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THE GIROUX READER

by

HENRY A. GIROUX

edited and introduced by

CHRISTOPHER G. ROBBINS

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Credits  

About the Author and Editor
In an age where irrelevance is fashionable and low expectations dominate public discourse, Henry A. Giroux’s work is an anomaly. It refuses to be inconsequential or strive for mediocrity. Giroux’s wide-ranging studies of education, politics, culture and society are not only engaging and challenging—sometimes even disturbing—they are, more fundamentally, crucial resources for educators, parents, young people, and other citizens concerned with reclaiming and revitalizing democratic public life and its supporting institutions, practices and languages. At a time of momentous political retreat, this means that Giroux’s body of work is necessary. It demands to be read carefully, reread closely, interrogated critically, appropriated wisely, and inserted widely into public conversations in order to gain a sense of the despairing civic atrophy currently undermining democratic public life in the U.S. Giroux’s work is instructive for citizens concerned with the question of how and where to begin building a political culture, and educating its agents, in ways that can offset a fundamentally reordered, mass-mediated, market-driven, and globalized world in the interests of a social order that is more humane, less exclusionary—more democratic in form, content, function, and effects. Hopefully, this carefully selected sampling of Giroux’s many writings will help, in some modest way, in such a process.

Evolving over the course of nearly 40 years, 40 authored, coauthored, edited, and coedited volumes, 280 scholarly popular press articles, and 154 contributions to edited collections, in addition to a highly regarded teaching career and frequent public speaking engagements, Giroux’s lifework is not merely impressive. It stands as a testament to this engaged oppositional public intellectual’s commitment to the project of a radical, inclusive democratic social order. To society’s benefit, Giroux’s intellectual and civic contributions have always been immunized to the plague of rapid-fire thought and politics of premature conclusions that pervade the political discourses of the public
relations talking heads in the corporatized media—with and of whom the U.S. has, unfortunately, become all-too-easily comfortable and accepting. Given the range, complexity, and diversity of his popular and scholarly work, Giroux’s overall contribution is sometimes difficult and always difficult to define, at least definitively. I will thusly refrain from feigning such an effort. Rather, after making a somewhat unorthodox way into Giroux’s work by providing a snapshot of how I have seen him fulfill his role as mentor, researcher, and teacher, I will sketch some rough outlines and highlight a few key facets of his work as I address the organization of the selections that are compiled and edited herein.

I will share these observations, of course, not to “make a case” for Giroux—this is something he has quite obviously accomplished—or to privatize the profoundly political essence of Giroux’s work, but merely to provide insights to the person behind the work and how he approaches the practical and everyday aspects of doing it. This entrance to Giroux’s work is important, I believe, because understanding how a scholar such as Giroux actually does the labor he so often researches and theorizes can possibly assist in understanding the studies he has published. What’s more, these lessons, while basic and, perhaps, unintentionally provided by Giroux, are important for any mentor/teacher to teach his/her students: One needs to witness and participate in intellectual struggle of Giroux’s sort, in order to learn that the public intellectual’s and citizen’s role is to be defined not by atomization, insularity, and competition, but solidarity, engagement, humility and cooperation.

**Learning Giroux**

**The Person and Mentor**

Solidarity, engagement, humility, and cooperation are some of the ways by which I have witnessed Giroux approach both his practice and theory. I met Henry A. Giroux some years ago when I visited his office unannounced. I was just a curious undergraduate student who had been exposed to—and appreciated deeply—Giroux’s early studies in sociology of education and some of his early cultural studies work. His resistance theories actually inspired me to pursue studies in education. Though I completed my studies at the school at which Giroux taught but not, ironically, where I had been introduced to his work, I had been unable to take any courses with him, and I simply wanted to meet and thank the person behind the work that I was just beginning to learn and that had so profoundly impacted me.

Giroux is as, or more, intense in person as he is in writing. Giroux has a candid demeanor and disciplined thought, which are tempered by a playful sense of humor and informed as much by his experiences in the world as by
Reading Henry Giroux

his experiences in the academic institution. From a working class upbringing in Providence, Rhode Island, in which Giroux made his adolescent rounds shining shoes, “breaking in to movies,” and scraping on inner-city basketball courts, Giroux made his way to the center of a university president’s political firestorm as a young professor at Boston University; has taught around the world as a visiting professor and directed departments, institutes and scholarly forums; has held distinguished or endowed chairs in different disciplines—quite a feat, indeed; and, recently, was awarded an honorary doctorate from Memorial University in Newfoundland in recognition of his contributions to society.1

This tempering of Giroux was clear during my introductory visit. Giroux was careful, deliberate, and critical, but by no means stuffy or guarded like many professionals, especially “scholars.” In a way that could only be engaging, Giroux dissected my responses to him and, with generosity, concern and humility, helped me rethink and reformulate my nascent understanding of his and others’ work—all this despite his initial telling me that he could spare only 5 minutes. Giroux, however, seldom slips like this. He has an acute awareness of time as a deprivation and not a luxury; despite his established position in academia and his entering the “middle” class, his working class youth and its etchings on his body and psyche often remind him of the temporal asymmetries that exist in a world of gross material and symbolic inequality. One thing was quite apparent and startling for me, and others have highlighted it: Giroux accordingly had little time or energy for small talk.2 He wanted to know what I thought about the commercialization of public schools, the commodification and sexualization of children and youth, the representation of youth of color in the media, what it meant to have a project, and what I thought all of these things suggested about the state of democratic public life and the future. The fateful talk ended with Henry giving me his card and telling me he thought I should pursue doctoral studies. He followed this, in his generous way, with an offer to study with him, once his next student’s assistantship was complete. I was shocked, for sure. Considering my background, merely attending college itself, let alone pursuing doctoral work, were remote dreams, but dreams all the same. To this thought, Giroux responded, “Bullshit. I come from a working class background. This is a once-in-a-lifetime offer. You either want it, or don’t. Stay in touch with me if it’s the former.” As readers familiar with Giroux know and new readers will soon observe, rarely are things so simplistic for him, but he is, predictably, as straightforward. Giroux doesn’t pull punches, and he takes great care to land them when and where they matter.

So began a continuing, challenging, and rewarding mentorship with Henry. Over the next few years, Henry sent me his new writings not only to merely share them with me but also, I assume, to learn what and how I was thinking about them. While the proposition to study with him was appealing,
I was unsure whether it was going to pan out, since I received his writings but no mention of the mentorship for quite some time. Many teachers mean well, but sometimes they have a tendency to blow smoke ... because quite often they have been trained to be afraid of taking positions or being straight up for fear of transgressing professional codes of politeness or shattering a “nurturing” aura. I would soon learn, and have repeatedly witnessed since, that Giroux is unpretentious, and he rightfully harbors no such inferiority complexes about the work he does—in print or in the classroom. As I was preparing to go out one winter Saturday afternoon, a letter from Henry arrived on my Michigan doorstep, asking if I would accept the offer to study with him the following fall and to call him as soon as possible. So continued the mentorship with Henry.

