metaphor, the language of triage also paints with a moral aura the crudeness of cost-benefit or ends-means thinking. Consider, for example, how the language of triage is being used in the public discourse. This language often surfaces, of course, in health-care and ecological contexts where it is used to explain policies for allocating scarce life-saving resources. But the language of triage also is being used to explain competitive economic and political strategies. For example, in a Washington Post story about the small town of Hedrick,

Iowa, and its struggle to remain self-sufficient, the reporter notes:

> Such towns are being advised to let go of some of their venerable institutions and tie their fate to that of their neighbors -- merging schools, sharing health services, utilities and libraries and promoting themselves as multi-town communities. Survival, they are being told by planning experts, requires a kind of "economic triage" -- the targeting of limited government resources in a way that allows some communities to survive while others are left to decline or die.
>
> "It's logical," said Harley Johansen, chairman of the geography department at the University of Idaho. "We have too many small towns for today's rural economy. They simply can't all survive" (Vobejda, 1991, p. A1).

Consequently, according to this reasoning, choices must be made about which towns to bolster and which to let die.

> These choices, known in the academic world as triage, are already practiced -- implicitly or explicitly -- when housing grants, highway funds and economic development aid are directed to communities judged to be viable. They are "not about turning your back, but making investments in places where investments will work and multiply," said Mark Lapping, dean of the faculty of planning at Rutgers University (p. A1).

Using much the same rationale, tied to a notion of economic "viability," an auto analyst quoted in the Greensboro News & Record explains General Motors' decision to shut down twenty-one plants and eliminate at least 74,000 jobs by 1995 this way:

> "They [GM managers] don't want to be the Grinch that stole Christmas. Most of them were in plants at one time or the other." But faced with a crisis, "they are performing triage.... You can reduce plants now or you can close the company later" ("Economy," 1991, p. B5).

Another example -- Thomas Edsall (1991) of the Washington Post describes as political triage a campaign strategy of appealing to "persuadable" voters while "writing off sections of the country as unwinnable": The strategy involves "such things as conduct polls and focus groups targeted to the specific regions of 'persuadable' voters and to various demographic groups to determine the kind of issues and strategies that could work to the advantage of the Democratic nominee in 1992" (p. A4).

In an extraordinary story, the Wall Street Journal (Dahl, 1992) describes a shelter for the homeless that sorts, selects, and "feeds ... with an uneven hand" the desperate people who come seeking help. A Catholic priest in San Diego has founded a luxurious, $15 million "shelter" for the homeless premised on the idea that "plush surroundings can restore the dignity the homeless need to rejoin society." Selected guests -- the "motivated or newly homeless" who distinguish themselves through diligence in job-looking, regular attendance at shelter classes, and high scores on basic skills tests -- "earn" the opportunity to stay in semi-private bedrooms with telephones and to enjoy gourmet meals. The other

homeless people, however -- approximately 80 percent who come to the place -- sleep next door in a barracks-style dorm and are served more traditional soup-kitchen fare. The "upscale and selective" approach is based on what an observer calls "the bootstrap doctrine," which "appeals to contributors" because "you definitely get the best bang for your buck this way." The priest behind this "country club" for the homeless explains the selectivity with the familiar argument that given limited funds, choices must be made. And since some of the people who come to the shelter are, after all, "lost causes who will never get jobs," why waste the nice perks on them? Besides, the inequity (my language) is educational: "In the real world, you have to earn nice things," the priest says (pp. A1, A9).

This story shows how the language and logic of triage have become integrated into both the biblical command to care for the poor and the needy and the meritocratic ideology of earning and deserving, and how the homeless themselves can be used to bridge the gap between these discourses. As objects of a putatively meritocratic charity, the homeless "allow" their benefactors to become (to borrow Robert Reich's [1991] phrase) "virtuous citizens at little [ideological] cost" (p. 278). Pre-selected on the criteria of obedience and diligence, the chosen few would seem to be those with the greatest potential to act out a meritocratic ideology. Set up as they are, therefore, to demonstrate that even among the most desperate some are

more deserving than others, the homeless are put in the service of confirming the very ideology that legitimates their benefactors' privilege and of undercutting the biblical notion that the poor are to be helped because they are poor, not because they might, someday, get a job. (The biblical idea that the needy are to be helped because they are needy, is, one would think, a last bastion against a rationality that sorts and separates the worthy and the unworthy or the worthwhile and the useless.) This story also shows how the language and logic of triage can be used to perpetuate the idea that what is to be provided (what is fair and just) is equal opportunity -- with the understanding that there will be differential results.

In all these instances, the language of triage has been extrapolated from the tragic, life-and-death situation of soldiers dying on the battlefield amidst a scarcity of doctors and medicine and applied in other contexts. What concerns me about this is that when triage is seen as an all-purpose competitive strategy, the language cloaks in a moral rhetoric a calculating rationality that accepts as necessary if not desirable the possibility of sorting, selecting, and leaving behind -- whether the issue is institutions, cities, voters, or homeless people. Triage suggests a thoughtful, reasoned balancing of ethical and efficiency considerations in the most horrendous of emergency situations -- situations, however, to which government investment policies, corporate decision-making, political campaign

strategies, and human compassion are hardly comparable.

These news stories suggest the complexity and danger of the habits of thought reflected in the language and logic of triage. When the process of sorting and the practice of rescue is extracted from the battlefield context, when an ethic for responding to a life-and-death emergency is used to explain (or rationalize) competitive strategies for "success" in business, politics, or even the work of charity, efficiency considerations eclipse ethical questions and efficiency itself masquerades as morality. In describing global economic competition in militaristic terms, A Nation at Risk reflects what most charitably might be called this confusion of the ethics of emergency decision-making, the mechanics of competition, and the preservation of privilege. A Nation at Risk, as I said, assumes a world of enemies -- enemies within colluding with enemies without: Others have become such a threat in part because we (the nation as a whole) have let ourselves slide. Within this context, knowledge is commodified, so that the point of school becomes the accumulation of intellectual capital (ammunition), but, significantly, in the aggregate. The suggestion, hardly veiled, is that those who fail to acquire an adequate amount of this capital hurt the whole, drag down the others, drain the system. The report, then, invokes a nationalist sentiment: We must pull together in the face of serious threats. At the same time, however, the report suggests that although we

all may be in the same boat some people (those who do not know enough) are weighing it down.

In this context the question needs to be raised of whether the call for higher standards, more rigid requirements, tougher admissions criteria, and so on, constitutes a strategy for "motivating" everyone to learn more or whether it amounts to a mechanism for separating the haves and the have-nots and sorting out the inadequately intellectually capitalized -- in other words, the surplus people. Along with whatever else it does, the nationalistic and militaristic rhetoric of A Nation at Risk provides a moral vocabulary and sanction for a cleaner and more consequential process of sorting and selecting among students. And, as we know, in times of war when the threats are real and the resources scarce, the weak (and the unlucky) must be sacrificed for the good of the whole -- or so the reasoning goes. The urgency of war times requires not only general alertness and competent performance but also suspension of "everyday" moral considerations of means and ends -- so that ends are seen as justification of the means. However, as the public discourse on triage shows up more clearly than the Nation at Risk report itself, a game plan for "winning," for protecting the interests of a few, all too easily masquerades as an ethical response to the most morally challenging of circumstances -- a just war. In using this language (of a just war) without calling into question its

assumptions, A Nation at Risk tacitly equates the welfare of America with the need to disenfranchise some Americans. The militaristic language justifying higher standards linked to the possibility of disenfranchisement presents as moral responsiveness to a serious threat what might just as plausibly, even more plausibly, be described as the ideological groundwork for a brutal social restructuring.

My critique of A Nation at Risk is, therefore, essentially a moral one. As I see it, the report transgresses moral boundaries in not only condoning political disenfranchisement but cloaking such an argument in a disingenuous moral rhetoric. The report construes the national interest as economic preeminence in a shifting global context and links this "interest" with public education in such a way as to put the schools directly in its service: Along with whatever else they do, schools are to identify the surplus people in a world that wants workers but has too few decent jobs. In so doing, the report outlines a strategy for drafting the public schools into the work of weakening, not strengthening, the dangerously frayed bonds of community in this society. The report also reinforces the widespread belief that competition -- among nations, citizens, and students -- is inevitable.

Already, however, I hear that annoying question: Whose "moral boundaries?" And to this I can say only that I am speaking out of a

common sense of morality; that we do, after all, have democratic and religious traditions that affirm the dignity and worth of all people and that, consequently, rationalization of disenfranchisement is or ought to be unthinkable. In this case, however, what of my argument that A Nation at Risk warrants critique because of its broad resonance with public fears and sensibilities? Without positing some sort of pervasive false consciousness (a supposition I do not want to make), what authority does my own moral critique have? How can I both set myself apart from dominant sensibilities (such as those A Nation at Risk reflects) and claim a measure of critical authority based on shared values?

Let me assume for now that I cannot -- that in a racist, sexist, class-stratified society faith in a notion of critical authority grounded in a shared moral sensibility is naive, at best. Instead, perhaps one must turn to some notion of analytic rigor or methodological soundness as a ground for critical authority. From this perspective, A Nation at Risk invites a less condemnatory critique. Indeed, assessed on the basis of the methodology employed, the report seems almost exemplary in the sense that it contextualizes well the call for educational reform. A Nation at Risk does not offer the truncated critique so common among technically oriented and pragmatically focused critics determined to keep their analyses within the classroom walls. Rather, the report not only acknowledges, affirms, and

elaborates a relationship between the schools and the broader society, but speaks powerfully to real fears and anxieties. However implausible the relationship suggested between 1) lazy students, poor curricula, ill-prepared teachers and 2) the nation's economic and military power, a critique of educational practices so situated does, to its credit, acknowledge that these are seriously troubling, even crisis, times and that efforts to reform the schools must be efforts to reshape the broader society as well.

In reducing our complex social crisis to issues of economic competitiveness and military might, however, A Nation at Risk ignores the breakdown in human community, which our undeniable economic problems certainly reflect but nevertheless neither account for nor adequately explain. For example, what Marc Miringoff (1992, January 16) calls the nation's "social health" has been steadily declining for at least twenty years: Child abuse has tripled and suicide among teenagers has almost doubled in the last two decades (p. A25). Less than half those eligible now vote in national elections -- a situation troubling enough in itself but even more so because those who don't vote are disproportionately poor (Reich, 1991, p. 292). And as our social health has degenerated, indices of economic injustice have risen to unheard of levels. The gap between rich and poor has swelled dangerously as an unprecedented share of the nation's wealth has been vacuumed up by the richest fifth of the

population.

> [Between 1977 and 1990] the average incomes of the poorest fifth of American families declined by about 7 percent, while the average income of the richest fifth of American families increased about 15 percent. That left the poorest fifth of Americans by 1990 with 3.7 percent of the nation's total income, down from 5.5 percent twenty years before -- the lowest portion they have received since 1954. And it left the richest fifth with a bit over half of the nation's income -- the highest portion ever recorded by the top 20 percent. The top 5 percent commanded 26 percent of the nation's total income, another record (Reich, 1991, p. 197).

If one looks at wealth (property owned minus debt), the numbers are even more alarming. By 1989, The New York Times reported, wealth had become so concentrated that "the top 1 percent (834,000 households with about $5.7 trillion of net worth) was worth more than the bottom 90 percent of Americans (84 million households, with about $4.8 trillion in net worth)" (Nasar, 1992, p. A1).

"The litmus test ... for assaying the health of a society," says Robert Bellah (1985), "is how it deals with the problem of wealth and poverty." He continues:

> The Hebrew prophets took their stand by the 'anawin,' the poor and oppressed, and condemned the rich and powerful who exploited them.... Classic republican theory from Aristotle to the American founders rested on the assumption that free institutions could survive in a society only if there were a rough equality of condition, that extremes of wealth and

> poverty are incompatible with a republic.... Contemporary social science has documented the consequences of poverty and discrimination, so that most educated Americans know that much of what makes our world and our neighborhoods unsafe arises from economic and racial [and, Bellah should have added, gender] inequality (p. 285).

If we use Bellah's test, contemporary American society clearly is critically ill. Never before in this country have rich and poor drifted so far apart. Bosses and workers now live in very distinct worlds.

> [By 1988] the chief executive officer of one of America's hundred largest corporations received, on average, $2,025,000. This was 93 times the wages paid to the average American production worker for these corporations. And, given the top tax rate was only 28 percent, the CEO took home about 70 times more than the worker on that line (Reich, 1991, p. 205).

Graef Crystal, comparing slightly different numbers, found that the typical CEO of a major American company now earns approximately 160 times what the average American worker earns (Arenson, 1991).

What is horrifying is not only the injustice of it all, but also the relationship between economic injustice and social misery. While compensation practices have become so preposterous, social programs that would benefit the most desperate have been cut drastically. Indeed, states seem to be "competing to make themselves unattractive places for the poor to live," remarked a state-budget analyst in light of the 1991 budget cuts in

cash "safety-net" programs for the poor, which account for only a fraction (about 5 percent) of the typical state budget -- cuts, that is, that could have been avoided ("State budget," 1991).

A Nation at Risk not only ignores these issues of social health by focusing exclusively on the nation's economic competitiveness. The report also makes several false assumptions. For one, it assumes that "a school is a school," and that since all schools are basically alike, across-the-board policies make sense (Metz, 1990, p. 142). Secondly, the report takes for granted the idea that more competition inside schools will translate into higher productivity levels outside schools and so enhance job opportunities (Bastian, 1986, p. 163). Most problematically, however, A Nation at Risk accepts at face value the notion of a national interest, supposedly served by an intensified intranational competition among citizens, especially students, which, it is assumed, will shore up the country's dominance in the international marketplace.

Reich (1991) offers a thorough critique of such a construction of the national interest -- an argument I want to review because it points to what I see as the most serious analytic shortcoming of A Nation at Risk. Despite all the talk about how to fix the national economy, Reich argues, we no longer have one. Therefore, speculation about how to "jump start" American business (one of George Bush's favorite metaphors) amounts to

answers to the wrong question:

> Politicians and pundits talk loosely of "restoring" or "restarting" American business, as if it were a stalled, broken-down jalopy in need of a thorough tune-up. Others offer plans for regaining America's competitive edge and revitalizing the American economy. Many of these ideas are sound. Some are silly. But all suffer from vestigial thinking about exactly what it is that must be restored, restarted, regained, or revitalized. They assume as their subject an American economy centered upon core American corporations and comprising major American industries.... But ... this image bears only the faintest resemblance to the global economy [of today], in which money and information move almost effortlessly through global webs of enterprise. There is coming to be no such thing as an American corporation or an American industry. The American economy is but a region of the global economy (p. 243).

The idea of an American economy that coheres around a few major corporations on whose health and vitality the well-being of Americans depends arises out of the belief that all of us, rich and poor alike, are in some sense "in the same boat": If the American economy sinks, we all sink, the metaphor implies. Reich elaborates:

> [T]he national economic boat is thought to be piloted by a number of Americans: the President, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, several thousand chief executives of major American corporations, the leaders of organized labor; and, arrayed around this core group, the executives of smaller American companies, investors and venture capitalists, and a wide-ranging collection of scientists, inventors, and entrepreneurs. Americans depend on these "pilots." Their collective wisdom, foresight, and ambition spell the difference between national prosperity and stagnation. Other Americans must faithfully do their parts as well, of course. All must

> work hard, save as much as possible, and inculcate in their children similar habits of diligence and frugality (p. 4).

