The Metaphor of "Space" in Educational Theory: Henry Giroux Through the Eyes of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault

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Universes of worlds as well as worlds themselves may be built in many different ways.
—Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking,* 5

Border pedagogy must provide the conditions for students to engage in cultural *remapping* as a form of resistance.
—Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 33, italics mine

Henri Lefebvre was one of the first of many to point out that "*(social) space is a (social) product."* Space, he pointed out, is not simply "there," a neutral container waiting to be filled, but a dynamic, humanly constructed, "means of control, and hence of domination, of power."[1] Michel Foucault also began theorizing about "space," although less explicitly, at much the same time. More recently, "spatial" interpretations of society have become increasingly widespread in social theory.[2] Doreen Massey, however, cautions that "many authors rely heavily on the terms "space"/"spatial," and each assumes their meaning is clear. Yet in fact the meaning which different authors assume (and therefore — in the case of metaphorical usage — the import of the metaphor) varies greatly."[3] It is because, as Massey notes, different ways of conceptualizing the "spatial" provide different bases for political action and struggle,[4] that a closer examination of the way the spatial metaphor tends (and tends not) to be used in educational theory is important. Following Massey's lead, instead of arguing against any single formulation, I promote *multiple* spatial paradigms as critical for any theoretical effort that hopes to examine agency in schools.

Following this "spatial" trend, many current theorists in education emphasize what bell hooks calls a "politics of location"[5] that draws on the spatial metaphorics of theorists like Michel Foucault. These theorists include Henry Giroux, Joe Kinchloe, Peter McLaren, Michael Apple, Parlo Singh, and Kathleen Weiler to name only a few.[6] I have chosen to focus on Giroux in this paper because his work is not only very rich, but relatively representative of the ways the "spatial" metaphor tends to be used in educational theory today.

I begin, not with Giroux, but with Foucault, drawing out some of the implications of the spatial metaphor in his work. My point is not that Giroux has taken his ideas directly from Foucault, but that Foucault represents a critical theoretical antecedent to the kinds of arguments Giroux and others make. I concentrate on Foucault's highly influential and "spatially" oriented "middle period" of, for example, *Discipline and Punish*, showing how Giroux reflects and alters this spatial metaphoric. In my opinion, however, Foucault would have rejected Giroux's approach. Unlike Giroux, Foucault fears the "space" created by our normalized modern culture, rejecting *any* "spatial" approach to liberation. He wants to escape the disciplinary "fields" of normalized society that imprison him in the "cage" of his

self. Yet, it is partly *because* of his rejection of the spatial metaphor as potentially liberatory that Foucault cannot articulate concrete "forms" of human agency in communities.

I turn to the work of Hannah Arendt to show a possible path out of Foucault's dilemma. Arendt, like Foucault and in contrast to Giroux, opposes the "fields" that construct individuals into identities in normalized society. But because she refuses to dignify normalization as "spatial" she is able, unlike Foucault, to look *elsewhere* for "space," finding what she calls the "public," where, she is convinced, individuals can "appear" more authentically to each other. Partly because she uses her metaphors differently, as Massey predicts, she discovers aspects of agency, worlds, to which both Giroux and Foucault seem blind.

Michel Foucault: Normalized Space

Foucault did not often explicitly describe himself as a spatial thinker, yet his work is shot-through with references to space. In fact, in one interview he admits that "people have often reproached me for these spatial obsessions, which have indeed been obsessions for me."[7]

Dreyfus and Rabinow[8] point out that after his relatively structuralist *Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault, in his "middle" period, moves to more fluid conceptions of power; yet the metaphor of subjectivity as arising from placement on a grid still remains. As Dreyfus and Rabinow go on to note, "this [new] dispositif [in *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1*, and D&P] is, of course, a grid of analysis constructed by the historian. But it is also the practices themselves, acting as an apparatus, a tool, constituting subjects and organizing them."[9] Discipline is not a *static* organization or a schematic, instead "it individualizes bodies by a location that *does not give them fixed positions*, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations" (D&P, 146, italics mine). "It is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field" (D&P, 177).