These acts of generosity, while far from flippant, pervade Henry’s actions. They provide the basis for the kinds of mutual give-and-take of everyday (and scholarly) solidarity and cooperation that is crucial to the work Giroux does and the radical democratic project to which such work is directed. Giroux is not only a generous mentor; he is also a supportive colleague. He openly allows professors, for example, to dip into his forty-year deep files of research, cutting some of their theoretical work, to a large degree, to the time it takes them to read his files. Henry also devotes his time and resources to study sessions with individual students and groups outside of his required course load. In the study group in which I participated, Henry reworked the traditional power dynamics of many classrooms by positioning himself as a student with us, knowledgeable about the background history and theory of the works, but new to the works themselves and thus the questions they provoked, providing a pedagogical context that was both supportive and intensive. (He bought the book for each of us and supplied the copies of the extra readings, to boot.) Behind Giroux’s intensity and generosity is a profound sense of humility, which—through his demonstrating a critical self-reflexivity about his own limitations—underpins not only his understanding of solidarity but also the grounds of mutual respect that define his pedagogical encounters.

The Researcher

Giroux is a methodical researcher. He reads voraciously, widely and carefully, putting himself (and his research assistants) through a rigorous reading, rereading, questioning, cutting, pasting, summarizing, and outlining of texts until they are reduced to their most pointed forms. He also observes and listens assiduously to the everyday conversations occurring around him, the institutional practices in which he is enmeshed (and often trying to untie), and the wider social, political, cultural, and economic relationships informing those practices and conditions. To borrow from and rework the title of one of his provocative studies, rather than “channel surf,” Giroux tunes
Reading Henry Giroux

into multiple channels, somehow surveying, apprehending, and analyzing a dizzying number of shifting and, sometimes, only seemingly incongruous social, political, economic, and cultural inputs at once. This process produces pragmatic and theoretical benefits for Giroux. In the former case, it allows Giroux to compile, and gain a second nature familiarity with, vast amounts of information pertinent to a set of specific questions he is pursuing. In the latter case, it permits Giroux, in the relentlessly probing style that has always shaped and marked his work, to hold these resources, their conditions of possibility, and the specific and broader contexts in which he does his work in conversation and dialectical tension, encouraging a synthesis and analysis that is at once sweeping, exacting, innovative, and often troubling. Simply, this approach underpins Giroux’s uncanny ability to underscore the odious contradictions between how the social world is represented and how it is actually ordered and experienced. He keeps one eye on the symbolic, the other on the material, resulting in stinging insights on the ineluctable interrelationships between economic and symbolic power and, importantly, the actual relationships of domination and the possible conditions for resistance and transformation.

Moreover, this “method,” to use a word that the technocratic heaviness of which will make Giroux bristle, backgrounds his talent for appropriating the tools of a range of disciplines and subdisciplines ranging from educational theory, sociology, political economy, philosophy and literary theory and criticism to art history, criticism, and theory, social and cultural theory, and cultural studies in ways that are conducive to investigating the most pressing issues of everyday life and the forces undermining democratic public life, which, nonetheless, refuse easy cordonning within arbitrary and preexisting academic boxes and the narrow methodological paradigms they shelter. (If it is not already clear to one that s/he does not live this moment in the economic, the next in the political, and another in the social and cultural, but that one experiences them all in different ways and at different times within a complex whole, as Raymond Williams would have put it, then Giroux is an indispensable guide for sorting this out.) Further, this “method,” or process of reading the material world and the discursive systems constructed to represent it, enables him to not only bring new understandings to bear on how the power/knowledge nexus orders a range of oppressive and contradictory relationships and experiences in society and culture, but also reconstruct the academic disciplinary lines of power and hierarchy, which are themselves, in part, responsible for and related to the ordering of wider social, political, economic, and cultural hierarchies. Consequently, Giroux’s various approaches to the study of social things both identify and use the mechanisms of power, while critiquing and rewriting their conditions of possibility in the interests of a more humane, radical democratic social order. As a result, Giroux’s studies themselves and the processes by which he conducts them defy easy categorization, if any at all, and provide theoretical and practical
resources that are far reaching. Test this conclusion, for instance, by Googling “syllabus’ + ‘Henry Giroux’.” One will find that his work is taught in fields and subfields ranging from cultural anthropology, the sociology of advertising, government, and political theory to art education, educational leadership, social and philosophical foundations of education, sociology of education, literary theory, English, rhetoric and composition studies, cultural studies, and media studies. In my research, I have seen his work appropriated in the development of theory in fields as diverse as criminology, music education and public health, not to mention African American studies, whiteness studies, rhetoric and composition studies, critical sociology, and any number of subfields in education.3

Despite the broad, critical influence of Giroux’s research, it is not free from sometimes rightful, other times misleading, criticism, and his work has not always been so widely disseminated, especially when he first started writing in the late 1970s. Consider the misleading side first. Giroux is a complex thinker who also publishes prolifically. Therein is part of the reason for what is often highly superficial and misleading criticism that is characteristic of what is now a destructively competitive academic market, which increasingly models its practices on the survival of the slickest politics of the wider market society. Rarely is his work taken up as a whole—to do this would, most likely, undermine the economies of efficiency that shape much of the conditions in which many academics must currently labor—and the result is that some of the criticism made of his work reveals an outdated position, because it has been superceded, or the critiques simply do not make sense, because he already addressed or preempted the criticisms in earlier work that, possibly, shares theoretical, analytical, and political continuity with the work being critiqued. For instance, it is nearly impossible to understand his work on critical pedagogy and what it might mean in the current era, unless one reads his later work on neoliberalism and public pedagogy, or vice versa; yet many reviews and some appropriations of his work begin and end with Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition (1983), a book he wrote over 20 years ago! As he publishes more and in different areas, he is also an open target for scholars who are forced to publish for tenure, a glimmer of recognition, or for the purportedly “objective” rants promoting neoconservative think-tank faith, as opposed to publishing for the public good and social relevance, and he is thus subject to hit-and-run misrepresentations of his work.4

Now consider the (somewhat) rightful side. In more serious efforts at critiquing and extending Giroux’s research, scholars who are wedded to particular theoretical paradigms have a difficult time pigeonholing his work, which cuts across multiple theoretical and disciplinary lines at once. As Eric Weiner has pointed out, modernist and postmodernist fundamentalists alike struggle to domesticate Giroux’s work; for the former, his studies are too
Reading Henry Giroux

fluid and draw sometimes relatively indeterminate conclusions, and, for the latter, his conclusions are “overdetermined,” not slippery enough and having few too little playful references made to “differance” or other once-critical analytical devices that the more apolitical approaches to postmodernist theory have fetishized. In other instances, especially in his studies of youth, he is criticized not for advocating for youth, but for not allowing them to speak in his work. This type of criticism is somewhat appropriate, but somewhat misleading. Surely, Giroux’s studies of youth might benefit from the integration of youth voices. However, they might then be something altogether different since Giroux never makes a claim to “speak for” youth. Rather, he attempts, in part, to theorize, as a moral and ethical intervention, the total social condition in which youth can or can’t speak in the first place and suggest, in turn, what this condition means for democratic public life and the future (See Chapters 5 and 6, this volume). Yet, in other instances, while being serious and fair in engaging Giroux’s research, disciplinary piety can be seen to prevail over theoretical significance, and Giroux is inappropriately tagged a “postmodern” “critical theorist” who has important ideas but lacks “sociological” grounding. This, I assume, is ultimately fine for Giroux, and the criticisms are somewhat correct, because the work he produces is neither this nor that “type” of work. Nor is he concerned with it being “this” or “that” kind of work as much as he is concerned with the ways in which his work uses the best tools offered by multiple intellectual traditions in order to shed light on animating issues of the day and determine, however provisionally and always partially, what that critical light might suggest about the tendencies of force at work in society and culture.

