Policy Futures in Education

Book Review

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Ford R Derek, *Marxism, Pedagogy, and the General Intellect: Beyond the Knowledge Economy*. London: Springer International Publishing, 2019, ISBN 9783030838348, 303083834X

Whether right or left, capitalist or Marxist, the consensus appears to be that in today's world, *you must learn.* Learning is seen as not only the solution to any and all problems we may face, but by some, it is even seen as human nature—an ever-present, inherent characteristic of our species. Derek Ford's *Marxism, Pedagogy, and the General Intellect: Beyond the Knowledge Economy* comes to add to this discussion, challenging the dominant notion without discounting the importance of knowledge. Is stupidity nothing but a bad thing, holding human society back from its full potential? On the contrary, Ford says not only is stupidity an inseparable partner to learning, but it also holds the potential to be used for revolutionary resistance against the capitalist system which exploits the working class and knowledge itself.

Ford explains that the kind of stupidity which he is talking about is specific. It is not a *lack* of knowledge; it is a separation from the process of learning altogether—an inability to produce knowledge. Stupidity in this sense can be and has been used for harmful and reactionary purposes, Ford acknowledges, but what gives it revolutionary potential is the fact that it is an *anti-value*. Many forms of resistance could be classified as *non-values*, which, in the grand picture, represent only speed-bumps for capitalist exploitation—a temporary slow-down or obstacle.

The struggles fought by the working and oppressed class within academia have made many demands that were indeed necessary, such as the struggles for women's studies and queer studies to be incorporated into the education system. Once the demands of these movements are met, however, capitalism not only continues along its destructive path—it walks away from the battle now able to exploit the history, language, or epistemology in question. The colonialist grasping drive, which seeks to conquer and exploit everything under the sun, does not limit itself to the physical world. This perpetual conquering of newly exploitable material is vital to capitalism's continued existence, including within academia. What makes stupidity an anti-value is that there is no way for capitalism to exploit it, according to Ford. How can you systematically exploit something that, by definition, defies logic and comprehension?

Ford further discusses how the grasping drive can be seen in the expansion of knowledge and research under capitalism, even in the field of mental health. With the continuous expansion of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), new treatments and research opportunities become available for profitization. Ford cites Anne McGuire's *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logic of Normative Violence* in which she describes these treatments and studies as social control and subject surveillance, respectively.

Much of Ford's book focuses on how capitalism exploits the *general intellect*. The general intellect includes not only the accumulated knowledge of society, but also the acts of thinking and learning themselves. As the economy becomes more and more identifiable as a knowledge economy, this exploitation of knowledge, thinking, and learning becomes more and more heightened. An example of this is the mountain of student loan debt in the United States. Students perform the learning labor involved with getting a degree in order to have the opportunity to be exploited in the workforce, but those years spent learning are also exploited. Many of us are put into debt with the expectation that we will find work that will help to pay off the loans, but where the general intellect does not produce a sufficient profit, that individual student is the one who takes the financial loss, Ford explains. If capitalism does not have a place for you in the workforce, your learning will still be exploited in the form of student loans.

The unpredictability and precariousness of the capitalist economy has dictated that the new model worker must be a flexible and cooperative lifelong learner. The focus of the education system has moved away from what exact content is being taught, toward the goal of teaching students *how* to learn, and eventually how to learn independently. Communication used to be punished in the workplace, and now communication and social skills are necessary in nearly every profession (hence, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is seeking ways to measure emotional and social abilities in workers). Ford cites Ikujiro Nonaka's work on the dialectic spiral between *tacit* knowledge and *explicit* knowledge, the former being our subjective intuitions. Nonaka says that the Japanese industry's growth was accelerated by exploiting workers' tacit knowledge, as companies gathered their workers' intuitions and insights, putting them to the test in order to find new innovations, and using the information for the company's gain in general. Communication between companies and customers is also increasing, as the name of the game has changed from mass production to lean production; it is about providing a quantitatively and qualitatively superior variety of choices for customers now, rather than simply producing the most. This kind of communication helps minimize losses by allowing companies to more quickly react to and accommodate fluctuations in demand.

How does stupor play a role in all of this, and how can it manifest as insurrection? Ford cites Antonio Negri's writing on Marx's *Grundrisse* and the revolutionary character of the stupor it exhibits. Published in 1939, long after Marx's passing, the *Grundrisse* is based on unpolished notes written by Marx, full of tangents and even some nearly incomprehensible passages. This is precisely why some like Negri appreciate it—for its subjectivity and openness. Marx's *Capital* is, in comparison, closed and presentational, linear and logical. Compare this to how revolutionary insurrection is indeterminable, growing and receding dialectically. Ford points out how this is not unlike the structure of the *Grundrisse*, saying that within the text, Marx's line of thought advances one way, only for it to take a turn and antagonize the previous inquiry or displace it completely. In this text never intended for publishing, we join in on Marx's investigation. But Ford cites Althusser to point out that even in the presentational and polished *Capital*, there are still hints of this inquisitive stupor—noticeable, for example, in the way he interrupts quotations to add his own commentary, or the way he structures the book diachronically.

How else does stupor manifest as insurrection? Ford draws a line and does not further elaborate on how else exactly we might use stupor for revolutionary change, acknowledging that even the question of whether or not we *should* use stupor for revolutionary change still needs to be collectively discussed. Ford's book aims to thoroughly, yet succinctly, elaborate his argument for why the answer to that question should be *yes*, and leaves the floor open for us to continue the conversation. This is not to say that the book is lacking in content, however; it may completely change

how the reader understands contemporary capitalism, pedagogy and academia, and the relationship between knowledge and stupor.

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