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Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies

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The great masses of people . . .
will more easily fall victims to a
big lie than to a small one.

Adolf Hitler

Most Americans would cringe at the thought that they have repeatedly fallen victim to big lies by their government as Adolf Hitler once prescribed. In fact, they would instinctively point out that the manipulation of people through big lies would only occur in totalitarian, fascist governments such as Hitler's. Within the same breath, they would remind us that their ancestors gave their lives in the great wars so we could enjoy the freedom and democracy we now have. They would also instantaneously recite our national slogans such as "live free or die", "freedom of speech", "freedom of information," among others.

While busily calling out slogans from their patriotic slogan memory warehouse, these same Americans dutifully vote, for example, for Ronald Reagan, giving him a landslide victory under the platform that promised to balance the budget, cut taxes, and increase military spending. This "unreason of reason" led George Bush to characterize Reagan's economic plan as voodoo economics even though he later also became entranced by the big lie of this voodooism. What American voters failed to do was to demand that Reagan tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In other words, they failed to require that Reagan accept that in order for his proposition to be true (and not a lie) the voters would have to give him and Bush a blank credit card with 4.3 trillion dollars in deficit credit to create a false sense of economic boom enjoyed under their leadership. I say a false

sense not only because of the present economic malaise but also because the Reagan economic boom was a bust. According to Samuel Bowles, et al. (1992),

output growth did not revive during the 1980's cycle. Far from stimulating investment through massive tax cuts and concessions to the wealthy, Reagan-Bush economic policy has dealt investment a blow; compared with the previous business cycle, the pace of real net productive investment . . . declined by a quarter during the most recent business cycle. (pp. 163-164)

Even before concrete evidence to the contrary, American voters swept Bush into office in 1988 with the same voodoo trickledown economics now ornamented with a thousand points of short-circuited lights. These same voters ascended to his moral high ground call for the application of international laws against Saddam Hussein's tyranny and his invasion of Kuwait. These great masses of voters who rallied behind Bush pushing his popular approval rating beyond 90 percent during the Gulf War, failed to realize that these same international laws had been broken by Bush a year or so before in Panama, and by his predecessor in Grenada, Libya, Nicaragua, just to mention a few historical facts. The question that begs us is why as highly literate and democratic citizens we frequently demonstrate the inability to separate myth from reality? This handicap pushes us to perpetual flirtation with historical hypocrisy.

However, not all Americans suffer from the inability to read the world critically. For example, David Spritzler, a 12-year-old student at Boston Latin School faced disciplinary action for his refusal to recite the Pledge of Allegiance which he considers "a hypocritical exhortation to patriotism" in that there is not "liberty and justice for all." According to Spritzler the Pledge is an attempt to unite the

oppressed and the oppressors. You have people who drive nice cars, live in nice houses and don't have to worry about money. Then you have the poor people, living in bad neighborhoods and going to bad schools. Somehow

the Pledge makes it seem that everybody's equal when that's not happening.

There's no justice for everybody. (The Boston Globe, 1991, p. 14)

David Spritzler was spared disciplinary action only after the Civil Liberties Union wrote a letter on his behalf citing a 1943 U.S. Supreme Court case which involved the West Virginia State Board of Education vs. Barnette. The Supreme Court upheld the student's right not to say the Pledge of Allegiance and remain seated.

What remains incomprehensible is why a 12-year-old boy could readily see through the obvious hypocrisy contained in the Pledge of Allegiance and his teachers and administrators who have received the highest level of literacy cannot deconstruct the Pledge so as to make its hypocrisy bear? These teachers and administrators inability to see through the obvious represents "a real sign of deep indoctrination [in] that you can't understand elementary thoughts that any 10-year-old can understand. That's real indoctrination. So for him [the indoctrinated individual] it's kind of like a theological truth, a truth of received religion." (Chomsky, 1988, p. 681) These teachers and administrators know that history shows us convincingly and factually that the United States systematically violated the Pledge of Allegiance from the legalization of slavery, the denial of women's rights, the near genocide of Indians, to the contemporary discriminatory practices against those people who by virtue of their race, ethnicity, class, or gender are not treated with the dignity and respect called for in the Pledge. If we did not suffer from historical amnesia, we would easily recall that once upon a time the Massachusetts legislature promulgated a law that provided monetary rewards for dead Indians: "For every scalp of a male Indian brought in . . . forty pounds. For every scalp of such female Indian or male Indian under the age of twelve years that shall be killed . . . twenty pounds" (Zinn, 1990, pp. 234-235). Even our abolitionist President Abraham Lincoln did not truly believe in the American Declaration of Independence propositions of life, liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness when he declared: "I will say, then, that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races . . . I as much as any

other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race" (Hofstadter, 1974, p. 148).

One could argue that the above-cited incidents belong to the dusty archives of our early history, but I do not believe that we have learned a great deal from historically dangerous memories to the degree that our leaders continue to incite racial tensions as evidenced in the Willie Horton presidential campaign issue and Bush's pretext of a quota for jobs as an invitation once again to racial divisiveness. Our perpetual flirtation (if not marriage) with historical hypocrisy becomes abundantly clear in the juxtaposition of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in Charlestown High School in 1976 in classrooms ornamented with copies of The Declaration of Independence alongside racial epithets on the walls: "Welcome Niggers", "Niggers Suck," "White Power," "KKK," "Bus is for Zulu," and "Be Illiterate, fight busing" (Lucas, 1985, p. 282).