Regarding the politics surrounding the dissemination of his early research, not until the late 1980s did Giroux get published by the heavy hitters controlling the education studies publishing industry. For instance, Giroux’s first study, Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling (1981), considered a significant appropriation and reworking of critical theory as it applied to schooling, was first published by Falmer Press in England and later by Temple University Press (in the United States), hardly a minor press, but hardly a central distributor of educational studies at that time. Giroux’s second study, Theory and Resistance in Education (1983)—which immediately unsettled prevailing educational wisdom, influenced innumerable studies of schooling thereafter and is now considered to be a classic—was published graciously by Bergin & Garvey, a courageous, independent publishing house, but not one that nearly carried the distributional or disciplinary clout of industry players such as Routledge and Kegan Paul or Falmer. Clearly, a politics of self-interest pervades the publishing industry on both sides of the equation: As some academics occasionally try to build publishing records vis-à-vis the acritical engagement of Giroux’s and others’ work, publishers, too, can be seen to act in “rational self-interest” when it comes to publishing work that
is controversial, nontraditional, or which simply rejects the types of easy categorization that are conducive to targeting niche markets and puffing up profit margins. Readers, I hope, will consider these issues and others, after studying the sampling of Giroux’s research compiled in this volume. But Giroux is not only a researcher; he is also, by art and vocation, a teacher.

The Teacher

Giroux is stupendous and difficult in the classroom. I would go so far as to say that the pace and rigor of his research and writing is not matched, but actually surpassed by his practice of teaching. This is a feat. It is, nonetheless, unsurprising when one considers that Giroux’s work is, in part, a gutsy effort to rethink—and enact—what it means to “use pedagogy as a referent for analyzing how knowledge, values, desire, and social relations are constructed, taken up, and implicated in relations of power in the interaction among cultural texts, institutional forms, authorities, and audiences.”10 For Giroux, however, the critical pedagogical encounter does not halt here, but it is connected to the identification and transformation of the very conditions in which civic agency can be taken up and the demands of democratic public life addressed. This is to say that Giroux takes the practice of teaching to new levels. He plugs it in. Each of his classes, to appropriate a seasoned professor’s analogy, is comparable to Bob Dylan’s first electric outing at the Newport Folk Festival, where Dylan not only provoked the traditionalists and reformists alike by going electric, but also disturbed them.11 He forced them to take positions by blasting them out of their common sensibilities concerning the given meanings of “music” or “folk singing/songwriting.” Giroux’s seminars and public talks have similar effects for which he, nevertheless, is more than willing to take responsibility. Giroux’s seminars, to continue the metaphor, don’t just rock; they also roll, they move. And like Dylan’s first electric outing, they persistently provoke and prod, disturbing the heavy sedimentation of commonsense, habits of quick thinking and easy conclusions that often weigh on students’ minds—and, occasionally, his own. Giroux’s seminars, similarly, encourage students and cultural workers to rethink what it means “to teach,” “to be responsible,” and “to know something” and what one might do, under what conditions, and in whose interests, as a result of that knowledge. This pedagogy needles most students; one cannot avoid being engaged by Giroux, as the late Paulo Freire pointed out.

There is no question about it: Giroux’s theory and practice are left-oriented, but he is not unreflectively or unreflexively left—in theory or practice. He doesn’t pull punches, but he doesn’t stand still. This is a reasonable strategy: The conditions in which he researches and teaches don’t stand still, and neither do the questions and challenges they present. For Giroux’s pedagogy to move, he must move and be moved, too. For example, I have
seen him modify a position he took in one of his classic essays—because, in a graduate seminar, an undergraduate correctly called him out, not nearly the type of thing most teachers appreciate doing nor, really, the kind of thing most students would have a context and set of class relationships to feel comfortable and confident in doing. Giroux has been around, remember, and he understands that he, too, stands to learn something from the pedagogical encounter. Giroux has sat with and asked other students and me: What worked? What didn’t fly so well? How could I have more effectively set up the segment on ideology? Did I provide enough practical evidence about the many ways the new racism works? Did that film resonate sharply enough with the arguments we read for the class? How could the relationships between intellectuals, academic work, and public responsibility have been explored more effectively? How can I make a context in which a conversation could be had with that student who is hard right [but hardly reflexive]? 

On this point, a politico-pedagogical problem, for Giroux, is not whether students, or academics, are right or left, but whether they are responsible or unreflexive and acritical—about themselves, the conditions in which they learn and work, and the broader world—and, thus, whether or not they make it difficult to extend the conversation and perturb the basic conditions of arrogance and myopia that underpin dead-end polemics and a politics of annihilation. To put it differently, Giroux cares little about changing personalities, legitimating particular student identities, or involving himself in privatized vendettas over being “right” or “wrong,” but about the making of appropriate contexts and the tapping of critical, civic skills in which questions about responsibility, judgment, ethics, and the broader public good can be raised—or why they are, perhaps, censored—in the first place. Here, in other words, are the practical trappings of Giroux’s conceptualization of “political education,” which is not to be confused with a “politicizing education” (see Chapters 4 and 7, this volume). Effective, which implies responsible, communication is a two-way street, with others and oneself, and it is the basis for any politico-pedagogical engagement that avoids smacking of elitism, vanguardism, or pretensions to a politics with guarantees.12 One cannot avoid, and has to take responsibility for, this social predicament in Giroux’s class and company—he’s checked me a time or two. And it goes without saying: In the age of lowered expectations and civic atrophy where social responsibility even on the most basic levels is marketed as too burdensome or even treasonous, being held to this kind of accountability is disconcerting for some—and “too” political for the escapist and negligent, as if the acts of constructing, orchestrating and disseminating knowledge, organizing bodies within institutional spaces and time grids, using public resources, mobilizing desires, and reinforcing or casting visions of social relationships were not already political. 

