

BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Hauktima and the Educational Imagination

Barbara
Regenspan

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Haunting and the Educational Imagination

Bold Visions in Educational Research

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Haunting and the Educational Imagination

Barbara Regenspan

Colgate University, New York, USA



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INTRODUCTION

LOCATING PRESENT ABSENCES

As an educational philosopher who learned from John Dewey to equate life and education, I write letters to editors and websites as a part of my job description. At the beginning of the Iraq War, I wrote a letter to the editor of Binghamton, New York's *Democrat & Chronicle* newspaper asking what it meant for our supposedly "safer" Western young people to learn that the death of Iraqi children in this war was publicly classified and legitimated as "collateral damage." I proposed an inquiry into the concept of "collateral damage" as school curriculum, certain from my knowledge of child and adolescent development that without the opportunity to unpeel the layers of oppressive assumptions whereby the killing of certain children could be legitimized, our supposedly safer young people would need to emotionally detach from Iraqi children in order to feel safe themselves. Clearly such detachment would bode poorly for sane political directions for this generation, facing global warming and the realization that we can no longer afford empire-building as a "growth" strategy. Western children's alliance with their peers around the globe was certainly more likely to promote such a dialogue about the global future. Further, I suggested that the phrase "downsizing to protect the health of the economy," quoted from a local manager explaining a recent round of layoffs in that same issue of the *Democrat & Chronicle*, might be introduced in that curricular unit plan as well. I did not use the term "haunted discourse" at the time, suggesting in my letter that both of these conceptions left unexamined—that dead children of certain ethnic or nationality groups represented legitimate collateral damage, and that creating unemployment brought health to the economy—would "haunt" the educations of our young people.

By haunting I refer to the distorting *present absences* in the curriculum of both schooling and the less formal education the society offers young people. They receive this less formal education through the media and their everyday experience, both of which are increasingly shaped by market relations. What can be bought and sold, for how much, and to whom has been negotiated through violent suppression of some groups by others throughout history. Such violent negotiations have determined, for instance, who will select those whose lives can be dismissed as collateral damage. This intentional violence and its impact are unacknowledged in the curriculum, but profoundly present in the form of ideological obfuscations like individualism, patriotism, and related, American exceptionalism, and the presentation of militarization as ordinary. Such ideological obfuscations, in turn, mask classism, white supremacy, sexism, and homophobia, which exist as a ghostly presence in the curriculum. Added to these unacknowledged oppressions is a more recent obsession with the accountability of all but the capitalist class. In public schools, standards and testing dominate the

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curriculum, producing the distorted perception that only what is testable is important. Exploration of qualities like our knowledge of our interdependence as human beings, for instance, falls out of the curriculum, along with conceptions of the value of emotions, once understood to be an aspect of thinking. Indeed, the understanding of the legitimate presence of emotionality in thinking was famously re-illuminated in the field of educational philosophy by Elliot Eisner, author of the classic *The Educational Imagination*, intentionally inscribed in the title of my book (Eisner, 1979/2002).

In both normalizing the obliteration of an Iraqi child's life as collateral damage, and in the normalizing of an intentional process of making people unemployed as promotion of economic health, we experience the phenomenon of market relations defining human relations. The insurance of profit to Haliburton, Bechtel, and Blackwater corporations as well as swift marketization of Iraqi society in the name of "democracy promotion" was reason enough to fight an illegal war on pretences known to be false, a war that would kill Iraqi children as collateral damage. My intention as a teacher and teacher educator writing that letter was to state the obvious—to recognize that our lives, and the curriculum of public schooling as representative of the values expressed by those lives, are haunted by market relations. Further, the assumption of the normalcy of these relations translates into uses of language that are fundamentally mis-educative, identified with what I am calling *haunted discourse*. A hope I continue to nurture and explore repeatedly in this book is that a growing chorus of people are noticing the devastating threat not only to the *lives* of socially marginalized children but to the ordinary child and adolescent *development* of all young people in the internalization of market relations as normalcy—indeed, increasingly as education. I identify with the pedagogical practices that seek to reclaim from their straitjacketing in market relations, which my colleague, Mark Stern, has named *hauntagogy*. "Haunting plus pedagogy = *hauntagogy*" (Stern, 2012). *Hauntagogy*, then, refers to teaching which privileges broadened conceptions of knowledge and thinking that make social injustice and the complexity of human life visible. It is a process that unearths both happy and unhappy ghosts, delivering them into the curriculum of life and schooling in the hopes that they will inspire enlivening artistic and intellectual expression and citizen activism.