At this juncture, we can easily frame our argument so as to demonstrate that David's teachers and administrators are either naive and victims of a big lie or they are cognizant of the ideological deceptive mechanisms inherent in the Pledge and consciously reproduce them even if it means violating those very rights proclaimed in the Pledge. I want to argue that the latter is true. Even if we want to give David's educators the benefit of the doubt, their naivete is never innocent but ideological. This becomes clearer in my analysis of the role of literacy in cultural reproduction in which collective experiences function in the interest of the dominant ruling elites, rather than in the interest of the oppressed groups that are the object of its policies. Literacy for cultural reproduction utilizes institutional mechanisms to undermine independent thought, a prerequisite for the Orwellian "manufacture of consent" or "engineering of consent". In this light, schools are seen as ideological institutions designed to prevent the so-called crisis of democracy, "another Orwellian meaning 'beginnings of democracy'" (Chomsky, 1988, p. 671). In fact, this very perspective on schools was proposed by the Trilateral Commission, a group of international and essentially liberal elites, which included within its membership, Jimmy

Carter. The Trilateral Commission referred to the schools as "institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young" (Chomsky, 1988, p. 671). Simply put, the Trilateral Commission argues schools should be institutions for indoctrination, "for imposing obedience, for blocking the possibility of independent thought, and they play an institutional role in a system of control and coercion" (Chomsky, 1988, p. 671). This becomes abundantly clear in the conservative call for the control of the so-called "excess of democracy". President John Silber, who prides himself as an education "expert" and who is also the president of Boston University, "has urged fellow conservatives to abandon any civility toward scholars whose work is considered political. (Giroux, 1992, p. 93). What Silber fails to realize is that the very act of viewing education as neutral, devoid of politics is, in fact, a political act. In order to maintain schools as sites for cultural reproduction and indoctrination, Silber prefers an educational system that brooks no debate or dissent. This is apparent in his urging of "his fellow conservatives to name names, to discredit educators who have chosen to engage in forms of social criticism (work that the New Right considers political) at odds with the agenda of the New Rights mythic conception of the university as a warehouse built on the pillars of an unproblematic and revered tradition" (Giroux, 1992, p. 93).

Although it is important to analyze how ideologies inform various literacy traditions, in this paper I will limit my discussion to a brief analysis of the instrumentalist approach to literacy linking it to cultural reproduction. I will also argue that the instrumentalist approach to literacy does not refer only to the goal of producing readers who meet the basic requirements of contemporary society. Instrumentalist literacy also includes the highest level of literacy through disciplinary specialism and hyper-specialization. In other words, both the instrumental literacy for the poor in the form of a competency based skill banking approach and the highest form of instrumental literacy for the rich acquired through the university in the form of professional specialization share one common feature: they both prevent the development of critical thinking which enables one

to read the world critically and to understand the reasons and linkages behind the facts. Finally I will analyze how the instrumentalist approach to literacy, even at the highest level of specialism, functions to domesticate the consciousness via a constant disarticulation between the reductionistic and narrow reading of one's field of specialization and the reading of the universe within which one's specialism is situated. This inability to link the reading of the word with the world, if not combatted, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions and the unjust asymmetrical power relations that characterize the hypocritical nature of contemporary democracies. The inherent hypocrisy in the actual usage of the term "democracy" is eloquently captured by Noam Chomsky (1987) in his analysis of the United States. Chomsky writes,

'Democracy,' in the United States rhetoric refers to a system of governance in which elite elements based in the business community control the state by virtue of their dominance of the private society, while the population observes quietly. So understood, democracy is a system of elite decision and public ratification, as in the United States itself. Correspondingly, popular involvement in the formation of public policy is considered a serious threat. It is not a step towards democracy; rather, it constitutes a 'crisis of democracy' that must be overcome. (p.)

Instrumentalist Approach to Literacy

In spite of the progressive appeal of the instrumentalist approach to literacy to produce readers who are capable of meeting the demands of our evermore complex technological society, it emphasizes the mechanical learning of reading skills while sacrificing the critical analysis of the social and political order that generates the need for reading in the first place. This position has led to the development of "functional literates," groomed primarily to meet the requirements of our contemporary society. Such a view also champions the instrumentalist approach to literacy as a vehicle for economic betterment, access to jobs, and increase in the productivity level. As it is clearly stated by UNESCO,

"Literacy programs should preferably be linked with economic priorities. [They] must impart not only reading and writing, but also professional and technical knowledge, thereby leading to a fuller participation of adults in economic life" (UNESCO, 1966, p. 97).

This notion of literacy has been enthusiastically incorporated as a major goal by the back-to-basics proponents of reading. It has also contributed to the development of neatly packaged reading programs that are presented as the solution to difficulties students experience in reading job application forms, tax forms, advertisement literature, sales catalogs, labels, and the like. In general, the instrumentalist approach views literacy as meeting the basic reading demand of an industrialized society. As Henry Giroux (1983) points out:

Literacy within this perspective is geared to make adults more productive workers and citizens within a given society. In spite of its appeal to economic mobility, functional literacy reduces the concept of literacy and the pedagogy in which it is suited to the pragmatic requirements of capital; consequently, the notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor process and the need of capital accumulation. (p. 87)

A society that reduces the priorities of reading to the pragmatic requirements of capital, necessarily has to create educational structures that anesthetize students' critical abilities so as to "domesticate social order for its self-preservation" (Freire, 1985, p. 116).

Accordingly, it must create educational structures that involve "practices by which one strives to domesticate consciousness, transforming it into an empty receptacle. Education in cultural action for domination is reduced to a situation in which the educator as 'the one who knows' transfers existing knowledge to the learner as 'the one who does not know'" (Freire, 1985, p. 114).

This type of education for domestication which borders on stupidification provides no pedagogical space for critical students like David Spritzler who question the received knowledge and want to know the reasons behind the facts. His defiance of the rigid bureaucracy, his refusal to surrender his civil rights, is rewarded by a threat of disciplinary action. In other words, the real rewards go to the "so-called good student who repeats, who renounces critical thinking, who adjusts to models. . . [who] should do nothing other than receive contents that are impregnated with the ideological character vital to the interests of the sacred order" (Freire, 1985, p. 117). A good student is the one who piously recites the fossilized slogans contained in the Pledge of Allegiance. A good student is the one who willfully and unreflectively accepts big lies as described below in Tom Paxton's song (as cited in Freire, 1985, p. 117):

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?