What can be seen here is a performative facet in Giroux’s pedagogy, which has at least two related and intended consequences. One, quite like John
Dewey would have had it, Giroux founds his pedagogy in a belief that democracy is only a form, emptied of any potentially just substance and capable of being filled with the rudiments of any political form such as the variants of authoritarianism, if the primary conditions for the practice and experience of civic skills and democratic social relationships are denied. Two, the intellectual for Giroux, in theory and as close as s/he can come in practice, must not only practice social critique, but also perform self-critique, and this will be observable in the selections of this volume where, through the trajectory of Giroux’s work, the reader will see that he has read against, reworked, and rearticulated his own positions over time and in relation to changing social and cultural relationships and political and economic demands. More: As Giroux has insisted many times in practice as a teacher and in the broader world as an engaged public intellectual, the intellectual has an obligation to link critique with a discourse of hope, a sense that individuals and groups can both make history—though not without struggle—and, under certain circumstances, make it for the better. Critique in this instance is inextricably linked to and enabled by a sense of possibility, a demand to imagine the world differently.

Reading the Giroux Reader

Giroux’s theoretical and practical work have been, from the start, devoted to investigating and bringing into being the conditions and relationships capable of supporting a more just and humane social order, a vision that Giroux came to align with the project of a radical, inclusive democracy. The theoretical traditions from which he has worked and reworked in the interests of this project have changed over time, and the categories stimulating Giroux’s studies have differed from time to time. However, there are some categories, for example, critical pedagogy and the transformative or oppositional public intellectual, which have always figured in Giroux’s research and which he has rethought in various moments. For these reasons, the selections compiled in this volume are organized somewhat chronologically in thematic sections, according to both the theoretical-political evolution of Giroux’s work and the primary categories he has investigated and theorized in the interests of promoting a radical, inclusive democracy.

The sections used to organize the selections in this volume are as follows, and in this order: Sociology of Education, Cultural Studies and Cultural Politics, The War against Youth, From Critical Pedagogy to Public Pedagogy, The Politics of Higher Education, and Public Intellectuals and Their Work. Of course, another scholar might have devised and used different categories, for instance, “film as public pedagogy” since Giroux has provided many studies on the subject. However, these have been addressed very well elsewhere. Considering the magnitude of Giroux’s publishing record, another scholar
might have, similarly, selected any number of studies in place of one or, perhaps, all of them presented here. We all have our rationales. In addition to providing a sampling of Giroux’s studies that speaks to the transformations and continuities in his theoretical work and the central categories that have impelled his research, I have attempted to provide selections that meet one or all of the following criteria: 1) provide theoretical and practical resources for teachers, students, and other citizens to use in their professional, academic, and everyday lives; 2) demonstrate a general intellectual contribution made by Giroux to social, political, cultural, and educational thought; and 3) have ongoing social, political, cultural and educational relevance. What’s more, it is hoped that these selections and their ordering can assist in taking up Giroux’s contributions as a whole or in parts by using specific sections of the volume as they fit particular course goals.

The Sociology of Education

Influenced strongly by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Giroux’s first studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s dealt with a range of concerns, which were related but not limited to the social, historical, and philosophical foundations of education, curriculum studies, and citizenship education. These studies largely underpinned Giroux’s development of a critical theory/science of schooling and, in turn, a critical pedagogy of learning. For Giroux to devise a self-reflexive and socially critical mode of collective learning by which its limitations and possibilities for enabling critical thinking and analytical discourse were constantly made visible, open to resistance and transformation, he took a detour through the sociology of education, primarily that which emerged from studies affiliated with what became known as the New Sociology of Education. Through his dialectical treatment of cultural reproduction and production, accommodation and resistance, structural-institutional forms and concrete human agency, and intensive engagement with issues of ideology and hegemony, a singular, though provisional, critical theory of schooling emerged from Giroux’s work at this time. In contradistinction to both liberal and radical theories of schooling, Giroux defined schools as “contested terrains” that were neither foolproof conveyor belts of social mobility and harmony nor precision-built engines of domination free from the play of history, culture, and the intended and unintended consequences of power, but arenas in which competing and unequal social groups struggled to institute and legitimate their view of social order. For this reason, teacher work itself had to be redefined, and Giroux began reformulating the role of the teacher as not merely a legislator or purveyor of given “truth,” but as a “transformative intellectual,” an interpreter of and key participant in the production of culture and, potentially, resistance, thus stripping the “intellectual” of his/her elitist regalia and pretensions to “scholarly” and political
“neutrality,” a reformulation that would remain central to Giroux’s work as readers will learn in Chapters 7–8 and 12–13.

Beginning in the mid- to late 1980s and significantly in the early 1990s, Giroux’s perspectives on culture, ideology, power and resistance began to integrate the key insights provided by cultural studies, critical feminism, and the moral and ethical work of liberation theology stemming from South America, in addition to the emerging theoretical discourses of postmodernism. Giroux also began to focus intensively on the political, cultural, and educational power of popular culture in a mass-mediated world that was undergoing rapid social and economic change. Both of these transformations in Giroux’s work revised his understanding of the complexity of domination by extending it from merely class oppression to gender and racial injustices, seeing oppression as a multivalenced process operating on different groups and different individuals in different ways and at different times across the shifting “borders” in a social world that was marked by the fluid conditions of postmodernity.

These advances in Giroux’s thought politicized popular culture. While Giroux retained the Frankfurt School’s critical posture toward the ways in which capitalist relationships saturated the spheres of entertainment and leisure, he refused to abandon or belittle these spheres. He understood/understands them to be contested terrains where battles were/are waged over the construction of subjectivities, and social, political, cultural, moral and, arguably, economic regulation occurred/s. Consequently, Giroux’s position on the power of schooling began to shift, understanding it in relation to the modes by which and the conditions under which people learn outside of the formal process of schooling. In this regard, Giroux came to see the production and regulation of desire that occurred through popular culture as a constitutive, “legitimate aspect of students’ everyday lives” and a “primary force in shaping the various and often contradictory subject positions students take up.”

Cultural Studies and Cultural Politics

The theoretical legacy and political thrust of cultural studies provided Giroux with the categories of investigation and modes of analysis for identifying, engaging, and redirecting the “educational force” of culture, assisting in further theorizing how schools occupy only one point in an intricate network of educational processes and social, political, and moral regulation. In particular, Giroux’s appropriation of cultural studies and his articulation of it with critical pedagogy laid the basis for a radical or “insurgent” cultural pedagogy, that is, the understanding that “culture is intrinsically pedagogical; it forms, shapes, and cultivates individuals and groups and is, thus, an important site for radical democratic politics.” Subsequently, Giroux theo-
lized more specifically how the processes of learning—in schools and by way of the educational force of culture—had to be constitutive of the processes of socially just transformation, extending an insight from cultural theorist Raymond Williams. To embrace critical pedagogy as cultural politics meant that, in addition to proliferating and legitimating the sites in which education occurs, literacy itself would then need to be pluralized. The idea of literacies suggested that in addition to being attentive to the pedagogical value of traditional print technologies and cultural artifacts, educators needed to engage just as seriously the cultural codes produced by youth and other citizens within asymmetrical relationships of power and the images, sound texts, narratives, and (Hollywood) films that pervaded increasingly commodified public cultures and which were circulated by the ever-changing new media technologies in a social field dominated by corporate interests.