Other nations' economies similarly are imagined to resemble boats "competing with each other in a worldwide regatta whose prize is economic preeminence." And because "boats that are in the lead at one point in history may fall behind at another time ... we must maintain our vigilance" (p. 5).

What's wrong here, Reich (1991) argues, is that, despite the "clarity and soothing comprehensibility" of the economy-as-boat picture, it is no longer true (p. 5). The economic well-being of any single American depends not on the relative competitiveness of a few major corporations or even of the society as a whole, but rather on the functions she herself performs in the global economy.

> Americans thus confront global competition ever more directly, unmediated by national institutions. As we discard vestigial notions of the competitiveness of American corporations, American industry, and the American economy, and recast them in terms of the competitiveness of the American work force, it becomes apparent that successes or failures will not be shared equally be all our citizens.
>
> Some Americans, whose contributions to the global economy are more highly valued in world markets, will succeed, while others, whose contributions are deemed far less valuable, fail (p. 172).

More specifically, and in terms of the three-way division of labor Reich (1991) describes, the fortunes of symbolic analysts are rising and likely will continue to rise, while those of service workers are falling, although not as quickly as those of the most precariously positioned routine production workers. Routine production work, marked by the performance of repetitive tasks, includes traditional blue-collar jobs but also supervisory jobs that entail doing the same thing over and over and by compensation based on either the amount of work done or time put in. In-person service workers, like production workers, perform simple, repetitive tasks and are paid by the hour or the job, but unlike production workers, interact face-to-face with customers and clients -- retail sales clerks, waiters and waitresses, and hospital attendants, for example.

> In-person servers are supposed to be as punctual, reliable, and tractable as routine production workers. But many in-person servers share one additional requirement: They must also have a pleasant demeanor. They must smile and exude confidence and good cheer, even when they feel morose. They must be courteous and helpful, even to the most obnoxious of patrons. Above all, they must make others feel happy and at ease (pp. 176-77).

Consequently, "It should come as no surprise that, traditionally, most in-person servers have been women" (p. 177). Symbolic analysts, more privileged in every way than the production and service workers,

manipulate symbols -- "data, words, oral and visual representations" (p. 177). Included in this group are engineers, consultants, and analysts of all sorts; lawyers, public relations executives, art directors, and film editors; journalists, musicians, and professors.

> Symbolic analysts solve, identify, and broker problems by manipulating symbols.... Some of these manipulations reveal how to more efficiently deploy resources or shift financial assets, or otherwise save time and energy. Other manipulations yield new inventions -- technological marvels, innovative legal arguments, new advertising ploys for convincing people that certain amusements have become life necessities. Still other manipulations -- of sounds, words, pictures -- serve to entertain their recipients, or cause them to reflect more deeply on their lives or on the human condition. Others grab money from people too slow or naive to protect themselves by manipulating in response (p. 178).

Only the symbolic analysts are faring well (for the most part very well) in a global market. American production workers can neither out-produce nor subsist on lower pay than their counterparts around the world, and the service workers increasing are competing with the cast-out production workers to hold on to their usually quite poorly compensated jobs. The fortunes of the symbolic analysts, however, depend on the fortunes of none of these workers but rather on the value of their skills and abilities in a global market.

Given this lopsided economic dependence, the critical question of social responsibility arises. What, if anything, holds together American

culture as distinct from an American economy?

> The underlying question concerns ... the fate of the majority of Americans who are losing out in global competition. The answer will depend on whether there is still enough concern about American society to elicit sacrifices from all of us -- especially from the most advantaged and successful of us -- to help the majority regain the ground it has lost and fully participate in the new global economy.... Are we still a society, even if we are no longer an economy? Are we bound together by something more than the gross national product? Or has the idea of the nation-state as a collection of people sharing some responsibility for their mutual well-being become passe? (Reich, 1991, p. 9).

In other words, do moral ties among American citizens exist in the absence of economic interdependency? Is there a national interest that transcends our no-longer-shared economic interests? Reich (1991) describes troubling patterns that suggest not:

> With each sought-after reduction in their taxes, symbolic analysts in effect withdraw their dollars from the support of public spaces shared by all and dedicate the savings to private spaces they share with other symbolic analysts. As public parks and playgrounds deteriorate, there is a proliferation of private health clubs, golf clubs, tennis clubs, skating clubs, and every other type of recreational association in which costs are divided up among members. So also with condominiums, cooperatives, and the omnipresent "residential communities" which dun their members in order to undertake efforts that financially strapped local governments can no longer afford to do well -- maintaining private roadways, mending sidewalks, pruning trees, repairing streetlights, cleaning swimming pools and paying for a lifeguard, and notably -- hiring security guards to protect life and property (p. 269).

These private security guards, which have doubled in number as a percentage of the work force, now outnumber public police officers in the United States (p. 269). The poorest four-fifths of the population, however, hesitates to ask much of more fortunate Americans:

> The reason is economic. The rest of the population is dependent upon how and where symbolic analysts decide to dedicate their energies and money. The dependence of in-person servers is direct; wealthy symbolic analysts in their midst attract money from the rest of the world and spend a part of it on local services. Routine producers, although not dependent on American symbolic analysts exclusively, nonetheless rely on the decisions of strategic brokers of whatever nationality to give them work and, hopefully, to train them to become more valuable and productive (Reich, 1991, p. 294).

In this climate, when whole groups of people are fearful of even broaching the subject of justice, it is politically possible to talk, for example, about the evils of a national health care system or the inadvisability of raising the minimum wage. All the social misery, however, need not provoke a guilty conscience in the sense that it is largely hidden -- because the "one thing Americans increasingly have in common with their neighbors ... is their income levels" (Reich, 1991, p. 277). Symbolic analysts tend to live in economic enclaves that shield them from insight into or even awareness of the plights of others.

> Since almost everyone in [the] "community" is by definition as well off as they are, there is no cause for a stricken conscience. If inhabitants of another neighborhood are poorer, let them look to one another. Why should we pay for their schools? So the argument goes, without acknowledging that the critical assumption has already been made: "we" and "they" belong to fundamentally different communities. Through such reasoning it has become possible to maintain a preferred self-image of generosity toward, and solidarity with, one's "community" without owing any responsibility to "them," in another "community" (Reich, 1991, p. 278).

However, if "we" and "they" do not comprise an inclusive moral community, in what sense does a national interest exist at all?

A Nation at Risk fails to ask this question. Consequently, we might fault the report not only for its reductionistic view of the social context of education (it reduces our massive and complex social crisis to a manipulable economic problem), but also for taking at face value a notion of such moral and political significance as "the national interest." Finally, despite its rhetorical power, the report fails to offer any insight into the historical context, political dimensions, or moral significance of the deep-seated anxieties and destructive fears of losing out that it plays into.

Still, the real problem with A Nation at Risk has less to do with these analytic or methodological shortcomings than with its moral import. A critique of Bloom's Closing of the American Mind will, I hope, clarify the distinction I want to make between 1) critiquing the methodology of a

critical text and 2) pointing (usually with alarm) to its moral and political implications. Problems arise, I want to argue, when these different critical strategies are confused. Bloom (1987) grounds his critique of university curricula (centered no longer on unified sets of core courses emphasizing classic texts) in the widespread anomie and confusion he sees in his admittedly quite-privileged students and in his sense that real philosophy has been all but undermined by a pervasive and debilitating moral relativism -- the legacy of Nietzsche as refracted through American culture. Critics across the political spectrum have critiqued Bloom's argument. Here, I want to focus on Martha Nussbaum's (1987) and Aronowitz and Giroux's (1991) critiques of Bloom because they raise important questions not only about his argument but also about the strategies or methods of educational criticism.

Nussbaum's (1987) critique of Bloom is essentially methodological. Bloom's historical analysis of the concept of relativism is "idiosyncratic," she says. Further, he makes unfounded, sweeping statements about "students" and "American culture"; his scholarship is "vague and offhand"; his argument contains "gaps and errors"; and he ignores important texts in Greek philosophy (those that contradict his thesis) while claiming to ground his argument in the wisdom of "the ancients." In short, his scholarship is poor: "How good a philosopher, then, is Allan Bloom?" Nussbaum asks.

"The answer is, we cannot say, and we are given no reason to think him one at all. His book is long on rhetoric, painfully short on argument." Bloom pretends to be a philosopher when he isn't, tries to pass off as serious argumentation what is little more than empty rhetoric, and lacks humility, Nussbaum suggests: "Bloom knows that he knows. Socrates knew that he didn't" (pp. 20-26). However, all this lays the groundwork for the moral argument that, it seems, is the one Nussbaum (1987) really wants to make:

> Bloom is really proposing that the function of the entire American university system should be to perfect and then protect a few contemplative souls, whose main subject matter will, apparently, be the superiority of their own contemplative life to the moral and political life.... The real problem with Bloom's advice on curriculum is the problem of the book as a whole: that it is not informed by concern for the diverse needs of diverse groups of American students (pp. 24-25).

In other words, the problem with Bloom is that he is elitist and that his plans for reform of university curricular are not in the broader public's interest.

In terms of critical strategy (as well as political orientation), Aronowitz and Giroux's (1991) critique of Bloom resembles Nussbaum's. They commend Bloom for reminding us "of what has been lost in the drive for rationalization, for the supremacy of science over philosophy, history

over eternal essences" (p. 33). They quickly add, however, that Bloom's "sweeping claims," made "without a shred of evidence," amount to a "hyperbolic tirade" -- all of which casts doubt on his scholarship, which amounts to little more than "scapegoating" and "invective" (pp. 29, 32). Bloom, Aronowitz and Giroux point out, "seeks to restore ... belief in the transhistorical permanence of forms of truth" -- a project that requires (as Nussbaum also suggests) "an unproblematic, quasi-essentialist, and elitist reading of history" (pp. 27, 37).

Yet, however true this may be, Aronowitz and Giroux's (1991) critique of Bloom, like Nussbaum's, seems driven less by offense at shoddy historical analysis than by alarm in the face of the moral and political import of his argument. The Closing of the American Mind, Aronowitz and Giroux argue, represents "a new cultural offensive," a battle over textual authority:

> [T]his offensive represents a form of textual authority that not only legitimates a particular version of Western civilization as well as an elitist notion of the canon, but also serves to exclude all those other discourses, whether from the new social movements or from other sources of opposition, which attempt to establish different grounds for the production and organization of knowledge (p. 26).

And the battle over what knowledge is most important is, of course, also about who is most important:

> [Bloom] yearns for the return of a more rigidly stratified civilization in which the crowd is contained within the land of the marketplace and its pleasures are confined to the rituals of the carnival. What he wants to exclude are the majority of the population from the precincts of reason. At the same time, he would drive the vox populi from the genuine academy where the Absolute Spirit should find a home, but does not, because of the confusion that reigns amidst the dangerous and flabby influence of the discourses of social commitment, politics, and equality (pp. 30-31).

Consequently,

> What Bloom means by reform is nothing less than an effort to make explicit what women, minorities, and working-class students have always known: the precincts of higher learning are not for them, and the educational system is meant to train a new mandarin class (p. 36).

Bloom's book marks a shift in the discourse, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argue, from an emphasis on schools as sites for the production of technical expertise and an "improved" work ethic to an emphasis on schools as sites of cultural production. In this context, Bloom's call for curricular reform amounts to a strategic move in a broader struggle "over the relationship between knowledge and power as well as ... the construction and development of the political subject" (p. 27). At stake in all this, therefore, is the question not only of what and whose knowledge counts, but also of the shape and morality of political society. In sum, Aronowitz and Giroux contextualize The Closing of the American Mind in the broader discourse of

educational reform and in the wider political battles fought on philosophical terrain. At the same time, their critique of Bloom, like Nussbaum's, is largely a moral critique advanced, however, along methodological lines -- not wholly so, but in part. This strategy raises what I believe are important questions about the practice of educational/cultural criticism -- questions I perhaps can focus best by returning to my critique of Mann's description of curriculum criticism.

The work of curriculum criticism, Mann (1975) argues, proceeds through a methodology of moral discernment wherein the critic's task is to disclose the meanings a curriculum contains by explaining its design in such a way as to show the nature of its influence. But in what sense are meanings <u>in</u> a curriculum -- in what sense, that is, do meanings <u>inhere</u> in a design able to be discovered by insightful critics and in what sense are they rather <u>created</u> in light of a curriculum's broader moral and political context? Richard Johnson's (1986) exploration of questions like this one provides a perspective on Mann's work. The cultural critic's task, Johnson suggests, is less to discover than to construct. Critique, the methodology of cultural studies as he sees it, is

> not criticism merely, nor even polemic, but procedures by which other traditions are approached both for what they may yield and for what they inhibit. Critique involves stealing away the more useful elements and rejecting the rest. From

> this point of view cultural studies is a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge (p. 38).

For Johnson, therefore, critique is a practice of selecting and forging -- picking and choosing among aspects and insights of various traditions to construct a useful analytic framework. Eagleton (1991) offers a different (but compatible) definition of critique (quoted in Chapter 1): "that form of discourse which seeks to inhabit the experience of the subject from the inside, in order to elicit those 'valid' features of that experience which point beyond the subject's present condition" (xiv). To this might be added Michael Walzer's (1988) comments about criticism's grounding in a sense of hope and possibility:

> Perhaps there is one common mark of the critical enterprise. It is founded in hope; it cannot be carried on without some sense of historical possibility. Criticism is oriented toward the future: the critic must believe that the conduct of his fellows can conform more closely to a moral standard than it now does or that their self-understanding can be greater than it now is or that their institutions can be more justly organized then they now are (p. 17).

From Johnson, Eagleton, and Walzer I would generalize that critique proceeds, at least in part, through affirmation -- a process of culling through the historical memory of personal experience as well as intellectual tradition for that which sustains hope and promises a new and better

world. Critique, therefore, requires some evaluative criteria; and good critique, it seems, requires articulation of those criteria or of the premises of one's judgment. West (1991) puts this well in calling for affirmation and self-disclosure on the part of those who would throw their intellectual abilities into the struggle for a better world:

> This means, in part, a wholesale critical inventory of ourselves and our communities of struggle. More pointedly, the existential and ethical dimensions of our lives require serious scrutiny. Why do we still fight and hope for social change? What really sustains our faith in struggle and our hope for change in these barbaric times? How do we analyze and account for the egalitarian values and democratic sensibilities we act upon? (p. xiii).

This kind of personal affirmation is, I suggest, what is missing not only in A Nation and Risk and The Closing of the American Mind, but also, and maybe especially, in Nussbaum's and in Aronowitz and Giroux's critiques of Bloom. Their criticisms seem to be not really that Bloom sorts and selects among the texts of Greek philosophy to make the argument he wants to make, but rather that he sorts and selects towards the wrong end or in the wrong direction. In other words, the real problem is the criteria by which he sorts and selects -- that is, what he affirms, which is an elitism in which the rational search for "the good" and "the true" is both the means and end of privilege. Whereas Bloom's fundamental affirmation seems to

be the legitimacy of privilege, A Nation at Risk seems most fundamentally to affirm competition -- its the value, its inevitability, and therefore its effects (the production of losers as well as winners).