One of the central features of Foucault's work is his description of the "normalizing" forces of modern society, and perhaps his best explanation of this process comes in *Discipline and Punish.* From simple places of confinement, he argues, institutions like schools evolved into places of observation. The techniques developed there heralded changes in the larger society. *Power* in these institutions proceeds "from the distribution of individuals in space."[10] And he is not only talking about physical space here. Supervisory technology allows individuals to be referred constantly to a "norm," creating *cultural* yardsticks by which each is differentiated exactly from another. This technology "measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals... In short, it *normalizes*" (D&P, 183). Normalization destroys freedom by defining the scope both of possibility and transgression. Individuals *appear qua* individuals (that is as subjects) only within the locations created for them by this social grid. "Space," he says, "is fundamental in any exercise of power"[11]

Henry Giroux: Agency Within and Among Dynamic Fields

As I noted above, Giroux's work represents a rich example of how many educational theorists have made use of Foucault and others' metaphor of society as

a dynamic spatial "field." I draw on his three most recent books, here, focusing on *Living Dangerously*.[12] In a simple sense, Giroux accepts a Foucaultian description of society, and seeks ways to achieve agency *within* its strictures. According to Giroux, a truly critical pedagogy would help students and teachers "be self-critical about both the positions they describe and the locations from which they speak" (LD, 38), analyzing "the social and political discourses that construct...[their] individual and collective identities across and within different economic, cultural and social spheres" (LD, 63). Giroux points out that critical pedagogy "must be a pedagogy of place, that is, it must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages and histories that students and communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity" (LD, 121).

But his is a very specific definition of "place" that focuses on the locations created by the multiple "fields" of society, not on the unique contexts and histories of individuals. Agents, for Giroux, are multiple and plural because they are made up of myriad intersecting languages and ideologies. He argues that the multiplicity of these intersecting fields allows a "politics of identity outside of the dictates of a narrow separatism and essentialism," (LD, 69), creating possibilities for a fluid and dynamic effort for change. Political action in his work becomes an effort to create multiple discourse communities, multiple spheres of action that recognize "collective agents capable of both challenging existing configurations [and] of offering new visions of a future" (LD, 63).

Giroux is seeking to create *better* "fields," "rewriting the cartography of innovation and struggle" in a very specific way, and thus expanding "the spaces/locations and potential alliances from which the production of knowledge can be interrogated and reconstructed within the primacy of the political and the pedagogical" (LD, 80). His effort seeks ways to "mobilize knowledge and desires that may lead to significant changes in minimizing the degree of oppression in people's lives" (ibid.). Giroux focuses "not [on] the geography of multiple subject positions that students inhabit, but [on] how students actually negotiate [these subject positions] within a geography of desire, affect, and rationality" (LD, 77, glosses mine). Power, for Giroux like Foucault, is dynamic and multiple. Critical pedagogy "must be viewed as the deliberate attempt to produce knowledge, forms of ethical address, *and social identities*" (LD, 39, italics mine). Thus, Giroux's border pedagogy provides "the conditions for students to engage in cultural *remapping* as resistance" (BC, 33, italics mine), providing new positions for individuals and groups.

Giroux is seeking, then, a "better" dispositif, a fluid geography of modern society more open to change and struggle. He has found in the work of Foucault and others the possibility of a resistance that takes *advantage* of the strategic, dynamic constraints of normalized society.

Revolution

In my reading, however, Foucault would have opposed Giroux's solution to the constraints of normalized society. At least until near the end of his life, he did not want to exploit "dispositifs" but instead wished to destroy them entirely, escaping the spatial into an entirely different cultural paradigm. Instead of a better geography,

he wanted no geography at all. Foucault is ever shading his eyes from the "light" of society, which for him is invariably a light of domination. He does not want a better place to "appear," instead, he does not want to "appear" at all. "Visibility is a trap," he declares.[13] Disciplinary power is oppressive because it "imposes...compulsory visibility" (D&P, 187, see also, 201). In fact, Foucault's inability to conceptualize a concrete political response, I will argue, is deeply intertwined with his rejection of the political potential of "space" that Giroux embraces.

Foucault asserts that before the development of the prison and the asylum, pre-modern deployments of power acted more directly on the body. He notes almost approvingly in the horrifying passage that begins D&P that even "death-by-torture allowed the condemned man this momentary saturnalia, where nothing was prohibited or punishable" (D&P, 46). Foucault's point is not that there were societies in the past where man was "free" of the categorizing power of society. Foucault himself points out that "*in every society*, the body was in the grip of very strict powers" (D&P, 136, italics mine). Instead, his assertion is that as we have moved into the modern age, opportunities within society for this kind of *undefined* "saturnalia" have been vastly reduced and are in danger of disappearing entirely.