I had intuited that haunted sites, places in the curriculum where masked discourses bury unpleasant or inconvenient knowledge, are markers for clues about what sociologist Avery Gordon names a *something-to-be-done*. Now, with access to Gordon's magnificent book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Gordon, 2008), I have become more intentional about the unearthing of haunted sites and their intimation of a *something-to-be-done* as the practice of teacher education. This book is my record of that project to date. As a Deweyan teacher educator in the educational studies department of Colgate University, I work from John Dewey's partly idealistic assumption that education is life, as stated above. Then, life (as education) is the project of enhancing personal growth in the context of fueling the nurturing capacities of communities, with communities understood to circumscribe each individual growth project.

I bring complications to this book, however. My framing draws from Dewey, but is fueled by other scholarly literature, much of which respects (with significant reservations) both Marx and Freud. I invoke material and spiritually inspired psychological thought in an effort to revive what I appreciate to be Dewey's combined material and psychological direction for contemporary teacher education. Further, writing as a curriculum theorist who equates education and life, my book will sometimes conflate a something-to-be-done in relation to curriculum for the classroom, with a broader political response, perhaps implicating policy change or movement building, to address a social problem. I make no apologies for this complication; the interplay between the school classroom as laboratory and the life of the broader culture that includes its laboratories is precisely the paradigm to which we must rededicate ourselves. Such a paradigm is especially important in the contemporary neoliberal era, with its agenda for schooling that negates such a holistic perspective at every turn. Indeed, the neoliberal agenda is precisely the effort to impose the dominance of market relations on knowledge, such that market relations permeate all consciousness. Certainly many teachers and parents organizing against the current neoliberal reform agenda, especially its pervasive high-stakes tests, recognize that these "reforms" are related to other social problems arising from the normalization of market relations as human relations. Broader teacher and parent activism is an anticipated response to the unearthing of haunted sites in schools; although such activism is extremely important, it is not a direct focus of this book, nor are specific prescriptions for broader social change.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY INTRODUCES RUDDICK'S MATERNAL STORIES AND BECKER'S *DENIAL OF DEATH*

The data I interpret in this book are grounded in the specific, coherent wisdom of autoethnography, "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze in writing (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As someone with a long history of reclaiming stories as more than data, I join, in the words of Carolyn Ellis, "scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines [who have begun] to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free" (Bochner, 1994). Avery Gordon contributes to this revisioning of the social sciences her conception of complex personhood, which disrupts any tendency to assume that "systematic analysis" will compensate for the fact of human irrationality:

Complex personhood means that all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others. Complex personhood means that people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. (p. 4)

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Searching for a paradigm to consider the realities of children's lives I was then observing for my dissertation in the early 1990s, I encountered in Sara Ruddick another feminist philosopher seeking to complicate notions of personhood. Ruddick proposed a conception of *maternal storytelling* that offered a political bridge to my preoccupation with what I named the *visceral* in human experience: "As she pieces her children's days together, a mother creates for herself and her children the confidence that the children have a life, very much their own and inextricably connected with others" (p. 98).

For Ruddick, a mother's stories reflect the balance between that aspect of her child's life that represents a separate quest, indeed, a separating quest, and the marginalized other growth project of learning to appreciate and face the reality of one's inextricable connections to others. Given the compelling feminist perspective of Madeleine Grumet and other educators and researchers that the prototype for teaching (by either women or men) is mothering (1988), Ruddick's formulation appears to capture the empowering balance of attention required in maternal work, which also characterizes the work of autoethnography. (Grumet's clarity that the late nineteenth to early twentieth century sentimentalizing of children coincided with their actual political disempowerment remains timely; contemporary neoliberal educational reforms touting the importance of our young people as critical thinkers while serving them up to the non-sustainable global economy appears to represent a parallel and haunting hypocrisy.)

