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**Updating critical ideas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to fight against neoliberal machine: interview with professor Henry Giroux**


**Atualizando as ideias críticas no século XXI para lutar contra a máquina neoliberal: entrevista com o professor Henry Giroux**

**Actualizando las ideas críticas en el siglo XXI para luchar contra la máquina neoliberal: entrevista con el profesor Henry Giroux**


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## **Presentation**

This interview was conducted in a dialogue format with Professor Henry Armand Giroux on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2020, in the city of Hamilton, Canada. Dr. Giroux currently works as a professor and researcher in the Department of Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Human Sciences at McMaster University where he is responsible for the *Paulo Freire Chair of Critical Pedagogy*. Considered one of the main authors of critical theory in the field of education, he develops an approach that

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strengthens the construction of democratic values in public life. He is greatly inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire, with whom he worked for many years, and in this interview he makes many mentions to this scholar. Only the first two questions of the interview, concerning Freire's ideas, were published before in another interview with Dr. Giroux conducted by Figueiredo and Siqueira (2020), all other questions are unprecedented for this article.

Henry Giroux is undoubtedly an important contemporary thinker. He is among the scholars who contributed most to the development of critical theory in education, emphasizing crucial intersections between the role of education in schools and universities and the role of culture in public life. His vision defends the need to make pedagogy central to politics itself and to help create the necessary conditions for the development of a formative culture that provides the basis for the development of critical citizens and a democracy with broad social participation. The ways in which he conceives an educational approach to combat authoritarian systems and his emphasis on the responsibility of intellectuals in building a "language of possibility" have an important repercussion among teachers and students in several countries, including Brazil. Currently its main areas of research are: cultural studies, youth studies, critical pedagogy, popular culture, media studies, social theory and higher and public education policies.

## The Interview

**Interviewers:** *You are a Paulo Freire's distinguished scholar in critical pedagogy at McMaster University. In your opinion, which are the main ideas and concepts of Freire's work that you think we should rescue and reinforce at the Brazilian universities?*

**Henry Giroux:** I think that one of the things that Paulo alluded to was that education had to be on the side of justice; that education had to be concerned with questions of solidarity - that education was central to democracy - that education had to address the vulnerable, in society, and to be able to take on the burden of educating people who ordinarily wouldn't be included in education as the practice of freedom. I think that Paulo was immensely in tune with the possibility that you could teach and you could learn at the same time, he was immensely alive to the richness of the imagination, the uncertainty, the pain of education, the willingness to take risks... He was aware of people who were not literate, in it. He was aware of the consequences of people not learning the skills necessary for reading the world but also what it meant if people could not use such skills to active intervene in the world. For Paulo, literacy means teaching people how to be able to intervene in the societies in which they lived, he wanted to equip them with all those skills, all those forms of knowledge that were necessary to recognize that education was always about doing everything we could, to continue what it meant to educate people who were unfinished. Moreover, education never stopped at the door of the school, it took place in field, it took place in farms, it took place in the media, you know? It was a central and ongoing element of society. The popular education! You know, that we had to address, because you can't talk about politics without talking about education, because you can't talk about politics without talking about consciousness. And you can't talk about intervening in the world, being an active citizen, or being practical, or - in any way, understanding the world without talking about what means to be informed. And Paulo understood that, and that's why he was dangerous to the system. I mean, Paulo's pedagogy was dangerous, because he said that you couldn't have education without an informed citizenry; you can't have it, a democracy without people who are educated, literate, and willing to take risks. He believed that education was central to every aspect of life, you know? We're constantly learning, we're constantly being bombarded by all these pedagogical messages coming from all kinds of diverse sides, and then, education basically is always a project, a political purpose, it's not a recipe.

It's an ongoing project, you can't say *here are ten things you need to know and that's it*. It's unfinished, it's ongoing, it adapts to different circumstances, and it's diverse. It's historical, and I think that people who think that education is simple, pre-determined, also believe that education can take place without teachers, and that all one has to do is learn facts, memorize, and I think that what Paulo was saying to people like that from the movement ... without party is "That's not about education, that's about depoliticizing people and making them dumb, that is an education that denies agency and empties politics of any meaning." That's an authoritarian model of domination. That's an education for domination and not to decolonization. That is what he meant by the pedagogy of the oppressed. When Paulo Freire created the concept "Pedagogy of the oppressed" what he was saying is that pedagogy can be about the facts and freedom, or it can be about the facts and domination, that there's no such thing as neutral education, that doesn't exist. That, in fact, what we need to ask here is *which side do you want to be on here? What kind of students do you want? Do you want critically imaginative students who can eventually make up their own minds about their politics and regardless of what those politics are, at least be well informed?* Paulo was never telling people what their politics should be, Paulo was saying, *look*, and you must make a distinction between political education and politicizing education. Politicizing education says: here's how you should think, here's what your ideology should be. It's pedagogy of indoctrination. He was *completely* against that! He was for political education, learning about power. Learning about the relationship between knowledge and power, learning about the struggle over the truth, learning about critical dialogue, learning everything you could to imagine how power could be used in every aspect of life through extended capacities. Paulo wanted people to be individual critical agents. And to be able to work collectively with others around shared concerns that would deepen them and make them more meaningful, the very notion of democracy itself.

