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## Article No.4

### Theories of the Stage, Social Projects, and Drama's Pedagogies

by Kathleen Gallagher (Canada)

#### Abstract

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical writings on the theatre and Bertold Brecht's theatre for instruction inform this investigation of drama's pedagogies. The paper questions what the matrix of theatre and pedagogy might mean for education and, most especially, education for inner-city youth. Entwining modern and postmodern conceptions of theatre and education, the author makes a case for a pedagogy of situation and action, presenting a set of pedagogical ambitions concerned with creating more complex and humane social interactions in urban drama classrooms.

Les écrits philosophiques de Jean-Paul Sartre sur le théâtre et le théâtre pédagogique de Bertold Brecht influencent cette recherche sur les pédagogies du théâtre. Cet essai questionne le rôle de la matrice du théâtre et de la pédagogie sur l'éducation, et tout particulièrement sur l'éducation des jeunes des cités. En parallèle, l'auteur propose une pédagogie de situation et d'action, et présente une série d'ambitions pédagogiques qui ont pour but de créer des interactions sociales plus complexes et humaines dans les salles de classe urbaines.

Los libretos filosóficos para teatro de Jean-Paul Sartre y el teatro instructivo de Bertold Brecht son parte de esta investigación de las pedagogías del drama. Este ensayo cuestiona que pueden significar para la educación, y especialmente para la educación de la juventud de los barrios céntricos de la ciudad, la esencia del teatro y la pedagogía. Entrelazar conceptos modernistas y post modernistas de teatro y educación, el autor diseña un caso para una pedagogía de situación y acción, presentando una serie de metas pedagógicas con el objetivo de crear interacciones sociales más complejas y humanas en las clases de drama urbanas.

#### Author's biography

Kathleen Gallagher is assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto where she teaches drama in the initial teacher education and graduate programs. Her dissertation research received the American Alliance of Theatre and Education award in 1999 and the Barbara McIntyre Distinguished Dissertation award in 2000. Her first book is entitled *Drama Education in the Lives of Girls: Imagining Possibilities* (University of Toronto Press, 2000) and was recently honoured by the American Education Research Association. Her most recent book is an edited collection with David Booth entitled *How Theatre Educates: Convergences and Counterpoints with Artists, Scholars, and Advocates* (University of Toronto Press, 2003). Kathleen's research and practice continue to focus on questions of inclusion in arts education and the pedagogical possibilities of learning through drama. She is currently working on a 3-year SSHRC-funded ethnographic study titled: *Drama Education, Youth, and Social Cohesion: (re) constructing identities in urban contexts*.

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*It is interesting because both these worlds - theatre and education - are very, very forgiving at one level, but they are most rigorous at another. Yet there is also something humane about both pursuits. The fact that they can tolerate a multitude of ineptitude doesn't take away from the fact that they are driven by excellence, like anything else.*

( Intellectual passions, feminist commitments and divine comedies - a dialogue with Anne-Marie MacDonald).Â

In this chapter, I would like to hold up the stage theories of Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertold Brecht against

the impulses of drama pedagogy, as I understand them. My aim in doing so is to examine some of the different but related political and educational desires of these earlier theatre and political projects in order to raise some new ideas about how drama pedagogy might intersect with and conceptually broaden these positions. As the winds of the "global education" movement gain considerable velocity, drama pedagogy, importantly, speaks to many of the questions related to ideas of community and difference. Moving outward, first, from a particular study on youth, drama education, and social cohesion, I would like to examine some of the philosophical and theoretical positions undergirding my conception of drama pedagogy, wherein the vexed question of theorizing and praxis remains at the centre. Ultimately, I present these "theories of the stage" as related to a set of pedagogical concerns aimed toward more complex and humane social interactions in classrooms.

