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EDUCATION AFTER ABU GHRAIB

Revisiting Adorno's politics of education

Drawing upon Theodor Adorno's famous essay, 'Education After Auschwitz' this article examines the question of how education should be engaged in light of the abuse and torture by American soldiers and personnel that took place at Abu Ghraib prison. The essay attempts to understand not only how the photographs of abuse and torture signalled a particular form of public pedagogy, but also how pedagogy itself becomes central to understanding the changing political, ideological, and economic conditions that made the abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib possible and what the latter implies for how we understand both cultural politics and the growing authoritarian nature of American society.

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Inhumanity has a great future.
(Paul Valéry)

Warring images

Visual representations of the war have played a prominent role in shaping public perceptions of the United States' invasion and occupation of Iraq. The initial, much celebrated image that was widely used to represent the war in Iraq captured the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad soon after the invasion. The second image, also one of high drama and spectacle, portrayed President Bush in full flight gear after landing on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln. The scripted photo-op included a banner behind the President proclaiming 'Mission Accomplished'.

The mainstream media gladly seized upon the first image since it reinforced the presupposition that the invasion was a justified response to the hyped-up

threat Saddam's regime posed to the USA and that his fall was the outcome of an extension of American democracy and an affirmation of its role as a beneficent empire, animated by 'the use of military power to shape the world according to American interests and values' (Steel 2004). The second image fed into the scripted representations of Bush as a 'tough', even virile leader who had taken on the garb of a Hollywood warrior determined in his efforts to protect the USA from terrorists and to bring the war in Iraq to a quick and successful conclusion.¹ The narrow ideological field that framed these images in the American media proved impervious to dissenting views, exhibiting a deep disregard for either accurate or critical reporting as well as an indifference to fulfilling its traditional role as a fourth estate, as guardians of democracy and defenders of the public interest. Slavishly reporting the war as if they were on the payroll at the Pentagon, the dominant media rarely called into question either the Bush administration's reasons for going to war or the impact the war was to have on both the Iraqi people and domestic and foreign policy.

In the spring of 2004, a new set of images challenged the mythic representations of the Iraqi invasion with the release of hundreds of gruesome photographs and videos documenting the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib. They were first broadcast on the television series, *60 Minutes II*, and later leaked to the press, becoming something of a nightly feature in the weeks and months that ensued. Abu Ghraib prison was one of the most notorious sites used by the deposed Hussein regime to inflict unspeakable horrors on those Iraqis considered disposable for various political reasons, ironically reinforcing the growing perception in the Arab world that one tyrant simply replaced another. In sharp contrast to the all-too-familiar and officially sanctioned images of good-hearted and stalwart American soldiers patrolling dangerous Iraqi neighbourhoods, caring for wounded soldiers or passing out candy to young Iraqi children, the newly discovered photos depicted Iraqi detainees being humiliated and tortured. The face of the American invasion was soon recast by a number of sadistic images, including now infamous photos depicting the insipid, grinning faces of Specialist Charles A. Graner and Pfc. Lynndie R. England flashing a thumbs up behind a pyramid of seven naked detainees, a kneeling inmate posing as if he is performing oral sex on another hooded male detainee, a terrified male Iraqi inmate trying to ward off an attack dog being handled by American soldiers, and a US soldier grinning next to the body of a dead inmate packed in ice. Two of the most haunting images depicted a hooded man standing on a box, with his arms outstretched in Christ-like fashion, electric wires attached to his hands and penis. Another image revealed a smiling England holding a leash attached to a naked Iraqi man lying on the floor of the prison. Like Oscar Wilde's infamous picture of Dorian Gray, the portrait of American democracy was irrevocably transformed into its opposite. The fight for Iraqi hearts and minds was now

irreparably damaged as the war on terror appeared to reproduce only more terror, mimicking the very crimes it claimed to have eliminated.

As Susan Sontag points out, the leaked photographs include both the victims and their gloating assailants. For Sontag, the images from Abu Ghraib are not only 'representative of the fundamental corruptions of any foreign occupation and its distinctive policies which serve as a perfect recipe for the cruelties and crimes in American run prisons. . . . [but are also] like lynching pictures and are treated as souvenirs of a collective action' (Sontag 2004). Reminiscent of photos taken by whites who lynched blacks after Reconstruction, the images were circulated as trophy shots in order to be passed around and sent out to friends. For Sontag and others, Abu Ghraib could not be understood outside of the racism and brutality that accompanied the exercise of nearly unchecked, unaccountable absolute power both at home and abroad. Similarly, Sidney Blumenthal argues that Abu Ghraib was a predictable consequence of the Bush administration to fight terrorism by creating a system 'beyond law to defend the rule of law against terrorism'. One consequence of such obscenely ironic posturing, as he points out, is a Gulag

that stretches from prisons in Afghanistan to Iraq, from Guantanamo to secret CIA prisons around the world. There are perhaps 10,000 people being held in Iraq, 1,000 in Afghanistan and almost 700 in Guantanamo, but no one knows the exact numbers. The law as it applies to them is whatever the executive deems necessary. There has been nothing like this system since the fall of the Soviet Union.

(Blumenthal 2004)

As time passed, it became clear that the instances of abuse and torture that took place at Abu Ghraib were extensive, systemic and part of a larger pattern of criminal behavior that had taken place in other prisons in both Iraq and Afghanistan – not to mention the prisons on the homefront.² Patterns of mistreatment by American soldiers had also taken place in Camp Bucca, a US-run detention center in southern Iraq as well as in an overseas CIA interrogation center at the Bagram airbase in Afghanistan, where the deaths of three detainees were labelled as homicide by US military doctors.³

The most compelling evidence refuting the argument that what happened at Abu Ghraib was the result of the actions of a few isolated individuals who strayed from protocol is spelled out by Seymour Hersh in his 10 May *New Yorker* article in which he analyses the 58-page classified report by Major General Antonio Taguba who investigated the abuses at Abu Ghraib. In the report, Taguba insisted that 'a huge leadership failure' (cited in Hersh 2004a) at Abu Ghraib was responsible for what he described as 'sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses' (cited in Pound & Roane 2004). Taguba not only

documented examples of torture and sexual humiliation, he also elaborated on the range of indignities, which included:

Breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees; pouring cold water on naked detainees; beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell; sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick, and sending military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack, and in one instance actually biting a detainee.

(cited in Hersh 2004b)

Not only does Taguba's report reveal scenes of abuse more systemic than aberrant, but also tragically familiar to communities of color on the domestic front long subjected to profiling, harassment, intimidation, and brutality by law and order professionals.

The politics of delay and outrage

Responses from around the world exhibited outrage and disgust over the US actions at Abu Ghraib. The rhetoric of American democracy was denounced all over the globe as hypocritical and utterly propagandistic, especially in light of President Bush's 30 April remarks claiming that with the removal of Saddam Hussein, 'there are no longer torture chambers or mass graves or rape rooms in Iraq' (cited in Hajjar 2004). The protracted release of new sets of pictures of US soldiers grinning as they tortured and sexually humiliated Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib further undermined the moral and political credibility of the USA both in the Arab world and around the globe. Restoring one of Saddam Hussein's most infamous torture chambers to its original use reinforced the image of the USA as a dangerous, rogue state with despicable imperial ambitions. As columnist Katha Pollitt puts it,

The pictures and stories [from Abu Ghraib] have naturally caused a furor around the world. Not only are they grotesque in themselves, they reinforce the pre-existing impression of Americans as racist, cruel and frivolous. They are bound to alienate – further alienate – Iraqis who hoped that the invasion would lead to secular democracy and a normal life and who fear Islamic rule. Abroad, if not here at home, they underscore how stupid and wrong the invasion of Iraq was in the first place, how predictably the 'war of choice' that was going to be a cakewalk has

become a brutal and corrupt occupation, justified by a doctrine of American exceptionalism that nobody but Americans believes.

(Pollitt 2004)

However, Abu Ghraib did more than inspire moral revulsion; it also became a rallying cry for recruiting radical extremists as well as producing legitimate opposition to the American occupation. At one level, the image of the faceless, hooded detainee, arms outstretched and wired, conjured up images of the Spanish Inquisition, the French brutalization of Algerians and the slaughter of innocent people at My Lai during the Vietnam war. The heavily damaged rhetoric of American democracy now gave way to the more realistic discourse of empire, colonization, and militarization. At another level, the images shed critical light on the often ignored connection between American domination abroad, often aimed at the poor and dispossessed, and at home, particularly against people of colour, including the lynching of American blacks in the first half of the twentieth century and the increasingly brutalizing incarceration of large numbers of youth of colour that continues into the new millennium. Patricia Williams links the criminal abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison to a web of secrecy, violation of civil rights, and racist violence that has become commonplace on the domestic front. She writes:

[I]t's awfully hard not to look at those hoods and think Inquisition; or the piles of naked and sodomized men and think Abner Louima; or the battered corpses and think of Emmett Till . . . This mess is the predictable by-product of any authority that starts 'sweeping' up 'bad guys' and holding them without charge, in solitary and in secret, and presuming them guilty. It flourished beyond the reach of any formal oversight by Congress, by lawyers or by the judiciary, a condition vaguely rationalized as 'consistent with' if not 'precisely' pursuant to the Geneva Conventions. Bloodied prisoners were moved around to avoid oversight by international observers, a rather too disciplined bit of sanitizing.

