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REVIEW ESSAY

Re-contextualising the re-contextualisers or pedagogy of the impressed?

Anthony Green*

Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Sociology and education: issues in sociology of education, by Natalie Bulle, Bern, Peter Lang, 2008, 310 pp., ISBN 3-03-911587-1

Sociology for educators in the post-9/11 world, by Edith King with Jennifer Thompson, Mason, OH, Thomson Publishers, 2007, 210 pp., ISBN 1-42-663715-2

Finding really useful introductions, overviews, readers and textbooks as resources for supporting courses offering frameworks for guidance across the variety of ‘levels’ and relations of social theory and educational realities is extremely difficult, impossible maybe, and arguably should not be attempted even by hard-pressed and responsible teachers. That said, the problems of design and assembly of teaching materials are especially acute as programmes of study become modularised mix-and-match collections responding to ‘needs’ of various kinds, arguably increasingly indifferent to academic freedom, especially while the game demands meeting ever more pressing quotas for *bums on seats* and pressures in the local political economy of quality working time on all the fronts of knowledge and educational production and reproduction.

Moreover, considering the possibility of adopting, one or both of these as textbooks, it could well be observed that *the chance would be a fine thing* in the present market context of UK higher education studies, at least. With no opportunity to summarise these books in detail, suffice to report.

Bulle’s *Sociology and Education* is presented as an introduction – at least that is what it says on the cover blurb – apparently attempting to capture the whole field of sociology of education in relation to psychology and philosophy, as well as the role of human reason in social action. Quite an ambitious project for an *introduction*, then. It is arranged in five parts in the following order. Part One is on ‘Education and Knowledge’; Part Two addresses ‘Education and Social Action: Theoretical Foundations’, and is subtitled ‘Social Bond, Order and Action’; Part Three presents ‘Sociological Approaches to Formal Education’ arranged under two sections, the ‘Social/Normative Pole’, subtitled ‘Structuralism and Education’, and the other section the ‘Individual/Interactionist Pole’, subtitled ‘Action and Interaction in Sociology of Education’; Part Four is ‘School and Society’ with two sections, subtitled ‘Social Philosophy, Knowledge and Education’ under the theme of ‘School and Democracy’ and the other ‘Dynamics of Change in Educational Systems’ with the theme ‘Sociologies and Social Change’; and Part Five presents ‘Schools and Inequalities’, subtitled ‘Inequality of Opportunity’. All familiar fare as topics for readers of this journal, although the inspirational influence of Boudon is possibly a somewhat minority interest.

*Email: anthony.green@ioe.ac.uk

King's *Sociology for Educators* is a course book for graduate students of education aiming to deploy 'the powers of sociological theory' as critical underpinning for *educational sociology* and supporting their professional development. It is set out in three parts, following a first chapter, 'Prologues: Why Sociology for Educators in the Post-9/II World?' Part One addresses 'Sociological Thought in the Pre-9/II World', with five chapters devoted in sequence to Robert Merton ('The Enduring Message of Unintended Consequences'), Margaret Mead ('The Concept of Culture and Cultural Continuities'), David Riesman ('The Other-Directed for the Post-9-II World'), Erving Goffman ('Stigmas and Phony Performances Still Abound') and Elise Boulding ('Visions of A Peace-filled Worlds'). Part Two addresses the 'Classical Social Thinkers and the Post 9/II World', with Durkheim ('Moral Education and the Post 9-/II World'), Weber ('Bureaucratic Organisations Consume Us') and Marx ('Poverty and Karl Marx Post-9/II'). Part Three is on 'Women and Social Thought for the Post-9/II World', with a chapter devoted to work of Peggy McIntosh (written by Thompson) and entitled 'Teaching for "Decent Survival of All"'. There is an 'Epilogue: Social Thought for Educators in the Post-9/II World'.

Doing full justice to the work these books represent on any, let alone all, of these themes is impossible and this essay will be highly selective and somewhat free-form.