What does the matrix of theatre and education mean for pedagogy? To contemplate this question, I am currently examining the experiences of adolescents in urban drama classrooms in order to develop a theoretical and empirically grounded account of the dynamic social forces of inclusion and exclusion experienced by adolescents within their unique contexts of urban North American schooling. Many notable educational theorists such as Paolo Freire (1972, 1998), bell hooks (1994), Arnot, David & Weiner (1999) and Maxine Greene (1995) as well as drama educators such as Christopher Odhiambo (2001), Shutzman & Cohen-Cruz (1994) and Dorothy Heathcote (in Johnson & O'Neill, 1984) suggest that human conditions are not determined but can be deconstructed and de-conditioned, and especially identities that are grounded in "outcast" status. To more fully appreciate the potential and the limits of drama pedagogy, then, I am investigating particularly the extent to which drama education in classrooms illuminates the intersections of youths' personal lives with their school lives in the formation of their social identity, their peer/community affiliations, and their artistic projects. My understanding of drama pedagogy in these contexts comes down - philosophically and ideologically - on the side of those who desire, and are inclined toward, the possibilities of change. In this way, the following discussion puts forward a conception of drama education that is theoretically grounded - like critical and feminist pedagogies - in social theories of schooling, of identity construction and systems of social relations. In these theories the very construction and deconstruction of identities and relations through dramatic role-play act as a testing ground for actual relations that support young people's views of themselves as dominant agents of their own social lives. In short, drama's capacity to explore relations in diverse communities, to experiment with shifting identities, lies both in its dialectical and embodied features. Its pedagogy is not merely an interpersonal process; it is a social art.

Rather than an article on the research "findings", this paper proposes a discussion of the questions provoked by beginning such a research project, as one stands at the classroom door. We live in an age where terms such as "hard-to-teach", "at-risk", and "behavioural students" (as though other students are without behaviours entirely) beset our pedagogical discourses, where students have grown up in systems all over the globe plagued by anti-immigrant, anti-welfare, "back-to-basics" rhetoric. Therefore how we frame and understand the dynamics of classrooms have serious ethical implications and powerful consequences for praxis. Patti Lather has described this as "doing praxis-oriented intellectual work in a post-foundational context" (1992:125).

In the rationale for my research project, titled *Drama Education, Youth, and Social Cohesion: (re)constructing identities in urban contexts*, I suggest that notions of global education continue to identify "diversity" (still, more often than not, implicitly suggesting low-achievement or declining standards) and other "inner-city challenges" as the greatest obstructions to healthy, safe, and high-achieving (or "competitive") classroom communities. Schools persist in identifying the many and diverse needs of urban populations in this way. As one response, many schools have widely adopted arts programs, generally thought to be "good" for disaffected youth. Drama education research, however, has largely operated within psychological conceptions of learning and development. Drama education's meta-cognitive theoretical frameworks attempt to explain poor self-esteem and school failure as residing within individuals and individual behaviour. Thus far, it is this body of work, rather than studies of pedagogy and classroom relations, that has most significantly influenced current school practices and policies. In imagining the project of my current research and preparing for the intellectual work of understanding these complex classroom communities, I sought, conversely, to address the significant omission of studies that examine the socio-cultural dimensions of drama practices in schools. In this paradigm, the problems to be addressed are articulated in social and critical theories of youth and schooling. In fact, there exist very few qualitative studies that adequately document the socio-cultural/political dimensions of aesthetic practices in schools, and their impact on the formation of youth identities and classroom relations.

Conceptions of multicultural classroom communities desperately need to push beyond the narrow

confines of identity politics. Most 'democratic' classroom spaces hide behind an illusion of neutrality and fairness. They are crying out for what Sawicki (1991) calls a 'radical pluralism'. And this is where my notion of drama pedagogy enters the scene. Rather than regular classroom instruction or exploration being enhanced by drama methods, I am referring to a pedagogy and artistry that self-consciously places embodied and imagined relations between collaborators at the centre of the action. In addition, I am suggesting that any self-reflection a participant undertakes in/through the drama activities consciously entertain both the 'fictional' and the 'actual' performances of self within the context of the classroom. When I draw out the term drama pedagogy, therefore, I am orienting my analysis around two different but related questions: How do the dialectics of self and other, of local and global, of democracy and domination play out in drama's pedagogy; and how do the players (and teacher) come to understand the dialectical relationship between what we deem performative (role-playing) and what we often assume is non-performative (students in a classroom) - that is to say, the intertextual relationship between the fictional roles enacted in the dramas and the so-called 'real' ones of classroom life?