(Williams 2004)

Outrage abroad was matched by often low-keyed, if not crude, responses by those implicated whether in military barracks or Washington offices. For the high priests of 'personal responsibility', it was a study in passing the buck. President Bush responded by claiming that what happened at Abu Ghraib was nothing more than 'disgraceful conduct by a few American troops' (Bush 2004). General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested it was the work of a 'handful' of enlisted individuals (quoted in Moniz & Squitieri 2004). However, the claim that the Pentagon was unaware of the Abu Ghraib was at odds not only with International Red Cross reports that regularly notified the Pentagon of such crimes, but also it was further contradicted by both the Taguba report as well as by a series of memos leaked

to the press indicating that the White House, Pentagon and Justice Department had attempted to justify interrogation practices that violated the federal anti-torture statute two years prior to the invasion.

One such memo was written in August 2002, authored by Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee, head of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel. In it, he argued that in a post-9/11 world any attempt to apply the criminal laws against torture under the Geneva Convention Against Torture undermined Presidential power and should be considered unconstitutional. More specifically, the Bybee memo argued 'on behalf of the Justice Department that the President could order the use of torture' (Lewis 2004). Alberto Gonzales, a high ranking government lawyer, argued in a draft memo to President Bush on 25 January 2002 that the Geneva Conventions are 'quaint', if not 'obsolete' and that certain forms of traditionally unauthorized methods of inflicting physical and psychological pain might be justified under the aegis of fighting the war on terrorism.⁴ Anthony Lewis in commenting on the memo states 'Does he believe that any treaty can be dismissed when it is inconvenient to an American government?' (Lewis 2004). In fact, a series of confidential legal memoranda produced by the Justice Department flatly stated that the 'administration is not bound by prohibitions against torture' (Lewis, N. A. 2004). A Defense Department memo echoed the same line in a calculated attempt to incorporate torture as part of normal interrogating procedures in defiance of international protocols. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on 7 June 2004 that these memos sought to assign the President virtually unlimited authority on matters of torture' (Bravin 2004). Exercising a degree of rhetorical licence in defining torture in narrow terms, they ended up legitimizing interrogation practices at odds with both the Geneva Convention Against Torture and the Army's own Field Manual for intelligence, which prohibits 'The use of force, mental torture, threats, insults or exposure to unpleasant and inhumane treatment of any kind'.⁵ In reviewing the government's case for torture, Anthony Lewis writes:

The memos read like the advice of a mob lawyer to a mafia don on how to skirt the law and stay out of prison. Avoiding prosecution is literally a theme of the memoranda . . . Another theme in the memoranda, an even more deeply disturbing one is that the President can order the torture of prisoners even though it is forbidden by a federal statute and by the international Convention Against Torture, to which the United States is a party . . . the issues raised by the Bush administration's legal assertions in its 'war on terror' are so numerous and so troubling that one hardly knows where to begin discussing them. The torture and death of prisoners, the end result of cool legal abstractions, have a powerful claim on our national conscience . . . But equally disturbing, in its way, is the

administration's constitutional argument that presidential power is unconstrained by law.

(Lewis 2004, p. 4, p. 6)

Both John Ashcroft and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld denied any involvement by the Bush administration in either providing the legal sanctions for torture or for creating the conditions that made the abuses at Abu Ghraib possible. Ashcroft refused the Senate Judiciary Committee's request to make public a 2002 Justice Department memo sanctioning high-risk interrogation tactics that may violate the federal anti-torture statute while repeatedly insisting that the Bush administration does not sanction torture. When the Abu Ghraib scandal first broke in the press and reporters started asking him about the Taguba report, Rumsfeld claimed that he had not read it.

When reporters raised questions about Seymour Hersh's charge that Rumsfeld had personally approved a clandestine program known as SAP 'that encouraged physical coercion and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners in an effort to generate more intelligence about the growing insurgency in Iraq', Pentagon spokesman Lawrence Di Rita responded by calling Hersh's article, 'outlandish, conspiratorial and filled with error and anonymous conjecture' (Associated Press 2004). At the same time, Di Rita did not directly rebut any of Hersh's claims. When confronted directly about the charge that he authorized a secret program that was given the blanket approval to kill, torture and interrogate high-value targets, Rumsfeld performed a semantic tap-dance that would have made Bill Clinton blush. He told reporters: 'My impression is that what has been charged thus far is abuse, which I believe technically is different from torture . . . I don't know if . . . it is correct to say what you just said, that torture has taken place, or that there's been a conviction for torture. And therefore I am not going to address the torture word' (cited in Folkenflik 2004). However, Rumsfeld's contempt for the Geneva Conventions and established military protocol were made public soon after the war on terror was launched in 2001. Disdaining a military machine shaped by the 'old rules', he believed they prevented the military and its leadership from taking 'greater risks' (quoted in Hersh 2004a, p. 41). In 2002, he went so far as to claim that 'complaints about America's treatment of prisoners . . . amounted to "isolated pockets of international hyperventilation"' (quoted in Hersh 2004a, p. 41). It was later reported by a range of news sources, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Newsweek*, that Rumsfeld had indeed supported interrogation techniques against the Taliban and Iraqi prisoners that violated the Geneva Conventions. As the facts surrounding the abuses emerged belatedly in the dominant media, he admitted he was responsible for the hiding of 'Ghost detainees' from the Red Cross and asserted before a Senate Committee that he would assume the blame for Abu Ghraib, but also refused to resign.

What became clear soon after the scandal of Abu Ghraib went public was that it could not be reduced to the 'failure of character' of a few soldiers, as George W. Bush insisted. Nor could it be seen as behaviour that was antithetical to the values and practices of American democracy. In June 2004, both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* broke even more stories documenting the use of torture-like practices by American soldiers who subjected prisoners to unmuzzled military dogs as part of a contest waged to see how many detainees they could make involuntarily urinate out of fear of the dogs and forcing detainees to stand on boxes and sing 'the Star Spangled Banner' in the nude (White and Higham 2004, p. A01). Both tactics took place long before the famous photographs were taken at Abu Ghraib (Zernke and Rohde 2004, p. A11). Far from the 'frat boy pranks' apologists compared the torture to, these acts were designed to inflict maximal damage – performed on detainees whose culture views nudity as a violation of religious principles and associates public nudity with shame and guilt. Equally disturbing is the International Committee of the Red Cross estimate that 70 to 90 percent of the detainees arrested by Coalition troops 'had been arrested by mistake' and had nothing to do with terrorism (Drogin 2004). It gets worse. Since the release of the initial photos, a new round of fresh photographs and film footage of torture from Abu Ghraib and other prisons in Iraq 'include details of the rape and . . . abuse of some of the Iraqi women and the hundred or so children – some as young as 10 years old' (Govern 2004). One account provided by US Army Sergeant Samuel Provance, who was stationed in the Abu Ghraib prison, recalls 'how interrogators soaked a 16-year-old, covered him in mud, and then used his suffering to break the youth's father, also a prisoner, during interrogation' (Govern 2004). An Army investigation also revealed that unmuzzled military police dogs were employed at Abu Ghraib prison as part of a sadistic game used to 'make juveniles – as young as 15 years old – urinate on themselves as part of a competition' (White and Ricks 2004).

The wanton abuse of Iraqi detainees, including children, the ongoing efforts at the highest levels of the Bush administration to establish new legal ground for torture, and the use of private contractors to perform the dirty work of interrogating detainees in order to skirt what is clearly an abdication of civil and military law is evidence of a systemic, widespread collusion with crimes against humanity. In spite of claims by the Bush administration that such abuses are the work of a few rogue soldiers, a number of inquiries by high-level outside panels, especially the four-member Schlesinger panel, have concluded that the Abu Ghraib abuses point to leadership failures at the 'highest levels of the Pentagon, Joint Chiefs of Staff and military command in Iraq' (Schmitt 2004, p. 1). Such reports and the increasing revelations of the extent of the abuse and torture perpetuated in Iraq, Afghanistan and American prisons does more than promote moral outrage at the growing injustices practised by the American government, it also positions the USA as one more rogue regime

sharing, as an editorial in *The Washington Post* pointed out, the company of former military juntas ‘in Argentina and Chile . . . that claim[ed] torture is justified when used to combat terrorism’ (*The Washington Post* 2004, p. A01).

In spite of the extensive photographic proof, international and internal reports, and journalistic accounts revealing egregious brutality, racism and inhumanity by US soldiers against Arab detainees, conservative pundits took their cue from the White House, attempting to justify such detestable acts and defend the Bush administration’s usurpation of presidential power. Powerful right-wing ideologues such as Rush Limbaugh and Cal Thomas defended such actions as simply a way for young men (sic) to ‘blow off some steam’, engage in forms of harmless frat hazing, or give Muslim prisoners what they deserve. More offensive than the blasé attitudes of talking-heads was the mantle of moral authority and outrage of politicians who took umbrage with those who dared criticize Bush or his army at a time of war. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Republican Senator James Inhofe insisted that calling attention to such crimes not only undermined troop morale in Iraq, but it was also deeply unpatriotic. Inhofe actually stated publicly at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that he was outraged by the ‘outrage everyone seems to have about the treatment of these prisoners . . . I am also outraged by the press and the politicians and the political agendas that are being served by this . . . I am also outraged that we have so many humanitarian do-gooders right now crawling all over these prisons looking for human rights violations while our troops, our heroes, are fighting and dying’ (Solomon 2004). That many of these prisoners were innocent civilians picked up in indiscriminate sweeps by the US military or that US troops were operating a chamber of horrors at Abu Ghraib was simply irrelevant, providing fodder for silencing criticism by labelling it unpatriotic, or scapegoating the ‘liberal’ media for reporting such injustices. Inhofe provides a prime example of how politics is corrupted by a dangerous ethos of divine right informed by the mythos of American exceptionalism and a patriotic fervour that disdains reasonable dissent and moral critique. Inhofe’s arrogant puffery must be challenged both for shutting down dialogue but also brought to task for the egregious way in which it invites Americans to identify with the violence of the perpetrators.