**Interviewers:** *You have worked with Paulo for a long time, is there something about him that you would like to reinforce?*

**Henry Giroux:** Paulo was the most humble...I mean, the thing about Paulo that I always loved ... was how humble he was. I've never met anybody with more humility. Paulo never narrated himself; he never interviewed himself. He was sweet, he was lovely, he was fun to be around, he was warm... I mean, Paulo would say things to me, like, in that Brazilian accent, he would say [changing the voice] *Giroux... I don't believe in the radical by the strength, this is not me, I can't believe how can you be radical if you don't love to dance...* He was a romantic! You know? He was a man of poetry and he was a theologian. He was capacious in his interest and in his taste; he brought out the best in people. People loved him. I mean, you were immediately attracted to Paulo because he was a *great* storyteller. I even remember him telling me when he was first arrested, he said: *Giroux, they took me to their prison, and as I walked in, the guy said, we caught the canary*. They put him in a cell next to somebody else. Elsa didn't know where he was... And he said he was alone in this fight, and there was a guy next door and he said his mother brought in a cooked chicken, and he said he could hear him eating the chicken, and he said- he said *Paulo, I know who you are* and he reached over and he gave him something to eat. And these were the kinds of stories... I mean, Paulo told me a long story about how he was working with some people somewhere when Castro called him on the phone, when the revolution had just began... wanting him to come to Cuba.

I mean... this was Paulo! I remember once he said *Look, Giroux, the most important thing that ever happened to me, I got an honoree doctorate in Spain*. I said *Really, Paulo? That's fabulous*. He said the Pope at that time intervened and denied him the award. (Laughs) He said: *How great is that?* (More laughs). He was the most unorthodox leftist I've ever met, do you understand? He knew how to play. Too many on left today have lost the quality of playfulness. They can't play, you know? Except in Brazil, right, where they know how to play. People are often frozen, you know, in their orthodoxies. This

was the opposite, for Paulo. Paulo was playful, humble, committed and always open to new possibilities. At the same time, he had firm convictions, but *always* open to dialogue, you know? And he never allowed himself to be treated like a hero. Never. He'd say *No, no, no, this is about issues, not about me*. He never- Angela Davis is like that, in the United States, right? People try to iconize her, she's like *No, no, no, no, not about me!* People often say to me: *You are the father of critical pedagogy*, I say *No, and I'm not. That's nonsense! A lot of people talked about critical pedagogy, you know?* There was a movement for critical pedagogy; I'm not the father of anything. That's a terrible language. Because it seems to ignore the fact that we built our theories on the work of others, right? Collectively, this is a collective project, you know? I just write and publish a great deal, people know about it, but to say I'm the father? I started it? That's nonsense, I don't like that language, you know, I don't think it helps anybody, and I think it erases histories. But Paulo was just the *sweetest, loveliest* man. He would always ask you; he would say- *how is your wife? What a beautiful woman!* I mean...he was just sweet. Just lovely to be around; when you were with Paulo, it was like- it was like you were dancing with someone. You were eating and... whenever I was around Paulo, I felt we were drinking wine, we were talking about issues that mattered, we were touching each other, you know, it was- it was a very sensual, politically, uplifting event. I've met a lot of interesting people in my life, but man... Paulo Freire is special. He was special. I am trying to keep his legacy alive while also expanding my own work with new ideas, particularly around the emergent merging of neoliberalism, authoritarian populism, and fascism that are some more contemporary challenges we are facing in the beginning of this Century.

**Interviewers:** *Henry, talking about this contemporary world, what do you think are the most important challenges for the democracy and the social rights?*

**Henry Giroux:** I think that what we're seeing all over the world is the emergence of new political formations that view democracy as the enemy of human rights, of the human condition, actually. And I think that we can identify some threads that are moving through this political formation, that speaks in many ways through recurrence, not in the most direct sense of fascism, but an updated notion of fascism, and it's a notion of fascism that begins by rewriting the narratives of history, and what that basically means is that... It's a history that leaves out the genocide, the suffering, and the exploitation. A fascist politics built upon militarism and ultranationalism, racial purity, and social cleansing. And I think that what's particularly interesting is that this new movement is updated not in the sense that it's reproducing different versions of what we might call "elements of a fascist past" from the ultranationalism and militarism to degrees of global inequality, but it's aided now by cultural apparatuses in a digital world, and loads of representation, unlike what we've seen before. So, in a sense, you have two things going on, that I think is very interesting. You have the merging, in this moment, unlike the thirties and the forties, you have, at one level, you have the crisis of neoliberalism - in other words, all over the world, neoliberalism has failed on its promises to basically increase social mobility and to decrease social inequality, and it's produced massive degrees of misery, particularly around economic inequality and intellectual inequality, meaning that... To the degree that people don't have the resources to basically find themselves in a role in which they can fulfill their multiple capacities to be critical agents. They find themselves, in a sense, unable to understand, because they don't have access to education, don't have access to these technologies, some of them... To basically understand the problems that they confront: neoliberalism and these new political formations right when authoritarianism, and elements of a fascist politics, has stepped in and taken advantage of that misery produced by neoliberalism. And, in a sense, it's a legitimization crisis through a political crisis, meaning that it has now combined the basic elements of neoliberalism with a form of economic authoritarianism, with a new form of political authoritarianism, and that political authoritarianism is basically all the elements of a fascist politics. So, we now have people being mobilized through a culture of fear, a

