Living Lives Between Borders: Interdisciplinary Academic Work and the Search for Transformative Openings

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In many respects being a PhD student is about learning—sometimes simultaneously—the dangers and limitations of boundaries as, individually and collectively, we try to come to terms with an academic "tradition", but one which is by its nature eclectic and ever changing. Writing from the standpoint of new scholars and teachers, we come with an openness to new approaches and insights as our generation makes its way into an academic culture and a world which is at once exciting and—in the best and worst senses of the word—*troubling* (Butler, 1997).

Inspired by Henry Giroux's idea of border crossing, the present issue of *The Morning Watch* represents an effort to find an approach to academic work which is at its heart collaborative, but also, nuanced and engaging. First and foremost, we have begun our undertaking with the recognition that "the concept of border crossing not only critiques those borders that confine experience and limits the politics of crossing diverse geographical, social, cultural, economic, and political borders, it also calls for new ways to forge a public pedagogy" (Giroux, 2005, p. 6). It is this transgressive exploration of the politics of the personal as political that Giroux's work shares with his mentors, and peers: cultural workers such as Paulo Freire, Joe Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg and bell hooks.

Indeed, shortly before this issue went to press we were met with the sad news of Joe Kincheloe's passing. Inspired by his work, in particular his notions of the bricoleur, and post formalism, but perhaps more so his remarkable humility and passion, we take on this task with a heightened sense of the urgent need to create new ways of being, thinking and living in the dynamic, sometimes constrictive space we come to know as the contemporary Academy. For us, all of the aforementioned teacher-educators are concerned with an educational approach which is rooted in dialogue, criticality and compassion – that is, each of the aforementioned writers seeks to unite theory with the "real lives" of students in ways which relate the political to the personal, the imaginative to the critical.

In many ways, then, we see Joe's passing as reaffirming the need to claim each opportunity for living and learning as activities which define us and our capacity to love more fully. Taking strength from his wisdom and insight, we see this type of work as the site of a rare wisdom which combines human caring with an undying resiliency. Indeed, for us, as for countless of his peers, friends and students, Joe was, and remains, the embodiment of such a spirit: a thinker who combined the consummate skill of the, skilful, but rough and ready, artisan with the poet's imagination and passion.

With such a vision in mind, as guest editors we have welcomed works which deal with desire, power, knowledge, freedom, their relation to the cultural politics which makes education at once a construct of historical memory and a forward looking, transformative

desire. Indeed, speaking from our own particular institutional vantage point, we perceived that *The Morning Watch* provided a space to give voice to those works over the course of nearly three decades.

In this issue we have sought to bring together the work of students and professors who collectively recognize the tentative, often exploratory, nature of human knowledge. In doing so, we have reaffirmed our belief in the need to make the university more open to the needs and aspirations of those marginalized by our culture's dominant power structures as we strive to make the world a more compassionate place. In some ways, each of the essays in this issue deals with the fundamental tension, between hope and loss which reminds us that we cannot truly transform the world without knowing the depth of its despair and its longing.

Perhaps to some extent the borders our institutions are designed to create separating the able and the unable, demonstrates the lack of a significant emotive dimension within contemporary institutional realities as educators forgo experiencing the sometimes remarkable depths of human love and compassion. Building on this theme, for Elizabeth Yeoman in her review essay of Barbara Coloroso's *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide... And Why It Matters*, the links between genocide and bullying reveal both the transformative promise of education and the arbitrariness of human suffering. Yeoman's reading of Coloroso displays her mistrust of simple binarisms, as well as the intimation that the starkness of this contrast between human love and suffering is, in itself, a pedagogical insight – one which underscores the underlying need to foster a more critical conception of human agency. Although one might conclude that "[p]erhaps Coloroso has it right and the antidote to destructiveness is…simply doing good" what does goodness mean in a complex, postmodern world of fragmentation and uncertainty? Yeoman's nuanced perspective leads the reader to ask what this desire to "do good" might look like in specific human contexts, namely the varied, contested, individual life worlds and communities where concepts are embodied and thereby take their form and being?

While impossible to answer in the abstract, this question leads us to the realization that sometimes the link between specific forms of pedagogy and transformative practice is mired in our preconceptions about certain "types" of people. In some respects, these primary borders frustrate our attempts to transform learners since they are built into the fabric of any subsequent pedagogical project which is not reflexive or radical enough to challenge them. In this vein, Morgan Gardner, Ann McCann and Angela Crocker see the often taken for granted vitality and exuberance of youth as a means of forming strategic alliances through participatory action research which builds on the pedagogical aspects of youth culture and identity. For Gardner and her colleges, much of what we see as the shortcomings of youth from conventional educational standpoints in essence reflects a preoccupation with effecting critical, often emancipatory, forms of collaboration and change. In their words, "as educators, policy-makers and administrators…we must realize that we cannot become leaders of social justice reform in education without embracing the leadership of youth who are experiencing the very inequities we are trying to remove from present-day educational contexts" (p. 11). As such, Gardner's project reminds us that being critical often means being willing to embrace the counterintuitive with steadfast courage.