I learned that Washington never told a lie,
I learned that soldiers seldom die,
I learned that everybody's free,
And that's what the teacher said to me.

That's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.

I learned that policemen are my friends,
I learned that justice never ends,
I learned that murderers die for their crimes
Even if we make a mistake sometimes.

I learned our government must be strong,
It's always right and never wrong
Our leaders are the finest men
And we elect them again and again.

I learned that war is not so bad.
I learned about the great ones we have had.
We've fought in Germany and in France,
And someday I may get my chance.

That's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.

The Barbarism of Specialization or the Specialization of Barbarism

Long before the explosion of hyper-specialization and the tragedy of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, the Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset cautioned us against the demand of specialization so science could progress. According to Gasset, "The specialist 'knows' very well his own tiny corner of the universe; he is radically ignorant of all the rest" (1930, p. 111). I am reminded of a former classmate of mine whom I met while doing some research work at MIT. When she learned that I was working with pidgin and creole languages, she curiously asked me "What's a pidgin language?" At first I thought she was joking, but soon I realized that, in fact, her question was genuine. Here we had a perfect case of a technician of linguistics doing the highest level theory available in the field without any clue about historical linguistics. It is not difficult to find prototypes of this form of specialization to the extent that, more and more, specialists dominate institutions of learning and other institutional structures of our society. The social organization of knowledge via rigidly defined disciplinary boundaries further contributes to the formation of the specialist class, i.e., engineers, doctors, professors, and so on. This sort of specialist is "only acquainted with one science, and even of that one only knows the small corner in which he is an active investigator. He even proclaims it as a virtue that he takes no cognizance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself, and gives the name 'dilettantism' to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge" (Gasset, 1930, p. 110). This so called "dilettantism" is discouraged through the mythical need to discover absolute objective truth. I remember vividly when I gave my linguist friend at MIT articles on pidgins and creoles to read. I later questioned her as to whether she had found the readings interesting and informative. She, half apologizing but with a certain pride in her voice, told me: "If I want to be a great theoretical linguist, I just can't be reading too much outside theoretical linguistics. I can't even keep up with all the reading in syntax alone." Obviously there are exceptions to this attitude, Noam Chomsky being a

prime example. However, it is quite frequent in specialization to divorce science from the general culture within which it exists.

Not only does specialization represent a rupture with philosophies of social and cultural relations, it also hides behind an ideology that creates and sustains false dichotomies rigidly delineated by disciplinary boundaries. This ideology also informs the view that "hard science," "objectivity," and "scientific rigor" must be divorced from the messy data of "soft science" and the social and political practices that generate these categories in the first place. In other words, for example, those linguists and psycholinguists who "believe that what they study has little to do with social values or politics in any sense" (Gee, 1992) fail to realize that their research results are "the product of a particular model of social structure that gear the theoretical concepts to the pragmatics of the society that devised . . . the model to begin with" (Fowler, 1979, p. 192). That is, if the results are presented as facts determined by a particular ideological framework, "these facts cannot in themselves get us beyond that framework" (Myers, 1986, p.). Too often the positivistic overemphasis on "hard science" and "absolute objectivity" has given rise to a form of "scientism" rather than science. By "scientism" I refer to the mechanization of the intellectual work cultivated by specialists which often leads to the fragmentation of knowledge as accurately understood by Ortega Y Gasset: "A fair amount of things that have to be done in physics or in biology is mechanical work of the mind which can be done by anyone, or almost anyone . . . to divide science into small sections, to enclose oneself in one of these, and leave out all consideration of the rest" (1930, p. 111). Specialists of this sort have often contributed to a further fragmentation of knowledge due to their reductionistic view of the act of knowing. They have repeatedly ignored that their very claim of objectivity is, in fact, an ideological act. Objectivity always contains within it a dimension of subjectivity; thus it is dialectical.

Almost without exception, traditional approaches to literacy did not escape the fragmentation of knowledge and were deeply ingrained in a positivistic method of inquiry.

In effect, this has resulted in an epistemological stance in which scientific rigor and methodological refinement are celebrated, while "theory and knowledge are subordinated to the imperatives of efficiency and technical mastery, and history is reduced to a minor footnote in the priorities of 'empirical' scientific inquiry" (Giroux, 1983, p. 87). In general, this approach abstracts methodological issues from their ideological contexts and consequently ignores the interrelationship between the sociopolitical structures of a society and the act of reading and learning. In part, the exclusion of social, cultural, and political dimensions from literacy practices gives rise to an ideology of cultural reproduction which produces semiliterates. In other words, at the lowest level of instrumental literacy a semi-literate reads the word but is unable to read the world. At the highest level of instrumental literacy achieved via specialization, the semiliterate is able to read the text of his or her specialization but is ignorant of all other bodies of knowledge that constitute the world of knowledge. This semiliterate specialist was characterized by Ortega y Gasset as a "learned ignoramus". That is to say, "he is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his speciality; but neither is he ignorant, because he is a 'scientist' and 'knows' very well his own tiny portion of the universe" (1930, p. 112).

Because the "learned ignoramus" is mainly concerned with his or her tiny portion of the world disconnected from other bodies of knowledge, he or she is never able to relate the flux of information so as to gain a critical reading of the world. A critical reading of the world implies, according to Freire (1987, p. 131) "a dynamic comprehension between the least coherent sensibility of the world and a more coherent understanding of the world." This implies, obviously, the ability, for example, of medical specialists in the United States who have contributed to a great technological advancement in medicine to understand and appreciate why over 30 million Americans do not have access to this medical technology and why we still have the highest infant mortality rate in comparison to other developed nations? The United States in 1989 ranked 24th in child mortality rate as compared to other nations (The Boston Globe, Feb. 7, 1992, p. 8).

