

## TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

## Memories of Paulo

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## AFTERWORD

### *A Fado for Freire*

We are standing before the ignoble wreckage of a social order—a has-been state recycling second-hand ideas, where a politics of fear has been created, in part, by a bandying about of the term “terrorist” and an organic integration into the neoliberal state as internalized co-optation and forms of self-regulation resulting in a managed consent of the masses to their own domination. Such a turbid politics has stanchd and fractured public debate on vexed political issues, quelling voices of dissent and proscribing public efforts at critical inquiry. The current administration’s<sup>1</sup> contempt for civil rights has made a mockery of our constitutional system and defamed the historical struggle of social justice educators to create the conditions of possibility for students to become self-reflexive citizens.

The work of Paulo Freire constitutes an antidote to much of what is wrong with the current political landscape. Freirean *pedagogia libertadora* is animated by a value-based vision of a better future for humanity through the development of a self-educative and transformative process that facilitates revolutionary praxis, a liberatory shaping of a collective political and ethical project. Interlinking critical theory, humanistic philosophy and the hermeneutic tradition of Marxist critique of political economy, Freirean pedagogy situates itself through dialogue and cooperation—the conditions for the creation of *conscientizacao*. Through supporting the social development of individuals who are positioned as agents of history in the making, encouraging individuals and groups who are socially, culturally and economically excluded, and intervening in both formal educational and non-formal educational settings, Freirean pedagogy continues to advance across the educational firmament.

He was a picaresque pedagogical wanderer, a timeless vagabond linked symbolically to Coal Yard Alley, to Rio’s City of God, to the projects of Detroit and any and every neighborhood where working men and women have toiled throughout the centuries, a flaneur of the boulevards littered with *fruiterers* and fish vendors and tobacco and candy stalls, the hardscrabble causeways packed with migrant workers and the steam punk alleys of dystopian dreams. This man of the people was as much at home in the *favelas* as he was in the mango groves, a maestro who could cobble together the word and the world from the debris of everyday life. from its fury of dislocation, from the hoary senselessness of its cruelty, from its beautiful and frozen emptiness and wrathfulness of its violence. And in the midst of all of this he was able to fashion revolutionary hope from the tatters of humanity’s fallen grace. This was Paulo Freire.

Some time ago in Lisbon, I went with a colleague to hear Joao Queiroz, an exponent of the Coimbra version of popular Portuguese music known as *Fado* in a restaurant called *A Severa* (named after Maria Severa, the intrepid gypsy singer who was the most famous interpreter of the *Fado* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century). The word *Fado* comes from the Latin and signifies fate or prophecy. *Fado* is meant to express

various states of the soul—from melancholia, to happiness, to the satirical. Transfixed by the guitars and the majestic voice of the singer, I began to see this book as a type of literary Fado in honor of Paulo Freire. It is a Fado, yes, but it also has elements of José Alfonso's famous revolutionary song "Grândola, Vila Morena." It is a heart-rendering testament to the beauty and power of memory as Paulo's life and work are remembered and his love of the people and the comradeship—and revolutionary praxis—he developed with them are celebrated. We would do a disservice to Paulo to make him larger than life, because life for Paulo was larger than any one human being. But that should not stop us from imagining a Fado for Paulo, sung by Cristina Branca, and carried to the farthest reaches of our heart.

Because I spend a great deal of my time traveling internationally at the invitation of universities, teachers unions, and political and activist organizations, I am forced to do much of my writing in hotel rooms, airport lobbies and on dinner trays in airplanes. The writing of this afterword is no exception. Recently I gave a week of talks to elementary and secondary school teachers in Medellín, Colombia. One of the handful of schools that I visited during my visit to Colombia was *La Independencia*, a combined preschool, primary and secondary school (educación preescolar, básica primaria y secundaria y media academia) located in the barrio of El Salado, sector de San Juan, comuna 13.

The school sits like an somber sentinel in the heart of comuna 13 where a massive military-police operation occurred in October 2002 (known as operation Orion), targeting members of the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, established in the 1960s as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party) and FARC sympathizers as well as members of the ELN (the National Liberation Army) and the CAP (People's Armed Comandos). On the orders of President Uribe, and led by the notorious General Mario Montoya, head of the army's Fourth Brigade and the man who led the scorched earth campaigns in Putumayo in 2001–2002), a combined task force of 3,000 army troops (mostly from the Fourth Brigade), intelligence agents, and police descended like a raging beast upon this shantytown of 100,000 people (many of whom are displaced Afro-Colombian peasants) in the central-western hill, with the backing of tanks and Blackhawk helicopter gunships that indiscriminately fired upon targeted areas. Young men were dragged out of homes, bound, and executed in front of horrified children. Targeting neighborhoods like 20 de Jiloi, Belencito, Corazon, El Salado and las Independencias, this "cleansing" operation that lasted twelve hours left 14 people dead and countless wounded. Hundreds of residents were arrested and at least 46 people "disappeared" in the immediate aftermath of the operation. Not long after the operation, the rightwing death squads of the AUC (United Self-Defence of Colombia, the feared paramilitary that succeeded Pablo Escobar in controlling Medellín's storied drug trade), most notably the Bloque Metro and Cacique Nitibarra, successfully supplanted the left-wing militants, and ruled the area by means of a bloody reign of terror. Most of the *milicianos* fled to Santa Ana, San Luis and Granada, in the northeastern part of the city. I was shown by the principal of La Independencia, pictures of the dead and dying and people holding white sheets who were shouting for the violence to stop.

