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BOOK REVIEW

**Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling**, by Henry A. Giroux, 1981, London, Falmer Press, pp. 168.

This book comprises six previously published essays - five of which have been either edited or revised for the present publication - and a freshly written Introduction. The latter, obviously enough, is intended to weld the previously published 'fragments' into a unified whole - that is, into a book - and, indeed, to carry Giroux's work beyond the point it had already reached in his published articles. As Giroux puts it: "The purpose of [the] introductory essay is to extend and enlarge upon the theoretical project that has influenced the essays that make up the rest of this book" (p. 7). Personally I am not convinced that this theoretical project is significantly extended and enlarged upon by bringing the essays into book form. I am more inclined to see the major advance for Giroux's academic audience as being one of convenience: the convenience of having his work gathered together into a single scholarly bundle. It is up to the reader to weigh that convenience against the price of the book. Incidentally, the Falmer Press edition is riddled to the point of distraction with typographical errors.

The theoretical project (in which Giroux has obviously been engaged for several years now) is to try and steer a constructive, emancipatory course between two dominating traditions in American educational scholarship, each of which has counter-productive tendencies. The first tradition is what Aronowitz, in the Preface to *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*, refers to as liberal celebration. The innumerable volumes produced over the years by liberal celebrants have been based on the familiar conviction that education in liberal capitalist democracies is a passport to equal opportunity of life chances, guaranteeing to all a chance for individual/personal improvement and advance. Education, for the liberal celebrant, is "the great leveler of social and economic differences", and schools comprise "a means by which the disadvantaged and dispossessed may gain access to status, if not political and economic power" (ibid., pp. 1-2).

The second tradition, that of critical research of American schooling, emerged in opposition to liberal celebration. During the 1960's considerable evidence was amassed against the belief that schools overcome class inequality. The function of schooling, according to the emerging 'critical' writers, was in reality to socialise the new generation and not to facilitate genuinely democratic opportunities - as propounded in liberal rhetoric. The critical tradition grew progressively, in bulk and complexity, throughout the 1970's. The seminal works of the decade - including Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America*, and Martin Carney's *Education as Cultural Imperialism and Schooling in a Corporate Society* - complemented works in political economy such as Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital*. By 1980 'critical' scholars were heirs to various versions of an off-stated and well-documented social reproduction thesis.

Two inter-related dimensions to the alleged social reproduction function of education were identified by critical researchers. School/formal education functions to reproduce a labour force structurally tuned to the needs of capital. In addition school functions to reproduce dominant ideology. As we know, compulsory mass schooling has an historical destiny to work out. "What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed. The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class" (K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 57). In our own historical epoch, production and transmission of ruling ideas - the historically

necessary and inevitable intellectual production of our times - is seen by 'critical' researchers as being very much a central function of institutionalised education.

Underlying Giroux's project is the assumption that each of these traditions has importantly counter-productive tendencies. The tendency of liberal celebration is toward what Harris (Education and Knowledge, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) calls "the structured misrepresentation of reality". Giroux's opposition to this tendency is as one would expect from a 'critical' scholar. Equally familiar is the view that the social reproduction thesis can easily lead to a "radical defeatism" - and necessarily does so where any sort of strict historical determinism is entertained. If schools cannot alter social relations, if they are essentially determined by the dominant economic, social, political and cultural order, then the message of critical research on schooling is that there can be no constructive, emancipatory agenda for education. There can be no education toward social transformation. When cast in this mould the genuine insights of the critical tradition can at most help us to become critically aware observers of our own history - to watch it unfolding as it really is unfolding - rather than to 'see' it, as bearers of false consciousness, unfolding through veils of mystification. This is the legacy of a functionalist reductionism: theory which reduces schooling to a servile reproductive function within capitalist society. The tendency within the critical tradition toward functionalist reductionism, based on a strict historical determinism, is not only counter-productive in Giroux's view. It is also misconceived.

