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Responsibility and Resistance: Reflections on Key Themes Emerging from Research in Brazil.

This is a highly accessible collection of essays that I benefited from reading. As the editors are at pains to point out in their Introduction, this is a volume that introduces Brazilian research to the English-speaking world. It is not a volume about Brazil, but a series of essays written by Brazilian scholars (based in universities in São Paulo, Porto Alegre and Campinas) targeting poverty and marginalisation in their country. The Introduction contextualises the research in terms of the 'poverty, discrimination, colonialism, and struggle for social justice' that has characterised Brazil over the past 50 years and tells us that: 'The volume you hold in your hands presents, for the first time to an international audience, the novel understandings of critical social research that have emerged in this frame' (1).

In addition to the editors' Introduction, there are seven chapters followed by a collection of short narratives offered 'Instead of an Epilogue'. The first thing that struck me on reading the chapters was how familiar the theoretical and conceptual reference points were. Thus we encounter Agamben, Althusser, Bakhtin, Bauman, Bourdieu, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Vygotsky, Zizek, and others – a veritable A-Z of European theory. While it was interesting to see the various ways in which the ideas of such figures have been refracted through a Brazilian lens, it was more interesting still to note the complete absence of any reference at all to a single theorist from the North American continent. For example, while Freire is a constant presence throughout the book, the Freirean critical pedagogy of Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, bell hooks, Ira Shor et al gets no mention at all.

Perhaps the authors felt they had nothing to learn from North American social, cultural and educational theory. Perhaps Portuguese translations are harder to come by. Whatever the reason, it is certainly not because the authors give any privilege to Brazilian writers. For what I found most interesting about the theoretical reference points—what I found incredible, in fact—was that Roberto Unger does not get a look in. Not a single mention in nearly 150 pages. I must confess here that my knowledge of Brazilian history, culture and society is far from comprehensive, so rather than proffering an understanding I shall simply remain puzzled as to why the country's own leading social and legal theorist/philosopher/economist/politician is deemed to have less to say (nothing in fact!) on questions of social justice in Brazil than a host of European figures from a bygone age.

Rather than dwelling too long on an aspect of the book I fail to fully grasp, I shall turn now to three other aspects that I do feel equipped to understand and explore: the use of Freire and the two overarching themes of responsibility and resistance. Taking Freire first, the chapter that resonated most with me was Chapter 2, an essay focusing on the National Movement of Struggle for Housing (MNLM). This was written by three academics from the Federal University of Rio Grande du Sol, who worked with and for the MNLM and explicitly in support of the families removed from their homes to clear space for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The chapter contextualises the movement, describes the ugly and depressing consequences for the poor of an event like the World Cup, and documents the making of a film designed to give the evicted members of the MNLM a voice. What resonated most here was the use of Freirean pedagogy, which framed the researchers' engagement with members of the MNLM. While key Freirean terms such as dialogue, praxis and limit situation are duly outlined, the main thrust of this part of the chapter is an account of how Freirean popular education was put to use; how it informed the researchers' immersion in, and drove their

engagement with, members of the movement. The chapter spends far less time on theoretical and conceptual agonising and far more on detailing concrete practice.

This contrasts with the use made of Freire in the Anglophone world. Michael Apple has long bemoaned 'the Freire industry' and the ways in which Freire has been used by academics to create an illusion of political commitment, a badge worn by upwardly-mobile academics seeking radical kudos (Apple, 1999). How many journal articles have been written about the finer points of Freirean theory? How many books have been written revealing to us— again!—the emancipatory wonders of Freirean critical pedagogy? As Bojesen rightly points out in a recent review of yet another one, these books are staid and tiresome (Bojesen, 2016). There is nothing radical or emancipatory about them. How many of the authors of books on Freirean critical pedagogy have got their hands dirty, working with movements to put their theory into practice? A rhetorical question, of course, but I imagine the word 'few' pretty much covers it. What was refreshing about the chapter on the MNLM, then, was that more time was devoted to explaining how dialogue was enacted, as situated political practice, than was spent reviewing the voluminous literature debating dialogue as a concept.

This links neatly to the first of the overarching themes of the book – the political responsibility of the researcher. Time and again throughout the book we are told that the role of the researcher is to 'raise social problems and bring them into discussions at conferences, and in articles and books' (13), to give voice to those 'deleted…from social life' and 'reduced to silence' (111); that researchers have 'a moral obligation to use theories and research to denounce oppressive mechanisms' (26), and that we need 'to reaffirm the commitment of researchers to social movements and their struggles' (50). The chapters in the book each recount, in different and varied ways, committed engagements with and for the poor, the homeless, the landless, the ostracised, the criminalised, those deemed crazy and mentally ill. What the book does well, then, is highlight how familiar approaches (Freirean pedagogy, critical psychology, discourse analysis) can underpin and drive an engaged, politicised, responsible social research.