The inability to make linkages is predominant even among those who recognize that a coherent comprehension of the world cannot be achieved through fragmentation of knowledge. In a recent professional meeting, a concerned environmental scientist decried the absence of critical disciplines in his field of study. He eloquently called for an interdisciplinary approach to world environmental problems, particularly within third world countries. His present research is linked with environmental concerns in Mexico. With a certain amount of pride he emphasized that his research breakthrough could be used as a commodity in Mexico since that country is becoming more and more rigorous with respect to environmental laws. He, however, failed to ask a fundamental question: How can we package environmental technology for Mexico all the while exporting polluting factories to that country where they operate with less government regulation? This environmentalist was baffled that such a question should even be raised.

Although specialization may lead to a high level of literacy acquisition in a particular subfield of knowledge, it often produces a disarticulation of this same knowledge to the degree that it dislodges it from a critical and coherent comprehension of the world that informs and sustains it. This knowledge disarticulation anesthetizes consciousness, without which one can never develop clarity of reality. As suggested by Frei Betto (as cited in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 130) clarity of reality requires that a person transcend "the perception of life as a pure biological process to arrive at a perception of life as a biographical, and collective process." Frei Betto views his concept as "a clothesline of information." In other words, "on the clothesline we may have a flux of information and yet remain unable to link one piece of information with another. A politicized person is one who can sort out the different and often fragmented pieces contained in the flux" (p. 130). The apprehension of clarity of reality requires a high level of political clarity, which can be achieved by sifting through the flux of information and relating each piece so as to gain a global comprehension of the facts and their *raison d'etre*.

We can now see the reasons why David Spritzler's teachers and administrators who had received a higher level of literacy through a banking model of transference of knowledge could not relate each piece of this knowledge so as to separate the mythical dimension of the Pledge of Allegiance from factual reality. Part of the reason lies in the fact that teachers, as most specialists, are technicians who, by virtue of the specialized training they receive in an assembly line of ideas, aided by the mystification of the transferred knowledge, seldom reach the critical capacity of analysis to develop a coherent comprehension of the world. In reality, there is little difference between the pedagogy described in Tom Paxton's song for school children and the prevalent pedagogy in universities as described by Freire:

Today at the university we learned that objectivity in science requires neutrality on the part of the scientist; we learned today that knowledge is pure, universal, and unconditional and that the university is the site of this knowledge. We learned today, although only tacitly, that the world is divided between those who know and those who don't (that is, those who do manual work) and the university is the home of the former. We learned today that the university is a temple of pure knowledge and that it has to soar above earthly preoccupations, such as mankind's liberation.

We learned today that reality is a given, that it is our scientific impartiality that allows us to describe it somewhat as it is. Since we have described it as it is, we don't have to investigate the principal reasons that would explain it as it is. But if we should try to denounce the real world as it is by proclaiming a new way of living, we learned at the university today that we would no longer be scientists, but ideologues.

We learned today that economic development is a purely technical problem, that the underdeveloped peoples are incapable (sometimes because of their mixed blood, their nature, or climatic reasons).

We were informed that blacks learn less than whites because they are genetically inferior. (1985, p. 118)

In short, this type of educational training makes it possible for us to rally behind our political leaders who ritualistically call for the protection of human rights all over the world without recognizing these same leaders' complicity in the denial of rights of human beings who live under dictatorships that we either overtly or covertly support. The selective selection of our strong support for human rights becomes glaringly clear in the case of Haitians. In fact, The Boston Globe, confident of our inability to link historical events published a front page article on the U.S. Supreme court decision that allowed the administration to repatriate thousands of Haitian refugees. On page 2 of the same issue, the Globe also ran a story about groups organized in Miami to search for and assist Cuban boat people reach their final destination in Florida (Feb. 2, 1992, pp. 2-3). It is this lack of connectedness that helped Bush to prevail in erasing our foreign policy historical memory file in order to garnish support for his fabricated high tech war in the gulf. In what follows I want to use the Gulf War as an example of how questions of literacy and ideology can be used to separate events from their historical contexts so as to remap a self-serving history that feeds to the recontextualization of a distorted and often false reality leading (sometimes) to a specialization of barbarism ipso facto.

The Illiteracy of Literacy of the Gulf War

It is then not a coincidence that during the Gulf War we were saturated with information around the clock in the comfort of our homes and yet we remained poorly informed. It is also not a coincidence that George Bush categorically and arrogantly stated there will be "no linkage" in any possible diplomatic settlements in the Gulf crisis. Besides the necessary linkages to create conditions for a diplomatic solution to the Gulf crisis, Bush's insistence on "no linkage" served to eclipse historicity so as to further add to a total social amnesia. How else could we explain that a highly developed society that prides itself on its freedom of information and high democratic values could ignore the clarity of the

obvious? I say the "clarity of the obvious" because it is a well known fact that the Reagan-Bush decade was characterized by a total disdain for the United Nations. The Reagan-Bush administration stopped paying the U.S. membership contribution to the U.N. and threatened to withdraw from the world body because the rest of the world was not subservient enough to U.S. interests. And yet, during the Gulf crisis, the same George Bush saw it convenient to hail the United Nations as the theater where "civilized" nations uphold international laws and high principles. If it had not been for the denial of linkage and the social amnesia, we could have easily referred to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's role as the ambassador to the United Nations. In his memoirs, A Dangerous Place, Moynihan discusses the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia and sheds light on his role as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations: "The U.S. government wanted the United Nations to be rendered ineffective in any measures that it undertook. I was given this responsibility and I filled it with no inconsiderable success" (Chomsky, 1991, p. 8). Moynihan later proudly recounts his success when he states that "within two months, reports indicated that Indonesia had killed about 60,000 people. That is roughly the proportion of the population that the Nazis had killed in Eastern Europe through World War II" (1991, p. 8). By not linking these historical events, the Bush administration was able to exalt a moral high ground in the defense of international laws and the sanctity of national borders during the Gulf crisis.