Similarly, for Clar Doyle in his exploration of graduate education and educational research, the contemporary backdrop of a global economic crisis reveals the precarious underpinnings of a society which worships the expert's promise of certainty as a diversion from more textured, nuanced forms of life. Instead, for Doyle, imaginative pedagogies recognize that much of the generative and transformative potential of aesthetic and critical forms of education rests in their propensity to re-examine and recreate the liminal, and, often indeterminate, aspects of human culture. As he succinctly puts it: "[R] recognizing the illusion of certainty is a healthy academic exercise" (p. 1).

Doyle, like Gardner, then, challenges us to recognize that listening to students can be a transformative act which reinvents the everyday in ways which are radical by virtue of their very embodied imaginativity. By reflecting on his experiences as a lifelong playwright and educator, Doyle comes to realize the importance of helping students by "building on their own ideologies and experiences" as they "move toward realizing that critical research can often be the best approach for dealing with the complexities of educational, social, and cultural life" (p.1). Towards such an end, Doyle urges us to recognize that, in spite of the sometimes rigid borders of academic research, life remains ready at hand, in all of its beauty, richness and wondrous complexity.

Bridging the concerns of Doyle and Gardner, Melody Ninomiya asks whether educators have allowed conventions and stereotypes to typecast sexual education for contemporary youth in a curriculum which seeks to hide or mask the complexities of gender identity and the experience of erotic pleasure. Reflecting on her research as a graduate student, Ninomiya contends that "sexual health education remains rooted in the simplistic idea that it exists primarily to regulate teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)"(p.1) What are the costs, she asks, of such a limited view of human sexuality and desire? In grappling with this question, Ninomiya's work provides a timely challenge to the dogmas and neuroses of contemporary lifestyle education, as she invites us to consider the implications of an educational system in which "educators are rarely exposed to problematic and oppressive qualities of curriculum documents and materials, particularly as they relate to SHE, where there is a need for radical changes and critical thinking" (p.7). Difference, Ninomiya implies, collapses into the stifling constraints proffered by the artificial borders of a safe but blinkered heteronormative reality.

In an era of resurgent authoritarianism, how do we position the "intellectual" in a way which is both ethical and responsible in light of our society's democratic heritage, its progressive dreams, and its colonial inheritance? While, for many, such a question is beyond the pale of a technical rationality which is the proper realm of expert academic knowledge, for Amarjit Singh they are an inescapable aspects of what it means to work and struggle within the contemporary academy. Like Hoben, Singh cautions against the influence of neo-liberal values and institutional practices within university cultures as well as within broader society itself.

Indeed, for both writers, the foreclosure of hybrid spaces for dialogue and praxis, which has seemed to go hand in hand with the proliferation of utilitarian discourses of efficiency, has meant the wholesale erosion of democratic cultural capital as a source of innovation and inspiration. In many ways, both authors suggest, the confluence of market ideologies with hierarchical conceptions of work relations are by no means

accidental, but are suggestive of a set of more complex, underlying hegemonic relationships.

Understanding the plight of democracy in the contemporary academy as well as within the broader culture, requires both a commitment to public discourse and a willingness to challenge the dogmas of neoliberal desire in its subtle, and sometimes disarming, guises. Any war of position against managerial discourses of surveillance and control, then, must take into account the strategic possibilities for collaboration across public spaces as well as across conventional boundaries within the academy itself.

All of the essays in this volume, then, are about negotiating borders by listening, both critically and imaginatively, to the world of those whom we, as educators, wish to change. Without exception, the authors recognize that transformative education is not about objectifying the unquantifiable ethical and personal dimensions of human love and compassion. Rather, it is about working together, as we empower people to work through loss and despair, *for themselves*. As such, border pedagogy is rooted in a democracy of the everyday, as life is re-read in ways which makes the familiar simultaneously dangerous and captivating. In this shared public of little spaces then, we come to see that borders are constructs, which, no matter how seemingly imposing, can be redrawn, or, at last instance, removed. Always then, border pedagogues remain aware of the fact that the first step towards transformative change is the earnest conviction that a better world lives on, awaiting, in the immanent realm of human possibility.

Thus, quite simply, the search for an effective border pedagogy is the attempt to embody, through our lives and teaching practice, what Giroux has elsewhere called the broader effort to “link democracy to public action and to ground such a call in defence of militant utopian thinking as a form of educated hope” (Giroux, 2001, p. xiii). In a border ridden world, then, we are looking for the unexpected or, rather, hoping that the unexpected will cause us to cross boundaries, as, in continually reinventing the educative project, we come a little closer to finding each other, through our ongoing search for transformative openings, in the very flesh and fabric of our non unitary lives.