culture of hatred, a culture of demonization, and central to all of this is a notion of education, that's being central to politics itself, because this is a war of ideas, this is not just a war over consciousness, it's a war over identity. It's a narrative, that basically is saying that for all the misery we're seeing through the massive degrees of inequality in the world, and particular forms of oppression, the reason why we're having this is because we're being, in a sense, assaulted by refugees, people from the southern border, people who are considered disposable, so that the logic of disposability has been so expanded in this new moment; but it's not just about Jews, and it's not just about very limited populations, it's about anyone that doesn't fit into a white nationalist, often Christian narrative. So, it seems to me that what we're seeing, once again, to summarize it, is we're seeing a legitimization crisis that basically gives way to new forms of political authoritarianism, and these new forms of political authoritarianism constitute what I call *neoliberal fascism*. It's a new form of fascism, out of the economic misery, out of the depravation or the suffering, out of the inequalities, the industrialization, and the structure of manufacturing... Except that, all of a sudden, you have this global elite that has now consolidated its power and basically turned its attention to scapegoating populations all over the world who are no longer considered necessary. That's something we haven't seen before on such a global scale. It's happening in Brazil, it's happening in Chile; the economic crisis in Chile now gives way to a fascist politics of repression, right? We see it in The United States under Donald Trump, we see it under Erdogan in Turkey, under Netanyahu in Israel, we see it under Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and we also see it in Poland... what's interesting there, and something I've been thinking about, is that on the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz where the less than 200 hundred survivors gathered to basically say that "This can never happen again!" and... How did it happen? How did people turn away in the midst of that historical moment, frightening historical moment? And a testimony to moral witnessing and the need to develop a sense of historical consciousness, we all of a sudden find ourselves again in a period where historical consciousness is waning, where we are caught up in a culture of immediacy and consumption, where financial transactions eliminate any sense of ethical responsibility, where capital overrides the obligations of human rights: - that's new, and it's very dangerous.

**Interviewers:** *Thank you! Henry, you talk about neoliberalism, neoliberal fascism, and we have, in history, the Capitalism fascism. I would say that the first wave of fascism was exactly in the modern age when the Industrial Revolution and the capital waves of making money were spreading around the world. So, you addressed an important point now, which are the new media and the new culture. All this technology and new media, such as the Internet, were not present in the twentieth century... However, they are extremely crucial nowadays, in the twenty-first century, right?*

**Henry Giroux:** I mean, they're crucial because what's at stake here is the production of agents, molds of identification, values, and social relations. At one hand, you have these cultural apparatuses that basically make the claim that capitalism and democracy are the same thing, that make the claim that people basically don't need social things, the public goods are the enemy of democracy, and unions are worthless, that we don't need to invest in young people, that the public goods are the enemy of the market, that the market is basically the sole obligation for all social relations and not just economic relations, that self-interest is the only interest that matters, that privatization, standardization, deregulation anything that basically supports the market is at odds with any interference, under any situation from the State or from any other interest that might suggest that freedom is about more than market values and it's about more than simply matters of financial exchange. So, at one level, you have a form of neoliberalism that is so expansive and overwhelming in its reach and in its power economically that this constitutes a new political formation. What is new is that you have molds of legitimization that normalize neoliberalism in ways that function, I would say, on two registers. One, one register, it makes the claim that the only obligation of citizenship basically is consumerism, shopping and the privatization of everyday

existence, right? So, it individualizes the social, it depoliticizes people by leading them to believe that the only interests that they have are material interests and that the only understanding of politics that they have is one that suggests that all problems are individual problems, and therefore they can't translate private interests into large public considerations. The second issue is that it goes further and it makes the claim that if you really want to look at the source of all problems outside of your own sense of individual responsibility, then there is the notion of the social we have to address and that notion of the social is constituted by the language of pathology, it's constituted by the language of hate, it's constituted by the culture of fear, it's constituted by the language of threats, dehumanization; and we have seen this before, but we've never seen it on such a global scale and with the power of a culture apparatus concentrated in basically few economic hands to win that power. I mean, the stories that are being produced, the narratives that are being legitimated, and the social relationships that are being normalized... Speak to a version of fascist politics that basically take the old notion of fear that we saw under Mussolini and under Hitler and it's now not limited to individual rallies, you know? In Rome or in Chicago or in Florida... It's now *global*. It's on the screen. A fear that is now also virtual, on-line. Learning is no longer something that takes place in the school, and the new mold of learning is not what we learn, it's what we unlearn. It's what's to be forgotten, right? I mean, the lessons of history, all of a sudden if they're not being rewritten as in Poland... The Polish government passed a law saying that any attempt to link the Polish government or Poland in general with elements of the Nazi Holocaust is illegal. Auschwitz was in Poland! I mean, this is where even the recurrence and remembrance of history gets punished, right? So, I think that what we have seen is, we have seen an economic system that moves by simply legitimating the market and, if that doesn't work through outright forms of repression, to a system that now solely lies on education apparatuses, cultural apparatuses all over the world to normalize both scapegoating of others and its basic tenants, but that constitutes something very new... This integration of culture, power and technology, the new technologies, constitute a new equal educational sphere, very powerful, very pervasive and very global.