Other conservatives such as Watergate-felon-turned-preacher, Charles Colson, Robert Knight of the Culture and Family Institute, and Rebecca Hagelin, the vice president of the Heritage Foundation, assumed the moral high ground, blaming what happened at Abu Ghraib on the debauchery of popular culture. Invoking the tired language of the culture wars, Colson argued that ‘the prison guards had been corrupted by a “steady diet of MTV and pornography”’. Knight argued that the depravity exhibited at Abu Ghraib was modelled after gay porn, which gave military personnel ‘the idea to engage in sadomasochistic activity and to videotape in voyeuristic fashion’. Rebecca Hagelin viewed the prison scandal as the outcome of a general moral laxity in

which 'our country permits Hollywood to put almost anything in a movie and still call it PG-13' (all these examples are cited in Rich 2004). For those hard-wired Bush supporters who wanted to do more than blame Hollywood porn, MTV, prime time television and (not least) gay culture, the scandalous images themselves were seen as the source of the problem because of the offensive nature of their representations and the controversy they generated.

Despite the colossal (and it seems deliberate) misrepresentations of the facts leading to the war with Iraq along with the neo-conservative and Christian fundamentalism driving the Bush presidency and its disastrous policies at home and abroad, Bush's credibility remains intact for many conservatives. Consequently, they ignore the underlying conditions that gave rise to the horrific abuses at Abu Ghraib, removing them from the inventory of unethical and damaging practices associated with American exceptionalism and triumphalism. Thus, they ignore: Bush's disastrous, open-ended war on terrorism and how it has failed to protect the American populace at home while sanctioning wars abroad that have been used as recruiting tools for Islamic terrorists; Bush's doctrine of secrecy⁶ and unaccountability; Bush's suspension of basic civil liberties under the USA Patriot Act and his willingness to include some named terrorists under the designation of enemy combatants so as to remove them from the protection of the law; and the Bush administration's all out assault on the social contract and the welfare state.⁷ Treating the Bush presidency as sacrosanct – and so unaccountable and beyond public engagement – enables conservatives to conveniently overlook their own complicity in furthering those existing relations of power and politics that make the dehumanizing events of Abu Ghraib possible. Within this apologetic discourse, matters of individual and collective responsibility disappear in a welter of hypocritical and strategic diversions. As Frank Rich puts it,

the point of these scolds' political strategy – and it is a political strategy, despite some of its adherents' quaireligiosity – is clear enough. It is not merely to demonize gays and the usual rogue's gallery of secularist bogeymen for any American ill but to clear the Bush administration of any culpability for Abu Ghraib, the disaster that may have destroyed its mission in Iraq. If porn or MTV or Howard Stern can be said to have induced a 'few bad apples' in one prison to misbehave, then everyone else in the chain of command, from the commander-in-chief down, is off the hook. If the culture war can be cross-wired with the actual war, then the buck will stop not at the Pentagon or the White House but at the Paris Hilton video, or 'Mean Girls', or maybe 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy'.

(Rich 2004, p. AR1, p. AR16)

When it comes to reconciling barbarous acts of torture and humiliation with the disingenuous rhetoric of democracy so popular among conservatives, the issue of blame can assume a brutalizing character. For instance, a number of conservatives (as well as those responsible for the 11 September 2004 report by the Army's Inspector General) place the causes for abuse at Abu Ghraib at the doorstep of low ranking personnel who, once considered disposable fodder for the war effort, now provide equally talented scapegoats. Powerless to defend themselves against the implied accusation that their working-class and rural backgrounds produced the propensity for sexual deviancy and cruelty in the grand style of the film, *Deliverance*, they merely claimed to be following orders. However, class hatred proved a serviceable means to deflect attention from the Bush administration. How else to explain Republican senator Ben Campbell's comment that 'I don't know how these people got into our army' (Younge 2004). But class antagonism was not the only weapon in right-wing arsenals. Even more desperate, Ann Coulter blames Abu Ghraib on the allegedly aberrant nature of woman, particularly evident in her assertion that 'This is yet another lesson in why women shouldn't be in the military . . . Women are more vicious than men' (Younge 2004). All of these arguments, as *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich points out, share in an effort to divert attention from matters of politics and history in order to clear the Bush administration of any wrong doing (Rich 2004). Of course, I am not suggesting that Lynndie England, Sabrina Harman, Jeremy Sivits, Charles Graner Jr and others should not be held responsible for their actions; rather, my claim is that responsibility for Abu Ghraib does not lay with them alone.

Susan Sontag (2004) has argued that photographs lay down the 'tracks for how important conflicts are judged and remembered. However, at the same time, she makes it very clear that all photographs cannot be understood through one language recognized by all. Photographs are never transparent, existing outside of the 'taint of artistry or ideology' (Sontag 2003). Understood as a social and historical constructs, photographic images entail acts of translation necessary to mobilize compassion instead of indifference, witnessing rather than consuming, and critical engagement rather than aesthetic *appreciation or crude repudiation*. Put differently, photographs such as those that revealed the horrors that took place at Abu Ghraib prison have no guaranteed meaning, but rather exist within a complex of shifting mediations that are material, historical, social, ideological and psychological in nature.⁸

Abu Ghraib photographs and the politics of public pedagogy

Hence, the photographic images from Abu Ghraib prison cannot be taken up outside of history, politics or ideology. This is not to suggest that photographs do not record some element of reality as much as to insist that what they

capture can only be understood as part of a broader engagement over cultural politics and its intersection with various dynamics of power, all of which informs the conditions for reading photographs as both a pedagogical intervention and a form of cultural production.⁹ Photographic images do not reside in the unique vision of their producer or the reality they attempt to capture. Representations privilege those who have some control over self-representation, and they are largely framed within dominant modes of intelligibility.

The Abu Ghraib photographs are constitutive of both diverse sites and technologies of pedagogy and as such represent political and ethical forms of address that make moral demands and claims upon their viewers. Questions of power and meaning are always central to any discussion of photographic images as forms of public pedagogy. Such images not only register the traces of cultural mythologies that must be critically mediated, they also represent ideological modes of address tied to the limits of human discourse and intelligibility and function as pedagogical practices regarding how agency should be organized and represented. The pictures of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison gain their status as a form of public pedagogy by virtue of the spaces they create between the sites in which they become public and the forms of pedagogical address that both frame and mediate their meaning. As they circulate through various sites including talk radio, computer screens, television, newspapers, the Internet and alternative media, they initiate different forms of address, mobilize different cultural meanings, and offer up different sites of learning. The meanings that frame the images from Abu Ghraib prison are 'contingent upon the pedagogical sites in which they are considered' and their ability to limit or rule out certain questions, historical inquiries, and explanations (DiLeo *et al.* 2004). For example, news programs on the Fox Television Network systematically occlude any criticism of the images of abuse at Abu Ghraib that would call into question the American presence in Iraq. If such issues are raised, they are quickly dismissed as unpatriotic.

Attempts to defuse or rewrite images that treat people as things, as less than human have a long history. Commentators have invoked comparison to the images of lynching of black men and women in the American South and Jews in Nazi death camps. John Louis Lucaites and James P. McDaniel have documented how *Life Magazine* during World War II put a photograph on its cover of a woman gazing pensively at the skull of a Japanese soldier sent to her by her boyfriend serving in the Pacific, a lieutenant who when he left to fight in the war 'promised her a Jap' (Lucaites & McDaniel 2004, p. 7). Far from reminding its readers of the barbarity of war, the magazine invoked the patriotic gaze in order to frame the barbaric image as part of a public ritual of mortification and a visual marker of humiliation.

As forms of public pedagogy, photographic images must be engaged ethically as well as socio-politically because they are implicated in history and

they often work to suppress the very conditions that produce them. Often framed within dominant forms of circulation and meaning, such images generally work to legitimate particular forms of recognition and meaning marked by disturbing forms of diversion and evasion. This position is evident in those politicians who believe that the photographs from Abu Ghraib are the real problem not the conditions that produced them. Or in the endless commentaries that view the abuses at Abu Ghraib as caused by a few 'bad apples'. Subjecting such public pronouncements to critical inquiry can only emerge within those pedagogical sites and practices in which matters of critique and a culture of questioning are requisite to a vibrant and functioning democracy. But public pedagogy at its best offers more than forms of reading that are critical and relate cultural texts such as photographs to the larger world. Public pedagogy not only defines the cultural objects of interpretation, it also offers the possibility for engaging modes of literacy that are not just about competency but also about the possibility of interpretation as an intervention in the world. Meaning does not rest with the images alone, but with the ways in which images are aligned and shaped by larger institutional and cultural discourses and how they call into play the condemnation of torture (or its celebration), how it came about, and what it means to prevent it from happening again. This is not merely a political issue but also a pedagogical one. Making the political more pedagogical in this instance connects what we know to the conditions that make learning possible in the first place. It creates opportunities to be critical, but also as Susan Sontag notes, to 'take stock of our world, and [participate] in its social transformation in such a way that non-violent, cooperative, egalitarian international relations remain the guiding ideal' (Butler 2002, p. 19). While Sontag is quite perceptive in pointing to the political nature of reading images, a politics concerned with matters of translation and meaning, she does not engage such reading as a pedagogical issue.