Further, because they extrapolate social wisdom from personal experience, Ruddick's *maternal stories* must address the project of refusing to bifurcate the political and the personal. This project of conceiving of the personal as political is natural to myself and my peers who entered the field of educational studies after engaging in the political activity of the late 1960s and 1970s, political activity that was meant to be socially and personally transformative. We were educated by both the emerging feminisms of the 1970s and discourses that respected, while evolving continuing critique of, both Marx and Freud, typical of the work of Ernest Becker (who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for *The Denial of Death*). Becker's thesis legitimized two important arguments that are not only contested but also invalidated in the public mind by contemporary market relations. The first is that it's not primarily sexual desire that colors and distorts what Avery Gordon describes as *complex personhood*, but rather our universal fear of death. Our behavior as human beings is perennially distorted by the anxiety engendered by this fear, but contemporary market relations both exploit and exacerbate such anxiety by making it less available to depth-enhancing self-reflection. We are flooded with new iterations of technological possibilities, each bringing with it an illusion of personal renewal. There is a sense of endless postponements of death; such a false perception of immortality marks another haunted site. The death-denying individual as a consumer of technology brings us to the second focus of Becker's argument. It is only the individual's attention to the needs of others that provides a genuine solution to unmanageable levels of anxiety. (Becker, 1973).

RECLAIMING THE ECONOMICS OF MARX AND FREUD

An important part of this project, then, is the reclaiming of Marx and Freud, especially in conversation with one another. The knowledge both invoked and generated in the pursuit of a collectively sustainable life for us humans is the major focus of my field of educational studies. Both Marx and Freud offer the current neoliberal moment a challenge to its ahistorical claims, to its socio-cultural blindness, to its insistence that all fields of human endeavor can be rationalized according to dollar value and accreditation based on conformity to dollar-valuing systems. Both Marx and Freud offer methods of deconstruction for the purpose of finding how and where power hides, and how it asserts itself, often from its hiding places, even as it can negate personal and/or collective agency. For Freud, individual and collective history accretes a certain kind of depth, requiring of individuals that we re-evaluate our pasts in order to act with increased awareness. This increasing awareness then guides a more thoughtful and compassionate dispersal of the libido or life force.

For Marx, the accretion of history that shapes us requires examination of its patterns; we must understand how power is lost to us when we forfeit awareness of our collective interests. These two theorists offer roadmaps for the reclaiming of power to avert totalitarianism both within and without us through redistribution of that power which both conceive as economic. Freud recognizes investment in the “economics of libido” that are individual, producing the less or more aware complex personhood recognized by Avery Gordon. He requires of us that we agree to study/*learn* ourselves so that we distribute our life force as thoughtfully and compassionately as possible, given that the unconscious will always make self-awareness a partial project only. Freud argues for the necessity of redistributing the accessible resources within, not as solution, but as strategy for navigating a potentially meaningful life. Marx hopes for the same, although his roadmap has the intention of leveling the playing field (Scialabba, 2011, p. 14) so that each individual’s more thoughtful distribution of life force becomes possible. Marx’s intention is to prevent the inequitable accretions of power that block individual access to an appropriate share of the world’s resources, including education, for the enactment of the project of living. As social philosopher George Scialabba notes, “Like Freud, Marx sought only to deliver mankind from needless misery to inevitable unhappiness” (p. 14).

Both theorists recognize human interdependence, and both view its denial as perilous. Both ascribe to the leanest of aphorisms, “Know thyself,” and “Only connect,” and both point to avenues for alliance with the others on whom one’s life is dependent. In this regard Freud is more focused on obstacles to both self-knowledge and alliance with others, with his astute observation of the “narcissism of minor difference” actually deepening our awareness of the internalized challenges to finding allies and building alliances (Freud, 1930/1962, p. 72). Marx, in turn, supports our understanding of how the external economy can overwhelm the “economics of libido,” can overwhelm the intentional apportioning of individual life force into expression as passion for others, for art, for industry, for

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development of intellect and (from my perspective), for meditation. Both explain how the resources of the self can be made invisible to the self. Marx offers a critique of the evolution of the market relations of capitalism that have represented a kind of collective unconscious that he seeks to make conscious. Freud's psychoanalysis seeks to make possible the unearthing of the typically invisible depths of knowledge about self and other, much of it learned when the infant had no choice to refuse its lessons. Both underappreciated the power of the system being interpreted by the other: for Freud, there was an undervaluing of the external elements in the politics of totalitarianism. He could not consider that the domination of the super-ego might be determined by the very powerful socioeconomic historical forces, which, once internalized, actually constructed it. Related, he did not appropriately credit the power of the broadly social to shape the individual psychologies/complex personhoods of human beings (Gordon, 1997). For Marx, there was an attachment to rationalism and determinism that blinded him to the power of complex personhoods to derail the project intended to level the playing field. Then, too, that project's prescriptive certainties in turn defied the mutability of both complex personhood and the playing field.