The U.S. defense of high principles and international laws that led to the Gulf War could only have any moral currency if we were to obliterate our memory of recent history. Before proceeding, let me make it very clear that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was brutal, cruel, and unforgivable. But the violation of international laws and borders by other nations, including the United States, is no small matter. According to Noam Chomsky, (1991) the U.S. defense of high principles can be summed up as follows:

- * The U.S. invasion Grenada
- * The U.S. invasion of Panama, where the United States installed a puppet regime of its choice with U.S. military advisors running it at every level.
- * The U.S. mining of the Nicaraguan harbor. The World Court finds the U.S. guilty and the United States' reaction was to arrogantly dismiss the World Court.
- * The Turkish invasion and virtual annexation of northern Cyprus that killed a couple hundred people and drove out several thousands. The United States was in favor of the action.
- * The Moroccan invasion of the western Sahara, also supported by the United States.
- * The Israeli invasion of Lebanon, where the United States vetoed a whole series of resolutions in the Security Council, which was trying to terminate the aggression. In human terms, there were at least 20,000 killed, mostly civilians.
- * The Indonesian invasion of East Timor in which 60,000 people were massacred. The Carter administration provided 90 percent of the armaments to the invaders.

Against this landscape of violation of international laws and aggression perpetrated by the United States or other countries with the support of the United States, how can we explain the ease with which Bush convinced a supposedly highly literate and civilized citizenry that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was an isolated case of aggression against a weaker nation and had nothing to do with the historical record? The inability to link and treat the "clothesline" of the Gulf War had to do with ideological obstacles that too often obfuscate political clarity. We need to develop a more critical literacy along Freirian lines where, "as knowing subjects (sometimes of existing knowledge, sometimes of objects to be produced), our relation to knowable objects cannot be reduced to the objects themselves. We need to reach a level of comprehension of the complex whole of relations among objects" (Freire and Macedo, 1991, p. 131). In his book, The Social Mind, Jim Gee elegantly demonstrates that "to explicate the 'internal working' of the 'machine', and

not the uses to which the machine is put in the world of value conflicts and political action," is to treat each piece of the "clothesline" separately so as to never allow us to reach a level of comprehension of the complex whole of relations among objects. This functions as a form of illiteracy of literacy in which we develop a high level of literacy in a given discourse while remaining semiliterate or illiterate in a whole range of other discourses that constitute the ideological world in which we travel as thinking beings.

In an era in which we are more and more controlled by the ever increasing technological wizardry, ephemeral sound bites, metaphorical manipulations of language, and prepackaged ideas void of substance, it becomes that much more urgent to adhere to Jim Gee's posture that we acquire literacies rather than literacy. Given our preponderance as humans to construct "satisfying and often self-deceptive 'stories,' stories that often advantage themselves and their groups," the development of a critical comprehension between the word semantic field and a more coherent understanding of the world semantic field is a prerequisite to achieving clarity of reality. As Freire (1987, p. 132) has suggested, only "through political practice the less coherent sensibility of the world begins to be surpassed and more rigorous intellectual pursuits give rise to a more coherent comprehension of the world." Thus, in order to go beyond a mere word level reading of reality, we must develop a critical comprehension of psychological entities such as "memories, beliefs, values, meanings, and so forth . . . which are actually out in the social world of action and interaction" (1987, p. 132). We must first read the world - the cultural, social, and political practices that constitute it - before we can make sense of the word level description of reality.

The reading of the world must precede the reading of the word. That is to say, to access the true and total meaning of an entity, we must resort to the cultural practices that mediate our access to the world semantic field and its interaction with the word semantic features. Since meaning is, at best, very leaky, we have to depend on the cultural models that contain the necessary cultural features responsible for "our stories," and "often self-

deceptive stories" (Gee, 1992). Let's take the Gulf War again to exemplify how the role of cultural practices not only shapes but also determines metaphorical manipulations of language facilitated by the electronically controlled images and messages through "the strategic use of doublespeak to disguise from television viewers the extent of the real terror and carnage of the military campaign against Iraq" (Peter McLaren, in press). According to William Lutz, doublespeak "is a language that avoids or shifts responsibility, language that is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is a language that conceals or prevents thought; rather than extending thought, doublespeak limits it" (1989, p.).

The Gulf War coverage represented the production of doublespeak par excellence. The success to which the media used euphemism to misinform and deceive can be seen in the transformation of the horrible carnage of the battlefield into a "theater of operation" where the U.S. citizenry became willfully mesmerized by the near precision zapping of "smart bombs" during the aseptic "surgical strikes." The "theater of operation" positioned viewers to see "human beings become insentient things while weapons become the living actors of war. 'Smart' weapons that have eyes and computer 'brains' make decisions when and where to drop seven and a half tons of bombs, taking away the moral responsibility of the combatants themselves" (McLaren, in press).