For Foucault, achieving this kind of radical, undefinable liberation did not entail a focused project of specific change, but involved an effort to achieve total transformation. Yet what kind of transformative *social* action does this anti-spatial vision of society allow? Foucault was never clear, but we do have some hints. For example, probably the most important political effort of his life is his creation of and participation in the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* (GIP) whose goal was to cultivate "moments of spontaneous revolt," (cited in PM, 190) aiming at total transformation of the system. In a discussion with Giles Deleuze during this time, Foucault noted that struggles like these must be "radical, uncompromising and *nonreformist*."[14] As Michael Walzer points out, "despite his emphasis on local *struggles*, [Foucault] is largely uninterested in local *victories*."[15]

What a totalistic revolution would actually look like, however, is unclear. During his GIP period, in a discussion with French radical leftists, Foucault notes that the goal of the state should be "to educate the masses and the will of the masses in such a way that it is the masses themselves who come to [make decisions]" (PK, 13, gloss mine). In his example of justice, he says, "there will be discussion among the workers and a collective decision, before any action is taken. I can't see any embryonic state apparatus here." (PK, 31) But he does not say how a group can arrive at a "collective decision" without any "embryonic state apparatus."

In another 1970s interview, however, Foucault says that he is *not* promoting "a kind of thoughtless, instant spontaneity, unintegrated into an overall struggle. It is necessary to find *forms* through which this need for retribution...can be developed" (PK, 29, italics mine). Later in his life, in hindsight, he described his political work in the 1970s as the belief that he could "put to light the real, the concrete problem" and that "a political movement could come and take this problem and, from the data of the problem, elaborate something else" (Cited in PM, 233), a new kind of "form." But, again, it is unclear what "form" these forms would take.

In these discussions of revolution, Foucault seems caught in a conundrum, because he has defined out of bounds any attempt to *concretely* conceptualize some alternative to our current "disciplinary society." Any proposal for a better society that makes use of the metaphors available to us within our current "dispositif" or "regime of truth," as Giroux's does, ultimately shows itself to be bankrupt. Only if one reached a point radically beyond our current system, either through revolution or, later, ascetic operations on one's self, could one blaze a path to a fundamentally new way of being. If it can be conceptualized under our current "spatial" modes of being, he seems to be saying, it must be wrong.

I have focused, on purpose, on Foucault's disciplinary, "spatially" oriented "middle" work, but his work on the "self" and "governmentality" near the end of his life certainly complicates the picture I have drawn. On the one hand, some of Foucault's later statements seem to indicate that he was moving toward a vision of society more like Giroux's.[16] However, I tend to follow James Miller in his belief that Foucault's movement beyond the political and social to the more personal in his work after the first volume of *History of Sexuality* does not necessarily represent a fundamental *theoretical* shift in the direction of his thought.[17] Especially after the bloody result of the Iranian Revolution, which he had energetically supported,[18] Miller thinks Foucault pulled back from his earlier celebration of total political transformation to more pragmatic, reformist statements in, for example, "What is Enlightenment?" (PM, 314). The consequences of radical transformation in an ascetic (or aesthetic) personal practice, however, are not society-wide. Instead, the dangers of going too far are directed only at the individual — even though Foucault clearly saw political implications. Given the flux that Foucault's work seemed to be in at the end, however, it is difficult to know for sure where he was going.

Foucault struggles to discover a new form of life without "disciplinary" limitations, without imprisonment within a self. His "utopia," at least until his final works, would appear to be a world where everyone's unique multiplicity is released to play, where the world is not "*re*-mapped" but "*un*-mapped."

HANNAH ARENDT: ONLY THE APPEARING SUBJECT IS FREE

For Arendt, in deep opposition to Foucault, there is no politics without a subject. One must "appear" in the blazing light of a public space. Yet this disagreement hides a surprisingly powerful resonance on many basic issues. Foucault's descriptions of the affects of power and of the creation of subjects within a disciplinary society are strikingly similar to Arendt's descriptions of the "social." I argue that Arendt's work represents a possible path out of Foucault's dilemma, that, unlike Giroux's, rejects the "fields" of normalized society. Arendt's "social" is similar to Foucault's disciplinary society, but differs most significantly in its metaphorics. Arendt describes the rise of normalized society not as the creation but as the *destruction* of "spatiality."

