

**Book Review: Derek R. Ford *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution: Aesthetics, Unlearning, and the Sensations of Struggle* (Madison: Iskra Books, 2023), 158 pages, paperback. ISBN:13: 978-1-0880-7169-4**

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Derek R. Ford's book *Teaching the actuality of revolution: Aesthetics, unlearning, and the sensations of struggle*, offers thought provoking insight for pushing the envelope in taking to task the academic industry's activist scholars who wage a class struggle on behalf of capitalism. What complements such 'academician of fortune' train of thought is the lack of any roots, ability, or willingness to link them to the people's struggle. Ford argues they serve as the educational arm of the neo-liberal academic industry, whereby they are relied upon to use ambiguous rhetoric in camouflaging any political or economic alternatives for society. Such approach is adjusted to deflect precise inquiry for problematizing, and deconstructing the role that education serves in reinforcing or resisting the social and political hegemonic order.

The book's design and objective are to problematize and deconstruct capital's perceptual ecology by way of perception and sensation. In essence, providing a rupture in the aesthetics for common sense 'meaning making' and 'understanding' by way of engaging in alternative world views. This particularly holds sway in the trenches of class struggle against the social reproduction of inequality through

imposed knowledge which serves as a distortion to reality and a stupidification for reading the world (Macedo, 1993).

Altogether, the book is organized with an introduction, five chapters, and bookended with a conclusion.

Ford states as a particular concern the selective usage of intellectual commodities as being utilized for the redefining of the left as non-Communist and anti-revolutionary. Ford suggests that capitalism relies upon dominant regimes of perception to inculcate and normalize a capitalist perceptual ecological system. In addition, he takes to task the early tools of socialization such as schooling which socially stratifies difference through a perceptual apparatus reinforced through regimentation and the normalized acceptance of social inequality. Antonio Gramsci cautioned on the insidious power of hegemony for the control of thought by way of coercion through consent. Antonini (2019), for example, asserts that Gramsci's critique of bureaucracy within social structures covertly aims at the preservation of the given order of present conditions. Furthermore, in the struggle within critical moments between hegemonies in the war of position the state will attempt to centralize its forces through a progressive absorption of civil society in educating the population under an assumed consensus.

In **Chapter 1. *Pedagogy and the Perceptual Ecology of Capital***, Ford begins the chapter by suggesting that an ideology is effective for ever so long as it is unquestioned and accepted as natural. As such, our subjective consciousness/sensuousness are both the overall complex determinations of history, and our everyday encounters that either reinscribe, alter, or challenge our way of making sense of the world. According to Hill (2012) neo-liberalism is

accompanied with overt institutionalized violence, but relies more upon covert normalized ideologies and asserted control over education. Ford's central argument of the book is that capital's perceptual ecology is and must be continually reinforced through educational processes. In order to rupture dominant regimes of thought it's critically imperative to disrupt such pattern of thinking through the interplay of both perceptions and sensations which provide a bridge between educational politics and aesthetics of meaning making. Ford in the chapter revisits Karl Marx's historical works on *Das Capital* and explains how value is purely social in relation to commodity fetishism. This in turn is a constitutive aspect of the collective sensorium which has been socially constructed and enforced under capitalism. This is a critical lens that provides understanding for how capitalists themselves sense and understand the world.

**Chapter 2. *Teaching as Unlearning Another Aesthetic***, begins by stating that we are wedded to capital's perceptual ecology. In breaking from such inculcation Ford turns to Freire's dialogic pedagogy as it is directed at negating and overcoming rather than passively accepting by confronting and critically analyzing object and experience. Ford poses the following question as an educational theorist, teacher and organizer: what is the educational project of the class struggle? How does---or how might---education strengthen our political movements by attending to the aesthetics of pedagogy? Thus, suggesting examining how pedagogy is delivered in relation to discourse projected through a management of potentiality. O'Neill (2022a) backs Ford's position by pointing out that as consumerism and rampant individualism legitimize intellectual and public spheres, the class struggle is minimized and no longer considered relevant. Consequently, Ford alludes that through a capitalist pedagogy we learn to make sense of knowledge as a commodity. Problematically, our senses are reinforced by way of individuality, and

a colonial education which project learning as an external and distinct object with a use and exchange value. This is substituted instead of as social relations between diverse segments of subjects in the global working class. Ford advises that a Marxist pedagogy teaches us to unlearn by interrupting a learners drive to effortlessly and without delay learn something. Idealistically, we can break open an experience of in-between- the-world as it is and could be.

In **Chapter 3. *Encounters With The Materiality of Thought***, Ford reiterates to the reader that knowledge under capitalism is fragmented and commodified.