As difficult as it is to see competition and privilege as affirmations, Nussbaum and Aronowitz and Giroux in some ways offer an even greater challenge. Nussbaum's (1987) central affirmation, it seems, is of a democratic conception of philosophy as "the active use of practical reason, which seems to be the common and universal possession of all humans" -- which, she points out, has important educational implications:

> [I]f, as Socrates said, "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being," it might seem to follow that a society dedicated to securing, for its members, the conditions of a full and worthwhile life would have a duty to make sure that they could get this higher education (p. 25).

Aronowitz and Giroux's (1991) central affirmation, it seems, is of a methodology -- that of "appropriation" of tradition -- although they clearly intend for this approach to be put in the service of specific moral and political ends (those of radical democracy):

> Above all, the canon must justify itself as representing the elements of our own heritage. In the final instance, it is to be appropriated rather than revered -- and, with this appropriation, transformed. The canon, then, is to be pressed into the service of definite ends -- which frees us from the yoke of acknowledging it as the unquestioned embodiment of Truth,

even as it remains unread (p. 38).

These affirmations (of a conception of philosophy and a relationship to tradition) are important. However, I want to argue, they need to be translated into terms that connect with people's lives. Nussbaum comes close in suggesting that taking Socrates seriously means making sure that anyone who wants to go to college can, and Giroux and Aronowitz approach this in describing the canon as a yoke around our necks. But their arguments, to my mind, remain too abstract and too disconnected from the substance of day-to-day life to really inspire or engage the reader.

This critique of some of the criticism (Nussbaum's and Aronowitz and Giroux's) of educational criticism (Bloom's) raises this question for me: If the central task of educational criticism is not to protect (in part through upholding methodological standards) the integrity of a field of inquiry (education), what is the task and what are its tools? If the task of educational criticism is to critique the social and cultural context of education, it involves judgment of the moral foundations of the broader society and culture -- that is, critique of the habits of thought and social practices that perpetuate injustice and provoke hopelessness and despair. Consequently, then, educational criticism requires moral argumentation that perhaps includes but nevertheless surpasses issues of analytic rigor and

methodological soundness.

The actual practice of educational criticism, however, does not demonstrate this. Instead of educational criticism as powerful and persuasive moral argument, we seem to have for the most part either powerful and persuasive apologies for fear-driven worldviews in which justice is a non-issue (A Nation at Risk, for example) or insightful, even brilliant, analyses of the causes or etiology of injustice mixed with disparaging remarks about other critics' competence (Nussbaum's and Aronowitz and Giroux's critiques of Bloom, for example). With the respect to Aronowitz and Giroux's critique, one thinks of Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov, who advances incisive social critique through his extraordinary powers of critical rationality -- and of the monk, Father Zossima, who observes that Ivan seems not even to believe his own arguments.

My criticism of Bloom's critics is, I realize, too harsh. I overstate the case, however, to point to what I believe is a real problem in educational criticism -- the lack of powerful and persuasive moral argument. Assuming that this kind of argument is or ought to be an important tool of educational critics, a host of questions arise: Is the lack of forceful moral argument a function of professional standards of scholarship that constrict and constrain the discourse? Or is it a broader educational problem -- when and where are the skills of moral argumentation taught? If they are

not taught at all, why not? And what are the cultural dimensions of this problem? Does the substance of contemporary educational criticism reflect a broader cultural confusion about the status of moral critique altogether? Let me hold these questions in abeyance for now, and turn next to the literature of critical pedagogy, an important strain of criticism that boldly affirms its moral impetus and offers a thorough critique of such educational criticism as A Nation at Risk and The Closing of the American Mind, but a strain of criticism that, in practice, brings its own set of problems and difficulties.

CHAPTER III

THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM II: PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED AND SCHOOLING AND THE STRUGGLE FOR PUBLIC LIFE

Conservative ideology, as I have argued, has shaped the most recent wave of interest in educational reform. The popular calls for intensified competition, higher standards, and more stringent mechanisms of accountability (like those put forth in A Nation at Risk) reflect and promote a view of education that links schools, often directly, to the struggle to increase "the nation's" economic strength and military might. The only serious alternative voice in the educational reform debate has been the far less popular but far more thoughtful, cogent, and well developed educational criticism found in the critical pedagogy literature -- the tradition of criticism in which I have been schooled and the one with which I identify most closely. This radical criticism has called attention to the political import of texts like A Nation at Risk (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, for example), has pointed to the continuing injustices the conservative criticism has failed to address (Bastian et al., 1986, for example), and has sought to tie the aims of education not to concerns about the nation's economic and military power, but rather to hopes for the realization of a truly participatory democracy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, for example).

The critical pedagogy literature, shaped by the Critical Social Theory of the Frankfurt School, has evolved most directly out of the work of the Brazilian educator and educational theorist Paulo Freire. Freire's writings, the best known of which is his Pedagogy of the Oppressed, have influenced the development of radical educational theory and practice in and outside this country.

> Paulo Freire is without question the most influential theorist of critical or liberatory education. His theories have profoundly influenced literacy programs throughout the world and what has come to be called critical pedagogy in the United States. His theoretical works ... provide classic statements of liberatory or critical pedagogy based on universal claims of truth (Weiler, 1991, p. 450).

Freire's teachings have been applied to the American cultural context by, among many others, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, and Peter McClaren. The critical pedagogy these writers espouse has been criticized for its almost-exclusive concern with issues of power, for its abstract and at-times esoteric language, and for its masculinist assumptions (Ellsworth, 1989, for example). Nevertheless, this literature has carried forward the reconceptualists' concern with issues of social justice and human freedom in a time when these ideals have been dangerously and conspicuously absent from the public discourse on education.

For purposes of critique of the critical pedagogy literature I will focus on two texts: first, Freire's foundational statement, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, then Giroux's Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Critical Pedagogy in the Modern Age. My intent is to provide, through critique of Freire's book, a sense of where the educational criticism found in the critical pedagogy literature comes from and, through critique of Giroux's, some sense of what it looks like today. I focus on Giroux's book because he is perhaps the most prolific and certainly among the best known and most influential contemporary theorists of critical pedagogy (Purpel, 1991, p. 82).

Freire (1990) critiques what he calls the banking concept of education, wherein the supposedly all-knowing teacher fills the minds of the allegedly know-nothing students who then demonstrate their mastery by filing away information, retrievable on demand. This pedagogy ends up dehumanizing those it purports to educate:

> Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.... [I]n the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system (p. 58).

This all-too-familiar form of schooling, Freire insists, teaches the poor and the powerless not to critique the oppressive relations of power in which they are bound, but rather to accept a static view of the world and of themselves that precludes the possibility of transformation. For Freire, therefore, pedagogy is eminently political and relations of power, eminently pedagogical.

Against a static view of the world and the schooling that helps perpetuate it, Freire (1990) preaches that men (one assumes he means women, too, but his language does not reflect this) are and must come to see themselves as always becoming other than they are. Consequently, the humanly constructed world itself is always in the process of change. Coming to feel this sense of possibility (conscientizacao) requires not banking education but its alternative, problem-posing education, wherein students and teachers alike intervene in the oppressive reality that thwarts efforts towards humanization. Such intervention proceeds through the praxis of dialogue, reflection, and action:

> It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis (Freire, 1990, p. 52).

At the heart of this pedagogy is the resolution of what Freire calls the teacher-student contradiction, a relationship that often mirrors that of oppressed and oppressors in the broader society. Joined in a mutual struggle to name and intervene in an oppressive world, teachers become teacher-students and students, student-teachers, and the curriculum arises out of the dialogical relationship among these teacher-students and student-teachers:

> [T]he dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks himself what he will dialogue with the latter about (Freire, 1990, pp. 81-82).

Freire's (1990) pedagogical and political philosophy rests on two important assumptions about human nature and the nature of reality: 1) there is an objective reality (one of oppression), which can be "unveiled" through a process of dialogue and reflection; and 2) this process of unveiling, although often thwarted, reflects an ontological will toward humanization and desire for "a world in which it will be easier to love" (p. 24). Movement in this direction requires overcoming or resolving the oppressed/oppressor contradiction. The hope, for Freire, is not to upend the hierarchy (so that the oppressed come to dominate and exploit their former oppressors), but rather to transform human relations so that love

and communion are possible. Transformation will come, however, only through opposition and struggle. The oppressed must oppose their oppressors, violently if necessary, in the interest of the humanization and liberation of all:

> [I]t is -- paradoxical though it may seem -- precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found. Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love.... As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression (p. 42).

In the sense that Freire believes only power "that springs from the weakness of the oppressed" can free both the oppressed and their oppressors, he grounds his faith in the victims of an unjust social order and affirms for them a certain epistemological privilege:

> Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? (pp. 28-29).

Central to Freire's (1990) thought, therefore, is a profound faith in transformative possibility. Although "both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for man as an uncompleted being

conscious of his incompletion," the will toward humanization can be thwarted but never eradicated, Freire insists:

> This vocation [of humanization] is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.... Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less than human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so (pp. 27-28).

Freire's great contribution to educational theory and criticism is to lay out a political philosophy, epistemology, and pedagogy consistent with and supportive of such utopian ideals.

Although Giroux does not use Freire's quasi-religious language, he continues the tradition of framing educational theory in terms of politically emancipatory ideals. In Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life Giroux (1988b) develops a critical theory of citizenship education grounded in a democratic public philosophy. Giroux rejects the idea that democratic ideals can "be grounded in any transcendent notion of truth or authority," and offers instead the outlines of a public philosophy, the rudiments of an educational theory, and a view of "citizenship" that reinforce and help legitimate each other (p. 28). He explains the project this way:

> [C]ritical literacy and citizenship education [can] provide the rationale for developing schools as democratic public spheres ... places where students learn the knowledge and skills of citizenship within forms of solidarity that provide the basis for constructing emancipatory forms of community life. What this suggests is that a public philosophy is needed that links the purpose of schooling to the development of forms of knowledge and moral character in which citizenship is defined as an ethical compact, not a commercial contract, and empowerment is related to forms of self- and social formation that encourage people to participate critically in shaping public life (pp. 34-35).

Giroux's project, therefore, is to link radical democratic ideals with educational theory in such a way as to justify an explicitly moral and political view of schooling -- a project Giroux situates against what he calls the conservative preoccupation not with citizenship but rather with a narrow patriotism "made synonymous with the tenets of economic productivity and national defense" (p. 17).

Giroux (1988b) develops his argument through critique of the radical educational theory with which he is affiliated. While a tone of outrage and indignation pervades this discourse, Giroux argues, the lack of a substantive social vision blunts its force:

> [M]oral indignation has often been expressed in a language paralyzed by skepticism and unable to move beyond the limited task of charting and registering the failure of American schooling. Lost from this perspective is any attempt at recovering and building upon those forms of subjectivity and a collective struggle rooted in a creative, self-transforming, life-

> enhancing morality which the dominant culture so actively conceals and precludes whenever possible (p. 37).

Giroux's response to the "paralysis" he describes is to urge educators and educational theorists to infuse their discourse with a language of hope and utopian possibility and to develop a "provisional morality" as part of an ongoing attempt to articulate a resonant and historically contextualized social vision. As he puts it,

> Developing a provisional morality that points to the adequacy of naming certain norms as emancipatory and others as repressive represents a major challenge for educators.... No less challenging is the need to reconstruct and critically appropriate those historically constituted traditions of protest that might provide the basis for organizing everyday experiences around a language that promotes radical needs and emancipatory sensibilities (p. 60).

This, of course, is Giroux's own project: to link a resonant public philosophy with a compelling moral discourse supportive of a rationale for public schooling that legitimates and furthers democratic ideals.

I have juxtaposed Freire's and Giroux's books not only to try to show the focus of some of the critical pedagogy literature, but also because I believe reading Giroux against Freire offers an important perspective on the development of critical pedagogy in general and on Giroux's work in particular. In this context, let me go back to Freire. His teaching is shaped

by an overarching concern for social, political, and historical relevance. Freire worked out his ideas in the context of the egregious oppression and grinding poverty of the Third World (Brazil), and has warned against extrapolating his pedagogy and its rationale wholesale (Schilb, 1985, p. 258). That said, Freire unquestionably has made a major contribution to educational theory and pedagogical practice. His teachings continue to be critiqued and interpreted by scholars in and outside the profession of education (Weiler, 1991, Elbow, 1986, and Schilb, 1985, for example).

Nevertheless, efforts to appropriate Freire raise important issues of context, among which surely are these: How oppressed are college and university students in the United States (the primary participants, happily so or not, in most efforts toward liberatory pedagogy) compared with the Brazilian peasants with whom Freire worked? How useful are the dichotomous categories "oppressed" and "oppressor" in the United States where race, class, and gender intersect so deceptively? How resonant is Freire's language of conversion and redemption in America, given our concerns about separation of church and state, especially with respect to the public schools? On the other hand, how compelling is Freirian theory, fraught as it is with paradox and infused as it is with radical hope, when extracted from a narrative of conversion and redemption? I want to take up each of these questions as a way of trying to clarify Freire's significance

for contemporary educational criticism in this country.

1. How oppressed are college and university students in the United States? Schilb (1985) says he believes his own students (first- and second-year students at a private university) are oppressed, but their oppression is more ideological than material:

> The students have undeniably escaped the pain of extreme material want. However, they can be thought of as entrapped in a certain profound fatalism. Unaware of the conceivable relationships between one institution and another, one historical event and another, one human being and another, they themselves experience life as a fragile web of monadic units that cannot afford to depend too much on the prospect of mutual aid. Given their own apprehension of culture as incorrigibly opaque, they follow the specific edicts of their parents and the general doctrine of social Darwinism as the only means of mental and physical survival.... But they do suffer doubts and inner schisms, exacerbated by their continued blindness to social relations and their continued reliance on ideological cliches (p. 259).

If Schilb is right in his characterization of his students' oppression, the pedagogical question arises of how effectively fatalism, excessive self-doubt, and so vulnerability to the brutality of social Darwinist thinking (and the meritocratic ideology that buttresses it) can be addressed and transformed through the tools of critical dialogue and reflection. Breaking out of these habits of thought would seem to require a consciousness not only of one's own oppression but also of an alternative reality in which sacrifice or relinquishment of the psychological and material investments in a

meritocratic ideology makes sense: Why should we who are able to "win" the competition for decent work, some measure of material security, and some degree of power and authority critique not just "the rules of the game," but the whole metaphor of life as a game -- a contest with winners and losers? Certainly we should, but I wonder whether the question of why can be addressed meaningfully within the confines of critical rationality. Perhaps it can. I raise this as a question, however, because of my own suspicion that critical rationality is so wedded to ideas about the value of self-interest that sacrifice as real sacrifice (something valuable really is given up and not replaced) will always be written off as irrational.

2. How useful are the categories "oppressed" and "oppressor" in the United States where race, class, and gender intersect so deceptively? Kathleen Weiler (1991) speaks to this in her critique of Freirian theory -- a critique that arises out of the realization, she says, that in feminist classrooms the interpersonal dynamics call into question some of Freire's assumptions. For example,

> Feminist educational critics ... want to retain the vision of social justice and transformation that underlies liberatory pedagogies, but they find that their claims to universal truths and their assumptions of a collective experience of oppression do not adequately address the realities of their own confusing and often tension-filled classrooms (p. 450).