My primary concerns are with critical pedagogy and emergent pedagogy of critique in the context of critique of political economy *of, in and as* education (Green, Rikowski, and Raduntz 2007; Macrine 2009), plus these as contexts for articulation of critical realist with historical materialist discourses (Bhaskar 1979; Sayer 1983, Frauley and Pearce 2007; Hartwig 2009), while partly drawing loosely on such interpretations of the educational implications of Barthes' account of 'mythology' and distinctions between *readerly* and *writerly* texts (Barthes 1972, 1974, 1976, 1981; Carolan 2005). With contrasting styles in their orientations to pedagogy and curriculum, we see quite different approaches to and competitive marketing strategies in the field, not least on the book titles and covers. Despite including a great deal of the same ground, most of it pre-twenty-first century and realising some vital aspects of the contemporary significances of academic tradition, there are differences in content and atmosphere, no doubt reflecting specificities of purpose, modes of production, cultural and institutional contexts, not least that one is French and the other has a US pedigree. Bulle's book is relentlessly high-end academic, more explicitly philosophical and expressed with some precision. As a stand-alone teaching material it is relatively dull, truncated and often indigestible and occasionally elusive, although this may be to do with its translation (the original was published in 2000 in French). It is partly integrated and given much needed coherence by re-working a familiar thesis, updating Durkheim on the evolution of pedagogy in France, about the relation of *modernist* educational forms to broader social changes, and is in this sense indirectly political. It seems to be primarily an introduction for a French readership with summarising references to many non-Francophone, especially English sources, mostly located in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

King and Thompson's work is pitched towards the typically geo-political and is designed as support and stimulation for those aspiring to be self-consciously activist in and through education, in a world where the 'shadow of terrorism' (as King puts it on p. 11) potentially reinstates the ultimate barbarism of nuclear war. They go some way towards demonstrating their critical androgyny as teacher educators, encouraging education workers to themselves engage with global dynamics of their own working lives as potentially critical educators. The rationalist appreciation of the topic sociology *and* education in Bulle contrasts with the

critical pragmatic applied sociology *for* educators *in the* 'Post-9/11 World' of King and Thompson. Furthermore, Bulle seems to represent an underlying thesis about the role of education and changing forms of curriculum and pedagogy through a rationalist critique of 'progressivism' as retreat from rationality.

This includes intimations of non-analytical anti-educative practices, possibly dumbing-down even. King and Thompson provide possible material for Bulle's argument as applied to the United States, by their *social* as distinct from *cognitivist* orientation to pedagogy and social commitment. In the process, however, King and Thompson deliver, amongst many other aspects of the contemporary US scene, critical attention to negativities of bureaucratic high-stakes rationalist educational forms, antimonies of capitalist state-sponsored modernism, perhaps. Between them, there is Epicurean plenty to get your teeth into and opportunities for productive intertextual dialogues abound.

On the surfaces: cover stories and come-ons

A superficially engaging feature of these books as attention-grabbing visual objects is the contrasting forms of social and educational gloominess their cover designs excite. Bulle's is figurative and surrealist, depicting children at play in a cropped and reversed image from a P.J. Crook painting. It foregrounds a queue of stern-faced elementary school girls, engaged in a rhythmic but frozen line game, eerily following each other through arched arms created by two of the youngsters' linked hands. To process and be sequentially processed, for fun, in the deadly serious business of play, perhaps? Or is this clichéd tedium of schooling presented as social relations emergent in structuration, fixing these youngsters in the surface busyness of play? It invokes stunted exuberance radiated in their expressions, edging them towards responsibility and constitutive of elements of (Durkheimian) *morale*, the *pedagogic form of the social*

for the infinite complexities of late modernist organic solidarity, for classroom struggles *if not for class struggles*. Sites for habitus displayed, habitus re-made perhaps, and the symbolic violence that goes with them. All this resonates well in formal presentational terms, with the style and contents for delivering the message, on my reading: *learning, developing cognition is a serious business*.

King's American course book, size bulk, has a cover depicting a photo-realist darkly clouded grey sky, seen as from a passenger airliner. The clouds are rent by a stylised lightening flash. Aha ... 9/11 iconography? What did the passengers know, what changed in the 9/11 instance? This image is backdrop to announcing sociology *for* educators in this, our networked and glocalised post-9/11 world in which the risks have been ratcheted up many notches.

Two forms of packaging, then. However, what are the challenges? What are we being sold by these titles and cover images? What are the commodity forms playing on their surfaces for these dimensions of academic capitalism? Ambiguity, if nothing else in either case, thank goodness, in the 'surreal' (Bulle) and 'real' (King and Thompson). Are there messages about the need for working with depth ontology, too, for relational analysis in our descriptive and explanatory forms when it comes to considering, doing and being done *as education*, thereby articulating such contributions *to* the social? Well worth looking into, I would suggest, when educating the educators.