As part of a politics of representation, photographic images necessitate both the ability to read critically and utilize particular analytical skills that enable viewers to study the relations between images, discourses, everyday life and broader structures of power. As both the subject and object of public pedagogy, photographs both deploy power and are deployed by power and register the conditions under which people learn how to read texts and the world. Photographs demand an ability to read within and against the representations they present and to raise fundamental questions about how they work to secure particular meanings, desires, and investments. As a form of public pedagogy, photographic images have the potential, though by no means guaranteed, to call forth from readers modes of witnessing that connect meaning with compassion, a concern for others and a broader understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts and relations that frame meaning in particular ways. Critical reading demands pedagogical practices that short-circuit common sense, resist easy assumptions, bracket how images are

framed, engage meaning as a struggle over power and politics, and as such refuse to posit reading (especially images) exclusively as an aesthetic exercise but also as a political and moral practice.

What is often ignored in the debates about Abu Ghraib, both in terms of its causes and what can be done about it, are questions that foreground the relevance of critical education to the debate. Such questions would clearly focus, at the very least, on what pedagogical conditions need to be in place to enable people to view the images of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison not as part of a voyeuristic, even pornographic, reception but through a variety of discourses that enable them to ask critical and probing questions that get at the heart of how people learn to participate in sadistic acts of abuse and torture, internalize racist assumptions that make it easier to dehumanize people different from themselves, accept commands that violate basic human rights, become indifferent to the suffering and hardships of others, and view dissent as basically unpatriotic. What pedagogical practices might enable the public to foreground the codes and structures that give photographs their meaning while also connecting the productive operations of photography with broader discourses? For example, how might the images from Abu Ghraib prison be understood as part of a broader debate about dominant information networks that not only condone torture, but also play a powerful role in organizing society around shared fears rather than shared responsibilities? Photographs demand more than a response to the specificity of an image, they also raise fundamentally crucial questions about the sites of pedagogy and technologies that produce, distribute, and frame them in particular ways and what these operations mean in terms of how they resonate with historical and established relations of power and the identities and modes of agency that enable such relations to be reproduced rather than resisted and challenged. Engaging the photographs from Abu Ghraib and the events that produced them would point to the pedagogical practice of foregrounding 'the cultures of circulation and transfiguration within which those texts, events, and practices become palpable and are recognized as such' (Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003, p. 386). For instance, how do we understand the Abu Ghraib images and the pedagogical conditions that produced them without engaging the discourses of privatization, particularly the contracting of military labour, the intersection of militarism and the crisis of masculinity, and the war on terrorism and the racism that makes it so despicable? How might one explain the ongoing evaporation of political dissent and opposing viewpoints in the USA that preceded the events at Abu Ghraib without engaging the pedagogical campaign of fear mongering adorned with the appropriate patriotic rhetoric waged by the Bush administration. How might we provide a historical context for linking Abu Ghraib to a legacy of racial abuse?

I have spent some time on suggesting that there is a link between how we translate images and pedagogy because I am concerned about what the events of

Abu Ghraib prison might suggest about education as both the subject and object of a democratic society and how we might engage it differently. What kind of education connects pedagogy and its diverse sites to the formation of a critical citizenry capable of challenging the ongoing quasi-militarization of everyday life, growing assault on secular democracy, the collapse of politics into a permanent war against terrorism, and a growing culture of fear that increasingly is used by political extremists to sanction the unaccountable exercise of presidential power? What kinds of educational practices can provide the conditions for a culture of questioning and engaged civic action? What might it mean to rethink the educational foundation of politics so as to reclaim not only the crucial traditions of dialogue and dissent but also critical modes of agency and those public spaces that enable collectively engaged struggle? How might education be understood both as a task of translation but also as a foundation for enabling civic engagement? What new forms of education might be called forth to resist the conditions and complicities that have allowed most people to submit 'so willingly to a new political order organized around fear?' (Greider 2004, p. 14). What does it mean to imagine a future beyond 'permanent war', a culture of fear and the triumphalism that promotes the sordid demands of empire? How might education be used to question the common sense of the war on terrorism or to rouse citizens to challenge the social, political, and cultural conditions that lead to the horrible events of Abu Ghraib? Just as crucially, we must ponder the limits of education. Is there a point where extreme conditions short-circuit our moral instincts and ability to think and act rationally? If this is the case, what responsibility do we have to challenge the reckless violence-as-first-resort-ethos of the Bush administration?

Such questions extend beyond the events of Abu Ghraib, but at the same time, Abu Ghraib provides an opportunity to connect the sadistic treatment of Iraqi prisoners to the task of redefining pedagogy as an ethical practice, the sites in which it takes place, and the consequences it has for rethinking the meaning of politics in the twenty-first century. In order to confront the pedagogical and political challenges arising from the reality of Abu Ghraib, I want to revisit a classic essay by Theodor Adorno in which he tries to grapple with the relationship between education and morality in light of the horrors of Auschwitz. While I am certainly not equating the genocidal acts that took place at Auschwitz with the abuses at Abu Ghraib, a completely untenable analogy, I do believe that Adorno's essay offers some important theoretical insights about how to think about the larger meaning and purpose of education as a form of public pedagogy in light of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. Adorno's essay raises fundamental questions about how acts of inhumanity are inextricably connected to the pedagogical practices that shape the conditions that bring them into being. Adorno insists that crimes against humanity cannot be simply reduced to the behaviour of a few individuals but often speak in profound ways to the role of the state in propagating such abuses, the

mechanisms employed in the realm of culture that silence the public in the face of horrible acts, and the pedagogical challenge that would name such acts as a moral crime against humankind and translate that moral authority into effective pedagogical practices throughout society so that such events never happen again. Of course, the significance of Adorno's comments extend far beyond matters of responsibility for what happened at Abu Ghraib prison. Adorno's plea for education as a moral and political force against human injustice is just as relevant today as it was following the revelations about Auschwitz after World War II. As Roger W. Smith points out, while genocidal acts have claimed the lives of over 60 million people in the twentieth century, 16 million of them have taken place since 1945 (Smith 2004). The political and economic forces fuelling such crimes against humanity – whether they are unlawful wars, systemic torture, practiced indifference to chronic starvation and disease or genocidal acts – are always mediated by educational forces just as the resistance to such acts cannot take place without a degree of knowledge and self-reflection about how to name these acts and to transform moral outrage into concrete attempts to prevent such human violations from taking place in the first place.

Education after Abu Ghraib

In 1967, Theodor Adorno published an essay titled 'Education After Auschwitz'. In it, he asserted that the demands and questions raised by Auschwitz had so barely penetrated the consciousness of people's minds that the conditions that made it possible continued, as he put it, 'largely unchanged'.¹⁰ Mindful that the societal pressures that produced the Holocaust had far from receded in post-war Germany and that under such circumstances this act of barbarism could easily be repeated in the future, Adorno argued that 'the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds' must be made visible (Adorno 1998a, p. 192). For Adorno, the need to come to grips with the challenges arising from the reality of Auschwitz was both a political question and a crucial educational consideration. Adorno recognized that education had to be an important part of any politics that took seriously the premise that Auschwitz should never happen again. As he put it:

All political instruction finally should be centered upon the idea that Auschwitz should never happen again. This would be possible only when it devotes itself openly, without fear of offending any authorities, to this most important of problems. To do this education must transform itself into sociology, that is, it must teach about the societal play of forces that operates beneath the surface of political forms.

(Adorno 1998a, p. 203)

Implicit in Adorno's argument is the recognition that education as a critical practice could provide the means for disconnecting common sense learning from the narrowly ideological impact of mass media, the regressive tendencies associated with hyper-masculinity, the rituals of everyday violence, the inability to identify with others, as well as from the pervasive ideologies of state repression and its illusions of empire. Adorno's response to retrograde ideologies and practices was to emphasize the role of autonomous individuals and the force of self-determination that he saw as the outcome of a moral and political project that rescued education from the narrow language of skills, unproblematic authority and the seduction of common sense. Self-reflection, the ability to call things into question, and the willingness to resist the material and symbolic forces of domination were central to an education that refused to repeat the horrors of the past and engaged the possibilities of the future. Adorno urged educators to teach students how to be critical, to learn how to resist those ideologies, needs, social relations, and discourses that lead back to a politics where authority is simply obeyed and the totally administered society reproduces itself through a mixture of state force and often orchestrated consensus. Freedom in this instance meant being able to think critically and act courageously, even when confronted with the limits of one's knowledge. Without such thinking critical debate and dialogue degenerates into slogans, and politics, disassociated from the search for justice becomes a power grab. Within the realm of education, Adorno glimpsed the possibility of knowledge for self and social formation as well as the importance of pedagogical practices capable of 'influencing the next generation of Germans so that they would not repeat what their parents or grandparents had done' (Hohendahl 1995, p. 51).

Adorno realized that education played a crucial role in creating the psychological, intellectual, and social conditions that made the Holocaust possible, yet he refused to dismiss education as an institution and set of social practices exclusively associated with domination. He argued that those theorists who viewed education simply as a tool for social reproduction had succumbed to the premier supposition of any oppressive hegemonic ideology: nothing can change. To dismiss the political and critical force of pedagogy, according to Adorno, was to fall prey to both a disastrous determinism and a complicitous cynicism. He argues:

For this disastrous state of conscious and unconscious thought includes the erroneous idea that one's own particular way of being – that one is just so and not otherwise – is nature, an unalterable given, and not a historical evolution. I mentioned the concept of reified consciousness. Above all this is a consciousness blinded to all historical past, all insight into one's own conditionedness, and posits as absolute what exists

contingently. If this coercive mechanism were once ruptured, then, I think, something would indeed be gained.