**Interviewers:** *Is that why you say that neoliberalism has its own pedagogy? Is there a neoliberal pedagogy? And how does political education make people stronger so that they can contest and criticize it?*

**Henry Giroux:** I think that it's an enormous mistake to operate off the assumption that the only tools of domination that we see under neoliberalism are economic or oppressive in the most immediate sense, through the police, through the National Guard, through the army. Neoliberalism doesn't just produce structural apparatuses of power and repression. It also produces subjects, it produces multi-agency, and it creates narratives. You have to have ideological means, it would seem to me, to be able to suggest a way of normalizing forms of oppression that people would no longer call into question. And I think that what we have seen, I mean, particularly in the UK and in The United States is increasingly cultural apparatuses such as higher education, public education, such as the health service, such as government bodies that dispense knowledge and information. I mean, all of these channels in which knowledge is being produced, the way in which grants get set up, the way in which corporations offer knowledge to people about themselves, their relationships through others in the world. I mean, these are all filtered through a new neoliberal pedagogical apparatus. That's a teaching machine! And it teaches people to conform. It teaches people to believe that democracy is basically the enemy of the largest elite. It teaches people to hate, it teaches people to reduce fear to simply "the fear of the other", it teaches people to believe in borders, it teaches people to put up with the United States putting children in concentration camps, it teaches people to believe that when Bolsonaro says that "Hitler was a communist" it's probably true. It teaches people to believe that when Boris Johnson appoints somebody in his cabinet that is basically a racist and claims that he believes that black people are less intelligent than white people and that you should impose force upon the underclass because they reproduce in ways that suggest that

they're a threat to the very notion of civilization... I mean, what you have is an ideological apparatus at work that is cementing, producing, and legitimating multi-desire, particular kinds of social relations, particular kinds of values. You cannot talk about new fascist politics without talking about education. You cannot talk about the institutions that neoliberal fascism creates to basically eliminate those institutions that make critical thinking possible and critical consciousness, as Freire would say, right? You can't talk about the rise of critical ideas if you don't have public institutions to produce them and support them, and the right knows this. The right and these new fascists understand that this war is not just over economic resources, it's also over, it seems to me, what it means to be able to colonize all those models of pedagogical education that have now come into play in the twenty-first century.

**Interviewers:** *So, on the one hand they are producing what you have been calling a "Desimagination Machine" and on the other hand they are attacking directly the professors and the educational systems. They are attacking us from both sides, right?*

**Henry Giroux:** Yes, I mean, this is a very important point, we're talking about a mold of oppression and a war culture. Imagine this is a war culture. Imagine the societies are being militarized in every way; they're being militarized by virtue of the fact that more money is being pumped into the military, to the repressive state apparatuses, more money is being pumped into institutions that basically believe that human rights are less important than the accumulation of capital and profit whether in a global, federal or national level. At the same time, it seems to me they're pumping enormous amounts of money not only into the expansion of the state, they're pumping enormous amount of money into ways to destabilize and defund those democratic institutions, those institutions that are central to democracy: public education and national health care, social provisions, the ability to basically provide necessary aid to people who are in the margins of society, the need to attack economic inequality. So, the second moment, that moment when you defund public goods to make them fail so that the market can then step in and privatize, deregulate and operate without any fear of competition. The proof is, they're attacking intellectuals. It's attacking those intellectuals and those elements of the press and the media that basically offer the opportunity to believe that you can't have a democracy without informed citizens. I mean, we see it in Brazil, of course, under Bolsonaro, and we see it particularly in the United States under Trump who makes no qualms about claiming that the press is the enemy of the American people, the enemy. I mean, this is the language of fascism, right? I mean, what we see in Turkey, where over five hundred academics are expelled from the country for... What crime? What's the crime? Speaking the truth? Making power accountable? If those three elements aren't a basic register and indication of the new fascism, then what is? And maybe another way of looking at this is to try to understand that fascism doesn't come over night. It comes in accumulations; it comes in what I would call accumulation of micro aggressions. So, first you put kids in camps, secondly you create a language of disposability and dehumanization, as in Brazil, right? You claim that people, who are basically poor, are criminals. And then you go further, and then you shoot them from helicopters, right? Then you do away with the press. You start putting journalists in prison. These are trial runs; you see how far you can go. In The United States you see a president who basically increases and updates almost every day the degree of lawlessness that he can impose; now that he's been cleared of impeachment, he's been punishing those people, for instance, who testified against him, firing the ambassador to European Union, you know, you see a language of punishment now accelerating, you see a president who is claiming that he's above the law, that he can use the justice department to punish his political enemies. I mean, we've seen this before! Under Hitler we had something called the Enabling Act in which all of a sudden Hitler said *Look, courts don't matter anymore, I have power over the courts, the law is basically embodied in me, this right wing popular leader like me*. Ask yourself where we see this emerging again? But the thing that you should really ask is *how is it in the midst of*



