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## SOCIAL JUSTICE: A LANGUAGE RE/CONSIDERED

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Some have argued that we live in a post-Civil Rights Movement, post-feminism, post-structuralism, post-history, post-modern, post-colonial, and post-9/11 moment. In this moment, how do we think about and think through the praxis of social justice, where praxis is understood to be that murky intersection of theory, language and practice? In this moment, where the practice of politics has no guarantees, how do we define educational pedagogy, curriculum, knowledge, ethics, and difference? Is there a distinction between “difference” and “diversity”? In the age of multiplicity and multiple interpretive communities within which we ask and answer questions, who is the Other, how do “they” enter “our” lives, and how do we conceive and hence treat the Other? Is this language useful any more, especially the language of “race,” gender, ability, sexuality and social class—commonly known as the framework of intersectionality? Indeed, what and how do we think the modernist dichotomy of Self-Other, Us-Them, Oppressor-Oppressed, Colonizer-Colonized, Center-Periphery, Inner-city-Suburb? Moreover, how do we think the Nietzschean notion of *ressentiment* or resentment, the practice by which one defines one’s identity through the negation of the other? What is gender and what is race, among others, and what role do they play in this process of *ressentiment*? Finally, how do we think the question of identity itself as framed within an individual subjective framework and a larger identity politics, including the State and its apparatus?

This paragraph was the call for papers and the theme for the 2005 OVPES conference. Every one of these questions, I believe, has been answered satisfactorily by one if not more than one article in this volume of *Philosophical Studies in Education* (PSIE). So, instead of repeating what was said best by others, I want to frame this volume of PSIE around three dialectic areas that are crucial to the praxis of social justice: Homi Bhabha’s distinction between “diversity” versus “difference”; Lawrence Grossberg’s notion of “mattering map”; and Frederick Nietzsche’s notion of *ressentiment*, which will be dealt with respectively.

### THE DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

In a classic interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha<sup>1</sup> makes a convincing distinction between what he calls “a creation of cultural diversity” and “a containment of cultural difference.” Bhabha argues that within the Western cultural practices, “although there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always a corresponding containment of it.”<sup>2</sup> This containment usually takes place in a subtle way and through a process of normalization whereby the dominant culture becomes the

normalizing gaze. In other words, “a transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that ‘these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our grid.’”<sup>3</sup>

So, the revision of “the history of critical theory,” declares Bhabha in a different context, “rests...on cultural difference, not cultural diversity.”<sup>4</sup> For Bhabha, diversity is “the recognition of pre-given” norms, values and customs that are “held in a time-frame of relativism.”<sup>5</sup> It is the fixed “content” that we could name, contain and compare with norms, values, customs and symbols. It is, in Bhabha’s words, the “system of the articulation and exchange of...signs” that may even emerge in certain “imperialist accounts of anthropology.” In the final analysis, it gives rise to unproblematized, homogenizing and “anodyne” notion of multiculturalism and cultural exchange, and creates a “radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity.”<sup>6</sup>

Difference, on the other hand, is “the process of signification through which statements *of* and *on* culture”—as just one form of difference—authorize the production of “fields” of force, history, subjectivity, struggle, power, resistance, and eventually hope. Here, history is an organic field to be reckoned with and because of systemic power, not all *categories of difference*—including social class, gender, race, sexuality and disability—perform themselves or are performed the same way in our everyday lives. The essays by Kerry Burch, John Covalleskie, William Fridley and Greg Seals in this volume all remind us that we need to recognize *the difference that makes a difference*. In other words, we do not need to put these categories of difference in competition where women are more oppressed than, say, Native or African Americans. However, we also need to recognize the radical role of power in accessing resources and institutional power structure, what Alexis de Tocqueville calls the “Tyranny of the Majority” (see Burch’s essay in this volume).

Difference “problematizes the division of past and present, tradition and modernity.”<sup>7</sup> It seeks to uncover the “lost territory” and lost history; and enables the subaltern to speak through the creation of safe spaces both at the school and the larger society. There are no “constant principles” here that are safeguarded and unchanging across times, languages, geographies and cultures. These “principles” are dialectic, contingent and ever changing. This is why categories of difference can only be understood within a framework of intersectionality. Social class matters as much as gender, race, disability and sexuality. In fact, as Jennifer Logue and Cris Mayo remind us in their essays in this volume, “the lost discourse of desire” should be placed at the heart of these categories of difference. I will address this idea later. In the end, the notion of difference is a radical notion of questioning (even our core being). It creates what Frantz Fanon would call “the zone of occult instability”<sup>8</sup> and it is in that

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dialectic zone of tension, struggle and hope where people actually dwell that public intellectuals must come.