(Adorno 1998a, p. 200)

Realizing that education before and after Auschwitz in Germany was separated by an unbridgeable chasm, Adorno wanted to invoke the promise of education through the moral and political imperative of never allowing the genocide witnessed at Auschwitz to happen again. For such a goal to become meaningful and realizable, Adorno contended that education had to be addressed as both a promise and project in order to reveal not only the conditions that laid the psychological and ideological groundwork for Auschwitz but also defeat the 'potential for its recurrence as far as people's conscious and unconscious is concerned' (Adorno 1998a, p. 191).

Investigating the powerful role that education played to promote consensus among the public along with the conscious and unconscious elements of fascism, he understood education as more than social engineering and argued that it also had to be imagined as a democratic public sphere. In this context, education would take on a liberating and empowering function, refusing to substitute critical learning for mind-deadening training (Adorno 1998b). At its best, such an education would create the pedagogical conditions in which individuals would function as autonomous subjects capable of refusing to participate in unspeakable injustices while actively working to eliminate the conditions that make such injustices possible. Human autonomy through self-reflection and social critique became for Adorno the basis for developing forms of critical agency as a means of resisting and overcoming both fascist ideology and identification with what he calls the fascist collective. According to Adorno, fascism as a form of barbarism defies all educational attempts at self-formation, engaged critique, self-determination, and transformative engagement. He writes: 'The only true force against the principle of Auschwitz would be human autonomy . . . that is, the force of reflection and of self-determination, the will to refuse participation' (Hohendahl 1995, p. 58). While there is a deep-seated tension in Adorno's belief in the increasing power of the totally administered society and his call for modes of education that produce critical, engaging, and free minds, he still believed that without critical education it was impossible to think about politics and agency, especially in light of the new technologies and material processes of social integration. Similarly, Adorno did not believe that education as an act of self-reflection alone could defeat the institutional forces and relations of power that existed outside of both institutionalised education and other powerful sites of pedagogy in the larger culture, though he rightly acknowledged that changing such a powerful complex of economic and social forces began with the educational task of recognizing that such changes were necessary and could actually be carried out through individual and collective forms of resistance.

What Adorno brilliantly understood—though in a somewhat limited way given his tendency, in the end, toward pessimism—was the necessity to link politics to matters of individual and social agency.¹¹ Engaging this relationship, in part, meant theorizing what it meant to make the political more pedagogical; that is, how the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities — both individual and collective — are shaped, desired mobilized and experienced take on form and meaning within those social formations that provide the educational foundation for constituting the realm of the social.

While it would be presumptuous to suggest that Adorno's writings on education, autonomy, and Auschwitz can be directly applied to theorizing the events at Abu Ghraib prison, his work offers some important theoretical insights for addressing how education might help to rethink the project of politics that made Abu Ghraib possible as well as how violence and torture become normalized as part of the war on terrorism and those others considered marginal to American culture and life.

Recognizing how crucial education was in shaping everyday life and the conditions that made critique both possible and necessary, Adorno insisted that the desire for freedom and liberation was a function of pedagogy and could not be assumed a priori. At the same time, Adorno was acutely aware that education took place both in schools and in larger public spheres, especially in the realm of media. Democratic debate and the conditions for autonomy grounded in a critical notion of individual and social agency could only take place if the schools addressed their critical role in a democracy. Hence, Adorno argued that the critical education of teachers played a crucial role in preventing dominant power from eliminating the possibility of reflective thought and engaged social action. Such an insight appears particularly important at a time when public education is being utterly privatized, commercialized, and test-driven, or, if they serve underprivileged students of color, turned into disciplinary apparatuses that resemble prisons.¹² Public schools are under attack precisely because they have the potential to become democratic public spheres instilling in students the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for them to be critical citizens capable of making power accountable and knowledge an intense object of dialogue and engagement. Of course, the attack on public education is increasingly taking place along with an attack on higher education, particularly the humanities (Giroux and Searls 2004). Everything from affirmative action to academic freedom is up for grabs as neo-conservatives, religious fundamentalists, and hard-core right-wing ideologues such as David Horowitz actively push for state and federal legislation in order to impose political quotas on higher education by making conservative ideology a basis for faculty hires (Piper 2003). They are also actively attempting to introduce 'ideological diversity' legislation that would cut federal funding for colleges and universities that harbor faculty and

students that criticize Israel,¹³ and they incessantly attack curricula and faculty for being too liberal. If Adorno is right about educating teachers to neither forget nor allow horrors such as Auschwitz from happening again, the struggle over public and higher education as a democratic public sphere must be defended against base right wing attacks.

At the same time, how we educate teachers for all levels of schooling must be viewed as more than a technical or credentialized task, it must be seen as a pedagogical practice of both learning and unlearning. Drawing upon Freudian psychology, Adorno believed that educators had to be educated to think critically and avoid becoming the mediators and perpetrators of social violence. This meant addressing their psychological deformations by making clear the ideological, social and material mechanisms that encourage people to participate or fail to intervene in such deeds. Pedagogy, in this instance, was not simply concerned with learning particular modes of knowledge, skills and self-reflection, but also with addressing those dominant sedimented needs and desires that allowed teachers to blindly identify with repressive collectives and unreflectingly mimic their values while venting acts of hate and aggression (Adorno 1998a, p. 192). If *unlearning* as a pedagogical practice meant resisting those social deformations that shaped everyday needs and desires, critical learning meant making visible those social practices and mechanisms that represented the opposite of self-formation and autonomous thinking so as to resist such forces and prevent them from exercising such power and influence.

Adorno realized far more so than Freud that the range and scope, not to mention the impact of education, had far exceeded the boundaries of public and higher education. Adorno increasingly believed that the media as a force for learning constituted a mode of public pedagogy that had to be criticized for discouraging critical reflection and reclaimed as a crucial force in providing the 'intellectual, cultural and social climate in which a recurrence [such as Auschwitz] would no longer be possible, a climate, therefore in which the motives that led to the horror would become relatively conscious' (1998a, p. 194). Adorno rightly understood and critically engaged the media as a mode of public pedagogy, arguing that they contributed greatly to particular forms of barbarization that necessitated that educators and others 'consider the impact of modern mass media on a state of consciousness' (1998a, p. 196). If we are to take Adorno seriously, the role of the media in inspiring fear of Muslims a hatred of Arabs, suppressing dissent regarding the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, and its determining influence in legitimating a number of myths and lies by the Bush administration, must be addressed as part of the larger set of concerns leading to the horror of Abu Ghraib. The media has consistently refused, for example, to comment critically on the ways in which the USA, in its flaunting of the Geneva Accords regarding torture, was breaking international law, favouring instead the discourse of national security provided by the Bush administration. The media has also put into place forms of

ingoism, patriotic correctness, narrow-minded chauvinism, and a celebration of militarization that rendered dissent as treason, and the tortures at Abu Ghraib outside of the discourses of ethics, compassion, human rights and social justice.

Adorno also insisted that the global evolution of the media and new technologies that shrank distances as it eroded face-to-face-contact (and hence the ability to disregard the consequences of one's actions) had created a climate in which rituals of violence had become so entrenched in the culture that 'aggression, brutality and sadism' had become a normalized and unquestioned part of everyday life. The result was a twisted and pathological relationship with the body that not only tends towards violence, but also promotes what Adorno called the ideology of hardness. Hardness, in this instance, referred to a notion of masculinity based on an idea of toughness in which:

virility consists in the maximum degree of endurance [that] aligns itself all too easily with sadism. . . . [and inflicts] physical pain—often unbearable pain—upon a person as the price that must be paid in order to consider oneself a member, one of the collective . . . Being hard, the vaunted quality education should inculcate, means absolute indifference toward pain as such. In this the distinction between one's pain and that of another is not so stringently maintained. Whoever is hard with himself earns the right to be hard with others as well and avenges himself for whose manifestations he was not allowed to show and had to repress.

(Adorno 1998a, pp. 197–8)

The rituals of popular culture – especially reality television programs like *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, *Fear Factor* and the new vogue of extreme sports – either condense pain, humiliation and abuse into digestible spectacles of violence or serve up an endless celebration of retrograde competitiveness, the compulsion to 'go it alone', the ideology of hardness, and power over others as the central feature of masculinity.¹⁴ Masculinity in this context treats lies, manipulation and violence as a sport, a crucial component that lets men connect with each other at some primal level in which the pleasure of the body, pain and competitive advantage are maximized while coming dangerously close to giving violence a glamorous and fascist edge.

The celebration of both violence and hardness (witness the fanfare over Donald Trump's tag-line 'you're fired!') can also be seen in those ongoing representations and images that accompany the simultaneous erosion of security (around health care, work, education) and the militarization of everyday life. The USA has more police, prisons, spies, weapons and soldiers than at any time in its history – coupled with a growing 'army' of the unemployed and incarcerated. Yet, its military is enormously popular as its underlying values, social relations and patriotic, hyper-masculine aesthetic

spread out into other aspects of American culture. The ideology of hardness, toughness and hyper-masculinity are constantly being disseminated through a militarized culture that functions as a mode of public pedagogy, instilling the values and the aesthetic of militarization through a wide variety of pedagogical sites and cultural venues.