These transformations in Giroux’s theoretical work provided the tools with which he began to work on other sites, processes, and agencies of education in the interests of both expanding, that is, democratizing, the sites and processes of education in which people were entangled in their everyday lives and providing modes of analysis and resources capable of intervening in those contexts and, when necessary, changing them for the better. Amongst other substantive pedagogical sites, Giroux analyzed how corporations were not only involved in a politics of representation, but were also transforming the representation of politics in the early 1990s (Chapter 3, this volume), simultaneously riffing on captivating and formative social relationships in particular historical contexts, and educating citizens to construct new relationships in which their roles would be defined less by the demands of citizenship than by the allures of being loyal consumers of “responsible” corporations in a marketized social order. Moreover, this crossing of cultural studies and critical pedagogy alerted Giroux to and allowed him to examine how the reordering of capitalism, the changing roles of the state, and the conditions of postmodernity began to impact youth, underscoring challenges besetting democratic public life more generally (Chapter 4, this volume).

The War against Youth

Giroux rarely asks comfortable questions. Particularly since the mid-1990s, he has mobilized his facility with multiple theoretical and public discourses to address the following questions: In what ways and how do the conditions to which youth are subjected and the various “crises” surrounding them constitute, by definition and in effects, a war against youth? How does the war against youth register iniquitously along gender and racial lines and across multiple, purportedly unrelated spheres (e.g., talk radio and social welfare policy, popular newspeak and public schools, or Hollywood films and education and criminal justice policy)? In turn, how does the war against
youth both symbolize and constitute a war on the future and democratic public life itself? What tendencies of force with what latent and blatant consequences tie the two wars into a seemingly “natural” whole? Indeed, these are disturbing questions, and it is not accidental that Giroux started asking them in the mid-1990s and has returned to them at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In part, Giroux’s entry point to the war against youth was, counter intuitively, the public discourses of “innocence,” and, more predictably, the syntax of abridgment that began to lock media image-narratives of people of color and “criminality” into a nearly impenetrable post–civil rights worldview. Giroux found that behind the pretensions to innocence and the panics about youth criminality in the 1990s was a set of wicked material practices, which were/are related to changes in social policy and public culture and have produced devastating consequences for a generation of youth. To put it differently, while a direct causal relationship might not necessarily exist between media representations of youth (of color) and changes in social policy, Giroux underscores the substantive resonances between the two sets of discourses and practices, as they mobilize the same codes of representation within the same historical-material conditions. Both sides of this relationship were/are related to a larger set of forces for Giroux: Between the persistent and escalating corporate assault on public spaces and discourses, a process which Giroux increasingly has come to associate with neoliberal economic philosophy and cultural politics, and decreasing state responsibility for social provisions such as public schools, social welfare, healthcare and so on, children and youth have become public enemy number one—not because they are dangerous, though an exceptionally rare few of them are from time to time, but because they are dependent upon the very public investments that neoliberals and social conservatives of the New Right have lambasted as public burdens and fiscal waste for the last 30 years. This makes children and youth, by default, not only private burdens, according to the New World Order(ing) of things, but also social dangers and wastable or, in Giroux’s term, disposable as both public coffers and public languages are emptied of any vestiges of social responsibility toward youth and the future—a social irresponsibility of sorts that is run through the distillery of “private” choice, “personal” responsibility or pathology, and “self-help.”

In study after study, Giroux has mapped the territory of this harrowing set of social forces across numerous public and private sites. These forces are implicated in processes ranging from the commercialization of public schools and the commodification and sexualization of child and youth bodies (Chapter 5, this volume) to the criminalization of youth and the militarization of public space and culture (Chapter 6, this volume). Assuredly, for Giroux, these transformations in the conditions of public life and in adult responsibility toward youth bear consequences for all youth, but they also need to be understood and contested in terms of
how they are refracted disproportionately through the modalities of race and gender and threaten the very promise of democracy.

From Critical Pedagogy to Public Pedagogy

As Giroux’s conceptualizations and understandings of education, cultural politics, public culture, the profound and pervasive influences of (global) corporate culture and politics, and democracy both expanded and became more exacting, so too did his understanding of critical pedagogy. In recent years, Giroux has theorized critical pedagogy as public pedagogy. Public pedagogy is, as Giroux explains in Chapter 8, a strategy for engaging “more seriously how pedagogy functions on local and global levels to secure and challenge the ways in which power is deployed, affirmed, and resisted within and outside traditional discourses and cultural spheres.” This reformulation of critical pedagogy, in broader terms as public pedagogy, has at least four consequences, making a significant contribution to social thought. One, Giroux again provides a rationale—and calls into being the set of relationships—for recognizing and extending, or transforming, the ways power operates, knowledge is produced, and subjectivities are secured or resisted under the conditions of a globalizing neoliberal capitalism and emerging global public sphere. This has the consequence of subjecting all knowledge forms and their modes of production to public engagement and contestation. Two, it requires that the historical legacy of cultural studies, and its relationship to public pedagogy, be rethought in light of altered historical conditions—by no means an easy task, but a necessary one all the same. Three, the responsibility of intellectuals takes on a new dimension and force, as the borders delineating official and unofficial sites of knowledge production either proliferate, become commodified, or become more porous due to ever-changing media and communications technologies and in accordance with the assault on all things public and democratic by the forces of neoliberalism. Intellectuals, that is, must renew and extend their practices and projects with a moral commitment to creating contexts—within and outside of dominant cultural institutions—in which education can be linked to “modes of political agency that promote critical citizenship and engage the ethical imperative to alleviate human suffering,” as Giroux explains in Chapters 7 and 8 (this volume). Thus, as human suffering and grotesque power asymmetries have assumed global proportions that evade the limited reach of the modern nation-state’s social side, citizenship itself must be calibrated to the “new social formations that the current political and social institutions of the nation-state cannot influence, contain, or control,” and it must “invoke a broader notion of democracy in which the global becomes the space for exercising civic courage, social responsibility, politics, and compassion for the plight of others,” Giroux explains in the intimate context of an interview.
Introduction

with another international scholar (Chapter 7, this volume). (Intellectuals, it should be clear, play a critical role in either supporting or subverting such a global democratic project.) Four, considering the inordinate power that corporations wield on the representation of politics and the politics of representation, cultural production, and everyday life, public pedagogy underscores the profound necessity of educators and cultural workers to work with wider groups to both hold corporations publicly accountable for their impacts on public life and struggle for fundamental reform of economic, education, and media policy. In other words, corporations should be engaged for the public pedagogies they produce and the representational politics they employ, “forcing civic discourse and popular culture to rub … against each other,” as Giroux demonstrates in one of his many case studies of the Disney Corporation in Chapter 9 (this volume).23