The effective outcome of the doublespeak during the Gulf War was not only to give primacy to sophisticated weaponry with its newly acquired human attributes, but it also functioned as a means to dehumanize human beings by removing them from the center stage. The preoccupation of reporters and so-called "experts" was to zealously narrate the "accuracy" of the "smart bombs" while showing over and over again Star Wars like images of "surgical strikes." What these reporters did not show was the 92.6 percent of the bombs dropped that were not "precision-guided ordinances" and which amounted to roughly 82,000 tons. Even the 7.4 percent of 'smart bombs' dropped during the war had a reliability rate between 20 percent and 90 percent (The Boston Globe, April 16, 1991). However, it would be considered unpatriotic and unAmerican to question the Pentagon

controlled deceit of the American public. Even after the Gulf War was all but faded in our national consciousness, the Pentagon ordered Theodore Postal, an MIT professor and leading critic of the Patriot missile, "to cease all public discussion of his critique or face disciplinary action" (The Boston Globe, March 18, 1992, p. 3). The Pentagon's gag order was summarized by Postal himself: "The Army and Raytheon are now using DIS [Defense Investigation Service] which appears to be more than an unwitting partner, to suppress my speech on the subject of Patriot performance in the Gulf" (The Boston Globe, March 18, 1992, p. 3). So much said for independent thought, critical thinking, and freedom of speech. What the American citizenry was less concerned with was the terror of war and the horrible carnage caused by the 82,000 tons of "delivered packages" that ended up as de facto carpet bombings. Then again, the American viewers had already been positioned in a "theater of operation" context as passive observers seduced and fascinated by the wizardry of exciting precision guided missiles. The "theater" "overfloweth with computer graphics, night-vision lenses, cruise missiles and, best ever, the replay of the impact of laser guided bombs" (The Boston Globe, Jan. 20, 1991). Missing from the "theater" center stage were the horrified human faces of tens of thousands of Iraqis, including women and children, who were decimated by the unparalleled bombing "sorties." The American viewers' feelings were structured away from the reality of over 100,000 Iraqi casualties to the degree that the electronic management of the Gulf War vulgarly reduced human suffering and casualties to mere "collateral damage."

In "The Paradox of the Image", Peter McLaren and Rhonda Hammer (1991) accurately characterize the Gulf War as "a gaudy sideshow of flags, emblems, and military hardware - a counterfeit democracy produced through media knowledge able to effectively harness the affective currency of popular culture such that the average American's investment in being "American" reached an unparalleled high which has not been approximated since the years surrounding the post World War II McCarthy hearings." This unparalleled patriotism was cemented by the signifier yellow ribbon which functioned

very effectively to suffocate any truly democratic dialogue. The yellow ribbon ideologically structured the Gulf War debate so as to brook no dissent or dialogue. Criticizing the Bush administration's policies was viewed as not supporting the troops. In fact, the yellow ribbon did more to ideologically cage the American mind than all the speeches given by politicians. One could easily argue that the yellow ribbon patriotically tied American minds by making them sufficiently complacent so as to be complicit with the manufacture of consent for a fabricated war.

The complexity of networks of relations in our present telecratic society is making our sensibilities of the world less and less coherent leading to a real crisis of democracy, to the extent that the present

propaganda approach to media coverage suggests a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic interests. This should be observable in dichotomized choices of story and in the volume and quality of coverage. (Hermon and Chomsky, 1988, p. 35)

This political dichotomization became flagrantly obvious when, on the one hand, George Bush, in a John Waynean style, rallied "civilized" nations to uphold high moral principles against aggression when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. On the other hand, Mr. Bush sheepishly watched and allowed thousands of Kurds, who he had incited to revolt, to be exterminated by the same forces of aggression. So much for high moral principles. What is at stake here is our ability as democratic citizens and thinking beings to see through the obvious contradictions and discern myth from reality. However, our level of criticism is being rapidly eroded to the degree that "today's cultural and historical events bombard our sensibilities with such exponential speed and frequency, and through a variety of media forms, that our critical comprehension skills have fallen into rapid deterioration" (McLaren & Hammer, in press). The deterioration of Americans' critical comprehension of the world became self-evident when they instinctively rallied behind the "Pentagon's vacuous military

briefings, lists of aircraft types, missions, and losses [that] have become the sterilized equivalent of body counts recited in Saigon. Far more important elements - human and political - are being lost (The Boston Globe, Jan. 20, 1991). It is indeed a sad statement about the ability of the American citizenry to make the necessary historical linkages so as to develop a rigorous comprehension of the world when, with the exception of a small minority, only vice-President Dan Quayle was able to read the Gulf War reality correctly by describing it as "a stirring victory for the forces of aggression" (The Boston Globe, April, 12, 1991). President Bush became entrapped in a similar Freudian slip during an interview with Boston Channel 5 TV anchor, Natalie Jacobson (January 16, 1992). Referring to the Gulf War, Bush said "We did fulfill our aggression", instead of the no doubt intended, "we did fulfill our mission."

The seemingly misspoken words by both Bush and Quayle denude the pedagogy of big lies to the extent that their statements more accurately capture the essence of Ortega y Gasset's (1930, p. 113) proposition that civilization if "abandoned to its own devices" and at the mercy of specialists would bring about the rebirth of primitivism and barbarism. It is certainly not an illuminating civilization that prides itself in reducing Iraq to preindustrial age killing tens of thousands of innocent victims, including women and children, while leaving Saddam Hussein, our chief reason for war, in power and with the same capacity to perpetuate genocide against his own people. Ask the Africans who endured the chains of slavery, the Indians who were victims of a quasi-genocide, the Jews who perished in the Holocaust, the Japanese who experienced first hand the destructive power of science to measure our so-called advanced Western civilization: If they apply the same rigorous objective standards of science, intellectual honesty and academic truth in their inquiry. Their response would have to be unequivocally: primitivism and barbarism. Ortega y Gasset (1930, p. 75) could not have been more insightful on this issue:

It may be regrettable that human nature tends on occasion to this form of violence, but it is undeniable that it implies the great tribute to reason and

justice. For this form of violence is none other than reason exasperated.

Force was, in fact, the 'ultima ratio'. Rather stupidly it has been the custom to take ironically this expression, to methods of reason. Civilization is nothing else than the attempt to reduce force to being the 'ultima ratio'. We are now beginning to realize this with startling clearness, because 'direct action' consists in inventing the order and proclaiming violence as 'prima ratio', on strictly as 'unica ratio'. It is the norm which proposes the annulment of all norms, which suppresses all intermediate process between our purpose and its execution. It is the Magna Carta of barbarism.