Oppression is more complex than Freire suggests, Weiler says -- a misunderstanding, she believes, that ends up supporting anti-liberatory pedagogical practices because the complexity of the teacher-student relationship, for example, thereby escapes critique. In appropriating Freirian theory, Weiler says, theorists and practitioners of feminist pedagogy must take into account not only the conflicts that arise from the divided consciousness Freire describes (wherein the oppressed internalize the consciousness of their oppressors). Conflicts among social groups and between teachers and students also must be addressed. For if not,

> [T]he conflicts among groups trying to work together to name and struggle against oppression -- among teachers and students in classrooms, or among political groups working for change in very specific areas -- can lead to anger, frustration, and a retreat to safer or more traditional approaches [than Freirian or feminist pedagogies] (p. 451).

Addressing these conflicts requires that "the goals of justice" be framed "more specifically in the context of historically defined struggles" and that the interests and identities of teachers and theorists as well as students be, at the very least, named (p. 451).

A Freirian view of the world (as constituted by the oppressed and their oppressors) not only oversimplifies the nature of social conflict, Weiler (1991) says, but ignores the complexity of oppression at the level of

subjectivity:

> What is not addressed is the possibility of simultaneous contradictory positions of oppression and dominance: the man oppressed by his boss could at the same time oppress his wife, for example, or the White woman oppressed by sexism could exploit the Black woman. By framing his discussion in such abstract terms, Freire slides over the contradictions and tension within social settings in which overlapping forms of oppression exist (p. 453).

This is a problem because a pedagogy that fails to take into account the contradictions and complexities of oppression is too quick to assume that

> the teacher is "on the same side" as the oppressed, and that as teachers and students engage together in a dialogue about the world, they will uncover together the same reality, the same oppression, and the same liberation (p. 454).

These observations bring Weiler to call for a more situated theory of oppression and subjectivity and for self-disclosure on the part of educators:

> The recognition of our own histories means the necessity of articulating our own subjectivities and our own interests as we try to interpret and critique the social world. This stance rejects the universalizing tendency of much "malestream" thought, and insists on recognizing the power and privilege of who we are (p. 469).

Recognizing "the power and privilege of who we are" in turn requires accepting responsibility for our own implication in an unjust social order --

the only alternative to which is the denial and evasion born of privilege:

> The claim to a lack of identity or positionality is itself based on privilege, on the refusal to accept responsibility for one's implication in actual historical or social relations, or a denial that positionalities exist or that they matter, the denial of one's own personal history and the claim to a total separation from it (Martin & Mohanty in Weiler, 1991, p. 469).

As insightful as Weiler's argument is, I believe it too warrants critique. As a teaching assistant and doctoral student I have lived the teacher-student contradiction Freire describes and would resolve through a recasting of these roles as teacher-student and student-teachers. As a student expected to write often and well, my struggle to articulate my own interests and commitments, to name the world meaningfully, and to construct authentic arguments has been a struggle primarily against vapidness -- argument for argument's sake or explication for explication's sake. "Education is suffering from narration sickness," says Freire (1990, p. 57). My struggle has been to try to cut through the narration to get to the sickness, to feel the pain, to know the proximity of death and deceit in order to say something that matters and to situate myself <u>in</u> a world of meaning -- in other words, to break out of the fatalism Schilb sees in his students.

As a teacher expected somehow to awaken students, themselves prospective teachers, and to provide them with a space in which to feel the weight of the needless suffering of so many people as well as the yearning for justice, however thwarted and mocked -- all within the context of trying to help smooth their own transition into the work of teaching -- the struggle similarly has been against a sense of shallowness, a sense that while we were playing at something very important, we finally were doing no more than that. The effort to see myself as both teacher-student and student-teacher, therefore, has been marked not only by the complexities and contradictions that, as Weiler suggests, infuse all relations of power and so all forms of oppression in this culture and society, but also by frustration with the poverty of my own language in the face of the pain and suffering I often can feel but not speak or speak but not feel.

The liberation theologian/social critic Dorothee Soelle (1984) names the disease in calling for a "rebellion against banality" (p. 11). In a culture in which shopping has become a ritual many people "engage in with almost religious ardor," it is hardly surprising that a sense of meaninglessness erodes our most profound hopes and deepest desires (Soelle, 1984, p. 18). A popular mail-order catalog advises potential customers that "freedom of expression ... room for self-expression" is to be had by choosing from among a colorful "array of eclectic ties" and that paring "down to the

essentials" is a matter of "starting with just the right shirt" -- pink silk, $88.

Rebellion against a deadened consciousness requires naming the evils without. But it also entails coming to understand -- understand in the sense of grieve -- what many of us have lost of ourselves.

> All desires to be different, to become a new being, to relate differently to others, to communicate in a new way, have been exchanged for the wish to possess things. It makes a difference whether a person says at some point in life, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10), or whether the yearnings that take this direction of radical change find no language in which to express themselves (Soelle, 1984, p. 15).

This longing to become new is worlds apart from the "desire" to "fulfill one's potential." I believe that part of what we -- and here I am speaking primarily of relatively privileged (which is to say, primarily white and middle-class) seekers and searchers -- must rebel against is a consciousness of toleration, a belief that things within as well as without are somehow okay, and a too-easy appropriation of ideals such as love and justice that offer a much-needed grounding for intellectual work but do not necessarily evoke the longing for a new humanness.

Freire writes out of a context in which this longing is close to the surface and the evils that thwart it are relatively easy to name. Radical educational critics in this country, however, are writing out of a context in

which the longing for a new humanness is dissipated by the material comforts (or the promise thereof) that an affluent society really does provide those who further the interests of its most powerful citizens. Educational critics therefore must do more than "unveil reality." They also somehow must evoke an alternative consciousness in which a new humanness, in the language of the dominant consciousness, is worth the price.

3. How resonant is Freire's language of conversion, redemption, and salvation in the American context? Freire (1990) points to the tension inherent in the teacher-student relationship and calls for a movement toward equalization of power through dialogue and reconceptualization of what it means to teach. Nevertheless, Freire neither fully describes nor resolves at the theoretical level the teacher-student contradiction: He speaks of teacher-students and student-teachers, not simply students, teachers, or human beings. Similarly, Freire (1990) speaks to the process of conscientizacao by which the oppressed, shackled within by the internalized consciousness of their oppressors, can expel or exorcise that consciousness, but also names the paradox: "How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation?" As "hosts" of their oppressors, the oppressed both desire and fear "authentic existence," and this is their "tragic dilemma":

> They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized (pp. 32-33).

A third paradox -- Freire speaks to the efficacy of critical reflection but also points to the essential illogic of empowerment: "[I]f the implementation of a liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none, how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution?" (p. 39.)

Freire (1990) does not resolve these tensions and paradoxes. Rather, he frames them in a language of conversion and communion. Through this experience (of conversion and communion) revolutionary teachers and leaders become radically new -- other than they are -- reborn:

> This conversion is so radical as not to allow of ambiguous behavior. To affirm this commitment but to consider oneself the proprietor of revolutionary wisdom -- which must then be given to (or imposed on) the people -- is to retain the old ways. The man who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into communion with the people, whom he continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived....
>
> Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were (p. 47).

Consequently, "[I]n the revolutionary process there is only one way for the

emerging leaders to achieve authenticity: they must 'die,' in order to be reborn through and with the oppressed" (p. 127). This is the path of salvation, which is always communal:

> [M]en cannot save themselves (no matter how one understands "salvation"), either as individuals or as an oppressor class. Salvation can be achieved only with others. To the extent, however, that the elites oppress, they cannot be with the oppressed; for being against them is the essence of oppression (p. 142).

This is also the path of love:

> No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause -- the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical.... If I do not love the world -- if I do not love life -- if I do not love men -- I cannot enter into dialogue (p. 78).

This profound faith in the possibility of conversion and salvation through love and in the possibility of right relationship in an unjust social order shapes Freire's pedagogy. However, as critical pedagogy has developed in this country (and Giroux's work reflects this), Freire's language of death and rebirth, conversion and redemption, has been dropped, perhaps for good reason, in lieu of a discourse of radical democracy. This leads to the my last question about the application of Freirian theory to the American context.

4. How compelling is Freirian theory when extracted from a narrative of conversion and redemption? As Michael Harrington (1983) has argued so persuasively, the religious foundations of Western culture have been uprooted, and nothing has taken their place:

> When God and morality and religion were relativized by the new scientific, historical, sociological and anthropological consciousness of the nineteenth century, a good part of traditional Western culture was undermined. And when, in the twentieth century, it became increasingly difficult to believe in optimistic theories of liberal or socialist progress, the crisis became all the more severe (pp. 201-02).

Consequently, "masses of people in the West [now] no longer know what they believe" (Harrington, 1983, p. 202). Although our society needs transcendental values, Harrington insists, "The basic religious tradition of the West can no longer, as a religious tradition, provide the core values of Western society" (p. 199). One wonders, therefore, how much resonance an explicitly religious language has in the culture at large, however powerful it may be for particular people.

Harrington's (1983) response to the moral and spiritual void he explicates is, on one hand, openly and passionately to affirm his own political commitments (to democratic socialism) and, on the other, to call for all people of good faith, those who proclaim themselves religious and those who do not, to unite behind "the common enemy" -- namely, the

"absence of serious thought about the human condition" (p. 203). More specifically, "[M]en and women of faith and anti-faith should, in the secular realm at least, stop fighting one another and begin to work together to introduce moral dimensions into economic and social debate and decision" (p. 218).

Harrington is hardly alone in pleading for such honesty about the moral disintegration of our culture or for the broad-based coalition-building and energy that any significant rejuvenation will require. Among educational critics, David Purpel (1991) has argued repeatedly that "progressive social theorists committed to social transformation have not yet developed a compelling and sophisticated moral discourse that resonates with their political discourse" (p. 84). And Giroux for years has stressed the need for a language of hope and possibility as well as of critique.

Moral discourse and argument for moral discourse, however, are not the same thing. The controlled language and careful argumentation that characterizes so much of the contemporary radical educational theory and criticism goes much further toward explication of the problem (the need for a compelling, resonant moral discourse that inspires and energizes) than it does toward filling this void. A discourse of hope that does not speak to the individual's yearning to become new and different -- that is, to the personal, subjective, and emotional dimensions of liberation -- remains

inadequate. Certainly Terry Eagleton (1983), quoted in Chapter 1, is right to insist that "political argument is not an alternative to moral preoccupations" (p. 208). In this sense to argue for a morally compelling discourse is always to argue for a politically resonant discourse. However, a discourse that speaks only or even primarily to political possibility -- in a society in which "the political" for masses of people means little more than the size of their tax bill -- cannot sustain the kind of radical hope needed in these times of pervasive cynicism and despair as well as more tangible oppression and exploitation. We need a critical language that enables us to imagine a world wholly other than the one run by the gods of fear (of scarcity, of inadequacy, or of implication in the poverty and misery of millions) and of competition (for security, for prestige, or for a sense of dignity, self-worth, and legitimacy).

Giroux calls for a language of hope and possibility grounded in historical analysis, faith in the efficacy of critical rationality, and the resonance of democratic ideals. Compare this, however, with the hope Walter Brueggemann (1987) describes -- a "resilient conviction that the processes of historical interaction are to be understood in relation to some overriding purpose that prevails in odd but uncompromising ways" (p. 3) -- or with the faith that Dorothee Soelle (1984) professes:

> We are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, and our identity is located in a place where we have never yet been, in humanity's true home, a world without war. "O God, I am thine" means that I can yield myself up, but it also means that my life's wishes do not have to be small and fearful. They can be as grand as the wishes and promises of him to whom I belong (p. 182).

Cornel West's (1982) broad critique of revolutionary Christianity and progressive Marxism helps clarify the different perspectives on hope I am trying to suggest: 1) hope grounded in faith in some larger-than-human power or purpose; and 2) political utopianism grounded in faith (solely) in human praxis.

> For Christians ... "what is" and ... "prevailing realities" are products of fallen, finite creatures, products that bear the stamp of imperfection. <u>This dialectic of imperfect products and transformative practice, of prevailing realities and negation, and human depravity and human dignity, of what is and the not-yet constitutes the Christian dialectic of human nature and human history</u> (p. 17).

Marxism, on the other hand,

> Instead of a dialectic of human nature and human history ... posits a dialectic of human practice and human history: human nature is nothing other than human practice under specific historical conditions, conditions which themselves are both results of past human practice and preconditions for it in the present. This <u>collapse</u> of human nature into human practice and into human history -- as opposed to a dialectical relation of human nature to human practice and to human history -- is the distinctive difference between Christianity and Marxism (p.

19).

Giroux's (1988b) faith is in human practice and agency -- faith that through praxis social institutions can be changed and the conditions of human relations thereby transformed. This is a political project with pedagogical implications:

> [T]eaching for social transformation means educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived. Acting as transformative intellectuals means helping students acquire critical knowledge about basic societal structures, such as the economy, the state, the workplace, and mass culture so that such institutions can be open to potential transformation. A transformation, in this case, aimed at the progressive humanization of the social order (p. 90).

This project of political awareness (awareness that because social institutions are humanly constructed, they can be changed) is, I believe, a necessary but not sufficient response to the moral challenge of these times. The hatred and hopelessness that surrounds us all reflects, I believe, the lack of a broader context of meaning or of a consciousness in which people can understand themselves as something other than or more than actors, however unwitting, in a grand competition for power and wealth -- or security and comfort, which amounts to the same thing. A language of hope and possibility grounded solely in human agency cannot speak either

to the yearning for redemption and wholeness or to the whole question of evil and enemies. Implicit in Giroux's argument is the belief that people can be politically awakened and rationally persuaded to commit themselves to the struggle for a more just social order. This, however, sidesteps the issue of evil and the more specific question of how educators can and should respond to seemingly evil people:

> Time after time we see people with strong intellectual skills, sophisticated education, enormous cleverness, insight, and understanding participate knowingly and willingly, if not cynically, in manipulation, oppression and deceit in all walks of life.... Do we really believe we can "educate" such people into transforming their orientation? If not, how are we to regard them? As enemies to be shunned if not neutralized or punished, or as neurotics to be treated and/or pitied and avoided? Can and should educators "teach" enemies and neurotics through a critical pedagogy? (Purpel, 1991, p. 83).

The question I want to raise, in addition to Purpel's about whether some people can be educated transformatively through critical analysis and reflection, is to what extent we can "educate" ourselves in this way. What is the relationship between critical analysis and the kind of hope James Baldwin describes of remaining whole in a broken world, able to love in a world filled with hate?

> Hope -- the hope that we, human beings, can be better than we are -- dies hard; perhaps one can no longer live if one allows the hope to die. But it is also hard to see what one sees. One

> sees that most human beings are wretched, and, in one way or another, become wicked: because they are wretched (quoted in Dworkin, 1987, pp. 50-51).