#### MAPPING WHAT MATTERS

But, as Mayo and Logue contend in their essays, there is no struggle without desire. Grossberg refers to this contention as “mattering map.”<sup>9</sup> For me, the complexity of studying “the lost discourse of desire,” especially within a social justice framework, stems from the fact that it works at the notoriously difficult plane of affect. Why we love a particular music, read a genre of novels, or watch “sleaze TV,” Grossberg argues, might be explained, but never fully. All we feel emotionally is that quasi-orgasmic rush, *juissance*, running through our veins. However, I want to argue, this rush is neither neutral nor without its *politics of identification*,<sup>10</sup> which eventually influences (if not determines) what we learn and how we learn it. That is, the rush is not simply ideological (where we as consumers are manipulated by a ruling class) nor simply affective or emotional; after all our emotions have their own (rational?) structure and language.<sup>11</sup> It is at this intersection of the consciously rational, willful, committed, and the unconsciously emotional, passionate, pleasurable and volitional that I want to locate the discourse of desire within social justice struggle.

As far as desire is concerned, mapping what matters within the praxis of social justice is a “mattering map,” where no investment is haphazard and where people’s identities and everyday lives are formed and performed. Mattering map is where things matter to us personally and where we socialize our identities and thus envision the possibilities of our existence. It is a durable, transposable disposition, structured *champ*<sup>12</sup> or a discursive formation whose meaning is only possible within a theory of articulation.<sup>13</sup> The latter argues that diverse elements or formations, which have no intrinsic, historical or apparent connection, can be connected, accumulated and articulated together to produce a new event, a new possibility of political alliance. According to the theory of articulation, feminists would and should see the need to struggle with gay and lesbians, gay and lesbians would and should see the need to struggle with Native and African Americans, and so on.

However, because of our personal investment and because we experience different categories of difference in multiple ways, we tend to chose one (or more than one) as our point of entrance into struggle for political and social justice. We care about and feel “at home” with certain categories of difference, “partly because there seems to be no other space available, no other terrain on which [we] can construct and anchor [our] mattering maps.”<sup>14</sup> Hence they become sites of empowerment.

For Grossberg, “mattering maps” are like “investment portfolios” where changing investments matter as much as where, how and the intensities and degrees of investment. They “define different forms, quantities and places of

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energy. They “tell” people how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate their way into and through various moods and passions, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories.”<sup>15</sup> Mattering maps, he continues, “also involve the lines that connect the different sites of investment; they define the possibilities for moving from one investment to another, of linking the various fragments of identity together. They define not only what sites...matter but how they matter.”<sup>16</sup> Put otherwise, it is these mattering maps that regulate not only our passion and affective investment in the struggle for social justice, but eventually our identities, identification, and the possibilities of what we could become.

#### THE PEDAGOGY OF *RESSENTIMENT*

According to Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy, what we could become is directly impacted by the social and historical conditions in which we live, by our “age of difference.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the age of difference is also the age of boundary maintenance, quick fixes, moral panic, competence measurement, unthreatening forms of multiculturalism, “accountability,” “clientele,” and the language of panacea and technique (what Dimitriadis and McCarthy refer to as the “technicist discourse”—see also essays by Xiaodan Huang, Richard Quantz, Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Francis Fowler in this volume). It is an age of what Nietzsche<sup>18</sup> called “ressentiment” (resentment), the practice by which one defines one’s identity through the negation of the other.<sup>19</sup> This resentment, Dimitriadis and McCarthy explain, is pronounced more clearly in how difference, multiplicity, and heterogeneity are dealt with in educational settings; how knowledge formation, mattering maps, genres of representation, and bodily encounters are all regulated by resentment. The Other is here capitalized, absolutized and rancorously put either in the inner-city or “over there” in the Third World. The identity of social victim, interesting enough, especially in the United States, is claimed by the professional middle-class dwellers of the suburb. “In so doing, the suburban professional class denies avenues of social complaint to its other, the inner-city poor.” This in turn projects the “suburban worldview as the barometer of public policy, displacing issues of inequality and poverty with demands for balanced budgets, tax cuts, and greater surveillance and incarceration of minority youth.”<sup>20</sup>