For Giroux, the school in general and the curriculum in particular are to be regarded as sites of struggle or contestation rather than as historically determined *faits accomplis*: i.e., schooling is not an unstoppable machine grinding out the ideology and social relations of capitalist reproduction. His scholarship proceeds on a hope/faith that schooling in general and the curriculum in particular are indeed sites of 'win-able' struggle; genuinely dialectical terrain where contradictions and pressure points exist which can be exploited by critically conscious human beings to produce social action in the direction of enhancing individual freedom and progressive social reconstruction. With regard to the curriculum as a site of potentially profitable struggle, Giroux's hope/faith is captured in the following passage.

"One of the major tasks of the curriculum field is to demonstrate in consistent fashion the process of self-criticism and self-renewal. Unfortunately, such a task is more easily stated than accomplished. Yet, while the reasons for the loss of this critical capacity are varied and complex, the underlying source for the atrophy of self-reflection in the curriculum field may be traced to a general failure, particularly among members of the dominant tradition, to understand how the interface of ideology, dominant institutional interests, and curriculum theory contribute to the latter's incomplete development.

Walter Benjamin provided one clue when he wrote, 'In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it'. This implies that no field of inquiry, including the curriculum field, is immune from the complacency that threatens it once the field gains status as an 'acceptable' mode of discourse and inquiry. Thus, the institutionalisation of the curriculum field points to the need to develop a mode of analysis that educates its members to the language and logic of its own political and ideological center of gravity. What this means is that if the curriculum field is going to resist the conformity that threatens to overtake it, its members will have to reassess its possibilities for critique and growth against the influence and mediations of those dominant institutional forces that often work to limit the curriculum field's power as a mode of critical discourse and inquiry" (op. cit., p. 113).

Given the hopeful belief that schooling is genuinely a site of struggle on which the fight for "social action in the interest of both individual freedom and social reconstruction" (ibid., pp. 7-8) can be fought, the fight itself will involve a radical pedagogy. This radical pedagogy will be the point at which contradictions, complacencies, and (other) pressure points within the ideologies and material practices of capitalist education, are ultimately expressed in transforming social action by committed and critically aware agents involved in the educational process. It comprises, in other words, the culminating point of dialectical exchange between contradictory forces within educational theory and practice. Human emancipation, progressive social reconstruction, is

possible because history is dynamic. Humans can enter the historical process by grasping, at both a general and a particular level, the inherently dialectical nature of historical forces and influencing the interaction of these forces. Schooling is one point, and a crucially important one, at which humans can enter the process of making history. The point at which a radical pedagogy is achieved is the point at which human agents, within the sphere of education, make history in the direction of human emancipation.

Now Giroux's ultimate purpose in *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling* must be understood in relation to radical pedagogy. Ultimately his aim is to contribute to the emergence of radical pedagogy. I detect three connected strands within his overall project thus construed.

- a) He seeks, in the tradition of Gramsci, Benjamin and Freire, to make coherent and give credence to the view that, like other dimensions of society's superstructure, formal education comprises a site of struggle within 'the process of creating history. On this site human beings can enter the process of creating history with a progressive end in view.
- b) He wants to "examine whether existing radical critiques of schooling have made good on their claim to provide the theoretical building blocks for a radical theory of pedagogy" (ibid., parentheses and emphases mine).
- c) Finally, Giroux hopes to "lay the theoretical groundwork for developing a radical pedagogy" (ibid., emphasis mine).

Thus it is with the theory rather than the actual practice of radical pedagogy that Giroux is expressly concerned. Accordingly it is in respect of this expressed concern that I will comment here. As we know, there are numerous recorded instances of educators practising radical pedagogy in schools, universities, and villages in various parts of the world. We are all familiar with the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. It is sometimes argued that, of course, Freire's pedagogy would have to be suitably adapted for it to represent an appropriate exercise in social action within modern, complex, highly urbanised, capitalist societies. Now, accepting the need for some fine (and some not so fine) tuning of Freire's pedagogical model suggests scope for a measure of serious theoretical investigation. And Chapter 5 of Giroux's book is indeed devoted to a description and theoretical critique of Freire's approach to radical educational theory and practice. But the fact is that there exist documented and detailed accounts of radical pedagogies actually practised in American schools and colleges along just the sorts of lines that Giroux is advocating in his theoretical project.