Because Giroux does not speak in any direct way to the desire to become new and whole (redeemed) he does not evoke the anguish of living not as we would like to live or of being not as we would like to be. A compelling moral discourse must engage not only the hope for a better world for others but also the longing for a better way to be in the world for ourselves. This, of course, is not an either/or proposition. My argument has to do rather with emphasis: In stressing so heavily the social, institutional, and theoretical dimensions of hope, Giroux does not evoke the spiritual, emotional power of anguish and desire -- what Rita Nakashima Brock (1988) calls the erotic power of heart:

> As we feel deeply the complex, many dimensions of ourselves, we begin to want the joy that we know emerges through the erotic.... We are empowered to refuse the convenient, shoddy, conventional, and safe. The erotic compels us to be hungry for justice at our very depths because we are response-able. We are able to reject what makes us numb to the suffering and self-hate of others. Acts against oppression become essential to ourselves, empowered from our energized centers. Through the erotic as power we become less willing to accept powerlessness, despair, depression, and self-denial. The erotic is what binds and gives life and hope (pp. 40-41).

A compelling moral discourse requires a language that speaks to whatever

makes us "response-able" -- certainly a language more concrete, evocative, and personal than that of discourses, theories, and concepts, or even of ethics, possibilities, and concerns. As Michael Walzer (1987) says, "'Don't be indifferent' is not at all the same thing as 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' " (p. 8). A language that urges us to uncover "sources of suffering and oppression" (Giroux, 1988b, p. 6) is not at all the same thing as a language that evokes remorse and kindles the desire to become better, whole, more loving and caring. We need a language of desire for renewal and redemption as well as a theoretical framework that helps us situate this desire, and all that thwarts it, in a social, political, and intellectual context.

Giroux (1988b) attempts to do this in appropriating aspects of different traditions, including feminist theory and liberation theology, to forge a moral framework supportive of an educational theory centered on a critical view of citizenship. Giroux cites the work of, among others, feminist theologians Beverly Harrison, Sharon Welch, and Rebecca Chopp and applauds their efforts to ground a knowledge of justice and liberation in experience and concrete struggle:

> One of the most important insights developing within this work focuses on the experiences of women and the oppressed as the source of knowledge and moral principles. In this view, justice is bound less to abstract, conceptual rules and tied more closely to concrete forms of struggle and liberation that give priority to the well-being of people in their own historical

> locations. Justice in this perspective is not merely the application of procedural rules to varying contexts; it is an attempt to understand how moral sensibilities are formed amid human suffering and the struggle for liberation and freedom (p. 93).

What gets lost in Giroux's appropriation of liberation theology, however, is precisely the God talk. There is, for example, no mention of Jesus of Nazareth in Giroux's sorting and selecting from among the insights of liberation theology and so no embodiment of the flesh-and-blood promise of redemption and the radical hope of newness.

Giroux (1988b) bears witness to the difficulty of trying to appropriate Freire's political ideals in the absence of a religious language that substantiates hope. Giroux drops the language of conversion and redemption and appeals instead to the ideals of radical democracy, then calls for a compelling moral discourse, which he arguably fails to use -- because, as he understands so well, we don't have one. Not surprisingly, therefore, Giroux's argument for moral discourse leads to discussion of the legitimacy of critical authority. Giroux begins with the assertion that the idea of democracy "cannot be grounded in some ahistorical, transcendent notion of truth or authority," but rather must be seen itself as "a 'site' of struggle and as a social practice ... informed by competing ideological conceptions of power, politics, and community" (pp. 22, 29). However, in

the absence of "a transcendent guarantor," critical authority becomes an ongoing struggle wherein the battle over meaning amounts, to put it most harshly, to a competition for credibility. From this perspective, Giroux is arguing for the need to enlist moral resonance as well as rational persuasiveness in the struggle to establish and legitimate critical authority.

Giroux in one sense does as Harrington, and Walzer, would have him do in not using a religious language of conversion and communion. Good criticism is always written in the language "of the folk," Walzer (1988) says: "The best critics simply take hold of that language and raise it to a new pitch of intensity and argumentative power -- like Luther in his pamphlets or Marx in The Communist Manifesto" (p. 9). Although Giroux's language is hardly that of "the folk," he does appeal to the ideals of a broadly shared democratic tradition and in this sense grounds his critique in presumably common moral references. However, when ideals and hopes are expressed in an almost exclusively political language, there is then no way to speak convincingly about the possibility of transformation, personal or social. Freire (1990) presumes the possibility of resolving "the contradiction" between teachers and students or oppressors and oppressed as each "becomes new" and these distinctions therefore become meaningless. He explains:

> Liberation is ... a childbirth, and a painful one. The man who emerges is a new man, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all men. Or to put it another way, the solution of this contradiction is born in the labor which brings into the world this new man: no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but man in the process of achieving freedom (pp. 33-34).

This image of a world of "new men" seems a long way from Giroux's (1988b) "vision of the future grounded in a programmatic language of civic responsibility and public good" (p. 31).

Without a way to talk convincingly about transformative possibility, issues of power, and so of authority, remain paramount. In a world in which evil persists and the existence of enemies is taken for granted, who has power and authority becomes the overriding, all-important question. Consequently, the question of how people, institutions, and theories can obtain and maintain this power and authority -- in other words, what legitimates power and authority -- arises. Giroux (1988b) speaks to this question in rejecting universal truths, ahistorical foundational principles, and professional standards of methodological rigor as criteria for valuing educational criticism and theory. Rather, he says, legitimacy should be seen as a function of emancipatory potential.

> [C]ritical theory in its first instance should be valued for its political project, its estranging quality, and the nature of its criticism as a part of a project of democratic possibility and

> hope. In other words, it should be valued for the extent to which it can provide potentially liberating forms of critique and the theoretical basis for new forms of social relations (p. 205).

Without such a "standard" of valuation (emancipatory potential) radical educational theory, like the radical social theory from which it draws, falls prey to what Giroux calls "an ever-deepening quagmire of theoretical obfuscations" and to the temptation to "redefine social crises in purely technical and academic terms" (p. 204). Without transcendental values or universal foundational principles with which to discredit opponents, critics end up battling out not only what "democracy" or "liberation" will mean, but also what will count as legitimate authority to participate in the "conversation" about these things. Consequently, in a culture obsessed with competition and hierarchy, the struggle over language becomes a struggle to win personal legitimacy, a struggle that presupposes that some are not legitimate. Giroux's own critique of the concept of authority is instructive.

As part of his larger project of developing a rationale for a politics and pedagogy of critical citizenship, Giroux (1988b) critiques popular understandings of authority:

> Conservatives celebrate authority, linking it to popular expressions of everyday life, but in doing so they express and support reactionary and undemocratic interests. On the other hand, radical educators tend to equate authority with forms of

> domination or the loss of freedom and consequently fail to develop a conceptual category for constructing a programmatic language of hope and struggle.... Liberals, in general, provide the most dialectical view of authority but fail to apply it in a concrete way so as to interrogate the dynamics of domination and freedom as they are expressed within the asymmetrical relations of power and privilege that characterize various aspects of school life (pp. 78-79).

In other words, while the Right valorizes authority but in destructive ways, the Left tends to equate authority with domination, with politically disastrous consequences. Meanwhile, middle-of-the-road liberals have neutralized and sanitized their basically good ideas about authority by ignoring issues of social and political context. Against all these views of authority, Giroux delineates a concept of emancipatory authority, which he believes holds together the political and the pedagogical by legitimating intellectual struggle (in and outside the classroom) grounded in democratic ideals. His is

> a view of authority and ethics that defines schools as part of an ongoing movement and struggle for democracy and teachers as intellectuals who both legitimate and introduce students to a particular way of life (p. 72).

This view of authority "legitimates schools as democratic, public spheres"; it legitimates "teachers as transformative intellectuals who work toward a realization of their views of community, social justice, empowerment, and

social reform"; and it legitimates the work of "rethinking the purpose and meaning of public education and critical pedagogy" (pp. 72-73, 88). This last point is important. In legitimating particular kinds of intellectual work, the concept of emancipatory authority legitimates particular kinds of intellectuals -- specifically, transformative intellectuals who function "as producers of cultural forms and discourses that point to particular views of authority, ethics, and pedagogical practice whose underlying logic is consistent with a radical cultural politics" (pp. 87-88).

My point in trying to clarify Giroux's project is to suggest its justificatory dimension. Giroux would provide theoretical justification for intellectuals engaged in a particular kind of important work. He provides the theoretical tools, including reconstructed notions of citizenship and authority, for justifying a political and pedagogical project of democratic renewal. However, while Giroux calls into question narrow notions of legitimation, such as those based on "the deadening criteria of consistency and reliability," he does not question the whole idea that one's authority must be legitimated (p. 205). That is, he does not question the socially constructed need to legitimate oneself in a world in which it is taken for granted that some are not legitimate.

Giroux in one sense responds to Dwayne Huebner's (1975) decades-old but still relevant challenge to educators to avow their own moral and

political commitments:

> Why do we move around so frantically?... Why do we not comport ourselves in such a manner that our center -- our sense of who we are and what we are about -- can be restored and reformed? Why do we not pause to feel the painful tensions and pulls in us, which are reflections of the tensions and pulls of our society?... Is it because we are afraid to acknowledge that power makes up our center -- a power that necessarily comes up against the power of others: principals, parents, kids, board members, text writers (pp. 271-72).

Giroux, to his credit, has made the workings of power and his own political commitments the center of his considerable writings -- and in so doing has made a major contribution to educational criticism. In this way Giroux has responded to the challenge to understand "what we are about" and to recognize the political dimensions of his educational work. However, because the challenge Huebner articulates is itself so important, I want to look carefully at the nature of Giroux's response.

If Huebner is right that the process of reclaiming our centers is critical to educational possibility (leaving aside the important question of in what sense such things as "centers" exist), Giroux's work takes on heightened significance. Giroux not only responds to the challenge to affirm moral and political ideals but also demonstrates a methodology for doing so: Theoretical justification of one's commitments is, he suggests, if not wholly sufficient, certainly necessary and fundamental. Because radical

educators have not had a well-developed moral theory, they have not had "a theoretical discourse and set of categories" with which to construct "forms of knowledge, classroom social relations, and visions of the future that give substance to the meaning of critical pedagogy." Consequently, the radical position has been almost entirely cut out of "the debate on schooling, politics, and values that has been gaining force in the United States" (Giroux, 1988b, pp. 37-38).

Giroux (1988b) speaks to the need to elaborate the moral theory he sees as a necessary but missing or inadequately developed in radical educational discourse, and in this way makes an important contribution to radical educational theory and criticism. As I have suggested, however, this project is not problem-free. Because Giroux's effort to articulate what does and does not count as emancipatory authority is simultaneously an argument about who is and is not a truly transformative intellectual Giroux's project raises questions about community -- specifically, about the tension between 1) strengthening an existing community (such as that of transformative intellectuals) through a process of self-definition and 2) enlarging the boundaries of a community through a certain suspension or alteration of pre-existing definitions. My question is: When does a heightened sensitivity to who "we" are begin to <u>produce</u> a "they" we then must oppose? And, what is gained and what lost in such a process?

These questions arise for me primarily out of my experience in a project, literally, of authorization -- of giving authority. As a member of a two-year publishing collective for a journal written by and for Quaker women, I participated in the difficult decisions of what to publish and not publish -- that is, whom to provide a forum and so whom to deny a forum -- in an explicitly moral and spiritual context. We took as fundamental to our project Quaker teachings and traditions as well as the significance and importance of women's voices. Most of the journal's authors had never published their work, so editorial decisions literally were about whom to make (and not make) an author. Reflecting on the meaning of authority in that context and the moral issues it raised has given me a critical perspective on Giroux's effort to define authority in an emancipatory way.

Among the lessons I learned working on the journal is that trying to derive editorial standards from a religious tradition is certainly preferable to trying to derive them from the workings of the marketplace, but nevertheless is difficult and never clear-cut. At the simplest level, we struggled to reach any consensus (a method of decision-making central to Quaker practice) about what falls under the banner of "Quaker women" -- anything written by Quakers? by women? about Quakers? about women? in harmony with Quaker teachings? in harmony with feminist commitments, which we assumed we shared but soon found out we really

didn't? I bring this up in connection with Giroux because I believe that trying to describe or prescribe a pedagogy for democracy or emancipation is no less fraught with definitional tension and uncertainty than trying to derive editorial standards from the values of Quakers and/or women.

Giroux, at least in Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life, goes to great lengths to refine the particular meanings he wants to ascribe to such terms as citizenship and authority, and in the process clarifies what democracy means for him. However, he doesn't deal with what I suspect are the almost inevitable outcomes of such a process of refining and critiquing. Working on the journal, I saw that editorial decisions both strengthened and at times threatened the community. Decisions about what submissions to publish or reject were always statements about what spiritual, political, or aesthetic values we could affirm as a group composed, for the most part, of fairly conservative Quaker women. Because we shared a commitment to decision-making through consensus and because the health of the community (the broader readership as well as the publishing collective) was as important to us as the quality of the journal, tensions arose -- tensions that trying to further clarify our editorial standards only exacerbated.

Particularly difficult, for example, was a poem celebrating lesbianism. Some members of the collective (generally the younger women) were

delighted: We had not dealt adequately at all with issues of sensuality and sexuality and publishing the poem would enable us to express our own concerns and commitments. However, other members (generally the older women) were opposed to publishing the poem -- for much the same reasons. What would publication suggest about themselves? Sensing that really wrestling with the inter-group conflicts this poem had brought to the surface would threaten the community, we talked around the issue: After hours of evasive discussion, someone pointed that, all other considerations aside, the poem was simply not very good. That we all could agree on and so rejected the poem. In one sense, we took refuge in aesthetic criteria in order to avoid dealing with issues of sexuality and politics that we should have named and struggled with. In another sense, however, we opted to preserve the community (which our pseudo-concern with aesthetic standards allowed us to do) rather than sacrifice it to individuals' desires to have the journal reflect their own deeply felt, but nevertheless personal, political perspectives and levels of comfort with issues of sexuality. My point is that we were able to keep the group together and get the work done (publish reasonably on time) only because we tolerated a certain amount of ambiguity about who we were as a group.

Thinking about Giroux's project in this context raises for me the question of what is at stake in seeing legitimation as the outcome of a

process of justification, the point of which is to defend adequately one's own intellectual commitments and so too the political and pedagogical practices they imply. I raise this question in light of some of the insights of the object-relations theory developed by Nancy Chodorow (1985), among others -- specifically, insights about our ontological relationality:

> Object-relations theory shows that in the development of the self the primary task is not the development of ego boundaries and a body ego. Along with the earliest development of its sense of separateness, the infant constructs an internal set of unconscious, affectively loaded representations of others in relation to its self, and an internal sense of self in relationship emerges.... This suggests that the central core of self is internally, a relational ego, a sense of self-in-good-relationship (pp. 9-10).

This understanding of "the central core of self" suggests that, as Rita Nakashima Brock (1988) puts it,

> We are fundamentally relationship-seeking beings. We internalize most deeply and powerfully our earliest relationships, from which come our ability or inability to internalize later loves and losses, to coexist humanely with others, and to continue to flourish and grow as persons.... We begin with an understanding that we are intimately connected, constituted by our relationships ontologically, that is, as a basic unavoidable principle of existence (pp. 5, 7).

This view of the self calls into question the whole project of trying to legitimate our beliefs and commitments through theoretical justification. At

the very least, coming to see ourselves as legitimate would be a much more embodied, emotional, and interpersonal process than Giroux suggests.