Between the covers with Bulle

Bulle's potential for productively educative ambiguity revolves around whether this text is a pre-text for pedagogy *in dialogue* or text as *transmission of knowledge*, an authoritative rendering of the canon and what is needed to know, for starting to think and begin the careering role of becoming a competent academic practitioner. The style is uncompromisingly direct enunciation and exegesis with no framing rationale provided, nor prefacing, nor introduction, or epilogue, either. It is encyclopaedic and as an educative textual resource it exists nowhere, no intimations of a mode of its production, no acknowledgements, no social location, text as the representative forms for abstracted facts of announced content concerning items of theory, itemised concepts, tabled, summarised and diagrammised methodologies and meta-theories.

There seems to be no point in reading this text as a monograph if by reading we understand the practices of living as/in dialogue and understanding in the service of struggling for equity and socially sustainable democratic equality. Except dialectically, that is. Its centre of gravity revolves around consultation, expertly conveying information and asserting its thesis as a sub-text. This presentational form relentlessly moves on by assembling what could pass for a structure of the field of study for many readers in the know, while often provocatively jerking to a halt for such readers just when things get interesting. And, despite cover blurb promises, no 'links', few tensions, no invitation to engage, only the sub-textual thesis signalling authorship and often 'argued' by normative and evaluative moments of assertion, rather than (perhaps ironically) through rationalist forms. Thus, while the self-presentation is as an *introduction*, to what are we being introduced? Is it intended to be *state of the art*? To be illustrating *key problems*? Tellingly, perhaps, the index is exclusively names, no subjects, contexts or topics. This is frustrating in a re-contextualising tool. It appears to be reinforcing the context of elite academic career forms and practices by indirectly reminding the reader (by omission of contexts), of the *reputational* as academic commodity form. Academic *morale* is re-made hereby in the field of those competing to be distinguished, listed, cited and *named*. So far as explicit meta-theory is concerned, it is constituted in a species of methodological suspended animation, despite the wealth of exegesis of theoretical, conceptual and empirical items on display, not least of Marx' Thesis III on Feuerbach, on *educating the educators*, and very lightly with Bachelard and Foucault, for instance, neither of whose names make it into the References.

The temptation is to see this text as an opportunistic move in the market for the attention of unreconstructed budding intellectuals dutifully assembling the wherewith-all for displaying their stuff and for other students as consumers of such stuff dutifully reproducing it as coursework. Perhaps, in its way it is a work of the pedagogic art of condensed re-contextualisation in an age of expanding consumerist, academic capitalist reproduction, existing in negative dialectical terms purely for what it may not be, and as such, a resource for becoming in fixity. If so, this book could languish as fit only for nerds, while it screams silently for the whiff of an opportunity to get down and dirty with critical pedagogy, if not for pedagogy of critique. Show us how you are made; who are you made for, who profits/prophets? Possibly, these scriptures require no dedicated *Introduction* because it is necessary to already be in the know, for the earnest autodidacts to tick off knowledge and ignorance secured in its re-contextualising zones. It falls short as a potential generative tool completing itself in use as the means for making theory of description(s), supporting interventions and resources for transformative actions, despite productive confusions and

ambiguities. Pedagogy of the mass impressed, perhaps? It all badly needs critical interlocution and supplies plenty of material for that purpose.

Thus, there is potential use value in this book as a pre-text for dialogue and development, not least in what it encourages us to explore about these forms of academic practices. Make no mistake, in some respects this is an excellent book as a teaching resource with many sensible and provocative snippets on a host of topics, and critically not least on the 1970s British form of *New Sociology of Education*. But, as a teaching resource, it is for the very well-informed and imaginative teachers of this material to supplement, deploy and integrate. It could be used possibly as a companion to Rob Moore's book of similar title (Moore 2004), or perhaps providing some initiating modelling through supplying (often somewhat dated) descriptive materials alongside Lauder et al.'s (2006) collection, or Sadovnik's (2007) recent reader, amongst others. Its value lay in its breadth and capitalising on its loose ends and lack of flow to be regarded not simply as obscurities and irredeemable problems but as provocative opportunities for productive work. Thus it is choc-full of such *summarising and enunciating dichotomy as sites of what might be problematic*, such as:

