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READING THE WORLD: HISTORICIZING SYSTEMIC CONTRADICTIONS IN INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGUES

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Across the globe today we see evidence of profound systemic crises disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable members of all societies; the manifestations of the profound contradictions that we find ourselves in are evident in any serious critical analysis of asymmetrical power relations and hence a simultaneous delving into the overt and covert acts of resistance of those who insist on a different reading of the world. The Occupy Movements dispersed across the world (from New York to Hong Kong), work stoppages in Seattle and California, localized resistances in Brazil, student protests in Puerto Rico, Chile and Mexico are all visceral reminders of the existence of and insistence on different visions of the future by those who have been “organically” critically educated.

Whereas national and international political discourses continuously reinforce the necessity to develop more literate populations capable of being more “competitive” in the global marketplace as the antidote to these systemic crises, such discourses rely primarily on neoliberal market reform as the solution. In all corners of the globe, the social and political discourses center either on the limitations of the current local or national educational systems vis-à-vis their counterparts or on the need to extract more “return on investment”. Education then becomes the lynchpin, or the frame through which social analysis is conducted despite the fact that such analysis is routinely disarticulated from other social fields. Rarely is there concerted consideration of the type of citizen that states aim to create beyond the narrow scope of the needs of the economic structure. **What does it mean to**

be a literate human being? What is the relationship between literacy and emancipation? How can we collectively achieve social transformation in spaces where the ethos of individualism and consumption reign? How can we use our evolving understanding of the world and our relationship to it as a means of liberating ourselves and the other? What do we do in the face of social resistance? These are paramount questions that while central to any serious engagement with educational reform (hence state reform) often are selectively and purposively omitted from the dialogue. As James Baldwin insightfully noted,

The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it – at no matter what risk.

It is in this context that the ensuing dialogue between the late Paulo Freire and Donalddo Macedo can be framed; for on the one hand, the dialogue provides a historical context under which an intertextual analysis can be undertaken so as to provide a richer understanding of the past. On the other, an understanding of the historical conditions of the past set the stage for a more in-depth analysis of the limitations and possibilities contained in the present. Freire's insightful highlighting of the critical links between literacy and emancipation, further, the role of literacy in unleashing a set of practices in which the populace assumes its own liberation, is particularly instructive when critical education is increasingly under attack and democracy itself is threatened. As critical scholar Henry Giroux has noted,

Education remains one of the most important spheres left for creating critical and engaged citizens capable of challenging a material and symbolic order that blindly legitimates a culture of corruption, greed and inequality. Under casino capitalism, we not only have a growing divide between the rich and the poor, a divide in which the rich pretty much have a monopoly on political, economic and social opportunities, but also the enormous power of a cultural apparatus that

functions as a nonstop mode of education that endlessly carpet-bombs young and old with market-based values that undermine democratic values, notions of shared responsibility and a respect for the public good.

Beyond Freire's understanding of literacy as involving much more than the set of mechanistic practices currently reflected in neoliberalism's emphatic and pervasive reliance on standardized testing, his critical analysis of the linguistic challenges faced by societies such as Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau is of paramount importance to the development of enlightened language policy. As organic intellectuals insist on the viability, indeed the necessity of the Cape Verdean language being recognized as a legitimate means of expression in all domains, national commissions move forth along parallel roads.

The dialogue is timely in that it inserts itself firmly in questions of human agency, liberation, emancipation and the omnipresent crucible of collective responsibility. The dialogue between Macedo and Freire is presented here as a bridge between a rich historical past, a complex present replete with localized resistances and a future full of possibilities.

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