Reading Giroux against Chodorow and Brock raises another question for me: If legitimating beliefs and commitments requires defending them, who or what are they to be defended against? This is the question, as I said earlier, of enemies. Giroux would establish the legitimacy of his understandings of authority and citizenship over and against other, less critical and less democratically oriented understandings. But where does this leave us? If Giroux "wins," who loses? As David Purpel (personal communication, 1992) often asks, "Who is the Left's Other?" If Giroux's (and my own) commitments attain legitimacy, whose commitments are then, by definition, not legitimate -- which is to say who is then, by definition, not legitimate? Is the fundamental issue how best to establish the legitimacy of particular ideals and commitments or how best to transform a culture that makes legitimacy a competition among competing interests rather than a relational power we afford each other?

In fairness, Giroux (1988b) does name, if not the enemy, what he is speaking against. The model of legitimation he rejects is professionalism: "As it stands, teachers tend to legitimate their roles as professionals through highly exclusionary and undemocratic appeals to knowledge and expertise" -- which, of course, "has little to do with democracy as a social

movement" (p. 109). Giroux's point is well taken. Trivializing, competitive, and hierarchical notions of legitimized authority clearly are not what we need. But so too are there problems with Giroux's perspective. To go back to Huebner (1975), his caution against affirming ourselves as functionaries in the world we call school is important: "Why are we lost?" he asks educators and speculates:

> I think it is because we have let the school become our center and we have become an appendage, nothing but a role or functionary in someone else's institution.... If we forget or never knew that schools are a product of men and women who used their power to build or maintain a certain kind of public world, then we easily become bondsmen of those who live only in the routines. We do their things, maintain their world, distribute their awards (p. 272).

Implicit in Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life is a call to affirm ourselves not as functionaries in someone else's institution but rather as transformative intellectuals engaged in politically oppositional struggle -- struggle, however, that includes the need to justify our commitments and in this way to legitimate our own authority as democratically oriented teachers, scholars, and critics.

My question, therefore, is how radical Giroux's alternative to professionalism as a legitimating ground of authority is. Until and unless the legitimation of some does not come at the expense of the illegitimation of others (a trade-off Giroux's notion of transformative intellectuals

implies[4]), we have only redefined the arena of competition for personal dignity and a sense of self-worth and altered the rules by which the winners and losers will be declared. Giroux, as Patrick Shannon (1988) says, offers radical intellectuals engaged in political and pedagogical struggle "words to live by and to work with" (p. 133). He offers the sustenance of intellectual justification for politically oppositional struggle and the shoring up of community that efforts toward self-definition provide. What Giroux doesn't provide -- and this we sorely need -- is critique of the way in which the culture makes self- and community-definition a process of self- and community-justification on the basis of a notion of legitimacy that is never assured and always something to be struggled for, won, and defended against others construed necessarily as not legitimate.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM AND IMPLICATION

This dissertation reflects my exploration of some of the difficulties and complexities inherent in the work of educational criticism through critique of my own practice -- an approach that led me to questions of accountability and critical authority. Chapter 1 argues that as a form of social and cultural criticism educational criticism shares in all the difficulties of the broader practice -- including the questions Jacoby raises about the academization of criticism and the questions Ehrenreich raises about what she sees as a consciousness of elitism on the part of the professional middle class. With the academization of criticism has come a notion of accountability related more to a sense of the critic's moral autonomy -- what Jacoby (1987) calls "the freedom to be academic" (p. 189) and what an even angrier Steven Watts (1992) calls "academic narcissism" in which "the stakes are almost exclusively academic: reputation, promotion, and publication" (p. A40) -- than to a sense of responsibility grounded in relationships with real people.

Chapter 2 focuses on two of the most influential texts in educational criticism: the NCEE's A Nation at Risk and Allan Bloom's The Closing of

the American Mind. These rhetorically powerful texts, I argued, have been countered with moral critiques of their anti-egalitarian premises and implications. However, these moral critiques (at least in the case of Nussbaum's and Aronowitz and Giroux's of Bloom) are buttressed by arguments along methodological lines -- leading to complaints, for example, about poor scholarship, sloppy thinking, or myopic analysis. Such a critical strategy, it now seems to me, reflects uncertainty on the part of the critic about the role of moral argument in scholarly criticism -- an uncertainty reflected, in turn, in the questions Giroux raises explicitly about critical authority.

As I argued in Chapter 1, education as a field of inquiry has not escaped the radical questioning of postmodernism that has swept across the humanities and the social sciences. Neither, therefore, can the practice of educational criticism escape scrutiny of its purposes nor educational critics escape scrutiny of the grounds of their authority. If what educational critics are about is not primarily explication of the how-to's of schooling but rather broad social and cultural critique, in what can and should their authority as critics be grounded?

Walzer's (1988) thoughts about social criticism help clarify why trying to ground critical authority methodologically is so difficult. Most fundamentally, Walzer says, social criticism is complaint about the

circumstances of our shared life:

> Complaint is one of the elementary forms of self-assertion, and the response to complaint is one of the elementary forms of mutual recognition. When what is at issue is not existence itself but social existence, being-for-others, then complaint is proof enough: I complain, therefore I am. We discuss the complaint, therefore we are (p. 3).

Given this interpretation of social criticism, why should anyone pay particular attention to someone's thoughts on this subject -- the circumstances of our common life -- if their primary qualification is a generic adeptness at showing up the methodological flaws of other people's arguments? In some sense, this is a straw man. I set it up, however, to suggest the way in which methodological critique too often tries to stand in for powerful and persuasive moral vision -- but finally can't.

The educational/social criticism of Kozol is a case in point. I, along with many others (Kozol's most recent book, Savage Inequalities, made the bestseller list), listen to him less because I appreciate his methdological rigor than because he evokes the desire for a better world in which children do not suffer so much. Those critics who argue that Kozol's methodology leaves something to be desired are probably right (Jeffrey Kane, personal communication, 1992). Conceding this, however, does not change my evaluation of his work. Kozol's authority as a critic is grounded

elsewhere -- in, I would argue, his relationship with the children he writes about with such compassion and indignation.

Chapter 3, focused on Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Henry Giroux's Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life, raises further questions about critical authority. Freire and Giroux, like other critics writing in the tradition of critical pedagogy, do, to their credit, boldly affirm the moral underpinnings of their work and attempt to ground their authority therein. In critiquing the Freire and Giroux texts, however, I came to see how affirmation of transformative possibility (the core of Giroux's work), when disconnected from a persuasive language of such possibility (the language of redemption and conversion Freire uses, for example), leaves unchallenged the significance of the political question of who should have more power than whom. This question is important. Who has power over whom matters tremendously. However, the struggle to gain and then maintain power and authority will (indeed, in one sense, must) require our total attention until and unless we can, in good faith, ask other questions -- such as how we can best use the shared power we no longer have any desire to hoard and protect.

It is in this context that I raised questions about Giroux's notion of emancipatory authority -- a way of thinking about authority, I suggested, that remains trapped in a consciousness of struggling to win and keep a

certain power. Further, as I argued in Chapter 3, the very language of legitimacy Giroux uses to talk about issues of authority reinforces a consciousness of competition and triumphalism -- over those whose "illegitimacy" is exposed as one's own is established. Although I share with Giroux the belief that power in its many guises (including critical authority) must be attended to, I know just as surely that we cannot compete our way into a consciousness of cooperation and sharing.

Perhaps more than any other educational critic or theorist, Giroux has wrestled with the problem of how to ground critical authority in these times of skepticism about all foundationalism and "universal" truths. If there is nothing either foundational or enduring to back us up, how can we claim what we say is right, even as we know it is? Along the lines of Purpel's (1989) argument that true enough is good enough for our purposes here on earth, right enough seems also to be an adequate justification. Still, this doesn't solve the problem I believe often lies behind the skeptic's question of how to ground critical authority in a foundationless world -- the problem, partly one of rhetoric but not wholly so, of moral argumentation (how to do it).

Giroux (1988b) would "shore up" his critical authority by aligning it with democratic ideals and with an elaborated moral theory -- subjected, he suggests, to the "truth test" of emancipatory potential. He acknowledges a

debt to the feminist liberation theologian Sharon Welch, whose politics, he says, are

> firmly rooted in a view of authority that is not dependent merely on the logic of epistemological arguments, but which is deeply forged in "a creation of a politics of truth that defines the true as that which liberates and furthers specific processes of liberation" (Welch, 1985, quoted in Giroux, p. 98).

West (1988) critiques Welch on this point and argues that such a view of truth ("that which liberates") is too abstract -- a criticism I believe applies to Giroux's project as well:

> [H]her theology [is] too thin, her faith too fragile, and her sense of struggle too abstract.... A faith based solely on contemporary struggle for liberation is too presentist and unmindful of unpredictable future developments. And a sense of struggle that focuses more on the improbability of ultimate triumph than on the necessity and possibility of gaining the next penultimate victory reflects a distance from practical engagement that can never disarm skepticism (West, 1988, pp. 210-11).

Although I do not see in Giroux's work the overemphasis on "the improbability of ultimate triumph" that West sees in Welch's, I believe Giroux, like Welch, has difficulty grounding his ideals in day-to-day practical struggle because his hopes are utopian and not reformist -- as well they should be. But this needs to be acknowledged.

Giroux's thought, to me, reflects what seems like the tragic struggle of the radical intellectual committed to a praxis in which he seems not wholly to believe -- given his insightfulness about what all really is wrong in the world. The struggle Giroux's work represents and reflects is important and there is perhaps no other educational critic who has wrestled so thoroughly and systematically with these existential questions as Giroux. But we (and here I align myself those I criticize) have not "solved" the problem of how to sustain hope in a world that disgusts us. As a "truth test," "emancipatory possibility" -- or, to use Welch's language, the question, Does it liberate? -- is at once too amorphous and too stringent for any of our theories to pass.

This leads to another concern I have with Giroux's way of thinking about critical authority, which is that it seems more firmly grounded in ideals (of radical democracy) than in relationships with real people and the responsibility those relationships entail. What is the connection, I wonder, between 1) those people whose hopes and fears find expression (or don't) in the language or radical democracy and emancipation and 2) the critic who espouses the ideals? I am trying to suggest not that affirmation of ideals is unimportant, but rather that ideals, when clung to, can all but eclipse the flesh-and-blood anguish and desire with which those ideals presumably resonate.

These concerns have led me to try to think differently about issues of authority and accountability. Heyward's (1989) thoughts along these lines are helpful. She grounds her work (the development of a theology of sexuality) in a relational, communitarian ethic of accountability:

> My people hold me accountable -- responsible for what I say. And there is nothing abstract about "my people": They are my students and my teachers, my friends and lovers, my companeras and colleagues. They have names, faces, commitments, values, problems, questions, feelings, and ideas. With me and with one another, these people are healers, teachers, priests, pastors, counselors, therapists, organizers, politicians, poets, artists, mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons.... There [also] are many in whose service I hope to be working whom I do not now (and never will) know -- a vast number of people, especially women, throughout this and every nation whose bodyselves have been split asunder by structures of sexual and gender injustice. I attempt to hold myself accountable to these people whose lives I personally do not know and cannot well imagine (pp. 7-8).

Such a relational notion of accountability and authority goes a long way toward bringing ideals back to earth.

However, as insightful as I think Heyward is about authority and accountability, her ideas are not problem-free. Despite her desire to remain accountable to some whose lives she "cannot well imagine," her sphere of accountability seems essentially to be composed of like-minded friends. My difficulty with this comes in trying to generalize such an ethic. What of multinational corporations? Do we want them to be accountable (as they

now are) essentially to no one but their "friends"? I don't. The ethic Heyward affirms (in the sense that she doesn't challenge it) is, in one sense, the problem Jacoby rails against in criticizing academic critics. To the extent that "the community of scholars" means faculty tenured at major universities, in what sense does a communitarian ethic of accountability challenge a problematic professionalism?

I have a second question about Heyward's basically very good ideas about the communal, relational basis of accountability: What does it mean for people like me who have little idea of what, if any, community they belong to? With the promise of a one-year instructorship or assistant professorship in hand, am I now a bona fide member of the "community of scholars" or only a marginal affiliate, a migrant tagalong? Similarly, as someone who reads and tries to write radical criticism, do I belong to one of the "communities of resistance and solidarity" with which real radical scholars identify? And if not, why not? What does membership require or entail? I feel perhaps the strongest bond with other single mothers. At the same time I know my life, haunted as it is by texts and more texts (texts my nine-year-old daughter delights in ridiculing), differs radically from the lives of most other single mothers. And what of my white, suburban, middle-class roots? Neither ideologically (too radical or at least politically marginal) nor economically (too poor) would I qualify any longer as a

member of that great community of the mainstream middle-class. At the same time, I continue to realize, often with dismay, how deeply I have internalized mainstream, middle-class norms and habits of thought. That is who I am, even as I try to piece and patch together some alternative community to join.

Aside from the question of what the multiple alignments and allegiances of people like me mean for a consciousness of community, there also is the question raised in Chapter 3 of the tension between the work of criticism, which entails moral judgment, and the work of building and sustaining community, which requires a great deal of tolerance, forgiveness, and willingness simply to look the other way. To judge is to draw lines between right and wrong, the sacred and the profane, the just and the unjust. And these lines almost always end up separating the good people from the bad, friends from enemies, or those worthy of respect from those deserving of scorn -- in short, "them" from "us," which, of course, is never helpful in the work of enlarging community. This is a paradox I cannot begin to resolve. We must name and condemn the profane, the evil, and the unjust and we must transcend a consciousness of allies and enemies -- which is to say, I suppose, that we must live with the moral ambiguity and in the tension it reflects.

The subjective dimension of this tension is perhaps the fear of isolation bell hooks (1991) writes about with respect to the work of black women intellectuals:

> Black women struggling to strengthen and deepen our commitment to intellectual work know that we must confront the issue of "isolation," our fear of it, our fear that it estranges us from community inhibits full pursuit of intellectual work. Within patriarchy, men have always had the freedom to isolate themselves from family and community, to do autonomous work and re-enter a relational world when they chose, irrespective of their class status.... [However,] before that isolated Black woman intellectual can re-enter a relational community, it is likely that she must first assume responsibility for a variety of household chores (pp. 158-59).

I believe there is another dimension to this fear, one that is perhaps more significant for white women, particularly middle-class white women, than for black women for whom radical protest historically has been more of a necessity. I know my own fear is that my now fairly well developed critical consciousness will provoke anger and hostility from the very people I care most about. My fear is of transgressing boundaries of trust by bringing my well honed capacities to judge and critique too close to home, and so of stepping over some highly consequential line I would see only after crossing it. From this perspective, I would ask Jacoby to have more compassion for the academics he chastises for their concerns with upholding institutional standards of professionalism. Situated as scholars

are in hierarchical institutions -- "affiliation" with which is highly competitive and "disaffiliation" with which makes the work of criticism enormously more difficult -- there would seem to be something to be said for choosing one's battles.

In sum, as complicated and problematic as Heyward's communitarian ethic of accountability is, I don't want to lose the central insight her understanding reflects: that we are relationally-constituted beings who deny that ontology at our own peril. Our theories of authority and accountability, I believe, have to begin here, with who we are in relation to each other.