### **Sartre: a theatre (and pedagogy) of choice**

Britzman (in *The Arts of Inquiry*) asks some important questions that allude to the impasse between conceptual and material terrain in liberatory projects in education. She is asking what we make of 'wild thoughts' in classrooms and further, what 'doubt' as a mode of thinking might provoke. Here Britzman is using the arts to think about pedagogical actions. What is significant about these modes of thinking she is calling for - the kind of thinking that often requires courage and imagination - is whether the act of 'imagining' the experiences of others can help us better know ourselves in any way. She is asking whether, in aesthetic education, we can somehow come to know ourselves better through knowing the complexities of others: 'Is it ever the case that it takes one to know one? Are we unequipped to encounter anyone different from the imagined self? What does the writer draw upon to do such work as imagine different countries, different genders, different sexual orientations, and different histories?' (2001:22).

These are pertinent questions to bear in mind while considering, first, Jean-Paul Sartre's writings on the theatre. In his well-known play *Huis Clos (No Exit, 1965)*, Sartre explores the philosophical idea that 'hell is other people', by putting three characters in hell and making each of them the other's torturer. But he did not simply believe that our relations with others are necessarily poisoned. This is, according to Sartre (1973), a misunderstanding of his work. He believed, instead, that other people are the most important means we have for knowing ourselves; we judge ourselves with the means other people have given us to do it. These ideas begin to offer pedagogical opportunities if we consider the performances and the self-spectatorship at play within the communal spaces of classrooms. Sartre's writings on the theatre are provocative and offer a philosophical basis for the kind of drama pedagogy I am examining. In other words, the idea of knowing ourselves through 'the other' is precisely what Britzman is calling for in any pedagogical interaction. Drama pedagogy's 'what ifs' set in constant motion the changing relationships that give form to the imagined worlds.

In his lecture at the Sorbonne in the Spring of 1960, Sartre claimed that sculpture represents 'the form of the body' and the theatre 'the act of the body'. The problem with the bourgeois theatre of his time, he asserted, was that it gave no intellectual trouble and was aesthetically anaemic. Unlike Britzman's unruly knowledge and wild thoughts, the bourgeoisie made theatre that was tame and self-satisfied. I am suggesting that what was inadequate in the theatre of Sartre's day is also inadequate in today's classrooms. Sartre is arguing for a theatre of situations, not of characters, so that in our story-telling and our character construction we are responding to the situations at hand. It is, therefore, our actions in a given situation that create our character(s). Following this line of argument, one might also begin to ponder the kinds of situations of choice one might imagine in classrooms: Under what conditions might I make my idea public? In which dialogues will I participate? How might I extend the artistic input of another? What positions of compromise allow me to collaborate? How does this situation or these people shape my performance? In other words, Sartre's theatre of situation helps to better elucidate the private and public choices both students and teacher make in the pedagogical contract.

Sartre bemoans the state of contemporary theatre in a particular way: it is not that there is too much greatness in psychology, but there is too little; that is why psychology and its stories of characters and motivations is often 'embarrassing' to witness on stage, and he regrets that modern authors have discovered and chose to use that 'bastard knowledge' (1973:19). If, as Sartre believed, 'man' could choose his freedom or not, then theatre ought to show 'man' choosing what he will be, in a given situation. When we delve, instead, into the psychological conundrums of characters on

stage, we lose the "act of the body". In much the same way, psychology is inadequate in the classroom, for it does not allow the full range of choice, the full engagement of imagination that might be possible in a given set of circumstances. At times, what is needed in a classroom is a brief moment of imagination to break the predictability. And if drama's pedagogy can create an intentionally interrogative space that exposes the choices of those historically privileged from those historically silenced (and the conditions that shaped those choices), it is producing an imagined situation that challenges the answers that may have been sufficient (to some) in the past. We may begin, as a result, to produce a pedagogy of choice inclined toward greater freedom. What particular form, then, might this pedagogy take? It is to Brecht that I will turn as I consider the features and form of a pedagogy of choosing that understands the self as co-constructed within communities of difference and capable of change.