Flags increasingly appear on storefront windows, lapels, cars, houses, SUVs and everywhere else as a show of support for the expanding interests of empire abroad. Public schools not only have more military recruiters, they also have more military personnel teaching in the classrooms. JROTC programmes are increasingly becoming a conventional part of the school day. Humvee ads offer up the fantasy of military glamour and modes of masculinity, marketed to suggest that ownership of these military vehicles guarantees virility for its owners and promotes a mixture of fear and admiration from everyone else. The military industrial complex now joins hands with the entertainment industry in producing everything from children's toys to video games that both construct a particular form of masculinity and serve as an enticement for recruitment. In fact, over 10 million people have downloaded *American Army*, a free video game the Army uses as a recruitment tool (Thompson 2004, pp. 32–7). From video games to Hollywood films to children's toys, popular culture is increasingly bombarded with militarized values, symbols and images. Such representations of masculinity and violence mimic fascism's militarization of the public sphere where physical aggression is a crucial element of male bonding and violence is the ultimate language, referent, and currency through which to understand how, as Susan Sontag has suggested in another context, politics 'dissolves . . . into pathology' (cited in Becker 1997, p. 28).

Such militarized pedagogies play a powerful role in producing identities and modes of agency completely at odds with those elements of autonomy, critical reflection, and social justice that Adorno privileged in his essay. Adorno's ideology of hardness when coupled with neoliberal values that aggressively promote a Hobbesian world based on fear, the narrow pursuit of individual interests, and an embrace of commodified relations profoundly influence individuals who seem increasingly indifferent towards the pain of others, pit their own ambitions against those of everyone else, and assimilate themselves to things, numb to those moral principles that hail us as moral witnesses and call for us to do something about human suffering. Adorno goes so far as to suggest that the inability to identify with others was one of the root causes of Auschwitz:

The inability to identify with others was unquestionably the most important psychological condition for the fact that something like Auschwitz could have occurred in the midst of more or less civilised and innocent people. What is called fellow travelling was primarily business interest: one pursues one's own advantage before all else, and

simply not to endanger oneself, does not talk too much. That is a general law of the status quo. The silence under the terror was only its consequence. The coldness of the societal monad, the isolated competitor, was the precondition, as indifference to the fate of others, for the fact that only very few people reacted. The torturers know this, and they put it to test ever anew.

(Adorno 1998a, p. 201)

Adorno's prescient analysis of the role of education after Auschwitz is particularly important in examining those values, ideologies, and pedagogical forces at work in American culture that suggest that Abu Ghraib is not an aberration as much as an outgrowth of those dehumanizing and demonizing ideologies, values and social relations characteristic of an expanding market fundamentalism, militarism, and nationalism. While these are not the only forces that contributed to the abuses and human rights violations that took place at Abu Ghraib, they do point to how particular manifestations of hyper-masculinity, violence, militarization and a jingoistic patriotism are elaborated through forms of public pedagogy that produce identities, social relations and values conducive to both the ambitions of empire and the cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of those others who are its victims. What ultimately drives the ideological vision behind these practices and gives them a stimulus for abuse and sanctioned brutality is the presupposition that a particular society and its citizens are above the law, indebted only to either God, as John Ashcroft, has insisted, or rightfully scornful of those individuals and cultures who do not deserve to be accorded human rights because they are labelled as part of an evil empire or dismissed as terrorists.¹⁵ The educational force of these ideological practices allow state power to be held unaccountable while legitimizing an 'indifference to the concerns and the suffering of people in places remote from our Western metropolitan sites of self-interest' (Bilgrami 2004, p. x).

Adorno believed that the authoritarian tendencies in capitalism were creating individuals who make a cult out of efficiency, suffer from emotional callousness, have a tendency to treat other human beings as things, and reproduce the ultimate expressions of reification under capitalism. The grip that these pathogenic traits had on the German populace then and the American public today can be explained, in part, through the inability of people to recognize that such traits are conditioned rather than determined. In keeping with Adorno's (1998a) reasoning, such traits even when seen as an intolerable given are often posited as an absolute, 'something that blinds itself toward any process of having come into being, toward any insight into our own conditionality'. Adorno's insights regarding the educational force of late capitalism to construct individuals who were cold through and through and incapable of empathizing with the plight of others are theoretically useful in illuminating some of the conditions that contributed to the abuses, murders

and acts of torture that took place at Abu Ghraib. Adorno was particularly prescient in forecasting the connection among the subjective mechanisms that produced political indifference and racialized intolerance, the all-encompassing market fundamentalism of neoliberal ideology, and a virulent nationalism that fed on the pieties of theocratic pretentiousness and their relationship to an escalating authoritarianism. What is remarkable about his analysis is that it appears to apply equally well to the United States.

The signals are everywhere. Under the reign of market fundamentalism, capital and wealth have been largely distributed upwards while civic virtue has been undermined by a slavish celebration of the free market as the model for organizing all facets of everyday life. Financial investments, market identities, and commercial values take precedence over human needs, public responsibilities and democratic relations. With its debased belief that profit-making is the essence of democracy, and citizenship defined as an energized plunge into consumerism, market fundamentalism eliminates government regulation of big business, celebrates a ruthless competitive individualism, and places the commanding political, cultural and economic institutions of society in the hands of powerful corporate interests, the privileged, and unrepentant religious bigots. Under such circumstances, individuals are viewed as privatized consumers rather than public citizens. As the Bush administration rolls American society back to the Victorian capitalism of the Robber Barons, social welfare is viewed as a drain on corporate profits that should be eliminated, while at the same time the development of the economy is left to the wisdom of the market. Market fundamentalism destroys politics by commercializing public spheres and rendering politics corrupt and cynical.¹⁶

The impoverishment of public life is increasingly matched by the impoverishment of thought itself, particularly as the media substitutes patriotic cheerleading for real journalism.¹⁷ The cloak of patriotism is now cast over retrograde social policies as well as a coercive unilateralism in which military force has replaced democratic idealism, and war has become the organizing principle of society – a source of pride – rather than a source of alarm. In the face of massive corruption, the erosion of civil liberties, and a spreading culture of fear, the defining feature of politics is its insignificance, reduced to an ideology and practice that celebrates passivity and cynicism while promoting conformity and collective impotence (Bauman 1999). For many, the collapse of democratic life and politics is paid for in the hard currency of isolation, poverty, inadequate health care, impoverished schools and the loss of decent employment (see Phillips 2003). Within this regime of symbolic and material capital, the other – figured as a social drain on the individual and corporate accumulation of wealth – is either feared, exploited, reified or considered disposable but rarely is the relationship between the self and the other mediated by compassion and empathy.¹⁸

However, market fundamentalism does more than destroy the subjective political and ethical conditions for autonomous political agency or concern for fellow citizens; it also shreds the social order as it threatens destruction abroad. As Cornel West points out:

Free market fundamentalism—the basic dogma across the globe—is producing obscene levels of wealth and inequality around the world. Market as idol. Corporation as fetish. Acting as if workers are just appendages or some kind of market calculation. Outsourcing here, outsourcing there. Ascribing magical powers to the market and thinking it can solve all problems. When free market fundamentalism is tied to escalating authoritarianism, it results in increasing surveillance of citizens and monitoring of classes at universities and colleges. When it is tied to aggressive militarism, we get not just invasion of those countries perceived to be threats, but a military presence in 132 countries, a ship in every ocean.

(West 2004, pp. 19–20)

We also get the privatized armies of mercenaries that take over traditional military functions extending from cooking meals to interrogating prisoners. In Iraq, it has been estimated that ‘for every ten troops on the ground . . . there is one contract employee. That translates to 10,000 to 15,000 contract workers, making them the second-largest contingent (between American and Britain) of the “coalition of the willing”’ (Hartung 2004, p. 5). Firms such as Erinys and CACI International provide rental Rambos some of whom have notorious backgrounds as mercenaries-for-hire. One widely reported incident involved two civilian contractors blown up by a suicide bomber in Baghdad in the winter of 2003. Both were South Africans who belonged to a terrorist organization infamous for killing blacks, terrorizing anti-apartheid activists and paying a bounty on the bodies of black activists (Navaer 2004). In Iraq, Steve Stefanowicz, a civilian interrogator employed by CACI International was cited in the Taguba report as having “‘allowed and/or instructed” MPs to abuse and humiliate Iraqi prisoners and as giving orders that he knew “equated to physical abuse”’ (Shorrok 2004, p. 22). While the Justice Department has opened up a criminal investigation on an unnamed civilian contractor in Iraq, CACI has refused to take action against Stefanowicz, making clear the charge that private contractors are not monitored as closely as military personnel and are not subject to the same Congressional and public oversights and scrutiny. The lack of democratic accountability results in more than bungled services and price gouging by Halliburton, Bechtel, Northrop Grumman and other corporations that have become familiar news, it also results in human rights abuses organized under the logic of rationalizing and market efficiency. Journalist Tim Shorrock claims that ‘The military’s abuse of Iraqi prisoners is

bad enough, but the privatization of such practices is simply intolerable' (Shorrok 2004, p. 22).