This brings me to Elizabeth Spelman (1991), who has shown me the way in which the emotions I have perceived as being so intrusive, so much in the way of my own work, are in one sense the very substance of that work. Emotions, particularly what Spelman calls moral emotions, reflect the ties we feel with others:

> Our emotions, or at least some of them, can be highly revelatory of whom and what we care or don't care about. They provide powerful clues to the ways in which we take ourselves to be implicated in the lives of others and they in ours (p. 220).

Different emotions "imply different notions of responsibility and depth of concern" (p. 221). Emotions, therefore, are best understood not as internal

events -- "churnings in our stomachs, flutterings in our hearts, chokings in our throat" -- but rather "as deeply connected to ourselves as moral agents" (pp. 221, 222). Attending to our emotions, therefore, should tell us something about our sense of moral agency.

Spelman offers these examples: If I regret that something has happened, I probably regard the event as undesirable, but do not necessarily feel any personal responsibility for it. For example, I may regret that my theories do not explain more adequately the injustice I try to analyze, but nevertheless feel no particular implication in or responsibility for. Embarrassment suggests a stronger sense of implication. The concern here, however, is less about what has happened or about my own behavior than about the fact of exposure. Others may have seen or discovered something I wish they had not, but this in itself does not suggest I have failed to act in accord with my own moral standards. A sense of guilt, however, implies that I have failed to live up to such standards -- those I either had set for myself or accepted from some authority. Still, guilt does not necessarily imply there is anything wrong with me. I did something I probably should not have done, but my moral being is otherwise okay and not irrevocably damaged by this one slip-up. Shame, however, brings me face-to-face with the realization that I am not the person I thought I was or hoped I was. In shame, I realize I have done something I should not have

done and that this behavior is in fact not inconsistent with who I am.

Spelman's discussion of the different senses of responsibility implied by these emotions (regret, embarrassment, guilt, and shame) suggests a way of gaining a perspective, if not on what the relationship among critic, subject, and audience ought to be, at least on the different shapes in which it comes. Attending to the emotional tone of criticism should tell us something about the nature of the responsibility the critic feels in connection with those she writes for and, perhaps especially, about. Attending to emotional tone, that is, should tell us something about the degree of implication and self-implication critics feel in the worlds they critique. Consider, for example, these passages -- three examples of educational criticism in the sense that they are about people learning things and in the sense that they imply some judgment about what appears to have been learned:

Example 1

> In one of my recent graduate courses I asked a number of public school teachers what criteria they used to defend or reject the introduction of certain materials either into their curricula or as part of a classroom discussion. In general, most of the teachers in the class answered that if people in the community or on the school board wanted the material included in the curriculum it should be there. Others argued that the knowledge selected should be judged on the basis of whether it contributed either to the development of an "academic" discipline or to the students' intellectual growth. In

both cases, there was no attempt to defend what was to be taught in wider political and ethical terms (Giroux, 1988b, p. 107).

Example 2

I had begun to teach in 1964 in Boston in a segregated school so crowded and so poor that it could not provide my fourth grade children with a classroom. We shared an auditorium with another fourth grade and the choir and a group that was rehearsing, starting in October, for a Christmas play that, somehow, never was produced. In the spring I was shifted to another fourth grade that had had a string of substitutes all year. The 35 children in the class hadn't had a permanent teacher since they entered kindergarten. That year, I was their thirteenth teacher.

The results were seen in the first tests I gave. In April, most were reading at the second grade level. Their math ability was at the first grade level.

In an effort to resuscitate their interest, I began to read them poetry I liked. They were drawn especially to poems of Robert Frost and Langston Hughes. One of the most embittered children in the class began to cry when she first heard the words of Langston Hughes.

> What happens to a dream deferred?
> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?

She went home and memorized the lines.

The next day, I was fired (Kozol, 1991, pp. 1-2).

Example 3

Late one evening, I was walking down an isolated street in Manhattan. A beggar was squatting on a pile of rags, and I was afraid of the old black man. As I gave him some money,

> he looked at me and said, clearly and with great dignity, "God bless you." I was moved, but I was not quite sure why. Today I would say that God's pain was visible in the old man's pain. Insofar as I took part in it, my own pain was transformed: my fear left me. My rage returned. Everything that Paul told the Corinthians about the sorrow that comes from God was present in that experience: I was outraged and horrified over this everyday picture of street life. "You have engaged in resistance, you have longed for a change and have called the guilty to account" (2 Cor. 7:11, Jorg Zink).... The old man who has no shelter in the richest country on earth, the richest country in history, evangelizes me; he calls forth my pain for his country, which I love and despise (Soelle, 1989, p. 330).

What is going on in these passages? The first one, I suggest, reflects anger in the face of what the author goes on to describe as oppressive "ideologies and practices" to which the students appear vulnerable, and perhaps regret that the students are not more aware of and thoughtful about the political and ethical dimensions of their work. There is, however, no embarrassment or guilt -- no sense that the critic himself has done wrong or is morally implicated in the student's lack of understanding or vulnerability. The exchange between teacher and student, according to the author's own interpretation, tells us about them (the students), not him (the teacher-critic):

> The answers ... suggest a lack of theoretical depth and civic rigor on the part of these teachers.... [T]hey [also] indicate how vulnerable teachers might be to educational ideologies and practices that reduce them to merely carrying out the "orders"

of wider interest groups (Giroux, 1988b, p. 107).

The second passage, to me, reflects outrage in the face of racism and the pain and injustice it causes, as well as affection for the children, depicted as innocent victims. The teacher appears to be "on the side" of the children and even to identify with them. He shares with them the poetry he loves and, like them, is treated unjustly: He is fired from his job. The critic here is emotionally connected with his criticism through his own indignation and compassion. Again, however, there is no suggestion that the critic feels morally implicated in the injustice he shows. While he is in the story morally, his role is that of prophet or witness, not perpetrator.

In the third passage, however, there is guilt, even shame, provoked by the recognition that in the face of pain -- sacred pain, God's pain -- the critic (here cast in the role of student rather than teacher) responded with fear. The story also reflects the critic's vulnerability: She is transformed -- evangelized, changed -- by the old black man who frightens her. Here, the critic is centrally implicated in the story she tells. She is made ashamed of her fear by the old man who transforms it into rage and disgust with (along with love for) a world that tolerates his suffering so self-righteously.

My point in commenting on these passages of educational criticism is to show not only their emotional dimensions, but also the differences among them. Although all three critics are physically in the stories they

tell, the moral dimensions of that implication differ -- which suggests to me that implication is not something critics can opt for or against, but rather something they own up to and integrate into our work to one degree or another, including not at all. The fact of implication is not a choice.

Paula Rabinowitz (1991) also has helped me see the relevance of this concept of implication to the work of criticism. Rabinowitz reviews radical women's literary writing in the 1930s and comments on the significance of this writing (radical women's fiction) for the broader genre of depression-era literary radicalism, and vice versa. The literary radicalism of that time, Rabinowitz says, "produced a discursive field through which intellectuals could stake a claim in the political arena" -- a masculinized field that discredited women's voices, but a field, and so a place to stand, nonetheless (p. 25).

I would generalize Rabinowitz's argument to say that all criticism, literary and otherwise, requires as much as enables the critic to "stake a claim" in the political, and so moral, arena. However, in light of Spelman's insights, the activity involved seems less that of "staking a claim" than of "claiming one's stake." It seems less the case that criticism enables the critic to respond to her theoretical constructions of the world than that criticism requires the critic either to affirm and deepen or to deny and evade her sense of responsibility in and for a world in which she is always already

implicated. The possibility of denial and evasion is real, and some of its forms are all too familiar -- the pretense to moral autonomy of the supposedly earned and deserved "freedom to be academic," the flight into what Watts (1992) derides as the "linguistic left's feeble politics of words" (p. A40), or retreat into the aesthetic pleasures of the elegance of well-wrought theory itself. However, like the "marginal men" Freire (1990) says many would like to believe are "outside" society and needing to be integrated back in, critics, including those who often plead the case of these people, also are not "outside" but rather all along have been "inside" the same social structures that oppress and constrain (p. 61).

This, then, is the path I have traveled in trying to gain some insight into issues of criticism and responsibility. Let me now try to pull all this together enough to comment on the significance of these reflections, deliberations, and unresolved questions for educational critics.

Implications for Educational Criticism

For educational critics to own up to the moral and relational dimensions of their work as well as to their implication in the injustice they (we) so often critique would, it seems, go a long way toward improving the quality of the criticism. On one hand, this is simply the only intellectually honest thing to do -- and that seems reason enough. I want to go the next

step, however, and argue that self-implication makes for better criticism. I say this for two reasons. First, as Heyward (1989) argues, "liberation of anyone depends on the tenacity of the connections and coalitions we are able to forge together" (p. 3). And this requires honesty about the inequities and unchallenged privileges that live in our relationships.

> We must be willing to pursue, critically and imaginatively, the truths of our own particular lives-in-relation -- the difference, for example, our race-privilege (or lack) makes to how we experience the world; the part played by our class, our gender, our religion, our nation, our sexual desires, and relationships (Heyward, 1989, p. 3).

In quoting Heyward, I am suggesting not that personal, family, and psychological issues should be the focus of critics' work, but rather that critics with emancipatory aims must take into account the conditions under which liberation from suffering and injustice is possible -- such as honesty, integrity, trust, and a willingness to try to set right what is wrong in all dimensions of life.

Secondly, self-implication invites a relational focus that does not preclude but nevertheless mediates against such habits of thought as the one I discussed in Chapter 2, the logic and rationale of triage, which paints with a moral aura the horror of separating and dividing people into, for example, valuable citizens and surplus people or "us" and "them," our

friends and our enemies. For critics to avow or own up to their own implication in a world of suffering and injustice would, it seems, go a long way toward sapping the rhetorical power of educational criticism like A Nation at Risk, which encourages and plays into this way of thinking. What, for example, would this criticism look like if the relationship between members of the NCEE task force and those whom their policies would disenfranchise were spelled out? Such a move might also undercut the persuasiveness of such elitist and self-righteous criticism as The Closing of the American Mind as well as help ground more firmly in the real world of anguish and desire the sometimes disembodied and abstract criticism of texts like Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life.

West (1991) suggests another important dimension of self-implication than the one I have emphasized (interpersonal sensibility) in urging morally and politically committed intellectuals to conduct "a wholesale critical inventory of ourselves and our communities of struggle" and to speak to the question of "what really sustains our faith in struggle and our hope for change in these barbaric times" (p. xiii). West's question about the nature of the hope that sustains intellectual work is implicit in Giroux's efforts to elaborate a moral theory adequate to the task of legitimating a citizenship-oriented pedagogy as well as the democratic ideals it would serve. In framing the question so personally, however, West brings it home. West

urges us to ask not "How might we legitimate our work?" but "What do I believe?" or "To what do I witness?"

This question is particularly critical for the work of criticism because, as Walzer (quoted in Chapter 2) argues, criticism without hope is pointless.

> [T]he critical enterprise ... cannot be carried on without some sense of historical possibility. Criticism is oriented toward the future: the critic must believe that the conduct of his fellows can conform more closely to a moral standard than it now does or that their self-understanding can be greater than it now is or that their institutions can be more justly organized than they now are (p. 17).

Real hope needs to be distinguished, however, from the cheery optimism Christopher Lasch (1991) calls its "poor substitute":

> The worst is always what the hopeful are prepared for. Their trust in life would not be worth much if it had not survived disappointment in the past, while the knowledge that the future holds further disappointments demonstrates the continuing need for hope....
>
> Improvidence, a blind faith that things will somehow work out for the best, furnishes a poor substitute for the disposition to see things through even when they don't (p. 81).

Hope must be grounded in a serious, sober look at the world as it is. Any number of statistics can be marshalled to encourage such a perspective. These, however, seem particularly telling:

> 1. It is estimated that between 500 million and one billion people are hungry. Each year 20 million people, the majority of them children, die from hunger or hunger-related diseases.
>
> 2. One child in every 10 in the world dies before its first birthday. Forty thousand children die each day (15 million each year) from preventable causes.
>
> 3. Enough grain currently is grown worldwide to provide every person on earth with 3,600 calories per day (adult average requirements fall between 2,000 and 2,700) and ample protein. This does not include the added calories and protein from the many non-grain foods grown (Peterson, undated).

And, at home --

> 4. Every year in the United States a million and a half kids run away from home. Many of them end up on city streets. Right now, today, there are some 30,000 kids living on the streets of New York City. Contrary to popular belief, most of them run away not because they want to but because they have to; because even the streets are safer than where they're running from.... Even so, they are not running <u>to</u> anything but death. Nationwide, more than 5,000 children a year are buried in unmarked graves (Strauss, 1992, p. 753).

<u>This is a broken world</u>.

My faith is that there is a value to naming the brokenness, to calling its various dimensions by the right names, to calling to account those who would deny the injustice that is both cause and effect of the brokenness, and to insisting that healing is possible -- not likely perhaps or even probable, but possible. Integrating this faith into the work of criticism,

however, requires more than affirmation of possibility. The world's brokenness has meaning as brokenness only when held up against a vision of wholeness. Therefore, we need a criticism that evokes an utterly alternative consciousness -- a consciousness in which what is can be judged in light of what ought to be, which is related to but not the same thing as the political question of what might be. We need a criticism that evokes a consciousness in which the culture's obsession with competition and hierarchy can be challenged to the core -- a consciousness in which we are ashamed to be so driven by these destructive impulses to compete and control, often just for the fun of it.

Evocation of such an alternative consciousness is partly a question of language. Educational criticism needs a language that helps us to feel the ache of not doing what we ought to do and to grieve the loss of lives, our own and others, lived in accord with the "demands" of the marketplace or the "requirements" of professionalism. "Real criticism," says Brueggemann (1978),

> begins in the capacity to grieve because that is the most visceral announcement that things are not right. Only in the empire are we pressed and urged and invited to pretend that things are all right -- either in the dean's office or in our marriage or in the hospital room. And as long as the empire can keep the pretense alive that things are all right, there will be no real grieving and no serious criticism.... The grieving of Israel, perhaps self-pity and surely complaint but never resignation, is the beginning of

> criticism. It is made clear that things are not as they should be, not as they were promised, and not as they must be and will be (pp. 20-21).

We need a language of criticism that allows such grief to surface in the public realm -- a language that creates a forum wherein we can acknowledge individually and as a people that we are not who we ought to be. We need a language that enables us to rally around something wholly other than hopes for a rising GNP or for a declining trade deficit. However, and this is important, such a critical language must speak to people where they really are -- implicated, all of us, in a world in which some live well at others' expense, some speak and are heard at the expense of others silenced or ignored, and some gain the language and analytic skills they need to name the world but at the expense of others who do not. The pain of this reality -- the pain of seeing what our lives-in-relation look like -- needs to surface in the public discourse.

Spelman, for me, speaks to the psychological dimension of the shift in consciousness Brueggemann would evoke. Her purpose in comparing and contrasting the moral dimensions of the emotions of regret, embarrassment, guilt, and shame is, in part, to show that only shame evokes a deep-seated desire for change -- for undermining privilege, including and especially one's own. We are moved to relinquish privilege,

she suggests, to the extent that we become ashamed of being the person that privilege allows and enables us to be -- a relationship Toni Morrison (1970) lays out with piercing clarity in The Bluest Eye. Looking back on the year she knew Pecola Breedlove, Claudia MacTeer reflects on the moral dimensions of her own (and others') relationship to the poor, black, homeless, raped, and, soon thereafter, hopelessly disoriented girl who once was her friend:

> All of us -- all who knew her -- felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used -- to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength (p. 150).

