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This small edited collection of Noam Chomsky's work is an appropriate addition to the *Critical Perspectives* series dedicated to Paulo Freire. Series editor Donaldo Macedo has chosen for this text three essays, as well as the transcripts of an interview and of a BBC-broadcast debate in which Chomsky participated. Throughout the book, Chomsky—as well as Macedo, both in the introduction and as interviewer—exemplifies a commitment to education and a passionate insistence on a universal "right to know" that are reflective of Freire's life and work. Indeed, Chomsky illuminates (exhaustively, and with his trademark attention to detail) the ways in which powerful civic participation can only happen when citizens comprehend the applications and implications of social policies. The breadth of his knowledge regarding U.S. foreign policies and military actions during the 1980s and early 1990s (those widely acknowledged as well as those still hotly disputed) is staggering.

In this somewhat diverse collection of his oral and written work, Chomsky claims that an educated and participatory populace is dependent almost exclusively upon two things: democracy and truth. First, schools must become democratic sites themselves, doing more than merely mouthing the values of democracy and ignoring the hypocrisy of so-called democratic practices; they must be run democratically—for example, administrators should be elected, not appointed. Second, and as a logical consequence of the first, teachers/intellectuals must be freed—or, perhaps more accurately, must free themselves—from the constraints of being institutional workers, "commissars" who reproduce dominant values and privilege by preaching the "myths" of democracy. Chomsky argues that "an education that seeks for a democratic world ought to provide students with critical tools to make linkages that would unveil the lies and deceit. Instead of indoctrinating students with democratic myths, schools should engage them in the practice of democracy." Crediting John Dewey's influence on both his early educational experiences and his current thinking about education and democracy, Chomsky advocates strongly for schooling in which students find Truth themselves, rather than being force-fed an "official truth."

What Chomsky seems unwilling to discuss, however, is the slippery
and contested nature of both truth and democracy, and the difficulty inherent in claiming either—even while the final chapter in this collection illustrates all too well how such claims so easily degenerate into an "is too; is not" exchange. His Marxist roots, which Chomsky has never abandoned, allow him to assume a constructed, false, "interested" truth set up against the undeniable (except by those whose motives are evil or those who are laboring under a false consciousness), "disinterested" truth. That claims of truth of all kinds exist to serve some interests and not others, and that truth-claims change as resources become more and less available among competing interests goes unremarked here, except in the cases where the "bad guys" are winning. This collection is thus less a discussion of how power and hegemony work within a context of education and an interrogation of how we might understand and address such systemic failures within a society struggling to be(come) democratic, than a rather horrifying account of the big political lies told over decades about U.S. interests and actions, and how education remains complicit in maintaining such lies.

In two of his three essays, as well as in the debate transcript, Chomsky focuses primarily on material events, the reportage of which is accompanied by an overwhelming onslaught of details: names, dates, places, body counts. The implication for education seems to be that if we understand his account and interpretation of events as evidence that the "truth" is indeed locatable, then teaching the truth is possible; teachers—intellectuals—just need to do their homework, muster their courage, and step up: "It is the intellectual responsibility of teachers—or any honest person, for that matter—to try to tell the truth. That is surely uncontroversial." Who among us would disagree? But what the truth is surely is controversial, or ought to be controversial.

And yet, according to Chomsky, democracy is dependent on truth in education—a concept with which he credits Dewey: "I, for one, was very lucky to have gone to a school based on democratic ideals, where the influence of John Dewey's ideas was very much felt and where children were encouraged to study and investigate as a process of discovering the truth for themselves." Dewey certainly does call for pedagogical practices that engage students in their own schooling as a part of civic education in a democratic society. But Dewey does more than that. He notes that there is a distinction between democracy as an idea and democracy as a system of government. They must be distinguished, Dewey argues, because the idea of democracy can never be exemplified in the state, even at its best; it is an ideal. Even those practices we hold
most sacred—elections, representation, civil liberties—evolved incrementally and often as a consequence of less-than-democratic practices. Democratic practices, Dewey argues, serve a purpose, but the purpose is to meet existing needs that can no longer be ignored, not to realize the democratic ideal. The ideal of democracy—perfect and completed—must always be distracted and interfered with by actual practice, and thus can never reach fulfillment, can never become fact.