In education, the politics of resentment, especially as expressed by mainstream (conservative?) educational theorists, tends to “draw a bright line of distinction between the established school curriculum and the teeming world of multiplicity that flourishes in the everyday lives...beyond the school.”<sup>21</sup> Most ironic, in a post-9/11 world where “migration, electronic mediation and the work of imagination of the great masses of people” all over the world have created “new, polyglot, and heterogeneous cultural landscapes,” we see in the United States (US) “a deep-boded nostalgic investment in Anglo-American culture and its European connections.”<sup>22</sup> Because of movement of peoples from

the Third World to the US, the reworking of American culture, and the changing of its demographic character, we see an increasing and intense form of resentment. Just think about the ongoing Republican discourse on immigration, language policy/bilingualism and same sex marriage!

For those of us who are concerned with the praxis of social justice, we need to reflexively apprehend and reformulate “the processes of resentment into a new language of hybridity and critical humanism that foregrounds both the contradictions and the unsuspected testless of association that cross the divide of center/periphery in the modern world.”<sup>23</sup> We need a language of possibility as much as we need a language of critique. To paraphrase Adrian Rich, “I know this is the oppressor’s language, yet I *need* to talk to you.” Our motto therefore should be: It doesn’t matter which language we “speak” or which category of difference we invest in, we should all *feel the urge, the need* and *the desire* to speak to each other in an informed, humane and genuine manner.

#### THIS IS NOT A CONCLUSION: SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

In her presidential speech, Mayo presents a convincing case on what she calls “embodied desire.” She returns to Aristophanes’ story of androgynes to argue that we need to put the body back into desire and we need not pit it against reason and learning. She provides a case study on how her contentions can be viewed and applied. She concludes that, “the sexual chaos of new forms of identity and association in gay straight alliances in public schools provide us with a way to think through the embodied movement toward futurity that desires motivates.” For Mayo, social justice is an organic praxis that should guide our political and social struggle and alliances.

In her poetic response to Mayo, Barbara Stengel invokes “dialogue,” both literal and metaphoric. She creates a wonderful dialogue between Aristophanes, Diotima, Socrates and Mayo. In the process, we discover the unfulfillable nature of desire and that desire’s “task is futurity.” In the end, we reach this conclusion: “When you shortchange the embodied nature of desire, you led support to those who would fail to educate our children in the depths of their experience as embodied persons for whom desires of all kinds are powerful forces for creativity.”

Megan Boler’s plenary speech follows a juxtaposition of a philosophical and a cultural studies approach in analyzing *The Daily Show (TDS)*. She offers a refreshing bridge between popular culture, pedagogy, philosophy and politics. Expressing my own feeling of why I am *TDS* junky, Boler writes, while watching the show, “I feel myself part of a particular counterpublic that is constructed through [*TDS*]. I feel part of an imagined and real public who avidly watches and appreciated this show, because I imagine that this public, along with me, now has a small space and time of refuge from the horrors of mainstream news.” In my response to Boler, I invoke Stuart Hall to think about

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“the beauty of representation.” Only through representation, I concluded, are we able to link *TDS*, Hip-Hop, pedagogy and education.

Burch, Covaleskie, and Seals reconsider the language of social justice by offering, respectively, Tocqueville’s notion of “the tyranny of the majority,” reconsidering Dewey’s notion of “democratic character,” and a re-reading of Jane Roland Martin’s *Reclaiming a Conversation*. The three authors combined to help us name and re-think the praxis of social justice, all three name it as such. On his part, Fridley pushes the boundary of social justice by exploring something new to me: “poisonous pedagogy.” He reads Alice Miller’s book, *For your own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, to think about pain, physical and psychic abuse, *ressentiment*, and he is able to link it to a larger philosophical analysis of morality.

As a philosopher, Joe Watras loves history and it shows. He takes us into a fantastic journey of how we as people working in the field of education moved away philosophy. He shows us how educators used to resolve their debates and arguments not based on numbers, surveys and empirical studies, but using philosophical arguments.