*so much misery, so much depravation, so much poverty, so much suffering that they become the answer for so many people?* That's a pedagogical question. How do you learn to be a fascist? How do you learn to believe in scapegoating? How do you learn to believe that refugees who are fleeing from war, militarized horrible situations are basically criminals trying to get a free pass into The United States, into France, into England, into Greece? What does it mean when you create societies based on borders in which you incarcerate people and label them as vermin? The endpoint of fascism is genocide, let's be clear, ok? Let's be clear about this. If you really want to talk about fascism, you have to talk about terror. Terror is *the* instrument of fascism. But terror doesn't any longer simple come into cruel, simple acts of oppression. It also now comes in molds of agency, identification, values, social relationships that make it possible, which allow people to not only look away in the face of crime, criminology, violence, but also then become complicities. Intellectuals have become complicities, you know, many types who do nothing but go to meetings and ignore linking education to enormously important social problems, health workers who really believe that people who are poor are basically criminals, you know? Doctors who believe that their medical ethic doesn't include people who don't fit into the register of racial purity, people who claim that they believe in justice and God, but that support dictators who violate human rights every time they turn around. These are pedagogical questions. These are historical questions, these are questions about the apparatuses that create the agents that make this possible, this is the great challenge of the twenty first century, and Marx basically didn't get it right. The issue was not if you had to know how to interpret the world or to change it, the point is to do both. The point is, you basically can't understand if you don't understand the world if you can't change it. Paulo Freire got that right. You know, he got it right, that's exactly right. So we have to prioritize the struggle over consciousness while at the same think about ways in which we can understand these new political formations, which are not simply national, they're global. You have a global elite that has enormous amounts of power, that refuses to allow their industries to be taxed in nation states, deprive nation states of the academic funding they need to be able to function, and all of a sudden where do these states turn to? They turn to repression. They turn to repression and tend to scapegoat, they turn to the language of hate. So this is a very different political moment, from that moment in which we saw the Paulo Freire's, the Mahatma Ghandis', right? The civil rights movement from the nineteen-sixties; or the gay movements from the nineteen eighties... This is now a very different moment. And unless we understand the elements that shape this moment, the 21st century, we cannot strategize pedagogical and political formulations that are able to link national struggles with global struggles.

**Interviewers:** *Great! And I would like to go further in this specific topic. So, if it is an educational or pedagogical problem, we also have to think in terms of civil education or political education, as a strategy that the left can use to build new consciousness, new subjectivities, so... What do you think would be the most important thing in political education activities? Could it be a mandatory discipline, or a course in a school, or some actions with the social movements in the non-formal educational and cultural institutions? What are the challenges in your opinion for what we call political education?*

**Henry Giroux:** That's probably one of the most important political questions one can ask at this particular moment, so I really thank you for asking that question, I mean, I think it's enormously crucial and I think that we might begin by recognizing that all education is political and all education is civic, because all education, in a sense, doesn't take place in a vacuum, removing the connections that allow us to both understand who we are and to adjust what it means to imagine a future that is better than the present. So, it seems to me if we recognize the fact that all education is directive, that people actually intervene through very educational practices, to create agents capable of making a democracy substantial, radical and worthwhile, and then we have to ask ourselves the second question. *What is the vision of education that matters in this case? How do we want to imagine education in terms of what is it for? How do we want to imagine education as a project and a movement? Both?* And it seems

to me that as project, education has to reel into questions by putting the agents that make democracy possible. As a movement, it has to imagine all those places where education takes place. And it would seem to me that any place that education is central to shaping the values, the relationships, the identities, molds of identification, elements of agency that allow people to be in the world and to relate to themselves and others, become sights of intervention. Whether we're talking about schools, whether we're talking about the media, whether we're talking about organizing at the level of everyday life... Whether we're talking about any culture apparatus that is engaging as education, we have to see in terms of pedagogical strategy in which people can occupy those places and use them. Uh, it seems to me the next issue that we have to address around that pedagogical consideration is: How do we give people a vocabulary and a sense of what it means to take control of those institutions so that they have some control over their own labor in those institutions? In other words, what does it mean to link education to power, not just in terms of how it shapes molds of human consciousness, but how the people who basically are involved in education have the power to control it? How do we begin to attack, for instance, the *neoliberalization* of the university? How do we talk about policy in ways that reveal that those policies function to infantilize faculty, infantilize cultural workers, destabilize them, prevent them from writing, prevent them from acting, limiting the labor process so that they become merely contractual workers? How do we link all of that to education so that we're talking about how power relations now become central to being addressed so that people can do the job they need to do in various agencies of education, in order to be effective? The next question, it seems to me, is... How do you talk about particular methods? How do you talk about a method by making it political rather than making it simply a recipe? How do you politicize methods, right? How do you do that? How do you talk about- what do we do in a classroom? What do we do in a health care center? How do we talk to people? How do we begin to imagine language as a tool that basically creates narratives that people can understand? What does it mean to make something, as I said, very existent in education forty years ago? How do we make something meaningful in order to make it critical in order to make it transformative? How do you do that? That's right from Paulo Freire, with a little Giroux added. So, it seems to me all those elements now become crucial, but here's the one that seems to matter to me: How do you do that as a social movement as opposed to an individual act of teaching? How do you do that in ways in which people in schools can work together? To not only to exercise their own collective power but also to reach out into communities as you do, and around health care issues. How do you elevate education to a notion of the social where education is basically about amplifying the social? In order to give people power, and to give them political and social rights, but, more importantly, economic rights. You cannot talk about rights as purely political and personal. Sorry. You know? If I don't have the resources, except to sleep under a bridge, do I really care about voting? Do I really care about the right of assembly? Do I really care about- do I have *time* to care about what it means to work with other people? No, you don't have time. You're dying. That's the workstations of social death. How do you eliminate the workstations of social death? How do you do that? How do you eliminate the *desimagination machine*? How do you create a new language that opens up the contradictions that we see in this merging of institutions of repression with cultural apparatuses that create narratives that depoliticize people? How do you do that? That's really a fundamental question.