The pedagogical implications of Adorno's analysis of the relationship between authoritarianism and capitalism suggests that any viable educational project would have to recognize how market fundamentalism has not only damaged democratic institutions but also the ability of people to identify with democratic social formations, invest in crucial public goods, let alone reinvigorate the very concept of compassion as an antidote to the commodity-driven view of human relationships. Adorno understood that critical knowledge alone could not adequately address the deformations of mind and character put into place by the subjective mechanisms of capitalism. Instead, he argued that critical knowledge had to be reproduced and democratic social experiences put into place through shared values, beliefs, and practices that created inclusive and compassionate communities that make democratic politics possible and safeguard the autonomous subject through the creation of emancipatory needs. Within the boundaries of critical education, students have to learn the skills and knowledge to narrate their own stories, resist the fragmentation and seductions of market ideologies, and create shared pedagogical sites that extend the range of democratic politics. Ideas gain relevance in terms of whether and how they enable students to participate in both the worldly sphere of self-criticism and the publicness of everyday life. Theory and knowledge, in other words, become a force for autonomy and self-determination within the space of public engagement, and their significance is based less on a self-proclaimed activism than on their ability to make critical and thoughtful connections 'beyond theory, within the space of politics itself' (Coudry 2004, p. 15). Adorno's educational project for autonomy recognizes the necessity of a worldly space in which freedom is allowed to make its appearance, a space that is both the condition and the object of struggle for any viable form of critical pedagogy. Such a project also understands the necessity of compassion to remind people of the full humanity and suffering of others, as well as 'the importance of compassion in shaping the civic imagination' (Nussbaum 2003, p. 11). If Adorno is correct and I think he is, his call to refashion education in order to prevent inhuman acts has to take as one of its founding tasks today the necessity to understand how free market ideology, privatization, outsourcing, and the relentless drive for commodified public space radically diminishes those political and pedagogical sites crucial for sustaining democratic identities, values, and practices.

Adorno's critique of nationalism appears as useful today as it did when it appeared in the late 1960s. He believed that those forces pushing an aggressive nationalism harboured a distinct rage against divergent groups who stood at odds with such imperial ambitions. Intolerance and militarism, according to Adorno, fuelled a nationalism that became 'pernicious because in the age of international communication and supranational blocks it cannot completely

believe in itself anymore and has to exaggerate boundlessly in order to convince itself and others that it is still substantial . . . [Moreover] movements of national renewal in an age when nationalism is outdated, seem to be especially susceptible to sadistic practices' (1998a, p. 203). Surely, such a diagnosis would fit the imperial ambitions of Richard Cheney, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and other neo-conservatives whose dreams of empire are entirely at odds with either a desire to preserve human dignity or respect for international law. Convinced that the US should not only maintain political and military dominance in the post-Cold War world, but prevent any nation or alliance from challenging its superiority, nationalists across the ideological spectrum advocate a discourse of exceptionalism that calls for a dangerous unity at home and reckless imperial ambitions abroad. Belief in empire has come to mean that the US would now shape rather than react to world events and act decisively in using 'its overwhelming military and economic might to create conditions conducive to American values and interests' (Devan 2004). American unilateralism buttressed by the dangerous doctrine of pre-emption has replaced multilateral diplomacy, religious fundamentalism has found its counterpart in the ideological messianism of neo-conservative designs on the rest of the globe, and a reckless moralism that divides the world into good and evil has replaced the possibility of dialogue and debate. Within such a climate, blind authority demands as it rewards authoritarian behaviour so as to make power and domination appear beyond the pale of criticism or change, providing the political and educational conditions for eliminating self-reflection and compassion even in the face of the most sadistic practices and imperial ambitions.

American support for the invasions of Iraq and the Apartheid wall in Israel as well as targeted assassinations and torture are now defended in the name of righteous causes even by liberals such as Niall Ferguson, Paul Berman and Michael Ignatieff, who, like their neo-conservative counterparts, swoon in the illusion that American power can be used as a force for progress, in spite of the official terror and reckless suffering it imposes on much of the world (see, for instance, Ferguson 2004 and Ignatieff 2004). National justification for the most messianic militaristic policies, as indicated by the war in Iraq, are wrapped up in the discourse of democracy and divine mission, an updated version of American exceptionalism, in spite of the toll the war takes on Iraqi lives – mostly children – and young, American soldiers. Then there is the wasted \$141 billion being spent on the war that could be used to support life-giving social programmes at home. Even moderately liberal democrats now appeal to an uncritical chauvinism with a fervour that is equally matched by its ability to cheapen the most basic tenets of democracy and deaden in some of its citizens the obligation to be responsible to the suffering and hardships of those others who exist outside of its national borders. Barack Obama, a rising star in the Democratic Party and a keynote speaker at the 2004 Democratic convention,

insisted we are 'One America', a moniker that does more to hide contradictions and injustices than to invoke their continuing presence and the necessity to overcome them. Equally important, 'One America' when appealed to outside of a critical examination of the damaging chauvinism that informs such a call ends up reproducing a more liberal, though equally privileged, notion of America's role in the world, a role that seems to have little understanding of what the limits might be or the legacy of human suffering it has produced historically and continues to produce.

The aggressive nationalism that Adorno viewed as fundamental to the conditions that produced Auschwitz have not been laid to rest. Echoes of such jingoistic rhetoric can be heard from neo-conservatives who want to wage a holy war against the non-Western hordes that threaten all things Christian, European and civilized. This virulent nationalism can be heard in the semantic contortions justifying hard and soft versions of empire, often produced by conservative think-tanks and Ivy League intellectuals acting as modern day missionaries for their corporate sponsors. It can be heard in the fundamentalist rhetoric of religious bigots such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson who are fanatically pro-Israel and are waging an incessant propaganda war for Palestinian land in the name of Christian ideals. The discourse of empire can be not only heard but also seen in the tangible presence of 725 US military bases in over 138 foreign countries that circle the globe in order to keep the world safe *from* democracy (figures cited in Cooper 2004).

The discourse of empire must be deconstructed and replaced in our schools and other sites of pedagogy with new global models of democracy, models grounded in an ethics and morality in which the relationship between the self and others extends beyond the chauvinism of national boundaries and embraces a new and critical understanding of the interdependencies of the world and its implications for citizenship in global democracy. Memory must serve as a bulwark against the discourse of empire, which is often built on the erasure of historical struggles and conflicts. Memory in this instance is more than counter-knowledge, it is a form of resistance, a resource through which to wage pedagogical and political struggles to recover those narratives, traditions and values that remind students and others of the graphic nature of suffering that unfolded in the aftermath of America's claims for a permanent war on terrorism. Appeals to American exceptionalism and the obligations of empire building sound hollow in the face of the monstrosities they produce; yet, such appeals also legitimize a process of othering, demonizing those who are not included by appeals to human dignity, human rights and international law.

At the heart of Adorno's concern with education was the call to create pedagogical practices in which we supplement knowledge with self-criticism. Self and social criticism was for Adorno a crucial element of autonomy, but criticism was not enough. Agency as a political force mattered in that it was not only capable of saying no to abusive power, but also because it could

imagine itself as a mechanism for changing the world. As a condition of politics and collective struggle, agency requires being able to engage democratic values, principles, and practices as a force for resistance and hope in order to challenge unquestioned modes of authority while also enabling individuals to connect such principles and values to ‘the world in which they lived as citizens’ (Said 2004, p. 6). Adorno’s plea for education rests on the assumption that human beings make both knowledge and history, rather than it simply washing over them. For Adorno, critical reflection was the essence of all genuine education as well as politics. Ongoing reflection provided the basis for individuals to become autonomous by revealing the human origins of institutions and as such the recognition that society could be open to critique and change. Politics is thus theorized as a practical effort to link freedom to agency in the service of extending the promise of democratic institutions, values, and social relations. The capacity for self-knowledge, self-critique and autonomy becomes more powerful when it is nourished within pedagogical spaces and sites that refuse to be parochial, that embrace difference over bigotry, global democracy over chauvinism, peace over militarism, and secularism over religious fundamentalism. The urgency of such a call can be heard in William Greider’s plea for critical education to bring the presidency of George W. Bush to an end:

The only way out of this fog of pretension is painful self-examination by Americans—cutting our fears down to more plausible terms and facing the complicated realities of our role in the world. The spirited opposition that arose to Bush’s war in Iraq is a good starting place, because citizens raised real questions that were brushed aside. I don’t think that most Americans are interested in imperial rule, but they were grossly misled by patriotic rhetoric. Now is the time for sober, serious teach-ins that lay out the real history of US power in the world, and that also explain the positive and progressive future that is possible. Once citizens have constructed a clear-eyed, dissenting version of our situation, perhaps politicians can also be liberated from exaggerated fear. The self-imposed destruction that has flowed from Bush’s logic cannot be stopped until a new cast of leaders steps forward to guide the country.

(Greider 2004, p. 18)

Teach-ins, reading groups, public debates and film screenings should take place in a variety of sites and spaces for dialogue and learning, and they should focus not simply on the imperial ambitions of the US but also on the dehumanizing practices informed by a political culture in which human life that does not align itself with official power and corporate ideology becomes disposable. The connection between Auschwitz and Abu Ghraib can also be traced in the educational force of popular culture in which pedagogy is disassociated from

justice, citizenship is restricted to the obligations of consumerism, and compassion is dissolved in the mechanics of social Darwinism. As mentioned previously, Abu Ghraib cannot be equated with the genocidal intent of Auschwitz, but the conditions that allowed Americans to commit such abuses on Iraqi detainees harbour the possibilities for atrocious acts of inhumanity, only this time they are dressed up in the rhetoric of advancing the democratic principles of freedom and justice. Adorno believed that education as a democratic force could play a central role in altering the rising tide of authoritarianism on both a national and global level. His call to rethink the value and importance of education as a central element of politics offers an opportunity, especially for educators and other cultural workers, to learn not only from the horrors of Abu Ghraib but also to rethink the value of critical education and public pedagogy as an all important part of politics, the future of public institutions and global democracy itself. In addition, Adorno brilliantly understood that it was not enough to turn the tools of social critique simply upon the government or other apparatuses of domination. Critique also had to come to grips with the affective investments that tied individuals, including critics, to ideologies and practices of domination and how an analysis of the deep structures of domination might help to provide a more powerful critique and healthy suspicion of various appeals to community, the public and the social. Clearly, while it is imperative to reclaim the discourse of community, the commons, and public good as part of a broader discourse of democracy, such terms need to be embraced critically in light of the ways in which they have often served the instruments of dominant power.