### **Brecht: a theatre (and pedagogy) of social action**

An examination of Brecht's "theatre for instruction" is relevant because theatre/drama in schools has taken on the "social issues" of the day. This is in part, I feel, due to its tenuous place in the curriculum: drama is forever needing to justify its existence. If drama can address some of the social problems schools are meant to eradicate, then it is eminently justifiable in a time of budget-cuts and "back-to-basics" regimes. There is also a widely held and well-intentioned belief that drama is best equipped and most effective in engaging young people's affective responses, and within schools, the affect is requisite in much of the current moral and citizenship education. Whatever the reasons, drama seems to be the place in schools where "difficult" issues will be raised, whether this happens in lively classrooms or in school auditoria with visiting artists. Jameson in probing Brecht's "method" asks:

Indeed, the tension now seems to run between the "showing" and the "judging": does the "moral" shown by a given parable-like or exemplary situation ask us to make our own judgement, to sit back and consider, reflectively, as Brecht so often liked to describe his workers' theater, or does it simply offer us the judgment already made, and at best ask us to judge the judgment, whether it was not the wisest or the most appropriate? (2000).

Brecht's own answer is clear in his essay titled *Can the Present Day World be Reproduced by Means of Theatre?*: "However, one thing has become quite plain: the present-day world can only be described to present-day people if it is described as capable of transformation" (1957:274). In other words, his particular theory of the stage posits the spectator as no longer in any way permitted to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simply empathizing with the characters in a play, by means of the old, familiar "stepping into the others' shoes". Instead, Brecht took the subject matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation he believed necessary to all understanding.

Brecht was the architect of the "epic" theatre form, as it was known. His early writings on this theatre of alienation - meant to elicit a new kind of engagement - are brilliantly illustrated in the following excerpt. One sees, immediately however, the problems this kind of approach to theatre (and pedagogy) would present for schools wedded strongly to a code of liberal humanism. Predating them by 30 years, Brecht's "modern" innovation here champions many of the principles of feminist and critical pedagogy:

When something seems "the most obvious thing in the world", it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up.  
 What is "natural" must have the force of what is startling. This is the only way to expose the laws of cause and effect. People's activity must simultaneously be so and be capable of being different.  
 It was all a great change.  
 The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too - Just like me - It's only natural - It'll never change - The sufferings of this man appall me because they are inescapable - That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world - I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.  
 The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it - That's not the way - That's extraordinary, hardly believable - It's got to stop - The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary - That's great

art: nothing obvious in it - I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (71).

I would suggest that drama education holds firmly onto the pedagogical idea(l) that collective art can be imagined by differently situated individuals within a group when they are involved in a collaborative process. In other words, Brecht's plea for a socially conscious interruption rather than a seamless identification is central. Drama education tenaciously insists that, as Adrienne Rich says, an "I" can become a "we" without extinguishing others (1993). It certainly does not always succeed. But in drama classrooms, pedagogy becomes a device that serves the art and this art form is a social one that benefits from divergent perspectives; its fragmented, non-linear, reflexive pedagogy can exert a dialectical pull on the terms of a dramatic collaboration. It can take difference (and sometimes conflict) as its starting point rather than its challenge. As above: "that's great [pedagogy], nothing obvious in it".

Thus far, we have considered Sartre's concept of choosing and Brecht's epic form in theatre as philosophical, ideological, and artistic processes for questioning drama's pedagogy. As I see it, one of drama's principal educative forces - like Brecht's theatre of alienation - is in its move away from the fourth wall. The narrator of the story on Brecht's stage was no longer missing and the entire room - the set, the projections of other places and times onto the set, and the spectators themselves became a part of the scene. The actors refrained from identifying entirely with the roles they were portraying and remained detached, so as to invite criticism. Correspondingly, the conventions of drama education interrupt time and space and challenge the invisible (or fourth) wall between "actor" and "spectator". Characters are interchangeable, time is non-linear, and as in Sartre's analysis, characters "act" by responding to situations. The situations themselves drive the character development. This "development" is often a collective enterprise and one that can foreground the different ways of seeing and being seen within a diverse community.