**Interviewers:** *You actually mentioned something I was going to ask you about... For the most part, your work talks about resistance, these agents working in a collective way or a social way, right? In a social movement or in a collective movement.... and people are just asking themselves, what could we do in a micro-level? You know... How important is the micropolitics for an effective change?*

**Henry Giroux:** I mean, I think that when you talk about micropolitics ask yourselves "How do micro-aggressions work?" You know? You want to be beginning with micropolitics? Begin with

the micropolitics of justice. What does it mean in particular class? What does it mean in particular meetings? What does it mean in particular communities? What does it mean in all the interactions we have at the level of daily life? To offer models of resistance that make power accountable, that reverse the script, that give people a sense that in the institutions and everyday lives in which they find themselves, they can reimagine in some fundamental way, how to challenge the micro aggressions that they and their students or others experience every day, and how do we do that in a way that people can relate to in terms of the language that we offer them, in terms of their daily lives. I walk into a factory, as a union organizer, and all of a sudden it is clear to me that people are working fifteen hours a day and their conditions are horrendous, they can't even go to the bathroom because of the regulations, you know? They only go to the bathroom twice a day. They're working eighteen hours! They're not being paid properly. That's what we want to talk about! I don't want to talk about the distractions of this global capitalism right now, I want to talk about what it means to be able to challenge this. What strategies can we develop? How can I, as an organizer, help them develop those strategies? How can we learn from each other? How do we promote a dialogue at those levels that produces new forms of resistance that are contextual? All resistance is contextual, it begins with context, meaning that it begins with instances of repression that people just don't hear about, and they feel. What does it mean to understand aggression as partly effective? The emotional injuries that people feel, but that they can't articulate against it? How do you begin to combine an articulation of that injury or the injury itself? And then what do you do about it? You know, in some cases, people would say *Well, you need very specific answers, tell me what exactly to do*. Actually *no*. I'm not going to tell people exactly what to do, what I'm going to say is that in the context in which you find yourself, which I don't know about, there are instances that you have to begin to reimagine about what you can learn from history, what you can learn from others, what you can learn about the context in which you find yourself and which you can challenge the everyday micro aggressions, elements of fascist politics that go on by actually working with other people in dialog, and in community, to address those issues. Whether it's producing a new curriculum, whether it's cutting back class sizes, whether it's challenging policy formations, and policies themselves that are oppressive; whether it means like restoring The United States, teachers in the US, in many, many states ignoring the unions and all that, and going into the streets and taking direct action against government, saying *I'm sorry, this is not just about increasing our payment, we need more social workers, we need smaller classes*. All into making an appeal to their most immediate needs in ways that suggest *these don't just benefit them*, they benefit everybody, because to the degree to which you accentuate the depravations that mark the social sphere, it's a degree to which the social becomes an element of resistance that everyone has to address.

**Interviewers:** *Radical democracy or revolution?*

**Henry Giroux:** They're the same! There's no difference between radical democracy and revolution. A democracy that is radical, just means that the revolution never ends.

**Interviewers:** *Yeah, I understand. But before starting this interview we were talking about revolutions and what does it means in the contemporary world... Could you please expand a little bit on the notion of revolution?*

**Henry Giroux:** Revolution means that you go to the roots of a problem and the changes that you argue for are not cosmetic, they're fundamental. They're fundamental, you know? We're not talking about adding *Band-Aids* to a system in order to make it perform better; we're talking about destroying the system. I mean, for me, to be very honest, capitalism is the most evil system that has ever been produced, because its endpoint is fascism. You know, it may create markets that increase production and the circulation of goods, but ultimately, we know where it ends. Brecht

was right on this. You want to know about fascism, study capitalism. So, it seems to me that, when I talk about revolution, I'm talking about a revolution that function at two levels. I'm talking about revolution in *thought*, that can make the connection between fascism and capitalism, and the horrible misery and destruction it does globally, everything from destroying the planet and destroying human lives to basically the need to say *Okay, we can't live with this anymore, this has to change, we have to change the economic structure, the political structure, the notions of power, the kinds of agencies that it produces and the institutions that make life possible in a democratic way*. You know, to be very simple, you want to talk about revolution? Go back to Greece. You bring people together, people have to have power, without power, there's no democracy... without collective power. And so, if you're going to have collective power, you're going to have a revolution, because you're going to overthrow the structures that prevent that power from being distributed in ways in which people can actually exercise it. I don't believe any longer in reform, except in the most immediate sense. I must tell you; the debate about reform versus revolution is a false debate, in my estimation. Reform should always have the same endpoint as revolution, meaning that I can believe in immediate reforms in which people who are dying, don't have food, who don't have food stamps, who don't have health care... Yes. But *never* with the assumption that that's *all* we need, *always* with the assumption that they are just one small step in restructuring the system so that you don't have to think about reform, that's what revolution is, it's a discourse without reform. It's a discourse that doesn't believe in reform because it's not necessary, but it's a discourse that believes that justice never goes far enough. So, the revolutionary process is endless, you can't have a revolution without endless forms of self-examination. You can't have a revolution without endless forms of questioning. No revolution is complete! And any revolution that says it's complete is no longer revolutionary; it's now become another form of authoritarianism. It's never complete. No society is ever just enough, you know? That doesn't mean that all forms of authoritarianism are the same, but ideological totalities, which only operates off the assumption of binaries, good and evil, right? People who belong and people, who don't, people who are ideologically incompatible with people who aren't, its just *bullshit*. It's a form of corruption, and it can corrupt anybody, you know? As Paulo Freire used to say, authoritarianism isn't just on the right, right? But those of us who are on the left rather than embrace authoritarianism have a responsibility to consistently fight against its *micro corruptions*, fair enough?