Adorno was insistent that education was crucial as a point of departure for imagining both autonomy, recognizing the interdependency of human life, and stopping cycles of violence. Education can help us imagine a world in which violence can be minimized as well as to reject the disparagement, exclusion and abuse of those deemed others in a social order in which one's worth is often measured through the privileged categories of gender, class, race, citizenship and language. Education can also seek to identify and destroy the conditions that provide an outlet for murderous rage, hatred, fear and violence. This requires a pedagogical commitment, in Judith Butler's eloquent phrase,

to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense. We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense. This might prompt us, affectively to reinvigorate the intellectual projects of critique of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of cultural translation and dissent, and to create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded

or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform.

(Butler 2004, p. 151)

But under certain circumstances, the limits of education have to be understood. What is difficult to grasp is that simply because one learns to be non-violent as part of a respect for humanity, a visceral repulsion for the suffering of others, or an ethical conception of mutual obligation, outbursts of violence cannot be entirely contained within such a rationality or mode of understanding. Under certain enormously stressful conditions, violence merges with circumstances of extreme social and bodily vulnerability and may appear to be one of the few options available for dealing with those already dismissed as inhuman or disposable.¹⁹ Even more horrible is the possibility that inhuman acts of abuse under incredibly nerve-wracking conditions represent one of the few outlets for pleasure. Is it conceivable that under certain conditions of violence and stress only the unthinkable is imaginable, that the only avenue for the release of pleasure can be attained by extending the logic of violence to those deemed as the other, those undeserving of narration, agency and power? Under certain modes of domination with all of its stress inducing consequences, those who exercise a wanton and dehumanizing power often feel that everything is permissible because all of the rules appear to have broken down. The stress soldiers sometime experience under such circumstances is often satisfied through the raw feel and exercise of power. Abu Ghraib remains, tragically, a terrible site of violence, a site in which an ethics of non-violence seems almost incomprehensible given the tension, anxiety and daily violence that framed both what happened in the prison and in daily life in Iraq. Under these conditions, neither education nor an ethics of peace may be enough to prevent 'fear and anxiety from turning into murderous action' (Butler 2004, p. xviii). Under extreme conditions in which abuse, loss, hardship and dehumanization shape the consciousness and daily routines of one's existence, whether it be for American soldiers working in Abu Ghraib or Israeli soldiers occupying Hebron, violence can undercut the appeal to ethics, critical reflection and all educated sensibilities.²⁰ This is not to suggest education does not matter much in light of such conditions as much as to suggest, following Adorno's insight, that education that particularly matters must address what it means to prevent the conditions in which violence takes root and develops a life of its own.

As a political and moral practice, education must be engaged not only as one of the primary conditions for constructing political and moral agents, but also as a public pedagogy that is produced in a range of sites and public spheres that constitutes cultural practice as a defining feature of any viable notion of politics. Education after Abu Ghraib must imagine a future in which learning is inextricably connected to social change, the obligations of civic justice, and a

notion of democracy in which peace, equality, compassion and freedom are not limited to the nation-state but extended to the international community. Education after Abu Ghraib must take seriously what it might mean to strive for the autonomy and dignity of a global citizenry and peace as its fundamental precondition.

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Notes

- 1 For an interesting comment on how the Bush media team attempted to enhance presidential persona through the iconography of conservative, hyped-up, macho-phallic masculinity, see Goldstein (2003).
- 2 While I cannot name all of the relevant sources theorizing the ethical nature of torture or its use by the American military, some important recent contributions include: Hersh (2004), Danner (2004a, 2004b) and Lewis (2004).
- 3 See Pound and Roane (2004). Also see *The Nation* (2004, p. 3). Degrading prisoners at Abu Ghraib had become so pervasive that forced nudity was seen as a commonplace phenomenon by both military personnel and detainees (see Zernike & Rohde 2004, p. A11).
- 4 The memo can be found online at: http://www.cooperativeresearch.org/entity.jsp?entity=draft_memo_to_the_president_from_alberto_gonzales,_january_25,_2004
- 5 See chapter 1 of the manual, 'Interrogation and the Interrogator'. Available online: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/policy/army/fm/fm34-52/chapter1.htm>
- 6 The level of secrecy employed by the Bush administration is both dangerous and absurd. For example, some individuals were shocked to learn that if they wanted to attend a rally hosted by Vice-President Dick Cheney at Rio Rancho Mid-High School in New Mexico the weekend of 30 July 2004, they could not get tickets to the rally unless they signed an endorsement pledging allegiance to President George W. Bush (see Jones 2004, p. 1).
- 7 I take up many of these issues in greater detail in Giroux (2004).
- 8 For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Lucaites and McDaniel (2004), pp. 1–28).
- 9 This issue is taken up brilliantly in Solomon-Godeau (1994).
- 10 This was first presented as a radio lecture on 18 April 1966, under the title 'Padagogik nach Auschwitz'. The first published version appeared in 1967. The English translation appears in Adorno (1998a).

- 11 Some might argue that I am putting forward a view of Adorno that is a bit too optimistic. However, I think that Adorno's political pessimism, given his own experience of fascism, which under the circumstances seems entirely justified to me, should not be confused with his pedagogical optimism, which provides some insight into why he could write the Auschwitz essay in the first place. Even Adorno's ambivalence about what education could actually accomplish does not amount to an unadulterated pessimism as much as a caution about recognizing the limits of education as an emancipatory politics. Adorno wanted to make sure that individuals recognized those larger structures of power outside of traditional appeals to education while clinging to critical thought as the precondition but not absolute condition of individual and social agency. I want to thank Larry Grossberg for this distinction. I also want to thank Roger Simon and Imre Szeman for their insightful comments on Adorno's politics and pessimism.
- 12 On the relationship between prisons and schools, see Giroux (2004).
- 13 On the intellectual diversity issue, see Lazere (2004), pp. B15–B16.
- 14 George Smith refers to one programme in which a woman was tied up in a clear box while some eager males 'dumped a few hundred tarantulas onto her . . . you can hear the screaming and crying from her and the witnesses. Some guy is vomiting. This is critical, because emptying the contents of the stomach is great TV. Everyone else is laughing and smirking, just like our good old boys and girls at Abu Ghraib' (Smith 2004).
- 15 This issue is take up with great insight and compassion in Lifton (2003).
- 16 I take up this issue in great detail in Giroux (2003).
- 17 One of the best books examining this issue is McChesney's (1999) *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*.
- 18 Constructions of the impoverished other have a long history in American society, including more recent manifestations that extend from the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II to the increasing incarceration of young black and brown men in 2004. Of course, they cannot be explained entirely within the discourse of capitalist relations. The fatal combination of chauvinism, militarism and racism has produced an extensive history of photographic images in which depraved representations such as blacks hanging from trees or skulls of 'Japanese soldiers jammed onto a tank exhaust pipe as a trophy' depict a xenophobia far removed from the dictates of objectified consumerism (see Lucaites & McDaniel 2004, p. 4, and Bauman (2004).
- 19 This issue is taken up brilliantly in Bauman (2004).
- 20 I want to illustrate this point with a comment taken from an Israeli soldier about his experience in Hebron:

I was ashamed of myself the day I realized that I simply enjoy the feeling of power. I don't believe in it: I think this is not the way to do anything to anyone, surely not to someone who has done nothing to you, but you can't help but enjoy it. People do what you tell them. You know it's

because you carry a weapon. Knowing that if you didn't have it, and if your fellow soldiers weren't beside you, they would jump on you, beat the shit out of you, and stab you to death – you begin to enjoy it. Not merely enjoy it, you need it. And then, when someone suddenly says 'Not' to you, what do you mean no? Where do you draw the chutzpah from, to say no to me? . . . I remember a very specific situation: I was at a checkpoint, a temporary one, a so-called strangulation checkpoint, it was a very small checkpoint, very intimate, four soldiers, no commanding officer, no protection worthy of the name, a true moonlighting job, blocking the entrance to a village. From one side a line of cars wanting to get out, and from the other side a line of cars wanting to pass, a huge line, and suddenly you have a mighty force at the tip of your fingers, as if playing a computer game. I stand there like this, pointing at someone, gesturing to you to do this or that, and you do this or that, the car starts, moves toward me, halts beside me. The next car follows, you signal, it stops. You start playing with them, like a computer game. You come here, you go there, like this. You barely move, you make them obey the tip of your finger. It's a might feeling. It's something you don't experience elsewhere. You know it's because you have a weapon, you know it's because you are a soldier, you know all this, but its addictive. When I realized this . . . I checked in with myself to see what had happened to me. That's it. And it was a big bubble that burst. I thought I was immune, that is, how can someone like me, a thinking, articulate, ethical, moral man – things I can attest to about myself as such. Suddenly, I notice that I am getting addicted to controlling people.

I want to thank Roger Simon for this insight and for his making available to me the transcript from which this quote is taken. See 'Soldiers Speak Out About Their Service in Hebron'. Available at www.shovrimshatika.org

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