### Contesting and advancing

In the last section of the paper, I will present in greater detail the premises of drama pedagogy as I see them and their implications for learning. I will also address what is often read as an internal contradiction about art that teaches. This does not mean that art is not an end in itself, but that "goals" for learning through theatre, drama's pedagogical aims for social justice or anti-oppressive education for instance, cannot be attained without theatre's art. In other words, theatre for instruction as Brecht called it, or drama's pedagogical ambitions, as I am framing them, do not - must not - lose their poetry.

As suggested above, the global "standards movement", in its current incarnation, has done great harm. There is nothing wrong, of course, with desiring standards, but the "standards movement" in Western education too often forecloses possibilities. In opposition, the engaged pedagogy of writers like hooks and Freire has valued the contributions of those situated on the margins, those most often constructed as not meeting the standards. Engaged pedagogy, according to Armstrong and McMahon (2002) has offered a simple but important insight: students do not desire failure. It also welcomes dissent, accepts conflict, and encourages resistance (hooks, 1994), not unlike the kind of critical engagement Brecht was seeking with epic theatre form. Gabel (2002) suggests helpfully that the pedagogical subject is discursive, at least in a metaphoric sense, and that it is a subject in the process of writing itself and of being interpreted by others. And Freire (1994), in *Pedagogy of Hope*, is convinced, too, that language is a route to the invention of citizenship. To these narrative accounts of the subject, of course, I add the embodied actor, the performer. Butler (1995) has often referred to the "strategic essentialism" that unfolds in groups, when bodies are part of communal activities. But drama also holds within its form the capacity to examine and compare so-called "natural" and "acted" behaviour. There is often a blurring of the semantics of "performed role" and "real identity". When, for instance, theatre directors speak of getting a text "up on its feet" in a rehearsal, they are speaking of drama's desire to make physical the poetry of playscripts. When audience members typically ask 'but how did you learn all those lines?', the actor knows that a large part of the answer lies in the body. The body has a memory and words get into our bodies and react with the memories - sensory and real - that already dwell there. The performances of adolescents in the drama classrooms that I am currently observing in the research project briefly described at the opening of this paper make explicit the dialogical relationship between the material subject and the imagined one. In the inner-city schools in Toronto and New York, where we are immersed in observing (and sometimes participating in) the drama produced by diversely-positioned young people, we are often left asking whether or how it is possible to move beyond limiting conceptions of ourselves and others, if Sartre is to be believed when he posits that we are forever in the "look of the other"? If students are raced, classed, gendered, in particular ways, entangled in certain configurations of power or powerlessness, how might their performances in

dramas productively converse with their performances of school identities?

Many have argued that the most radical thing critical pedagogy can do is make explicit the exclusions, the limiting discursive and embodied representations of others. Giroux (1992:3) was arguing very early on that critical pedagogy would not only transform knowledge but social relations, as it searched to uncover the processes through which people come to know themselves, and the ways in which they engage with others and their environment. Feminists such as Luke & Gore (1992) and Ellsworth (1992) have repeatedly asked the central question of 'who is empowering whom' in these contexts. However, many have become worn down by the endless stories of individual, personal transformation that these ideals have often produced, or the inertia produced by fragmented and stratified groups jockeying for space. There remain, as well, a great number of critiques of critical and feminist pedagogies that meet their limits because of institutional and ideological constraints.

Some questions remain. Can those working with concepts of drama pedagogy, for instance, not evade the issue of their own power? Can this kind of artistic and critical pedagogy avoid obfuscating its particular powers? Can drama pedagogy resist certain kinds of dogmatism (a charge often levelled against many of Brecht's theatre projects or certain feminist 'agendas')? Does drama make space for the unutterable? Can it extend the body's knowing beyond its own situatedness? What do notions of ambiguity and unpredictability look like in theatre practice?

### **The collaborative grounds of drama/theatre education**

Following from Sartre's premise, then, of a theatre of situation, drama pedagogy shifts emphasis to the 'context' in which meaning is produced. It is, I would suggest in summary, a precondition of emancipatory projects of drama pedagogy that change through art is possible. Paradoxically, however, the possibility of ever fully knowing in our bodies the material strategies of others remain beyond its grasp - the limits of being, relating and creating, in a social milieu such as a classroom. That is why the emphasis on context and action become central.