Bernstein's theory is interesting in that it ties in not only with general sociological questions but also with important socio-cognitive issues. That is why we can raise the question of the possible linkage between Bernstein's restricted code and elaborated codes, Piaget's concrete operational stages and formal operational stages, or between Levi-Strausses' savage and domesticated minds; or of the status of the concept of code in Bernstein's theory as a tool for cognitive mediation as compared with Vygotsky's work. (*Sociology and Education*, p. 113)

Nevertheless, though somewhat disappointing as either an *introduction* or a *contribution to* sociology of educational knowledge, Bulle's book, if seen as a teaching resource, provides a plethora of informative chunks that will need to be brought to life if it is not to remain obtuse and empty. Stand-alone, it is engaging – rather like Basil Bernstein doing stand-up as Old Mother Riley ala Marcel Marceau, or the touching elegance of the late Michael Jackson's creative forms performed in wax – and will not help make problematic the topicality, celebrity and piety, nor the forms of impotence of a first kind of Mr President doing his best, or of Wittgenstein coming to terms with Leonard Cohen in conversation with a would-be suicide bomber disguised as Valdimir Ilych, or indeed, Ivan Illich. Too harsh, ludic or inept?

Maybe. Inevitably, each one of these provocations, particularly the latter two, partly miss their immanent critical marks for evoking the absent elementary forms of pedagogy of critique of the mode of organic solidarity instantiated in Bulle. But dialectically that is the point.

Flying high with King and Thompson

On the back cover of *Sociology for Educators* we are informed that:

This book is for all those concerned with how society impacts schools and education in the post-9/11 world: educators, administrators, sociologists, social worker, parents, caregivers, and people everywhere.

A huge target readership then, for this Thomson corporate publishing product. King reflects that 'applying classical sociologists to schooling and the classroom was an exciting and stimulating exercise' (p 192), and this goes too for addressing the worlds beyond. Herein

King and Thompson's texts provide relatively open agendas that are by turns involving and disarming, and as teacher/writers they assemble some very useful items for potentially building engagement towards a progressive integrated code. Thus, they go some way to dissolving the topic resource boundary, indicative of pedagogic practices in pragmatist mode, and in the process some of their own mode of production is on display, too.

While more parochial (in US mode) and less analytic in content than Bulle, these materials are invitations and designed less directly as statements and firm positions or announcements. Thus, if nothing else, the material is more accessible and readerfriendly than Bulle. It also invokes a sense of social and cultural context, US midwestern, wholesomely possibilitarian with tentative pedagogy oriented to dialogical forms in less than elite educational contexts. Here the university teacher as text writer is intent on gently making available materials to students in their own professional development course and to the wider community of professional users. The idea is to service teaching in what may very well be challenging socially and culturally conservative environments in which to attempt interventions. Much of the enthusiasm and quite detailed exegesis is on Marx, 'this historic behemoth' (p. 142) for instance, and is potentially valuable in this context, even if ironically, while possibly intended as educative provocation/stimulation, may be realising more about sanitising Marx as the progressive humanist concerned with poverty. While, of course Marx was that, and good exegesis of his materialism is provided (pp. 143–148 and 155–156), it sits awkwardly alongside reporting Chinese experience, with grainy photography of impoverished school facilities and the Cultural Revolution as exemplifications, or is it *as warnings about* 'Marxist education' in practice.

Behind this book is 40 years of experience (King), premised on the (perhaps touching) belief in sociological theory to have a progressive critical social role in modernity, especially where the predominant social mind is *ready*, basically humane but perhaps relatively closed, *small* and potentially shockable. Thus this material is designed for opening localist, perhaps community-bound consciousness beyond their certainly strong state and national horizons with an agenda that can encourage looking both reflexively inwards, either to differences within these boundaries, and/or more expansively towards the international and global contexts. King and Thompson's rationale is to promote 'a sense of global responsibility and a belief that a peaceful world is a possibility', their version of 'worldmindedness' (p. 199).