Huang, Abowitz, Quantz and Fowler tell a compelling Ohio story: The Transfer Articulation Guide or TAG. To use Quantz’s term, they “rant” and debate its utility and its shortcomings. The TAG, as explained by Abowitz, “is a transfer module or set of courses approved by the Ohio Board of Regents providing a standard set of general education courses...in selected academic disciplines.” It is a guideline that affords students in Ohio to move from one university to another with no or little difficulties. The TAG for me raises a series of questions around the uniformity of content, teaching and outcome which are all addressed by the authors.

Robert Osgood continues his work on disability. He focuses this time on the power and the politics of labeling and language. His conclusion is: Things have changed considerably over the last 150 years, yet he argues “While the terminology has undergone considerable evolution and change over these many years, the meanings and functions behind the words continue to evoke confusion, controversy, and a powerful need for critique and dialogue.” Clearly, this is a life-long project and commitment on Osgood’s part.

Liz Jackson raises important questions about the shortcomings of abstinence education, pointing not only to the usual critiques, but also to the problems in counterdiscourses. Jackson argues that all parties to the controversies over sex education and abstinence only education are still mired in unexamined beliefs about the relationship between sex and subjectivity and until they get out of that circuit, all responses will be inadequate.

Similar to Osgood and Mayo, Logue asks the hard question when thinking about the mattering map of the discourse of desire in education: “Just

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what is desire (and what does it mean to be a subject to it)?” It was a question raised by both Mayo and Stengel, but I realized it was never fully answered. Though she tells us, “This is the ultimate question, for which I have no answer,” Logue means to be provocative. She does have *an* answer, but she also knows two more things. First, desire is unfulfillable and, second, it is slippery. We are always just right there in naming it but then it slips away, we can feel it but we don’t have a language for it yet, in fact, language stands in the middle like a Kafkesquian figure between it and a satisfactory naming. We should, however, in conclusion, heed Logue’s call. As she put, “What I do have is a call for philosophers of education to begin to grapple with it.” What else do we have but desire, and Aimé Césaire’s “rendezvous of victory” seems like a perfect site to meet, where desire meets social justice.

## NOTES

1. Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 26–33.
2. Bhabha, “The Third Space,” 208.
3. Bhabha, “The Third Space,” 208.
4. Homi Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference,” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 206.
5. Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference,” 206.
6. Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference,” 206.
7. Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference,” 207.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin / White Mask* (London: Paladin, 1967).
9. Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta get out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992).
10. Awad Ibrahim, “Black-in-English: Black English as a Symbolic Site of Identification,” in *Black Linguistics: Language, Society and Politics in Africa and the Americas*, eds. Sinfree Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha F. Ball, and Arthur K. Spears (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 110–123.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), and Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979).
12. For Bourdieu, a *champ* “is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy” (162). It is a space where art works, for example, “are produced in a particular social

universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws” (163). It is a “veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted” (164). Put otherwise, according to Bourdieu, any social formation is structured by and configured through a series of fields (the educational field, the economic field, the political field, the cultural field, and so forth). Each field is relatively autonomous but structurally homologous with the others and defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy, except in the cases of the economic and political fields (6). Within this space, agents occupy the diverse available positions and in some cases, create new ones, always competing for control and interests. In the cultural field, for example, the authority inherent in recognition (*reconnaissance*), economic rewards, celebrity, consecration, and prestige become the parameters of competition. To propose popular culture as a *champ*, then, is to recognize it as a space of cultural production that relates to other social fields and as a structuring structure with its own rules and regulations that permit certain practices and exclude others. Using particular forms of disposition, it is a *milieu artistique* that deploys an economy of *symbolic capitals* and rewards certain *habitus* (see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)).

13. Stuart Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2: 56–59.

14. Grossberg, *We Gotta get out of this Place*, 84–85.

15. Grossberg, *We Gotta get out of this Place*, 82.

16. Grossberg, *We Gotta get out of this Place*, 84.

17. Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy, *Reading the Postcolonial: From Baldwin to Basquiat and Beyond* (New York & London: Teachers College Press, 2001).

18. Frederich Nietzsche, *A Nietzsche Reader* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1977).

19. Dimitriadis and McCarthy, *Reading the Postcolonial*, 4.

20. Dimitriadis and McCarthy, *Reading the Postcolonial*, 4–5.

21. Dimitriadis and McCarthy, *Reading the Postcolonial*, 2.

22. Dimitriadis and McCarthy, *Reading the Postcolonial*, 5.

23. Dimitriadis and McCarthy, *Reading the Postcolonial*, 5.

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