Comuna 13 was not only known for its armed resistance to state terror, it was an area where residents excelled in organizing and building roads, schools, youth centers, and senior citizens' clinics with their own hands. The principal of La Independencia was proud of the accomplishments of the people of Comuna 13, and was determined after Operation Orion to help his students and their families heal, both physically and emotionally. He and his staff have taken a principled position to keep out of the school all illegally armed groups, including the FARC and the paramilitaries. The school sees its mission as keeping the students and teachers alive, nurturing them affectively and providing spaces of hope that can motivate them to seek enrollment in universities when they graduate. It has become a place of refuge and love (*amor al niño y refugio del niño*). While the school has taken a neutral position in the civil war (if it took a strong social justice position, teachers and administrators would almost certainly be assassinated), it has not abandoned the principle of solidarity with the oppressed. This is a courageous stand in the country with such a US-backed repressive state apparatus, where the military and its allied death squads wage a clandestine war against social movements and trade unionists. More trade unionists are assassinated in Colombia every year than in any other country.

In this school located on the razor's edge of human strife, I found the perfect place to reflect with the principal and the staff upon the importance of the work of Paulo Freire. Whenever I am in Latin America, Europe, Asia, or elsewhere, it is the name Paulo Freire that cements our passions together in a common struggle for justice.

While they have not suffered the fate of the youth in La Independencia, many of today's urban youth in the United States have had little to look forward to other than a life lived in the boulevard of broken dreams, ensepulchred within a granitic horizon of hopelessness that misery has rejected and even despair has abandoned.

We live in a world saturated by injustice. We cannot act justly by refashioning ourselves in an orgy of self-help voluntarism. We need to transform ourselves, yes, but through rebuilding the world in which our acts of justice take place. Our acts must eventually escape the framework of social relations in which they are encased. The circumstances in which people live need to be changed, yes, but it is the people who need to change them. This "change in circumstances" cannot be a gift bestowed by "those in the know" to those who know less. It is the people themselves who need to remove all obstacles to the full development of human beings—that is, after all, what the path to socialism is all about. We are talking here about the development of human capacities and human powers—in short, human agency—and the development of these not just for some select few but for all. This means self-management, co-management, co-operation, joint participation and collective development—all part of a protagonistic, participatory democracy. Michael Lebowitz (2008) affirms that this is what Marx meant when he talked about the concept of revolutionary practice—"the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change." All production should be about producing human beings. Factories, for instance, should be as much about producing human beings as producing commercial products. Lebowitz (2008)

writes: “Through revolutionary practice in our communities, our workplaces and in all our social institutions, we produce ourselves as ‘rich human beings’—rich in capacities and needs—in contrast to the impoverished and crippled human beings that capitalism produces.”

A new world requires new social beings, but new social beings who are actively working to transform the world. I am reminded of Prince Myshkin, in Dostoevsky’s masterpiece, *The Idiot*, who was a model of innocence in a world permeated by evil, but whose goodness sparked new acts of evil. In our world of faceless bureaucrats who control the courts and banks and Pentagon and mercenary companies and corporations and mass media, those who legitimize extraordinary rendition, water boarding and other forms of torture either by their ideological advocacy or by their stone silence, we are also reminded of Hannah Arendt’s storied insight that the most unprepossessing and innocuous-seeming functionaries—those without the obvious political horns and tails—can commit the most atrocious of crimes. The more that evil is able to cohabitate with us unsuspectingly through the blind and mechanistic actions of model bureaucrats, primitive patriots and crass careerists, and the more that we permit evil to live frictionless in our midst, the less we recognize its malevolent presence and the more we begin to become evil ourselves. The inability of much of today’s garden variety critical pedagogy—especially the domesticated and politically drained versions that fleck the landscape of our urban classrooms—to comprehend the nature and the extent of the alienation of today’s youth has produced its inevitable result on the reconceptualization of the problematics that inform the meaning of education as non-oppression, that is, as liberation.