The Politics of Higher Education

Despite Giroux’s formulation of public pedagogy and forays into popular culture, he is still critically invested in the moral and ethical roles demanded of public schooling and higher education in educating critical, civic minded citizens and keeping the “promise” of democracy alive. To be more precise, and honest to Giroux’s work, public pedagogy and popular culture, and public schooling and higher education, are not diametrically opposed or mutually exclusive spheres, and they cannot be if Giroux is, in fact, concerned with democratizing the processes of education and developing contexts in which learning processes can become the processes of social transformation. On the one hand, this understanding presents specific curricular and pedagogical challenges to educators and cultural workers working within institutions of public and higher education and, on the other, it demands sustained engagements with the structural-institutional and social changes (self-) imposed on institutions of higher education by the wider and often contradictory forces of neoliberalism and social conservatism.24

In the former case, this suggests, in part, that educators provide conditions and pedagogical relationships in which students can interrogate public discourses (e.g., Hollywood film, policy talk) as texts equally as legitimate as, and often more powerful than, traditional curricular devices and pedagogical modes. This does not mean that texts simply be “added” to existing curricular materials, but that they are added within a larger attempt to link critique with social action as part of developing the skills of and affective investments in critical citizenship. Educators and cultural workers must also be concerned with creating pedagogical conditions and relationships capable of not only bridging the gap between how the social world is represented within disciplinary gazes and how it is actually experienced by, for instance, people of color in this historical juncture, but also reordering the material
and symbolic structures underpinning that gap and its threat to democratic public life (Chapter 10, this volume). In the latter case, it means to engage the crisis of higher education as being fundamentally related to the war being waged against youth and on democracy by corporate culture. There are at least two points of entry here, as Giroux explains in Chapter 11. One is the construction of and recommitment to public time in higher education. This is a structural-institutional concern. As universities are defined (define themselves?) more by instrumental and commercial desires than by their responsibilities to public needs, the temporal burdens operating in universities refigure academic labor, transform university space, undermine collegiality, and alter teacher-student relationships and, more broadly, the relationship between universities, democratic public life, and the future. Two, educators, cultural workers, and students crucially need to construct and deploy a language of possibility within a politics of educated hope that "makes concrete the possibility for transforming higher education into a practice and public event that confronts the flow of everyday experience and the weight of social suffering with the force of individual and collective resistance and the promise of an ongoing project of democratic social transformation" (Giroux, Chapter 11, this volume).

Public Intellectuals and Their Work

The intellectual has always featured prominently in Giroux’s research. His earliest writings in Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling, Theory and Resistance in Education, Education under Siege (with Stanley Aronowitz) (Bergin and Garvey, 1985), Teachers as Intellectuals: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Learning (Bergin and Garvey, 1988), and the important Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Critical Pedagogy in the Modern Age (University of Minnesota Press, 1988), can be understood, in part, as "quest[s] to identify ... the role of the intellectual as a participant in social affairs" (Emphasis added). This is a deceivingly simple quest. The intellectual was not always imagined across the 20th century to be a self-reflexive “participant” in social affairs, but a “scholar,” an “academic,” a mere “observer” unadulterated by the “outside” world, or a legislator of it vis-à-vis his/her “objective” descriptions of and prescriptions for it. Characteristic of Giroux’s approach, he has sought in different moments to give the intellectual critical and transformative, not affirmative and reproductive, roles and, more recently, an oppositional, engaged public set of moral and ethical commitments. The intellectual is consequently redefined, in Giroux’s work, from his/her role as transmitter of “universal truths” to an active creator and innovator within multiple, related communities who is capable of providing moral leadership and constructing formative alliances with other cultural workers within, against, and between dominant cultural institutions and on local and global levels. For Giroux, the intellectual thus
must become a “border crosser,” one capable of “reinvent[ing] traditions not within the discourse of submission, reverence, and repetition, but ‘[in one of] transformation and critique’” (Giroux, Chapter 12, this volume). For these reasons, Giroux’s work on intellectuals investigates the politics of the intellectual’s location and work, the intellectual’s public responsibility as a result of his/her position in the division of labor, the ways intellectuals navigate the shoals of crisis, criticism, and worldliness (Chapter 13, this volume), and the intellectual’s place in articulating a politics of educated hope with a public pedagogy capable of contesting “social relations that keep privilege and oppression alive as active constituting forces of daily life” (Giroux, Chapter 12, this volume).

A closing editorial consideration before the reader can address the task at hand: Since the intellectual has always maintained a central presence in Giroux’s work, this section should have, perhaps, opened the volume, so as to give clearer insights to both the implicit and explicit values driving Giroux’s commitment to the work he does. I have my rationale. Respect, engagement, criticality, and a language of possibility saturate Giroux’s work on public intellectuals. This, I believe, in both personal and profound senses, is an important way to close The Giroux Reader—at least for now, since Giroux exhibits no signs of fatigue, lack of civic courage, or boredom with the ever-changing world around him … and us. Closing this collection with Giroux’s work on intellectuals will nod to the respect and language of possibility I have fortunately witnessed and experienced firsthand with Giroux, the mentor and teacher, and demonstrate Giroux’s openness and critical posture, as an engaged public intellectual himself, toward the insights and actions of others. More importantly, I wish to leave readers mobilized by the same openness, criticality, and language of possibility that animate these selections on public intellectuals and suffuse the rest of this collection.

Notes


4. See, for instance, J. Martin Rochester, “Critical Demagogues,” Education Next 3, no. 4 (2003): 77–82. In this essay, Rochester so egregiously misrepresents Giroux’s work by claiming it is “Marxist” and his whole pedagogical project is to inculcate unwitting students with revolutionary scripture. In this volume, one can see and learn that nothing could be further from the crux of Giroux’s work, especially that which has been published post-1995, which is founded in radical democratic theory, not revolutionary Marxism. Needless to say, this piece was published in a think tank rag that is edited by neoconservative restorationists. Another example of this type of misrepresentation comes from Fred Hess, an American Enterprise Institute fellow who is increasingly achieving acclaim in educational reform. Hess, in the typical New Right way, inverts the problematic. In this instance, Hess, whose education reform theories are underpinned by neoliberal market practices and ideology, hardly a democratic or even “conservative” framework, argues that the weakness in Giroux’s work is that he is a “status quo reformer,” impeding the change that schools and the wider American public “need.” Giroux, it is clear, is about change, democratic change. Thus, the revolutionaries on the right, for whom social democracy is anti-democratic and inefficient, invert the script, while misrepresenting Giroux’s work. See Frederick M. Hess, Common Sense School Reform (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2004).


7. See Alan R. Sadovnik, “Postmodernism in the Sociology of Education: Closing the Rift among Theory, Practice, and Research,” in G. Noblit and W. T. Pink, eds., Continuity and Contradiction: The Futures of the Sociology of Education (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1995), pp. 309–326. To see how Giroux actively differentiates himself from postmodernism and modernism, see Henry A. Giroux, “Rethinking the Boundaries of Educational Discourse: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Feminism,” College Literature 17, no. 2/3 (1990): 1–50. Additionally, some direct insights on how Giroux is, by all means, a critical theorist, but tied neither to postmodernism or modernism, can be found in Chapter 2, this volume.