While the self-doubt of this kind of shame cannot ground a vibrant feminist politics, Spelman (1991) cautions, the privileged are unlikely to want to relinquish that privilege until and unless they come to see it as deeply disfiguring to themselves: "The degree to which I am moved to undermine systems of privilege is closely tied to the degree to which I feel shame at the sort of person such privilege makes me or allows me to be" (p. 229). Spelman's particular concern is the injustice that lives among and

between women, and she says:

> I do not see how women who enjoy privileged status over other women (whether it be based on race, class, religion, age, sexual orientation, or physical mobility) can come to think it desirable to lose that privilege (by force or consent) unless they see it not only as producing harm to other women but also as being deeply disfiguring to themselves (p. 228).

If Spelman is right about the relationship between shame and relinquishment of privilege, the implications for educational criticism (and pedagogy in general) are clear. Critics and teachers need to ask the question of under what conditions people <u>can</u> -- are able to -- see not only their own disfigurement but also its relationship to privilege. Under what conditions can such a lesson be learned? Within what consciousness can it be seen, and how can such a consciousness be evoked?

Along the lines of Spelman's caution that shame is a necessary but not sufficient grounding for a feminist politics, I would qualify that a criticism that witnesses and confesses shame is not necessarily <u>better</u> than a criticism that "witnesses and confesses" regret. Although I believe shirking responsibility is far more common in our hyperindividualistic society than taking it on overzealously, all of us are not guilty of everything. At the same time, Abraham Heschel's (1962) understanding is important:

> Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible. If we admit that the individual is in some measure conditioned or affected by the spirit of society, an individual's crime discloses society's corruption (quoted in Purpel, 1989, p. 119).

We all are responsible at least in the sense of implication -- hence the need to at least ask the question: Given my situatedness in a world of suffering and injustice, how can and should I respond?

My concern is how educational critics have and might respond to this question as educational critics. Critics are, of course, first of all teachers -- and, like all teachers, cannot escape the moral dimensions of their work. Critics always teach something about something. Wayne Booth (1988) offers the simple example of Aesop's "The Goose." Like all stories, this fable reflects assumptions about shared beliefs -- beliefs on which the story depends for its effect but which also presumably are applicable to the "real world." Among the most important are these clearly value-laden assumptions, implicit in the story, about "the way life is."

> 1. More money is better than less money ... since it would indeed be good fortune to possess such a goose permanently, without succumbing to destructive greed.... The loss of such a goose is unequivocal <u>loss</u>, just as the loss of "gold" (of possessions), even in many a modern story, must be taken as real loss if the story, comic or tragic, is to work.
>
> 2. To value gold excessively is just human nature -- no explanation is required for why the two "soon" wanted more...

> 3. But to value gold immoderately is not only imprudent, it is stupid. Though there is no clear guidance about the borderline between excessive greed and a proper sense of the worth of what we gold-less moderns call financial security, we are to believe ... that true wisdom lies in being grateful for small blessings.
>
> 4. Greed will lead to other stupidities. The tale depends for its satiric force on our recognizing just how foolish are the means that the greedy adopt for their imprudent ends... (pp. 144-45).

To teach this story uncritically is, of course, to teach the values implicit in the assumptions Booth lays out -- something Purpel (1988) has been saying for years (p. 364). What I want to add is that to critique this story (and so its broader cultural context) without calling into question the values it reflects is not only to underscore them. More than this, to ignore the story's moral lessons is to <u>enact</u> a particular relationship -- one premised on the notion that the lessons of "The Goose" are not pertinent to the critic's relationship with readers. This question -- Given who I am in relation to you, do we need to bring up the issue of wealth and poverty or not? -- comes with the territory of deciding to critique this story (and so its cultural context). Not to ask the question is, of course, to answer it negatively -- and so to affirm the matrix of relationships that prevailing ideas about wealth and poverty sustain.

Conclusions

I began this dissertation with discussion of the way in which a great deal of educational criticism trivializes the complexity of the social and cultural problems we face and that our schools reflect. This criticism, which accounts for much of the educational discourse in the public press as well as in scholarly journals, cannot tell us much about the work of serious educational/cultural criticism. We do, however, need to pay close attention to the kind of criticism A Nation at Risk represents -- reductionistic description of our enormous social problems that would put our schools in the service of a brutal economic rationality. This criticism is important because it is both dangerous and rhetorically powerful as evidenced by its resonance with a broad public audience. Related to this strain of criticism is the equally important culturally-focused work of people like Allan Bloom -- an openly elitist call to get back to the basics of the classics. Again, this criticism is destructive. It invites a consciousness of us and them -- we who are worthy of a high-powered classically liberal education and they on whom such an education would be wasted. Yet, like A Nation at Risk, Bloom has a public following -- in part, I think, because he speaks to real public concerns. There are problems in the public schools and in our colleges and universities as well. And Bloom speaks to this. We may not like his descriptions and prescriptions, but he takes on the

issues -- something, I want to argue, the proponents of critical pedagogy could and should do more of.

This literature (critical pedagogy), I have argued, is the best contemporary educational criticism we have. Critics writing in this tradition offer often trenchant critique of the habits of thought implicit in the work of critics like the NCEE and Bloom, and attempt to link matters of schooling not with our most destructive fears and anxieties but rather with our highest ideals and hopes for a human community. This criticism, however, lacks the public audience it needs. Part of the problem, I believe, is that this criticism too often gets bogged down in methodological critique and theoretical justification of its aims and objectives -- which are, I believe, to use Lasch's phrase, "poor substitutes" for the powerful and persuasive moral argument the society and culture so desperately need and that I believe educational critics potentially could provide.

I have used as an example Giroux's discussion of how to legitimate critical authority, which comes in the midst of his call for an education for citizenship grounded in an elaborated moral theory and linked with democratic ideals. This project within a project (legitimating critical authority while espousing democratic ideals) can be seen as a reflection of the postmodern predicament: On one hand, there is a perception among growing numbers of people, it seems, that our world is in crisis -- 1) that

the possibility of environmental destruction is terrifyingly real; 2) that the chasm between the haves and the have-nots threatens to unleash unprecedented violence around the globe; 3) that our technological genius is running dangerously out of control; and 4) that the AIDS epidemic threatens to wipe out whole populations. Both literally and figuratively, the AIDS scare points to the insidiousness of the crises with which we have come face-to-face: Danger lurks, it seems, in even the most intimate spheres of life. (And what has been our response? Primarily to run from each other and deny the scope of the problem.)

Along with a growing recognition that our crises are real, however, there is confusion about how to speak of the moral good. As Michael Harrington (1983) has pointed out, the death of the traditional Judeo-Christian God as a political figure who helped us figure out how we ought to live together, as a final arbiter on what we ought to be doing, has left us with little more than our multiple stories about what is wrong and what we consequently ought to do in response. Although there is general agreement that <u>what is</u> is clearly not <u>what ought to be</u>, we lack a language for the common, moral good -- hence, the increasingly sophisticated arguments about which stories (whose stories) are best. In the contemporary cultural context such arguments, it seems, are almost inevitable. And amidst such arguments it is not surprising that legitimacy of critical authority itself has

come to be seen as what Giroux (1988b) calls "a terrain of struggle" (p. 74). My feeling, however, is that struggle on this terrain is not really very helpful, that it distracts us from the larger problems and crises we face, and that it bogs us down in what I have come to think of as theoretical fort-building, which shores up the critic's own defenses but not in a way that serves the common good.

Let me approach this issue from another angle. Walzer (1988) relates issues of critical language to what he believes is the central problem of the modern age, the connection between the many and the few -- "specialists and commoners, elite and mass" (p. 4). He explains:

> The standard hope of modern radicals is that popular education and democratic politics will bring the critic into a closer relationship with ordinary people so that criticism will be more like common complaint. But there is a problem here: the struggle for democracy seems indeed to bring specialists and commoners together, but the ambiguities of success breed separation. The actually existing popular regimes, more or less democratic, seem to produce a class of critics in flight from their audience. Mass society puts a special kind of pressure on the critic, especially if he claims to speak for the masses. How can he speak authoritatively unless he also speaks differently? (p. 10).

Consequently, "the choice of a critical language depends ... on the authority the critic wants to claim or thinks he has to claim in order to be heard" (p. 11). Ironically, however, critics themselves "draw the line" between

themselves and others -- a line they then "set out to cross" in and through their work of criticism (p. 25). And, I would add, in and through concerns with shoring up the legitimacy of their authority.

I think this consciousness of competing for authority is part of the problem and that critics would do well to follow Freire's lead. Just as the contradiction between teacher and student must be reconciled before real education is possible, so too, I believe, must that between "the critic" and "the people." Raymond Williams (1968) speaks to this consciousness:

> [T]he culture of a people can only be what all its members are engaged in creating in the act of living.... A common culture is not the general extension of what a minority mean and believe, but the creation of a condition in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values, and in the consequent decisions between this meaning and that, this value and that.... In speaking of a common culture, one is asking, precisely, for that free, contributive and common process of participation in the creation of meanings and values... " (pp. 36, 38).

From this perspective, the task of cultural criticism becomes not legitimation of authority, but "the removal of all the material obstacles to just this form of participation" (p. 36). Brueggemann (1982) also speaks to this consciousness in pointing out that --

> The educational task of the community is to nurture some to prophetic speech. But for many others, it is to nurture an awareness that we must permit and welcome and evoke that prophetic tongue among us (Brueggemann, quoted in Purpel,

1989, p. 110).

Developing one's own powers of prophetic speech is a different project from nurturing a prophetic consciousness. Similarly, establishing one's authority as a critic is not the same thing as nurturing a critical consciousness -- and may even get in the way of evoking such a consciousness.

Despite the questions I raised in Chapter 3 about the applicability of Freire's thought to the American context, his insights are immensely valuable. As he has taught, real education must start with where students are. The implication of this for critics are two-fold. First, critics must speak in a language that the people they want to address understand and, secondly, must speak about the world the people actually live in. What worlds educational critics choose to critique matters because the particular world critiqued is the particular world in which "a stake is claimed" and in which the possibility of communication is opened up. It makes a difference, for example, whether educational critics critique the narrow world of the classroom, the elusive world of discourse, or the everyday world where real people live and where what Williams calls ordinary culture gets made.

At the same time, Freire's insight about the problems of internalized

consciousness also is important and instructive. Telling people why what they think is wrong can be only so helpful. What is necessary is to evoke an alternative consciousness in which better thought is possible. This suggests critics need to speak to the public's best impulses -- impulses to be more compassionate, caring, forgiving, just, and generous -- and not (as do critics like Bloom and the NCEE) to the public's worst impulses -- to compete, to draw lines between "us" and "them," to form hierarchies, and to forget (if not scorn) the weak and the needy. We do not need any more educational criticism that counsels people about how best to race to the high end of a sinking ship. Neither, however, ought we get distracted from the work of responding to the sinking of the ship -- by, for example, preoccupations with issues of critical authority.

I realize that I have come quite close -- too close, I think -- to devaluing all criticism not written for a public audience. That's going too far, so let me pull back. Different critics clearly write for different audiences. I picture three general audiences: 1) like-minded scholars; 2) the segment of the middle class that reads the social criticism of people like Lasch, Bellah, Ehrenreich, and Lewis Lapham; and 3) readers of daily newspapers, which provide some semblance of a public forum, however subjected to the tyranny of the market.

My point is that the circle of like-minded scholars (among whom some excellent educational criticism circulates) needs to be enlarged -- not, however, by initiating more people into a non-negotiable world of critical scholarship, but rather by inviting more people to participate, with the language they already have, in negotiating what critical scholarship should be. Freire's (1990) language for this is that of witnessing:

> The leaders' pursuit of unity ... [requires] witness to the fact that the struggle for liberation is a common task. This constant, humble, courageous witness emerging from cooperation in a shared effort [emphasis added] -- the liberation of men -- avoids the danger of antidialogical control. The form of witness may vary, depending on the historical conditions of any society; witness itself, however, is an indispensable element of revolutionary action (pp. 176-77).

Although the form varies, all witness, Freire goes on to say, includes these elements:

> consistency between words and actions; boldness which urges the witnesses to confront existence as a permanent risk; radicalization (not sectarianism) leading both the witnesses and the ones receiving that witness to increasing action; courage to love (which, far from being accommodation to an unjust world, is rather the transformation of that world in behalf of the increasing liberation of men); and faith in the people, since it is to them that witness is made... (p. 177).

What does it mean to center the work of social criticism around "faith in the people"? This question, for me, leads back to Eagleton and his

critique of literary theory. Eagleton (1983) concludes Literary Theory: An Introduction with the argument that the book "is less an introduction than an obituary, and that we have ended by burying the object we sought to unearth" (p. 204). Given the social constructedness of "an object named literature" and the methodological divergence of its critics, there is no way to ground "an object named literary theory" in either the object of inquiry or the methods of that inquiry. Eagleton's response is to acknowledge the inevitably political character of criticism and proceed accordingly. Educational critics need to make much the same move, but not exactly. We don't need to "bury" the concept of educational critic so much as to turn it inside out. The work of criticism, as Eagleton argues so well, is always political work. But it is also the work of situating ourselves -- morally and emotionally -- in the world. This is good work, work that's best when shared, and work that (like most jobs these days) requires really very little expertise. Perhaps the special role of the educational critic is to first come to educate the public about the need for this work to be done by people like them.

NOTES

1. Here I am following the lead Jim Merod (1987), who consistently refers to criticism as work, for this reason:

> The word work ... is deliberate and deliberately polemic. It points to the intimacy between the world of everyday labor and that other world of intellectual exercise which seeks an essentially theoretical clarity. These worlds are not divisible, but their entanglement is not apparent without some demonstration. Whatever criticism amounts to in a world dominated by commercial and political rivalries that organize a distinctly aggressive order, a world in which the university plays the central role in the production of knowledge, it is a form of work (p. 1).

2. Toni Morrison's (1992) exploration of how literature "has behaved in its encounter with racial ideology" helped me think about the dimension of criticism I am trying to explore: what the work of criticism does or means to the critic her or himself (p. 16). Morrison's question is "what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of master" -- specifically, those who write literary criticism (p. 12).

3. The National Governors' Association 1986 report, Time for Results; the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's 1986 report, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century; and the Committee for Economic Development's 1985 report, Investing in Our Children: Business and the

Public Schools, for example.

4. Giroux (1988b) emphasizes that the category of transformative intellectuals creates a standpoint from which to critique other intellectuals who do not function this way:

> A view of authority and ethics that points to the importance of specific forms of intellectual work and practice ... provides a referent for analyzing and criticizing those intellectuals who have been reduced to either a technical intelligentsia performing a wide variety of functions in late capitalist society or those intellectuals who have become hegemonic intellectuals either unconsciously or consciously furthering the reproduction of the dominant society (p. 88).

In critiquing Giroux's stance, I am advocating neither blanket affirmation of all intellectual work nor naivete about its political dimension. My effort rather is to illuminate the exclusionary dimension of Giroux's important project.

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