Particularly, in relation to epistemology and how and whose interests we define by way of knowledge and rationality. Ford draws upon the pedagogy of Althusser's politics for unlearning and transforming the politics of education and redistributing them to produce a sensation in which we can be radically different than how and where we are now. This demands deconstructing capitalist ideology deeply entrenched and utilized through various agents of socialization which alter and distort the relationship of individuals to their real social conditions. O'Neill (2022b) reinforces Ford's position by referencing Gramsci's thought on the ability for one to assess history, class and culture. This entails drawing upon tools for carrying out an assessment of what is happening and identifying patterns of why it is occurring to others. Moreover, such a lens provides the possibility for building counter-hegemonic modes of enquiry and knowledge that pertain to the complexities and contradictions of the working-class reality under the confines of the globalized neo-liberal market, both serving as a theoretical concept and an empirical reality. Ford concludes the chapter by affirming that the revolutionary teacher does not merely arrange for contingent, unplanned, and uncontrollable encounters which may advance the class struggle. Guevara (2000) reasoned that people under a despotic government should never be taught that an education alone

will allow them to exercise their rights. The people should be taught first and foremost to conquer their rights, while at the same time, and without the slightest effort becoming organic teachers for everyone.

In **Chapter 4. *Listening For What We Don't Know***, Ford draws upon the work of Althusser's (2020) *What is to be done* to address the subject of listening and sound. Ford contends that in order to "listen correctly" one must be able to listen for what they don't know. Ford makes a clear distinction between simply hearing, a form of learning driven by a need to possess information, and *listening* in which he stresses that one must listen for the silence as well. Ford terms this symptomatic listening and outlines a model where listening is not motivated by a desire to know, discover, internalize or accumulate, but instead attempts to make the actuality of revolution perceptible by signaling the silences to be filled and the potential of filling them. Ford argues that teachers must teach their students, not to hear, but to listen, to understand that there is no finality to the "truth" and to turn silences into a beginning to keep thinking and building upon. Efficiently, we are conditioned to think about differences based on the norms and values that the society we live in places upon us. Winston (2004) also expresses this notion of filling in the silences as they explain how psychologists in the mid-1900s used their influence to shape racial discourses to either end or promote segregation and discrimination. This justified, reinforced, and conditioned racism as a norm within social structures.

In **Chapter 5. *The Pedagogy of Arrhythmia***, Ford pivots from the works of Althusser and turns to Lefebvre, which is interesting as the two are often pitted against one another. Ford employs Lefebvre's theory of rhythmanalysis as a framework for the struggle against capitalism and teaching the actuality of revolution. Ford explains how capitalism dominates both time and space by

diminishing living, cyclical rhythms turning instead to abstract, linear notions of time in order to restrict time into productive labor time, such as the ringing of a school bell or the tick of a clock or watch. Ratner & Silva (2017) suggests that we cannot conclude someone's activity based on the social environment they are in, implying instead that we must understand the environment within one's individual activity. Thereby, recognizing and affirming social constraints that impede a person's well-being. In order to fight against this, Lefebvre, *détournement*, the repurposing of time, can serve as an opening for a break between cyclical and linear rhythms. Ford argues that learning follows linear rhythms, as it is a process that moves one from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge mastery. Whereas unlearning follows cyclical rhythms of interruption and suspension or arrhythmia. Building on this, Ford posits that arrhythmia is a pause of unlearning which serves as a *détournement* between domination and appropriation. Therefore, arrhythmanalysis can be used strategically in the fight against the capitalist abstraction of time. As Pavon-Cuellar (2016) also notes, Western culture presents one-sided psychological representations that categorize people into categories of "good" citizens based on their ability to produce. In essence, a schooling that adheres to regimentation and conformity serves the status quo in the reproduction of social stratification.

The **Conclusion: *Unlearning Through Perceptual Meaning***, is brief yet compelling as Ford yet again emphasizes the need for perceptual mapping to identify the political, aesthetic, and educational forces at work in our society. Ford builds upon Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping, by suggesting we move beyond the single sense of sight, and incorporate various interactions, orders, and reorganizations of all our senses. Ford stresses how perceptual mapping may not only help us locate ourselves in the totality, the entirety of the world as it exists,

but it can also serve as a framework for teaching the actuality of revolution through unlearning. Perceptual mapping is a model for unlearning the dominant capitalist aesthetic which then allows us to look at the détournements, the interruptions, or breaks in our world to form new revolutionary political ideals and beliefs.

Derek R. Ford's *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution: Aesthetics, Unlearning, and the Sensations of Struggle*, is a guide to understanding how we have been conditioned to accept social injustice and inequality as a norm, thus problematizing the education system as a contested terrain. The book would benefit an international audience of educators, practitioners and scholars as a model for teaching students to question the social sphere we live in. A limitation of the book is a clarification of the audience in relation to theory and language. The book would benefit community activist by framing theory using layman's terms for describing complex or technical statements with words or terms that someone not specialized in a field can understand. Furthermore, a deconstruction through critical reflection of racialized social class and gender oppression in relation to capital's perceptual ecology through perception and sensation would have been invaluable.

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