8. These considerations of Giroux’s research and the ways he goes about conducting it are not made to claim that Giroux’s work should be left alone, left to “speak for itself,” or that it has no shortcomings. None of these options is scarcely the case. None of them would be productive for intellectual work and public debate, or honest about Giroux’s and others’ research. To the contrary, these considerations indicate the need to subject his and other scholars’ work to types of critical analysis that embrace the possibilities and limits of the work, so as to model and produce analytical discourses, vocabularies, and practices crucial to enriching wider public dialogue about the work and its potential effects on the social context from which it emerges and into which it intervenes.


12. An important theoretical exploration and antecedent to this understanding of the role of effective communication in a democracy can be found in Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780–1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 295–338.


14. Chapters 12 and 13, this volume, eloquently address the relationship between critique, discourses of hope, and possibility, particularly as they might be addressed in higher education and by public intellectuals.


17. It should be noted that planted in these engagements with cultural production were the seeds of Giroux’s fruitful studies to come.


19. For a useful and concise explanation of Giroux’s reworking of the Frankfurt School’s position on popular culture, see Michael Peters and Nicholas C. Burbules, Poststructuralism and Educational Research (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).


21. It is suggested that one reads Chapter 3, this volume, with Naomi Klein’s critically acclaimed and insightful study done nearly ten years later. See Naomi Klein, No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs (New York: Picador, 2002), especially pp. 87–105.

22. See also Lawrence Grossberg’s important study, Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America’s Future (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005).


25. Thomas S. Popkewitz, “Intellectuals, Sciences, and Pedagogies: Critical Traditions and Instrumental Cultures,” American Journal of Education 93, no. 3 (1985): 433. If the reader is not familiar with this review essay, it is highly recommended reading for its critical insights on not only Giroux’s early work, but also the background history of social and political thought concerning schooling in the twentieth century.

In the last decade [between early 1970s and 1980s], Karl Marx’s concept of reproduction has been one of the major organizing ideas informing socialist theories of schooling. Marx states that “every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction. . . . Capitalist production, therefore . . . produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation, on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.”1 Radical educators have given this concept a central place in developing a critique of liberal views of schooling. Moreover, they have used it as the theoretical foundation for developing a critical science of education.2 Thus far, the task has been only partially successful.

Contrary to the claims of liberal theorists and historians that public education offers possibilities for individual development, social mobility, and political and economic power to the disadvantaged and dispossessed, radical educators have argued that the main functions of schools are the reproduction of the dominant ideology, its forms of knowledge, and the distribution of skills needed to reproduce the social division of labor. In the radical perspective, schools as institutions could only be understood through an analysis of their relationship to the state and the economy. In this view, the deep structure or underlying significance of schooling could only be revealed through analyzing how schools functioned as agencies of social and cultural reproduction—that is, how they legitimated capitalist rationality and sustained dominant social practices.

Instead of blaming students for educational failure, radical educators blamed the dominant society. Instead of abstracting schools from the dynamics of inequality and class-race-gender modes of discrimination, schools were considered central agencies in the politics and processes of domination. In contrast to the liberal view of education as the great equalizer, radical
educators saw the objectives of schooling quite differently. As Paul Willis states, “Education was not about equality, but inequality… Education’s main purpose of the social integration of a class society could be achieved only by preparing most kids for an unequal future, and by insuring their personal underdevelopment. Far from productive roles in the economy simply waiting to be ‘fairly’ filled by the products of education, the ‘Reproduction’ perspective reversed this to suggest that capitalist production and its roles required certain educational outcomes.”

In my view, radical educators presented a serious challenge to the discourse and logic of liberal views of schooling. But they did more than that. They also tried to fashion a new discourse and set of understandings around the reproduction thesis. Schools were stripped of their political innocence and connected to the social and cultural matrix of capitalist rationality. In effect, schools were portrayed as reproductive in three senses. First, schools provided different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in a labor force stratified by class, race, and gender. Second, schools were seen as reproductive in the cultural sense, functioning in part to distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, language, and modes of style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests. Third, schools were viewed as part of a state apparatus that produced and legitimated the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state’s political power.

Radical reproduction theorists have used these forms of reproduction to fashion a number of specific concerns that have shaped the nature of their educational research and inquiry. These concerns have focused on analyses of the relationships between schooling and the workplace, class-specific educational experiences and the job opportunities that emerge for different social groups, the culture of the school and the class-defined cultures of the students who attend them, and the relationship among the economic, ideological, and repressive functions of the state and how they affect school policies and practices.

Reproduction theory and its various explanations of the role and function of education have been invaluable in contributing to a broader understanding of the political nature of schooling and its relation to the dominant society. But it must be stressed that the theory has not achieved its promise to provide a comprehensive critical science of schooling. Reproduction theorists have overemphasized the idea of domination in their analyses and have failed to provide any major insights into how teachers, students, and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence. More specifically, reproduction accounts of schooling have continually patterned themselves after structural-functionalist versions of Marxism which stress that history is made “behind the backs” of the members of society. The idea that people
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do make history, including its constraints, has been neglected. Indeed, hu-
man subjects generally “disappear” amidst a theory that leaves no room for
moments of self-creation, mediation, and resistance. These accounts often
leave us with a view of schooling and domination that appears to have been
pressed out of an Orwellian fantasy; schools are often viewed as factories or
prisons, teachers and students alike act merely as pawns and role bearers
constrained by the logic and social practices of the capitalist system.

By downplaying the importance of human agency and the notion of re-
sistance, reproduction theories offer little hope for challenging and chang-
ing the repressive features of schooling. By ignoring the contradictions
and struggles that exist in schools, these theories not only dissolve human
agency, they unknowingly provide a rationale for not examining teachers
and students in concrete school settings. Thus, they miss the opportunity to
determine whether there is a substantial difference between the existence
of various structural and ideological modes of domination and their actual
unfolding and effects.

Recent research on schooling in the United States, Europe, and Australia
has both challenged and attempted to move beyond reproduction theories.
This research emphasizes the importance of human agency and experience as
the theoretical cornerstones for analyzing the complex relationship between
schools and the dominant society. Organized around what I loosely label as
resistance theory, these analyses give central importance to the notions of
collict, struggle, and resistance.³

Combining ethnographic studies with more recent European cultural stud-
ies, resistance theorists have attempted to demonstrate that the mechanisms
of social and cultural reproduction are never complete and always meet with
partially realized elements of opposition.⁹ In effect, resistance theorists have
developed a theoretical framework and method of inquiry that restores the
critical notion of agency. They point not only to the role that students play
in challenging the most oppressive aspects of schools but also to the ways
in which students actively participate through oppositional behavior in a
logic that very often consigns them to a position of class subordination and
political defeat.