For Arendt, the social is a particular cultural form that came into being at the beginning of the modern period, much like Foucault's disciplinary society. In Arendt's "social," individuals are united because their needs and desires are essentially the same. *"Herdlike uniformity is therefore of the essence of 'society.'"*[19]

As for Foucault, complex, undefinable individuality is reduced to clearly defined "rank within the social framework."[20] Yet Arendt focuses on a different aspect of normalized society than Foucault, emphasizing the banal "sameness" and the lack of truly unique distinction that pervades the social. As Margaret Canovan notes, "instead of seeing modern society as impersonal, rational, individualistic and so on, [Arendt] sees it as stiflingly uniform, paternalistic and monolithic."[21] Arendt changes the terms of the argument and so can seek someplace else for the subject to "appear." The subject in the "social" is not, for Arendt, located in *space* because *normalized* differences are more like uniformity than difference.

Gazing out from the normalized world of the asylum and the prison, Foucault seeks an escape from the cage of his self. Left without a place to stand in the incomprehensibility of Auchwitz, Arendt searches instead for a place where subjectivity might appear. From the place where these thinkers begin, the world seems in many ways the opposite. For Arendt, normalized society is not the worst form of society. If Foucault's central example is of the prison, Arendt's is of the concentration camps, where the ultimate goals of totalitarianism are seen most clearly. The camps are the laboratories that teach regimes how one might truly eliminate all plurality from the earth. The camps act to eliminate human initiative and spontaneity entirely, turning people into "bundles of reactions,"[22] into "mere thing[s], something even animals are not" (OT, 438). Through a number of steps, the "unique identity" of each individual is ultimately dissolved through tortures which "manipulate the human body...in such a way as to destroy the human person" (OT, 453). What are left are mere marionettes which "do nothing but react" (OT, 455). Even their banal, "social" identities are destroyed. In opposition to Foucault's prison, in the concentration camps the "inmate has no price, because he can always be replaced; nobody knows to whom he belongs, because *he is never seen*" (OT, 444, italics mine).

Totalitarianism is represented by Arendt as the ultimate destruction of "space," a process that is merely begun in the "social." Instead of Foucault's "field," Arendt's metaphor is of the "iron band" which "which holds [men] so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic proportions" (OT, 466). If the "social" for Arendt is a kind of pseudo-space where unique individuality cannot be seen because it is reduced to defined places on a "ranking," totalitarianism represents the complete destruction of any space at all.

A NEW KIND OF SPACE

Because she refused to define normalized society as "space," Arendt was free to seek another concrete realm where individuals might "appear." She was convinced that unless individuals are able to take coherent and unique stances with respect to each other, politics dissolves into mass movements. Real space must allow individuals to appear in *unique* and unpredictable positions, not on some predetermined cultural "field," no matter how dynamic.

To allow political action, Arendt argues that there must be what she calls an "in-between." This in-between is made up of a set of common issues or concepts, which "must be seen in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity" (HC, 57).

This is a complicated point, but what I read her as saying, here, is that everyone must be able to arrive at their own unique interpretation of their common project,[23] while not interpreting it so uniquely that the "common" nature of the object is lost. "Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position" on this common project. Although the common issues of the public define, and to some extent restrict the common space, individuals can take one of an infinite number of possible positions with respect to them.

In a public space, then, people can take relatively unique yet communicable *stances* on common issues. The public represents a precarious compromise between absolute uniqueness, where there would be no common project between individuals, and normalized sameness. It is not the absolute freedom that Foucault desired, but it does allow individuals to act *with* others by bringing their unique potentials to bear upon a common project. Power, for Arendt, is created through this action "in concert" where each participant is neither "autonomous" nor simply a cog in a great machine, generating an immense force for unpredictable creative change (HC, 201). Arendt notes that we cannot foretell "the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act" (HC, 242). To gain complete control over the results of one's actions would be to deny agency to others. One becomes an "agent" in Arendt's scheme not because one can achieve one's ends, but because one can participate in a project one cannot control, because one's unique position on a common issue is taken into account by others.

"Space" in the public is not the kind of space you can take a Foucaultian "yardstick" to, but is instead a way of bringing different "worlds" or "multiple perspectives" together in a kind of *political* contact; it is a space, as Arendt points out, for which "no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised" (HC, 57). Where Giroux advocates a "re-mapping," Arendt advocates the creation of common spaces that tease out individuals' unique backgrounds.