**Interviewers:** *Last week, the catholic Pope received Lula da Silva for an interview in which they discussed about the Brazilian experience in making some structural reforms by distributing money and social goods for the poor, and how that changed the country's economy and has improved the welfare. What Lula argues is that if you give money to the poor, the poor will become consumers and will move the economy. So, while in 2008 the whole Europe was stuck under the concept of austerity, Brazil, under Lula's government, was giving people money, education access and goods; consequently, Brazil was not living this hard crisis. Last week, Lula and the Pope Francisco talked about coming up with a discourse of social economy, or an economy that is not entirely for profits. With all this capital adjustment and the neoliberal reforms happening right now, markets are producing more money, in a way, but the economy is stuck, in a global scale. And what Lula and the Pope, together, said is that if we start to put part of this money in the basis of the pyramid, including the poor people, the economy could start to grow again. What do you think about this perspective?*

**Henry Giroux:** It's a model we've seen before in a time of economic crisis, I mean, we saw it in The United States with the *New Deal*, under Franklin Roosevelt. And Roosevelt was forced in many ways by workers and communists to basically implement reforms, because he was afraid that if he didn't do it, they would win. You know? I mean, this was an attempt to basically blow up the system, not an attempt to basically implement molds of justice that were called into question. The issue here is molds of intervention that don't call the system into question, but basically believe you can modify the system to make it more just, in the long run, it produces the system, even when

it comes from the Pope Francisco, whom I like. You know, I love Lula, he have changed the life of poor and miserable people in Brazil and he is one of the most important progressive leader in the world actually, but... as well as the Pope, their discourse doesn't are in a spirit of revolution, but in the spirit of reform. That is not enough anymore. If the progressive thinkers keep playing the game faking we are living under democratic values, they will repeat the same mistake they made before, to insist that we could change starting with small reforms.

**Interviewers:** *Maybe that's the reason why the labor and the left political parties are being beaten around the world?*

**Henry Giroux:** They're not revolutionaries, I mean, we saw this in Greece, in Italy and in Spain. They talk in the spirit of revolution, weak, but still... And they end up basically accommodating to the demands of global capitalism. I don't want a language that accommodates global capitalism; I don't want a language that as moderate as it appears, in the end reinforces a fascist politics. I'm sorry. And I think that for those of us who believe that, you need to have courage, you got to take risks, you know what I mean? We don't have a lot of time left in this planet, I mean, we... We have governments in power now that are more dangerous than Hitler. They're more dangerous because you're not just talking about the extermination of eleven million people; you're talking about the death of the planet. You're talking about the death of millions, you're talking about a global capitalism that can't deal with pandemics, doesn't have the right resources. So now you have in China what we're seeing. We're all interconnected. Capitalism doesn't believe we're interconnected except for finding extra services. But if we're interconnected around the possibility of human rights, we're interconnected around the possibility of social and economic justice, if we're interconnected around the possibility of democracy that is global and not just based in particular states, nation states... This is a new kind of struggle, it demands a new kind of language, doesn't demand the language of reform, right? I mean, it seems to me that the political formations we're dealing with have exhausted any notion of reform and now have no interest in them. Now you have the heavy hand of fascism. How do you talk about the fate of reform without talking about fascism? How is there a revolution without talking about reforms as a mold of fascism? You know, fascism has two forms of violence, the slow violence, the violence that hides beneath the obvious, the violence of increased poverty, and the violence of families having to choose food over medicine, you know? The violence of everyday humiliations in dealing with social services, the violence of having to drink water filled with lead... Then there's the hard violence, the violence of State repression. Reform is the slow violence. Revolutionary thinking doesn't just concern itself with hard violence, it concerns itself with slow violence, and if you concern yourself with slow violence, you have to deal with reforms and what they mean, and to be able to understand what, in the long run, they produce.