THE ART OF TEACHING AND EISNER'S *EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION*

As noted above, this book, including its title, is also indebted to Elliot Eisner, who recognized that teaching was an art as opposed to a conventionally construed science. Beginning with *The Educational Imagination*, he famously elaborated particular qualities of its artfulness in numerous works that helped shape my own teaching and capacity to evaluate the work of my student teachers. Eisner's conception of *educational connoisseurship* is indebted to the four qualities he identifies in "The Art of Teaching," a chapter that is required reading for all of our student teachers at Colgate, which for me describes the possibilities of redrafting a symphony in every lesson we teach; the movements are as applicable to the college classroom as to elementary, middle and high school. Teaching is an art because:

[It] can be performed with such skill and grace that, for the student as well as the teacher, the experience can be justifiably characterized as aesthetic ...: teachers, like painters, composers, actresses, and dancers, make judgements that unfold during the course of action...; the teacher's activity is not dominated by prescriptions or routines but is influenced by qualities and contingencies that are unpredicted ...; [and] the ends [teaching] achieves are often created in process. (pp. 154, 155)

In the qualitative research he prescribes for the assessment of effective and inspiring teaching, Eisner supplies the interpretation of "objectivity" he acknowledges as valid, asserting that "... objectivity is a function of intersubjective agreement among a community of believers" (p. 237). Here he affirms his allegiance to the radical indeterminacy of the Deweyan project of democratic education. With regard to curriculum ideology, Eisner distinguishes from Deweyan progressivism the "cognitive pluralism" for which he advocates

(pp. 79-83). Yet I believe that the “mind-body in wholeness of operation” featured in Dewey’s later conception of life as education and education as life points to similar absences in the curriculum so worrisome to Eisner that he coined a new term: the “null curriculum” (p. 97). Eisner argues that what schools do not teach is as significant or even more significant than what they do teach or attempt to teach, inviting my conception of haunting with its focus on unappreciated absences. However, the null curriculum is not the same thing as the haunted curriculum, as Eisner does not theorize as product of market relations his recognition of a splitting off of feeling from thinking. Nor does he suggest political reasons for the typical school curriculum’s lack of cognitive pluralism. What he does do is recognize the need for a vastly expanded understanding of literacy, arguing persuasively, as introduced earlier, that schools as currently constituted promote a constrained conception of *thought*:

Aside from the problems inherent in the reification of distinctions among thinking, feeling, and acting, cognition itself has come to mean thinking with words or numbers by using logical procedures for their organization and manipulation, and not thinking in its broadest sense ... Yet, in the literature of education the term [cognition] has been impoverished, and in the process what we consider to be thinking has also been diminished. (p. 98)

Eisner was clearly concerned that the educational connoisseurship he prized was already being marginalized by instrumental evaluation of teaching at the time he first crafted his book. I’d argue that his unwillingness to assert that internalized (capitalist) market relations were responsible for the exclusion of affect, the body, and the arts from typical curriculum and teaching in schools, has returned to haunt his work. The marginalization of the arts in particular has never been so extreme as in the present. The practices of hauntology are now required to affirm Eisner’s own now classic contention that “the cultivation of imagination is not a utopian aspiration” (p. 100).

RECLAIMING THE PERSONAL AS POLITICAL: AVERY GORDON AND MAXINE GREENE

In my own first book, *Parallel Practices: Social Justice-Focused Teacher Education and the Elementary School Classroom*, I described my methodology as teacher educator self-study, a methodology then validated by the research of Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinegar. I began the introduction: “I have long believed the truism that no matter what the subject matter you intend to teach others, you can really only teach who you are. What I learned writing *Parallel Practices* is that it is also the case that you can only *write* who you are” (Regenspan 2002, p. 1). Although I *did* articulate that belief, I did not at the time appreciate the possibility of systematic parallels of life experience and political reality illuminating both. In other words, I was not prepared to answer the question, “Exactly how is the personal political?” an inquiry pursued with, I hope, poetic zest in this book. For those who would charge that autoethnography is the