Ortega y Gasset's profound thoughts enable us to deconstruct Bush's policy of violence parading under the veil of reason and justice. In fact, Bush successfully made force not only the 'ultima ratio', but also the 'unica ratio'. His total disregard for a multitude of proposals to negotiate a settlement in the gulf characterized the "norm which proposes the annulment of all norms, which suppresses all intermediate process between our purpose and its execution" (Gasset, 1935, p. 75). Flipflopping from a defensive stance, to the protection of our oil and the invocation of international laws and the sanctity of national borders, Bush simply refused to negotiate. When Saddam Hussein proposed to withdraw from Kuwait with the condition that an international conference be held to discuss the Middle East situation, Bush flatly refused the offer which, incidentally was very much in line with the U.N. General Assembly vote of 142 to 2 that called for an international peace conference in the Middle East. It was just such a conference that Bush and his administration aggressively promoted after the execution of the violence and terror that reduced Iraq to a preindustrial age. Had Bush accepted Saddam's condition for an international conference, a condition passionately promoted after the war, he would have avoided the carnage costing over 100,000 lives and the ecological disaster of enormous proportions. Bush's insistence on force led his administration to a constant double standard which our uncritical citizenry, including the media and the intelligensia, fail to see

and question. While Bush often referred to the United Nations resolution of November 29, 1990, that gave "the U.S. a green light to use military means to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait" he totally rejected a "U.N. General Assembly resolution, passed a week later by a vote of 142 to 2, which called for an international peace conference on the Middle East" (Lee & Solomon, 1991, p. xxii). Bush's convenient selective selection of the United Nations as a forum for international dispute resolution and justice points to a systematic gun-boat diplomacy that views force as the "unica ratio" in our foreign policy. We do not have to dig too far in our historical memory files to understand that, over and over again, the United States resorts to force to settle its so-called "national interest" which is, more appropriately, the interest of the capital and the ruling elite. When we mined the Nicaraguan harbor and supported the Contras as our proxy army and were censored by the World Court, we arrogantly dismissed the much hailed world body, the theater of justice, and the mecca of international disputes and settlements. It is this same arrogance of power and force that justified and rationalized Desert Storm. It is this same arrogance of power and force that continues to justify and rationalize our war on drugs.

In order for us to better understand how our rationalization process works to transform force and violence into methods of reason, I will create two hypothetical scenarios. The first will find its parallel in the Gulf War, the second in the war on drugs. To begin the first scenario let's imagine that the African countries, where over 20 million people die of hunger every year, decide to call the U.N. General Assembly to session to ask for permission to send a defensive armed force led by Ethiopia, to the Canadian and Mexican borders with the United States to protect and guarantee the flow of grain in order to prevent the death of over 20 million people. These African countries would argue that the U.S., being a major producer of food, should stop burning grain and paying farmers not to produce so prices will remain stable and profitable. The Africans would also passionately point out that the burning of grain and the limitation on production constitute a crime against humanity and that the 20 million Africans that are at risk of dying of hunger

should be protected by international laws which view hunger as a human rights violation. If this hypothetical scenario were to occur in reality and a half million African troops were dispatched to the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico, most of us would find the move so ridiculous as to be laughable. Well, Bush's initial rationale to send troops to Saudi Arabia was to protect the flow of oil that otherwise would disrupt the economies of the developed and industrialized nations. Even though Bush later recanted his earlier position by claiming that "the fight is not about oil, but about naked aggression" all evidence points to oil rather than naked aggression as a reason for the Gulf War. If Bush were defending the world order from naked aggression he would first have to bomb Washington since we had recently been engaged in a number of naked aggressions, mainly the invasion of Panama, the war against Nicaragua via a proxy army, the bombing of Libya, the invasion of Grenada to mention only a few of the most recent violations of the same international laws that Bush so passionately wanted to protect during the Gulf War. In fact, the oil rationale made infinitely more sense given the architecture of our foreign policy throughout history. The question that we should now ask of ourselves is: Would it be ridiculous for the African nations to send an army to protect the flow of grain that would save the lives of millions people who may die of hunger and not ridiculous and laughable for the U.S. to send a half million troops to the gulf to protect the flow of oil so industrialized nations may avoid economic chaos?

Let's turn to the second scenario which finds its parallel rationale in the war on drugs. Let's imagine that the third world countries, composed mainly of Latin American nations, but including some African nations as well, were to call for a regional summit where a decision is made to send troops to the United States to put a halt to the steady supply of armaments to support what they have characterized as the death industry in their countries. By death industry these nations are referring to the monies spent arming their military forces. Many third world countries, because of the never ending military rule often supported by the Western powers spend between 25 to 50 percent of their GNP on

armaments. This militarization of their societies is not only destroying their economies but also leading to the killing of great numbers of people every year. These third world countries would strategically send their troops to select states in the U.S. where research and production of destructive armaments are contributing to their economic chaos and the killing of millions. Third world troops would be trained to bomb and destroy all research laboratories and armament factories such as Raytheon, General Dynamics, Boeing, and so forth, in the hope of stopping the flow of arms to their countries. All of this would have international approval since this measure would constitute the national interests of these countries. If this hypothetical scenario were to be enacted, we can readily imagine the panic of all of those highly trained specialists who would be jobless once their factories and research laboratories had been destroyed. We can imagine as well the chaos that would ensue when these same specialists were left without a livelihood and abandoned to luck or perhaps some to form of social welfare. A turn to the latter for support would entail a reliance on a social structure that they no doubt had fought most of their lives to destroy or, at least, curtail to a bare minimum. I see very little difference in what we are doing to fight the drug war. The United States has militarized many Latin American countries, including Columbia, Peru, Boliva, Guatemala, among others, to fight and destroy coca fields and drug laboratories which constitute the only means of economic survival for millions of natives in these countries. By randomly destroying their only means of economic support in already poor countries with feeble economies, we are sentencing these native people to hunger and possibly death. However, we seldom think about the consequences and implications of the arrogance of power in the design of our drug war policy. That is to say, if we switch contexts, and focus on our hypothetical scenario, we can clearly see through the infantile dimension and the lack of logic behind the imagined destruction of workplaces devoted to the production of armaments. I am arguing that it is the same infantile policy which lacks logic that we support when we ratify Bush's war on drugs. The only effective way to fight the war on drugs is to decrease demand. Even law enforcement officials and

officials of these Latin countries have admitted that they are losing the drug war. In fact, by focusing only on the destruction of drug production while ignoring the social causes that breed a high demand for drug consumption, we are contradicting even our biblical principle of capitalism. In other words, the best way to control production is to control demand. If we try to destroy production while leaving demand unchecked, production will resurface elsewhere as is the case with drug reproduction in Latin America which is finding its way to Europe and other safe ports.