**Interviewers:** *But people also say that the socialism, at least as we have seen until now, have not been able to be developed in a democratic society, so we could talk about Venezuela, Cuba, Russia, China... They are countries that have adopted a more socialist thinking, but they are not democratic, what do you think about these arguments?*

**Henry Giroux:** You can't talk about socialism when it's infused with molds of authoritarianism. That's not socialism, I mean, that's a weak form of social democracy, that's the face of social democracy that hides the face... The foundations of fascist politics, so, I mean, it's easy to blame socialism for that, right? It's the claim that people get cancer because they want to. They want to be sick, right? I mean, look, we know that there are social democracies that are close to socialism, and we know that in some places like, whether we're talking about Finland, whether we're talking about Scandinavian State... we see a level of equality that is productive, but they're not profound

enough, the key here is how do we invent a democratic notion of socialism that learns from the past, takes the most radical ideas that we can, and implements them in a context in which people have power, people have political rights, people have social and economic rights? If you want to talk about socialism, you don't need a recipe; you need a way of refiguring how the basic rules of socialism work in the context of a new historical period.

**Interviewers:** *Nice, even because it seems like the capitalism has adopted a new form in the twenty first century that we call neoliberalism, right? And so, maybe the socialism could have another form and even another concept for the twenty first century?*

**Henry Giroux:** All ideologies breathe with the possibility of justice. Only if they can situate themselves and update themselves in the context in which they find themselves... I mean, any ideology, socialism included, that models itself after the nineteenth century or the eighteenth century... Is not a legacy vibrant with potential, it's a legacy that's dead in the past, right? I mean, but this is exactly what the enemies of socialism and communism do. What they say is "that's a historic relic, it has no relevance for us". And actually one might say that it's more relevant today in its updated forms, it's a taxed finance capital, inequality, and the discourse of human rights... And then you ask yourself in what way, the context... I mean, what does it mean to talk about *socialism in Venezuela*? Where there are enormous amounts of inequality as opposed to socialism in The United States, where there's an enormous amounts of wealth. How do the basic gaps refigure and then play out? So as to understand how power can be used economically, politically, socially... In ways to be able to create the foundations for a socialist society... And what do you mean by a democratic socialist society? What you mean is that power is distributed in resources and distributed in rights and distributed in which people have some control over their lives in the name of the public good, right? Compare that to neoliberalism and its basic assumptions. Compare that to the logic of the market; compare that to the fascist politics. These are very different models. Socialism begins with justice, capitalism begins with profits, and fascism begins with genocide and racial purity.

**Interviewers:** *This is a good comparison! So, we are almost done. I have just two more questions. How do we work with hope in the meaning that hope can be connected to individual agents but also with the general practices? And I mean, how do they work: the theory and the practice?*

**Henry Giroux:** You know, imagine the notion of hope as a kind of imagination on steroids. I don't think you can talk about revolution, I don't think you can talk about justice, I don't think you can talk about the future if you can't imagine something very different from the situation which you experience and find yourself. And it seems to me that imagination is the engine of hope, because if you can't think otherwise, you can't act otherwise. And so it seems to me that hope is not some romanticize, *Disneyfied* notion of innocence in which everything will be wonderful, because all you have to do is sit back and wait for it to happen. Hope, it seems to me, is a mold of inspiration and a condition for, in some way, engage in the realities in which you find yourself that prevent hope from actually being fulfilled. Hope is a condition of agency. Without hope you have no agency, without agency, you have no hope. They inform each other. So what we're talking about, when we're talking about hope is we're talking about a theoretical position in which one refuses to live in the present and assume that that's all there is. Hope is the condition that says *outside of the present, there is another world, and we have to fight for it individually and collectively*. But hope doesn't come by virtue of a wish; hope comes by virtue of having access to information, by being able to look into the past and to see how people struggled to basically change the worlds in which they find themselves. Hope comes in the examples of people who produce their own narratives and give us

a sense of *what's possible, hope comes in those institutions that said you're more than what you are, you can do more, but we have to do it collectively*. Hope comes when it aligns itself with justice rather than romanticizes justice. You know? Hope comes in the notion of struggle. You can't have hope without struggle and you can't have struggle without education, and you can't have justice without all of those things.

**Interviewers:** *Thank you! Just, so... Last question... What about the future? You've recently written an article with Dr. Ourania Filippakou, from Brunel University, in which you talked about hope in the future. You both expressed some good ideas about the future: about war, peace, and future choices... Could you talk a little bit about that?*

**Henry Giroux:** I think that what we were both trying to work through were three things. One is, how do you connect hope with the notion of agency that, in some way, speaks to a future very different from the present? Secondly, how do you connect hope to struggle? What is the relationship between hope and struggle, right? How... And what does it mean to go beyond the privatized struggles of neoliberalism with their shaming, their individualizing of the social and their refusal to translate private issues into large public considerations? And so we both... It became clear that you have to connect hope to collective struggles. That this is... Hope is the foundation of the struggle, not just a foundation for wishing about or dreaming about dreaming a different future. Hope is not just about dreams. Center to hope is the notion of struggle for the things you believe in, that are possible, and to recognize the forces that you have to confront. Thirdly, it seems to me, we were concerned about how public institutions such as higher education have, in some way, occupied a central role in illuminating hope, and an endlessly function on the side of cynicism by virtue of, for instance, the endless support for turning education into the culture of business. And what is the responsibility of public intellectuals in all of this? You know, in developing new discourses of hope. And so, it seems to me, in those three registers, we're trying to articulate an embryonic form, a script of some sorts, for rethinking hope in ways that are appropriated on the side of struggle, on the side of justice and, I must say, on the side of revolution.

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