Chomsky appears to agree in large part with Dewey, in that he spends a good part of the collection pointing out the hypocrisy of much of U.S. foreign policy. But he departs from Dewey with the rhetorical shift he makes in talking about a differentiation between democratic myths and practices rather than between democratic ideals and practices, as Dewey so clearly does. Dewey's position allows us to use ideals as a standard for an ever-evolving (but never quite arriving) practice, and a language and a logic through which to criticize that practice—the quintessence of ongoing, effective reform. Chomsky argues, however, that current teaching collapses democratic ideals and practice together by describing or implying that so-called democratic practice is ideal, which insulates practice from critique and creates myths of democracy—like students mindlessly reciting the Pledge of Allegiance when in fact the U.S. has never provided “liberty and justice for all.” These myths, according to Chomsky, serve to maintain and reproduce the kinds of atrocities he documents because they train students to turn a blind eye to what the U.S. really does and to accept instead the myth of a truly democratic U.S., thus making them supporters of the dominant culture rather than active participants in and critics of a democratic practice that needs improvement.

Dewey's insistence that we think about democracy in two ways simultaneously—as an ideal and as a practice—provides a space for potential change from within because the ideal serves as a standard to which practice may aspire and by which citizens might criticize democratic practices. Chomsky's call to think about democracy in two ways is far more radical. In a society where power resides in capital, the means of production must be seized; and in terms of education, the means of production is split between the powerful (who are obviously not interested in changing the status quo) and teacher/intellectuals—those who literally “produce” educated citizens. Chomsky moves from Dewey's notion of reform having some utility, to a notion that reform has no utility: “It is a waste of time to speak truth to power,” Chomsky argues, unless those in power cut themselves off completely from their institutional
roles. Revolution may succeed where reform must fail—and it must fail because there is no point in trying to make change from within since power is locatable in individuals who are ultimately corrupted by that power.

Michel Foucault argues, however, that power is produced from multiple positions, that it is not a top-down imperative; all social relations are power relations. Domination evolves from a complex set of strategies and investments, making it impossible to locate a single source. We cannot, therefore, continue to imagine educators as unique producers of reality for students; whether teachers teach "truth," falsehoods, or that various versions of truths are held by various groups and individuals for various reasons, students occupy many other sites of learning in which they will receive, produce, and assimilate other information, other knowledges. The multiplicity of positions that produce reality include not just the pedagogical operations of the classroom itself but also the conditions of educational production and reception. This means that the social relations of power among different parts of the industry (that is, administrators, students, parents, legislators, even media events that depict education or are related to the topics educators teach) are as much a part of education as the teacher/intellectual. It may no longer be useful—or accurate—to speak of the teacher or the student as the single construct of an ideological apparatus. Students are multiplicitious. Teachers are multiplicitious. We are all busy producing reality within what we call education. Age, gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality, among other categories of demography and individual experience, affect the reception and production of meaning. In other words, education no longer needs to be defined in strict terms of top-down power, truth and falsehoods; rather, education can now be seen as ongoing and constructed within a network of power relations. So education becomes more than just the truth—or its opposite. Similarly, students—as well as teachers—become far more than either complicit drones or radical interventionists in dominant culture.

What might this mean for democracy and civic education? Foucault says that resources for resistance exist alongside the nexus of power relations. They are always present—within social and institutional hierarchies—and they always leave their traces. This means also that they get caught up at some point within power relations, drawn into the system until they no longer function as resistances. Radical pedagogy—or, to borrow from (and somewhat mangle) Foucault, counter-education—attempts to overcome this limitation. Foucault talks about resistances as
"counter-investments," wherein individuals may adopt, or at least recognize, multiple and contesting practices. In this light, "counter-education" undermines the workings of power relations within educational institutions but does not stand as exterior to them. It gives voice to a multiplicity of discourses that are in contradiction, thus simultaneously exposing the complex set of stratifications and power strategies that lead to domination (hegemony) and making visible what gets dropped and what becomes salient. This means that educational hegemony—what Chomsky wages war on in this collection—and how it works are revealed. Such counter-education discloses that institutions come about as a result of investments in certain discourses over others. In this respect, counter-education is about discursive disclosure—that is, the expression of other knowledges normally passed over in silence—but disclosure as a part of, as embedded within, and as articulating with dominant discourses. This is where the potential power as a resource for resistance resides. Present forms of resistance are of course eventually and inevitably normalized, or recuperated, but recuperation in Foucauldian terms means also to invest in a discourse previously unrecognized. Present hegemony always changes, and since democracy (the ideal) can never be fully realized, this is what we should be working toward.

Chomsky has said elsewhere, "Optimism is a strategy for making a better future." But his hard line on reform, on working to change institutional practices from within, and his refutation of the possibility that configurations of power include the means of resisting that power occlude those resources within institutional life that may help create optimism, community—and, therefore, real changes in practice. The very fact of this book, and the body of Chomsky’s institutionally funded work, stands witness to the democratic values and practices that survive and persist within education. Myths abound in our classrooms and textbooks, but so do ideals—and, importantly, so do teacher/intellectuals committed to progressive pedagogical practices that enable students to operate critically and to connect their lives to the world around them.