In Brecht's essay entitled *Interview with an Exile* he underlines again the pedagogical purposes of his theatre:

Thus when a family is ruined I don't seek the reason in an inexorable fate, in hereditary weaknesses, or special characteristics - it isn't only the exceptional families that get ruined - but try rather to establish how it could have been avoided by human action, how the external conditions could be altered; and that lands me back in politics again (1933-1947:68).

Like Brecht, it is the purpose of drama's pedagogy to ask that the 'natural' (often stereotypical) images of 'self' and 'other' be made conspicuous. This is, I am suggesting, the kind of alienation needed in classrooms. What shape should drama's pedagogy take to promote the 'actorship' needed for people to become the co-authors of their cultural narratives, as Miedema & Wardekker express it (cited in Bayliss & Dodwell 2002)? We aim to do this, keeping in view the different means, points of access, and choices that people have - while like Brecht, we do not remain satisfied with inaction, that is, with difference that fractures to the point of inertia. One of the ways that drama can accomplish this is by our working toward an artistic commitment that is larger than self, where there is affective as well as intellectual investment, and where solipsistic tendencies are squarely confronted. And yet, it is a dramatic imperative that we begin from ourselves while asking how to find the distance necessary (the alienation) to provoke new understanding. Our success rests upon a few important questions: Can drama pedagogy do more than help the principles of inclusion along? Can the negotiations among collaborators be fundamentally reconstituted through our drama pedagogy so as to create new modes of attending to and creating with others? Can our drama pedagogy make the critical, feminist tradition more 'practical', 'lived', and effective at the level of the everyday? Just what does dramatic space open up? Do we ask: from where do we draw 'inspiration'?; can the influences of interpretation be uncovered?; what analyses move alongside our 'improvised' creations? These are the material questions that should ground our drama practices. By bringing the embodied subjects into sharp relief, we not only ask where we are located but where we are imagining ourselves moving, in the fictional and the actual. I use the construct of trajectories - and not just identities - but trajectories of difference, where our actions, our choices ask us to imagine ourselves ahead differently. Too much 'emancipatory' pedagogy implicitly claims to know the direction to liberation.

And this, as we have observed in our study sites, has not worked well for many.

### **A Pedagogy of Situation and Action**

In her address to the Southern Tier Institute for the Arts in Education at the Lincoln Center in New York City, Deborah Britzman (2001) asked: what do the arts want and what do we want from the arts? To conjecture, I would say, like Sartre, that the arts do not want to be reduced, to be contained, constrained, and consumed. And from the arts, we want more than our own edification. We want to be provoked; we want to ask again what makes life meaningful; we want community. Gilbert suggests that theatre, especially, should make us unsettled and uneasy in the positive sense of the word. He writes:

In our education system, theatre and drama must preserve their urgency, and become a place where self-creation, imagination, and dialogue are still possible; where the engagement of people in productive conflict and thought can be generated. The theatre must be guarded against the insatiable appetite of the ego, the pressures to be "hip," the demands of self-promotion (either through "image" or the exigencies of the camera), and the pressures to be seen and not see. Theatre should, in education, afford a place of freedom, thought and creation, subverting the ever-increasing demands of product and commerce, and be a place of action and not submission. It must be an area where the dialectic of factitious and authentic can be played out, where the institutional pressures to conform are, however briefly, suspended (2003:160).

What, then, should we want from drama pedagogy ? For this I must, in the final analysis, return to Sartre who brings us back again to the constraints of a system (or institution) that does not demand more of itself, that sits powerfully self-satisfied:

But, to act, which is precisely the object of the theatre, is to change the world and in changing it, of necessity to change oneself. Fine. The bourgeoisie has changed the world profoundly, and now it no longer has any desire to change itself, above all from without. If it changes, it is in order to adapt itself, to keep what it has, and in this position, what it asks of the theatre is not to be disturbed by the idea of action" (1960:52).

We might ask of our Drama pedagogy, too, whether we desire change, whether we are prepared to destabilize it as we direct it outward from the complex real and fictional (acted) classroom performances of teachers and students; whether we are prepared to take improvisation and imagination seriously. To take imagination seriously in classrooms, to invite Britzman's "wild thoughts" in, is to provoke choice, invite alienation, and count on the unpredictable and the productive conflict within communities of difference.

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