

it would be critical to understand how I am perceived (i.e., included or excluded) and how my involvement in the process may prevent or facilitate the acceptance of the change.

In addition, the book omits several major social issues with which rural educators across Canada find themselves confronted, like alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, youth flight from communities, helping victims of abuse, economic decline, and the impact of global forces setting rural agendas. It should be noted that the book did deal with school closure (indirectly) and school drop-outs.

To be more useful to practicing rural educators and to professors of teacher preparation programs, the book needs to take a more rigorous and systematic approach to investigating educational change in rural communities in Canada.

Tom Gougeon
University of Calgary

Giroux, H.A. (1994). *Disturbing pleasures: Learning popular culture*. New York: Routledge, 202 pp. (softcover).

Once again, Henry Giroux presents a thoughtful piece on critical pedagogy, schooling, and popular culture. As is the case with his previous works in the last five years, Giroux focuses his energies on the politics of cultural representations and how these representations create/define/naturalize certain meanings while limiting other, potentially liberating, possibilities. True to his overall style, Giroux offers a penetrating analysis of popular culture while offering a map for teachers and cultural workers to use in trekking through the dense jungle of a consumer culture that hinges on noncritical teachers, submissive cultural workers, and mindless consumers who buy impulsively and accept the reality created by advertising agents, movie directors, and CEOs. *Disturbing Pleasures* is divided into two sections: the first looks at the objectification of certain representations in popular culture while the second concentrates on cultural studies with an interesting article on Freire and an interview with Lech Witkowski.

Giroux's turn to popular culture in the first part is a confessed return to his roots; an awakening, of sorts, in which he is coming to realize the pedagogical potential of popular culture. His study of popular culture is, more

importantly, an attempt (although a failed one) to come to grips with his own suffocating definition of what culture is and the limits this definition puts on how he defines knowledge, views education, and looks at academic work. Unfortunately, this attempt ends in the preface (but does resurface in the second section) and the more traditional role of guardian of culture reappears as his journey transforms into an odyssey of condemnation and representation of popular culture as the playhouse for pleasure seeking consumers and manipulative image makers.

Don't get me wrong, Giroux's critical gaze into the racial representations in such films as *Grand Canyon*, the manipulation of epidemic social issues such as racism and AIDS by Benetton to sell their products and Disney's perpetuation (and rewriting) of the meritocratic myth and conservative family values in order to link Disney products with our national identities are important and welcome pieces of cultural criticism. With the power of his prose, he captures the effects of contemporary consumerism and the politics of representation. For instance, Giroux has captured the current state of race relations in America when he writes: "*Grand Canyon* ... mobilizes the fears and desires of white folks who recognize that cultural differences are here to stay but don't want to be positioned so as to call their own racism or complicity with economic, social, and political inequalities into question" (p. 80). Director Lawrence Karsdan's portrayal of contemporary racial attitudes reflects the mind set legitimated by the Reagan/Bush policies and justified by such recent events as the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings in which affirmative action has been stigmatized as special privileging. More importantly, through his continued development of what he calls cultural workers, he offers a possible pedagogical strategy for those who want to challenge both educational practices and social relations that naturalize certain possibilities (such as the feel good/do nothing attitude represented in Karsdan's work) while eliminating/silencing others.

However, for a cultural worker who proclaimed in *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life* (1989) the desire to move beyond the Frankfurt school's condescending and pessimistic perspective of popular culture, Giroux has failed to do so. In fact, by his failure to look at popular culture as a form of resistance to high culture domination (including the high culture of critical theorists), as a form of critical pedagogy, and as an avenue for creating a pedagogy of possibilities, Giroux continues the Frankfurt tradition of representing popular culture in a manner that limits its meaning to vulgar consumerism. Because of the limitations in the ways he chooses to represent popular culture and his own loyalties to academic culture, Giroux fails to

realize that popular culture in many ways is/can be a form of critical pedagogy. Popular culture does offer multiple possibilities or representations that challenge dominant cultures. In particular, these forms are present in television (which Giroux for some reason does not cover) including attempts by *Roseanne* to deal with economic instability and inequality, *Grace Under Fire* to cover spousal abuse, and *South Central* to provide alternative representations of urban African-Americans to counter the popular gang and/or welfare queen image so dominant in news coverage, films, and other television programs.

What's more, students do see the critical potential popular culture has. They also know popular culture is manipulated by the Benetton's, Disney's, and Karsdan's of the consumer world. At times they accept it by acting as vulgar/mindless consumers. At other times they reject it for the self-serving, grandstanding that it is. The key, for cultural workers, is to realize this and to find ways to connect this critical instinct of students with the broader social, cultural, and economic significance popular culture has for their lives and those around them. In order to do this, cultural workers like Giroux have to recognize that students do not need someone to decode or sanitize these messages for them, but they do need teachers and cultural workers who will show them how the knowledge they develop in everyday, popular forms is as important and meaningful as the "high status knowledge" they supposedly learn in schools. Giroux, unwillingly I am sure, perpetuates a hierarchical structure of knowledge (and the student's silence that goes with it) by ignoring the potential of popular culture as critical pedagogy.

In the second section of the book, the Frankfurt influence diminishes. Giroux is puzzled, as I am, why cultural studies theorists virtually ignore pedagogical issues, especially since, in his view, "cultural studies must be grounded, in part, in a project [which Giroux refers to as the pedagogy of cultural studies] that deepens and expands the possibilities for radical democracy both in the United States and abroad" (p. 128). Giroux correctly suggests two reasons for the absence of any pedagogical theory: "a refusal ... to ... take schooling seriously as a site of struggle ... [and] disciplinary terrorism that leaves the marks of its legacy on all areas of the humanities and liberal arts" (p. 130).

Whatever the reasons for this terrorism, Giroux's challenge to expose the walls that exist between cultural studies and pedagogy marks an important chapter in ending the hierarchical knowledge system that exists within academia. With this critique, Giroux reveals one of the reasons why students come to high schools and universities with the assumption that the all knowing professor will fill them up with all the important knowledge they

need to succeed in this world. Put simply, we, the academics and teachers, tell them this is what they should do. We do this by the myths we create about knowledge and our perceived need to police our canonical treasures and beloved intellectual heritage. This policing, Giroux warns us, goes beyond the creation of myths. This same mentality discourages students from expressing their views, sharing their ideas with their peers and believing in their own ability to change those things which subjugates them and others.

In his article on Freire, Giroux unintentionally provides a strategy to fight this disciplinary terrorism. One of the endearing accomplishments of Freire, Giroux reminds us, is his role as a border intellectual. That is, Freire has been able to leave his exclusionary and privileged home as an intellectual to take up the perspectives and experiences of the "Other" in order to challenge those very "cultural spaces and social formations" (p. 143) that privilege his position as an intellectual.

Giroux's idea of a border intellectual can be extended beyond those intellectuals like Freire who search for ways to give voices to the "Other." Educators who agree with Giroux in challenging border policing need to become interdisciplinarians who shape the discourse in other academic communities. Border crossers will have to do what Giroux and others have already done – see education as something that occurs more outside the walls of official schooling and show the policemen of other disciplines that without a pedagogical strategy they are partaking in a self-aggrandizing exercise which has little basis in wider social, political, and cultural experiences of everyday life.

In his study of popular culture and his critique of cultural studies, Giroux demonstrates that there are some disturbing pleasures in these movements. However, the Frankfurt school influence on the way he represents popular culture in the first section of the book reminds us that we are still "learning popular culture."

John A. Weaver
Louisiana State University Shreveport