In the acknowledgments to his *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, (Boston, South End Press, 1980) Ira Shor expresses his debt to the works of Lukacs, Gramsci, Reich, Marcuse and Freire, and notes that other writers who have played a role in his development include E.P. Thompson, Arnold Kettle, Raymond Williams, Sam Bowles, Herb Gintis and Harry Braverman. Shor then proceeds to take us through 270 pages of genuinely illuminating pedagogical experience as he describes aspects of his actual (radical) teaching practice, links these to the theoretical considerations that informed them, notes and comments on shortcomings he recognises and disappointments he has felt in his work. and in the same process develops a political analysis of schooling. Shor is inspired by the same hope/faith as Giroux, and his achievement provides the basis for my comments on Giroux's work.

Ultimately the kind of exercise in which Giroux is engaged is directed toward answering the following questions. Can radical pedagogy be practised by educators in American schools, colleges and universities? To what extent, or on what scale, can it be practised? What would such a pedagogy look like? How and out of what will it be developed? What sorts of barriers will have to be confronted in developing a radical pedagogy? And so on. I have serious doubts that a purely theoretical project of the type Giroux is engaged in can take us very far toward answering these questions. Many of the barriers and pitfalls in question simply cannot be anticipated in advance. They arise, as one would expect within a genuinely praxical, dialectical encounter, as the pedagogue proceeds with her

material engagement. In my view it is work like Shor's rather than work like Giroux's that takes us places here.

Even so, there is one crucial question which might be addressed by Giroux's kind of project but not by Shor's - the latter being an account of a single/ individual pedagogical exercise. Let us assume that Ira Shor has genuinely developed "a radical pedagogy that connects critical theory with the need for social action in the interest of both individual freedom and social reconstruction" (Giroux, pp. 7-8). To what extent is it possible for many Ira Shors to operate over a significant period of time within a state system of formal education? This, after all, is the crucial question that has been disputed by critical writers for a decade now. (And it is the hope that many radical pedagogues can so operate that underlies Giroux's project and inclines him to pursue the theoretical foundations of such activity.) Now there would be little point served by Giroux seeking to demonstrate that it is a theoretically coherent exercise for an individual educator to try and develop a radical pedagogy based on the conviction that there are points within the educational process at which individuals can enter the process of humanising history. For the work of people like Shor demonstrates the coherence of this empirically - and that is an important step beyond demonstrating a merely theoretical coherence. So the question on which Giroux's project might shed some compelling light is the question of whether significantly large numbers of educators might work within the state system practising a radical pedagogy à la Ira Shor.

Unfortunately, as far as I can see Giroux sheds little light on this question. In the end he can state and restate his underlying faith by arguing at length and from different directions the theoretical possibilities for radical pedagogy and suggesting some of its theoretical foundations. But the empirical question remains unanswered - and unanswerable by Giroux's approach. As far as I can see, the only way this question - and it is the historically important question - will be answered is by many people attempting the kind of thing Shor has attempted. And, I suggest, it is Shor's book, not Giroux's, that could inspire practising educators to back their commitment to humanising the world with pedagogical enterprise. Indeed Shor's book is precisely the kind of work that might 'conscientize' teachers in the first place. For it is accessible to educators on a scale that Giroux's work is not.

Where does that leave us with Giroux? In my estimation Giroux's book is a high quality academic book. It is the perfect vehicle for a university teacher wanting to introduce second year students and above to the scholarship of the 'critical' tradition. As numerous other reviews of the book amply attest, it is an exercise in quality scholarship that undergirds the international reputation Giroux has already acquired. And it is backed by an obvious and strong political commitment - one which has been tested in the most material of terms. But I find no compelling answers the questions with which I believe Giroux to be ultimately concerned.

### Footnote

For Giroux's most recent work see his *Theory and Resistance in Education: a Pedagogy for the Opposition*, London, Heinemann Educational, 1983, and "Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education", in *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1983, pp. 257-293.

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