This struck a strong personal chord with me as someone who has recently begun asking how best to bring their political commitments to bear on their role as an educator. Wracked with guilt about being one of the academics described by Apple (I have, after all, written esoteric papers exploring nuanced shifts in Freire's understanding of hope and utopia—was this in order to create an illusion of political commitment?), in recent writings I have begun to emphasise the issue of responsibility. Following Chomsky, it seems clear to me that the privileges enjoyed by the academic-intellectual – the training, resources, facilities, opportunities to speak and act – confer a responsibility (Chomsky, 2010). Of course, that the educator has a responsibility to exploit their own privilege in the service of the poor and marginalised is something that the authors in Facing Poverty and Marginalization would take as a given. The question is merely one of how. Here I turn to the second overarching theme of the book, that of resistance.

To a certain extent, the lives of the marginalised and the silenced are analysed throughout the book as in themselves a form of resistance; resistance is inscribed within the lives of the poor, the homeless, the landless, the criminalised. Sometimes this resistance takes the form of violence, as detailed in the discussion of incarcerated young offenders in Chapter 6 (104-07), but resistance is expressed in other forms too. I was taken especially with the story of Estamira, a 63 year old woman living in Rio's Gramacho landfill site. Having experienced a life punctuated by abuse, abandonment, and illness, the first chapter of the book describes how, through a discourse of resistance, she makes herself visible and imposes herself as a person. She resists her own experiences of marginalisation through representing herself as a

visionary, a prophet who can fortell the future, who declares 'I am the vision of everyone' (20). In a similar fashion, the chapter on the poetry of Stela do Patrocinio, writing from the confines of a psychiatric asylum, suggests that her poetry—the poetry of someone deemed mad, crazy, mentally ill—somehow 'create[s] another order, outside of the hegemonic discourse' (111).

The question of resistance—the scope for resistance, creating spaces of resistance, how best to enact or embody resistance—is something that animates many in the academy today. The understanding of resistance presented in Facing Poverty and Marginalization is informed primarily by Foucault (and if there is one European figure who looms large over the volume it is Foucault). So we are told that resistance is blind, is contingent, its effects beyond our control, we cannot know in advance what the effects of resistance will be (15). And it is here that I begin to part company with the authors' understanding of the political responsibility of the researcher. For the emphasis within the volume is placed firmly on resistance as the process through which the researcher demonstrates their commitment; that the role of the activist-researcher is to work with and for the poor and marginalised in order to create ruptures within the order of discourse (113). What the effects of these ruptures will be—the effects of Estamira's prophetic personhood, of the film documenting the plight of the those evicted to create space for the World Cup, of Stela's poetry, of the resistance of young offenders to their forced confinement—no-one can say. The responsibility of the committed researcher is simply to help disorder the discursive order.

This again struck a personal chord because it brings to the fore the limits of resistance. My own minor acts of resistance—acts that helped rupture the discourse of the National Student Survey, that helped disorder the discursive field of the departmental Research Centre, that lent support to student occupations that disordered the ordering of University space and time—have all ultimately proven to be acts of futility. The discursive order survives acts that rupture, puncture, and disorder it. More than that, it recuperates such acts and gains strength from them. So while the emphasis in this book on the political responsibility of the researcher resonated strongly, the understanding of resistance running through it troubled me a little. For me, the political responsibility described in the book did not go far enough, and a quote from the book I had read immediately before it came to mind. In Inventing the Future, Srnicek and Williams (2016, 47) argue that: 'We do not resist a new world into being.' They were directing their critique at the tactics of resistance employed by groups such as Occupy, 15m, ultra-left insurrectionaries such as The Invisible Committee and the student occupations inspired by them, but the point is a general one. Resistance is a conservative process glorified as a radical act.

Srnicek and Williams argue against horizontalism, localism, partialism and prefigurative politics, and claim instead that 'the left needs to reclaim the contested legacy of modernity and advance visions for a new future' (85). They present a strong and persuasive case for a renewed utopianism and I agree that any movement for genuine systemic change will be held together by 'the common adherence to a desirable vision of a better world' (197). Given the heavy Foucauldian influence, it is hardly surprising that the essays in Facing Poverty and Marginalization lacked a utopian dimension. I return here, however, to the surprising absence in the book of Roberto Unger, whose 'radical pragmatism' straddles the worlds of contingency and unintended consequences on the one hand and institutional and existential transformation on the other (Levitas, 2013, 137-41, 183-96). Levitas argues that, in spite of his overt opposition to utopianism, a future-oriented, visionary, utopian sensibility informs Unger's democratic experimentalism, and this kind of sensibility is lacking in Facing Poverty and Marginalization.

I gained a lot from reading this book. I learned a lot about Brazil and about how we might understand responsible social and educational research. However, do the essays contained in the volume present 'novel understandings of critical social research' as promised in the Introduction? This is open to question. One of the most striking features of the research is the familiarity of the approaches and theoretical frames used. Prime among the European influences is Foucault, and this places constraints on the possibilities of the engaged research presented in the volume. We are presented with the imperative for researchers to challenge oppression and work with and for social movements, but the Foucauldian framing of the research means that this is often confined to 'giving voice' or seeking a 'rupture'. We need more than this, however if poverty and marginalisation are to be confronted at a systemic level.

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