What about those who call themselves Freirean educators but whose actions bespeak anti-Freirean principles and practices? Recently, during a trip to the Universidade do Minho, in Braga (the fifth largest city in Portugal), I became aware of a puzzling and shameful situation. One of the professors there—a brilliant and well-published educational theorist, prominent social activist and popular teacher—is facing what can be straightforwardly called “social fascism.” A group of academics—some of them laudably self-nominated *freireanists* and *left intellectuals*, using such terms no doubt to enhance their social mobility—are not only explicitly blocking and positively boycotting several events that he has been organizing—inviting noteworthy critical scholars from around the world to participate as key note speakers—but also declining to renew the approval of his research project (that has been approved since 2004), claiming that he has no legitimacy to work within the field of educational policy. Moreover they had the temerity to claim and stipulate that race, class, gender and sexual orientation were issues that have nothing to do with curriculum. The following is an excerpt from an official letter addressed to this professor:

[We] have nothing to do with what you are reading or with your research, if you publish material here in Portugal or elsewhere related to Educational Policy. We have nothing against the fact that you are associated with this person, or that person. Do what you want. We will be here to judge and to evaluate what you are doing, and if you are doing appropriate work. However, you are not allowed to do what you are doing here at the Institute. Listen, what

you are doing has nothing to do with curriculum. I am sorry. You have to understand that once and for all. That is not curriculum. Issues of class, race, and gender and sexual orientation have nothing to do with curriculum. You are not allowed to work on those issues here at the Institute.<sup>1</sup>

This is pure societal fascism. What about academic freedom? What about the role of the university professor as a public scholar, a public intellectual? Such hypocrisy represents conditions in which educators (often careerists) talk left but walk right. Clearly, we need to clean up the Augean stables of critical pedagogy.

Paulo Freire has been at the center of almost every debate concerning the production and reproduction of the subject in modern and postmodern sites of learning and teaching. His legacy is daunting and his spirit indefatigable, his work foundational and ineradicable. There is a redivivus character to his thinking that gives his message an uncanny timelessness. No single educator has had such a singular purchase on the hearts and minds of generations of progressive educators throughout the world. It is no exaggeration to say that we can accept Freire or reject Freire, but we cannot, and must not, forget Freire. This is a book about remembering Freire. It is a series of heartfelt reflections on the humanity of Paulo Freire, on the ways that Freire’s personality and pedagogical spirit have affected—and profoundly transformed—educators and activists worldwide, not to say impacted the very mission of education throughout the past thirty years.

Paulo Freire has much to say to today’s teachers whose personalities seek nourishment and a chance to put down roots in a more secure pedagogical ground. His work cannot be transplanted, as if it were a static compendium of pedagogical insights. Rather, it needs to be treated as a process that is always in the making and that must be reinvented in the contextual specificity of where educators take up their particular challenge of teaching and learning. But critical pedagogy cannot be seen as a method, it is a way of being-in-the-world, and must be felt in the occult being of the teacher, in her or his self-sentient nature, by recognizing the sanctity of human life and of nature and the hidden history of otherness contained therein. For Freire, as for many revolutionary critical educators, praxis aggregates our political agency—and its differences—to collective struggle. Here critical pedagogy constitutes the building blocks for a relation with other people. In so doing, revolutionary praxis helps hope resume its odyssey of struggle against the obstacles of fear, ignorance and self-doubt.

Paulo Freire and I shared many moments together, both in North America and in his home in Brazil. He was a dear friend and mentor, and on one occasion in São Paulo during a grindingly academic speech of mine, he helped translate some of the most difficult words. And while he was always operating in an impossible schedule that had him in constant motion around the world, he still found time to pen prefaces and forewords for numerous works by international scholars with whose pedagogical projects he felt a comradely affinity. Such was the generosity of Paulo. Recently I went into the Church of St. Nicholas in Tallin, capital of Estonia (formerly known as Reval), to see the famous *Danse Macabre* painting as depicted at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Bernt Notke (likely the renewal of an analogous painting in Lubeck dating from 1461). The painting represents the transience of life

as we see Death defeating both the mighty and the weak. Everyone was made to dance with Death: the Preacher, the Pope, the Emperor, the Empress, the Cardinal, the King, and the Bishop. Freire's work for me offers the same instruction as Notke's great work: power and privilege and status are but transient affairs and all of us would do well to work as brothers and sisters in the common task of building a better future for all of humanity, and not just those who abuse their earthly rankings. Paulo wrote to me after the death of his first wife, Elza, and he was in very bad shape. But he was to find another love of his life—Nita—and we spent moments together rejoicing in his new-found joy and happiness. Paulo was one of a kind, a singular spirit in a complex world. And while there are those who aspire to be the most important exponents of his life and work, there will never be anyone who possesses the necessary instruments to measure the pedagogical footprints he has left on our planet. And we welcome the reflections of all of these wonderful authors and editors who recognize this, and who celebrate the depth and scope of Paulo's legacy.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Protocol correspondence. (2007) Requerimento Enviado à Comissão Directiva do Centro de Investigação em Educação do Instituto de Educação e psicologia da Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal.

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