These contradictions and instances of the unreason of reason are rarely understood and just as rarely questioned. If by coincidence, we come to understand the blatant contradictions and question them, the ideological machine will tow us immediately into line. That is what happened to a reporter in San Antonio, Texas, who incessantly questioned Bush about the obvious failure of his drug war. He was immediately fired for being insistent and impolite to the President. Here politeness functioned as yet another mechanism to eliminate the possibility of knowing the truth. Since our society functions, more and more, on a pedagogy of lies, it depends on ideological institutions such as schools, the media, and so forth, to reproduce cultural values that work to distort and falsify realities so as to benefit the interest of the power elite. If schools were really involved in the development of critical thinking to arm students against the orchestrated distortion and falsification of reality, they would have to both teach the truth and teach to question. That includes, obviously, the deconstruction of the Pledge of Allegiance so as to make its hypocrisy bare, and the rewriting of history books to keep alive dangerous memories so that slavery, the Holocaust, genocide, and Hiroshima could not be repeated under the guise and protection of Western civilization.

I believe that now we can return, with greater understanding, to our original question: Why is it that David Spritzler, a 12-year-old boy could readily see through the hypocrisy in the Pledge of Allegiance and his teachers and administrators could not? According to Chomsky (1988) these teachers and administrators, having been indoctrinated

by schools, are unable to understand elementary thoughts that any 10-year-old can understand. The indoctrination process imposes a willful blindness that views facts and contradictions as irrelevant. On the other hand, the more educated and specialized individuals become, the more vested interest they have in the system that provides them with special privileges. For this reason, we often see people whose consciousness has not been totally atrophied and yet fail to read the reality critically and side with hypocrisy. In most cases, these individuals begin to believe the lies and, in their roles as functionaries of the state, they propagate the lies. That is why, for example, the majority of the educated population supported the war in Vietnam while over 70 percent of the general population still in 1982 was saying that the Vietnam War was, according to a Gallup poll "fundamentally wrong and immoral, not a mistake" (Chomsky, 1988, p. 673).

As I have tried to demonstrate, both the competency based skill banking approach to literacy and the highest level literacy acquisition via specialization fail to provide readers with the necessary intellectual tools to denude the often veiled reality through the ideological manipulation of language. It is safe to assume, given the way the educated class, more often than not, supports "theological truths", the less educated one is, the greater the chances to read the world more critically. Chomsky accurately captures this form of illiteracy of literacy when he states that

The less educated . . . tend to be more sophisticated and perceptive about these matters, the reason being that education is a form of indoctrination, and the less educated are less indoctrinated. Furthermore, the educated tend to be privileged and they tend to have a stake in the doctrinal system, so they naturally tend to internalize and believe it. As a result, not uncommonly and not only in the United States, you find a good deal more sophistication among people who learn about the world from their experience rather than those who learn about the world from a doctrinal

framework that they are exposed to and that they are expected as part of professional obligation to propagate. (Chomsky, 1988, p. 708)

It is indeed ironic that in the United States, a country that prides itself on being the first and most advanced within the so-called "first world", over 60 million people are illiterate or functionally illiterate. If Jonathan Kozol (1985) is correct, the 60 million illiterates and functional illiterates that he documents in his book, Illiterate America, do not constitute a minority class of illiterates. To the 60 million illiterates we should add the sizable groups who learn how to read but are, by and large, incapable of developing independent and critical thought. In reality, the United States is in forty-ninth place among the 128 countries of the United Nations in terms of literacy rate. This ranking applies basically to the reading of the word and not the world. Our ranking, if applied to the reading of the world, would indeed be much lower.

Against this high illiteracy landscape, we can begin to wonder why a country that considers itself a model of democracy can tolerate an educational system that contributes to such a high level of illiteracy and failure? I am more and more convinced that the American educational system is not a failure. The failure that it generates represents its ultimate victory to the extent that large groups of people, including the so-called minorities, were never intended to be educated. They were never intended to be part of the dominant political and economic spheres. How else can we explain why we sit idly by and tolerate dropout rates that exceed 60 percent in many urban cities with New York City at 70 percent (Giroux, 1992, p. 111). I believe that instead of the democratic education we claim to have, we really have in place a sophisticated colonial model of education designed primarily to train state functionaries and commissars while denying access to millions which further exacerbates the equity gap that is already victimizing a great number of the so-called "minority" students. Even the education provided to those with class rights and privileges is devoid of the intellectual dimension of teaching since the major objective of a colonial education is to further deskill teachers and students so as to reduce them to mere technical

agents who are destined to walk unreflectively through a labyrinth of procedures. What we have in the United States is not a system to encourage independent thought and critical thinking. Our colonial literacy model is designed to domesticate so as to enable the "manufacture of consent". The Trilateral Commission could not have been more accurate when they referred to schools as "institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young." I see no real difference between the more or less liberal Trilateral Commission position on schooling and Adolf Hitler's facist call against independent thought and critical thinking. As Hitler noted, "What good fortune for those in power that people do not think."

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