One of the most important assumptions of resistance theory is that working-
class students are not merely the by-product of capital, compliantly submit-
ting to the dictates of authoritarian teachers and schools that prepare them for a
life of deadening labor. Rather, schools represent contested terrains marked
not only by structural and ideological contradictions but also by collectively
informed student resistance. In other words, schools are social sites charac-
terized by overt and hidden curricula, tracking, dominant and subordinant
cultures, and competing class ideologies. Of course, conflict and resistance take
place within asymmetrical relations of power which always favor the dominant
classes, but the essential point is that there are complex and creative fields
of resistance through which class-, race- and gender-mediated practices often refuse, reject, and dismiss the central messages of the schools.

In resistance accounts, schools are relatively autonomous institutions that not only provide spaces for oppositional behavior and teaching but also represent a source of contradictions that sometimes make them dysfunctional to the material and ideological interests of the dominant society. Schools are not solely determined by the logic of the workplace or the dominant society; they are not merely economic institutions but are also political, cultural, and ideological sites that exist somewhat independently of the capitalist market economy. Of course, schools operate within limits set by society, but they function in part to influence and shape those limits, whether they be economic, ideological, or political. Moreover, instead of being homogeneous institutions operating under the direct control of business groups, schools are characterized by diverse forms of school knowledge, ideologies, organizational styles, and classroom social relations. Thus, schools often exist in a contradictory relation to the dominant society, alternately supporting and challenging its basic assumptions. For instance, schools sometimes support a notion of liberal education that is in sharp contradiction to the dominant society’s demand for forms of education that are specialized, instrumental, and geared to the logic of the marketplace. In addition, schools still strongly define their role via their function as agencies for social mobility even though they currently turn out graduates at a faster pace than the economy’s capacity to employ them.

Whereas reproduction theorists focus almost exclusively on power and how the dominant culture ensures the consent and defeat of subordinate classes and groups, theories of resistance restore a degree of agency and innovation to the cultures of these groups. Culture, in this case, is constituted as much by the group itself as by the dominant society. Subordinate cultures, whether working-class or otherwise, partake of moments of self-production as well as reproduction; they are contradictory in nature and bear the marks of both resistance and reproduction. Such cultures are forged within constraints shaped by capital and its institutions, such as schools, but the conditions within which such constraints function vary from school to school and from neighborhood to neighborhood. Moreover, there are never any guarantees that capitalist values and ideologies will automatically succeed, regardless of how strongly they set the agenda. As Stanley Aronowitz reminds us, “In the final analysis, human praxis is not determined by its pre-conditions; only the boundaries of possibility are given in advance.”

In this rather brief and abstract discussion, I have juxtaposed two models of educational analysis to suggest that theories of resistance represent a significant advance over the important but limited theoretical gains of reproduction models of schooling. But it is important to emphasize that, in spite of more complex modes of analysis, resistance theories are also
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marred by a number of theoretical flaws. In part, these flaws stem from a failure to recognize the degree to which resistance theories themselves are indebted to some of the more damaging features of reproduction theory. At the same time, however, resistance theories have too readily ignored the most valuable insights of reproduction theory and, in doing so, have failed to examine and appropriate those aspects of the reproduction model that are essential to developing a critical science of education. Furthermore, despite their concrete differences, resistance and reproduction approaches to education share the failure of recycling and reproducing the dualism between agency and structure, a failure that has plagued educational theory and practice for decades, while simultaneously representing its greatest challenge. Consequently, neither position provides the foundation for a theory of education that links structures and institutions to human agency and action in a dialectical manner.

The basis for overcoming this separation of human agency from structural determinants lies in the development of a theory of resistance that both questions its own assumptions and critically appropriates those aspects of schooling that are accurately presented and analyzed in the reproduction model. In other words, the task facing resistance theorists is twofold: first, they must structure their own assumptions to develop a more dialectical model of schooling and society; and second, they must reconstruct the major theories of reproduction in order to abstract from them their most radical and emancipatory insights.

The remainder of this essay will first discuss three important theories that constitute various dimensions of the reproduction model of schooling: the economic-reproductive model, the cultural-reproductive model, and the hegemonic-state reproductive model. Since reproduction theorists have been the object of considerable criticism elsewhere, I shall focus primarily on the strengths of each of these models, and shall only summarize some of the general criticisms. Second, I shall look at what I generously call neo-Marxist theories of resistance that have recently emerged in the literature on education and schooling, examining their theoretical strengths and weaknesses, while at the same time analyzing how they are either positively or negatively informed by theories of reproduction. Finally, I shall attempt to develop a new theory of resistance and shall briefly analyze its implications for a critical science of schooling.

Schooling and Theories of Reproduction

Economic-Reproductive Model

The political-economy model of reproduction has exercised the strongest influence on radical theories of schooling. Developed primarily around the work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, it has had a major influence on
Chapter 1

theories about the hidden curriculum, educational policy studies, and a wide range of ethnographic research. At the core of the political-economy approach are two fundamentally important questions. The most important of these focuses on the relationship between schooling and society and asks, How does the educational system function within society? The second question points to a related but more concrete concern regarding the issue of how subjectivities actually get constituted in schools, asking, How do schools fundamentally influence the ideologies, personalities, and needs of students? While theorists who work within this model give different answers, they generally agree on the relationship between power and domination, on the one hand, and the relationship between schooling and the economy on the other.

Power in these accounts is defined and examined primarily in terms of its function to mediate and legitimate the relations of dominance and subordination in the economic sphere. In this perspective, power becomes the property of dominant groups and operates to reproduce class, gender, and racial inequalities that function in the interests of the accumulation and expansion of capital. This becomes clear in the way economic-reproductive theorists analyze the relations between the economy and schooling.

Central to this position is the notion that schools can only be understood by analyzing the structural effects of the workplace on them. In Bowles and Gintis’s work this notion becomes clear through their reliance on what they call the correspondence theory. Broadly speaking, the correspondence theory posits that the hierarchically structured patterns of values, norms, and skills that characterize both the workforce and the dynamics of class interaction under capitalism are mirrored in the social dynamics of the daily classroom encounter. Through its classroom social relations, schooling functions to inculcate students with the attitudes and dispositions necessary to accept the social and economic imperatives of a capitalist economy.

In this view, the underlying experience and relations of schooling are animated by the power of capital to provide different skills, attitudes, and values to students of different classes, races, and genders. In effect, schools mirror not only the social division of labor but also the wider society’s class structure. The theoretical construct that illuminates the structural and ideological connection between the schools and the workplace is the notion of the hidden curriculum. This term refers to those classroom social relations that embody specific messages which legitimize the particular views of work, authority, social rules, and values that sustain capitalist logic and rationality, particularly as manifested in the workplace. The power of these messages lies in their seemingly universal qualities—qualities that emerge as part of the structured silences that permeate all levels of school and classroom relations. The social relations that constitute the hidden curriculum provide ideological and material weight to questions regarding what counts as high versus low