Conclusion

Arendt alone is not enough. Because of the way she defines the social, for example, Arendt is not as able as Giroux to see the dynamic and oppressive power of normalized society, focused as she is on the "ideal" encouragement of unique perspectives. As Chandra Mohanty points out, a central strength of "normalized" approaches lies in their ability to make these "axes of power" evident (cited in BC, 34). Arendt and Giroux's approaches must work together. Each perspective has its own insights and blindnesses. And certainly there are more ways to conceptualize the spatial than I have presented here — even the spatial metaphor itself surely blinds us to some possibilities. Yet if we agree with Arendt, Keith, and Pile, and others that all politics is territorial and spatial to some extent, then the spatial metaphor will continue to be a critical signifier, helping us understand struggles around education for years to come.

There are some in educational theory who deploy spatial metaphors more like Arendt's than Giroux's. Maxine Greene, for example, draws heavily on Arendt's work in her use of the metaphor of "public space," although she transforms this term

in subtle but important ways.[24] Others use spatial metaphors in even more different ways. For example, I cited hooks early in this paper as someone who promotes a cultural "politics of location," but she also reflects on the *unique* situatedness of every human being and their *unique* relations to others more than Giroux.[25] In my own empirical work with groups of teachers, I have begun to use some of these multiple "spatial" perspectives on agency to help me understand and describe group interaction in a more fine-grained way.

Giroux advocates the creation of "a new language that can question public forms, address social injustices, and break the tyranny of the present" (LD, p. 28). I agree with Giroux, but argue that we will find these new "languages" are unavailable to us as long as we remain trapped within a restricted spatial imaginary. Certainly the approaches Giroux recommends are crucial. However, some of our radical pedagogues, as insightful and important as they have been, may not be thinking radically enough. Our goal should not be merely to change the map, but to alter the nature of geography itself.

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1. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974; reprint, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26. See also Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (New York: Verso, 1989).

2. See Michael Keith and Steve Pile, "Introduction," in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993),1.

3. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 250. See also Keith and Pile, "Introduction," 223. This paper concerns itself with purely metaphorical conceptualizations of "space." A complete exploration of the spatial metaphor, as many "radical geographers" point out, would require an analysis of the intersection between metaphorical and *material* space as social products.

4. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 143.

5. bell hooks, *Yearning* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 145.

6. Michael Apple, *Official Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Joe L. Kinchloe, *Toward a Critical Politics of Teacher Thinking* (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1993); Peter L. McLaren, "Collisions With Otherness: 'Traveling' Theory," in *Critical Theory and Educational Research,* ed. Peter L. McLaren, and James M. Giarelli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Parlo Singh, "Voicing the 'Other,' Speaking for the 'Self,'" in *After Postmodernism*, ed. Richard Smith and Philip Wexler (London: The Falmer Press, 1995); and Kathleen Weiler, "Friere and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference," *Harvard Educational Review* 61, no. 4 (1991): 449-74.

7. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980), 69; subsequently referred to in the text with page numbers as PK.

8. Hubert L Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* 2d. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xxiv.

9. Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism*, 121, brackets mine.

10. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House, 1977), 141; subsequently referred to in the text with page numbers as D&P.

11. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 252.

12. Henry Giroux, *Living Dangerously* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Henry Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures* (London: Routledge, 1994). The first two books are cited in the text with page numbers as LD and BC. I do not grapple here with his other major metaphor, that of "rewriting," although I do not think it would significantly alter my argument.

13. Foucault cited in James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 53; subsequently cited in the text with page numbers as PM.

14. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 216, italics mine.

15. Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader,* ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 59, italics mine.

16. See Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 12, nos. 2-3, 129.

17. While I agree with some of David M. Halperin's critique, in "Bringing Out Michel Foucault," *Salmagundi* 87 (1993): 69-93, of Miller's representation of Foucault's sexuality, among other issues, I think Miller's point about Foucault's theoretical leanings is accurate on this point.

18. See Michel Foucault, "Is it Useless to Revolt?" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1981).

19. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 117.

20. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 41; subsequently cited in the text with page numbers as HC.

21. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt,* 121.

22. Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javonavich, 1951), 441; subsequently referred to in the text with page numbers as OT.

23. This is very similar to what Maxine Greene says about public space, and I take the phrase "common project" from her work. See Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988); and below.

24. See bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994). I explore the differences between Arendt and Greene elsewhere.

25. Ibid., 88, 136.