Each chapter has accompanying stimulus materials, questions to get class discussions and essay writing going about a variety of educational matters from ethical aspects of teaching and administration to educational work on the ramifications of 9/11. Or, more specifically and challenging for instance, to suggest functionalist analysis with its biological organic analogy, for understanding the bombing of the transport system in London, in 2005. The class-work questions tend to focus on the descriptive, often calling for experiential responses, perhaps in empiricist mode underplaying analytical concerns despite encouraging 'applying' each theorist's work. Surprising, perhaps, no mention is made of the linguistic turn. Notably, for instance, Wright Mills' work for *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1970), or his 'Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive' (Mills 1940), are absent from the pantheon of key contributions to critical sociological theorising. This could have been valuable in addressing what is at stake in their 9/11 pedagogic moment. Peggy McIntosh' writing is significantly highlighted, its watchword is 'decent survival' encouraging colleagues and other faculty to 'pursue gender-fair and multicultural balanced curricular ... with inclusive teaching methods and strategies' (p. 164). This is especially valuable and could be developed in many other contexts of McIntosh's analytic of *unearned advantages*, not least on the contemporary scene

of *critical 'race' theory* through discussion of Mike Cole's (2009) recent analysis and dialogue, with both McIntosh and Gillborn (2006), in different ways where they underplay and distract from social relations of economic production.

Thus, King and Thompson's materials take the form of self-consciously *writerly* texts aiming at creating the contexts for new texts, meanings, consciousnesses and practices for critical engaging with a conservative cultural sphere. They could well be further developed with worked examples of such stimulus material, and follow-up exercises with dialogical elaborations, especially around the 'invisible' (p. 110) and thus the *relational nature of the social*. Critically, much more is possible and required in Gramscian terms; for instance, for counter-hegemonic work to make *good sense* in dialogue from the resources of common senses (Gramsci 1971; Mayo 1999, 87–88), to build on and with what is known and problematic in experience, resisting repressive tolerance and making progressive collective movements beyond such knowledge while challenging commodity forms of certification for human capitalisation (Allman 2001, 60–61; 2007). This is where/when critical pedagogy becomes in part materialist pedagogy of critique. One wonders how often, about what, and how, King and Thompsons's students have experienced productive tensions leading to serious work to address the structures their critical analysis has exposed. Alternatively, when and how does this articulates fatalism with comfortable social and cultural re-embedding, reproductive of those very structures themselves and rendering the student-teachers intellectually inoculated against such madness beyond their partially challenged common senses.

Educating the educators?

Reviewing textbooks and course books is a deadly business for those resistant to the foreshortening hauntology of merely *interpreting the world* rather than towards changing its forms and relations. Of course, writing textbooks is an odd practice, too, a shade less odd, perhaps, than falling for the beguiling invitation to essay on materials designed largely for re-contextualising practices, a new turn for this journal, so far as I recall. Clearly, these books present contrasting approaches to the meaning and uses of sociology of education and to the role of sociology, in relation to philosophy and psychology for the educational field. Bulle has laboured ostensibly to service the academic researcher and what passes for advanced teaching; King has done so on behalf of sociological theory by providing valuable perspectives for school and college-based teachers to stimulate reflexive work and underpin their critical practices under constraining social and cultural circumstances. It is perhaps worth observing that with the World Wide Web and the blogosphere as sources of a wealth of materials and practices now available, issues of pedagogy and the politics of knowledge and opinion are now more urgent than ever as topics and critical resources for such texts as these.

Neither book offers any consideration in depth of the implications of these in globalisation contexts, surprisingly perhaps. However, King, for whom new communications technology is a key ingredient in her sense of crisis and opportunity (p. 3), does provide some stimulus (in the context of considering David Reisman's *inner/other directedness*) and their characterisation of the role of teachers and knowledge in a post-9/11 world. Plus an invitation to examine money and finance and the threat of cyberterrorism, which 'could seriously interrupt or destroy our dependency on credit cards' (p. 61). No doubt good points to build from.

These books instantiate critical issues for content and forms of knowledge presentation and reproduction in an era of information hyper-explosion and commodification of everything. Combined with the increasingly entrepreneurial urgency in contemporary models of academic authorship intent on capitalising on, while making, professionalist news, these books are effective examples of such products, albeit exemplifying alternative genres. Thus the scientific and philosophical *monograph as handbook/handbook as monograph*, although falling between both stools and fulfilling neither demand for stimulating argument, despite scholarship aplenty or delivering the means for making news in a reader-friendly fashion. And the progressivist opening text innocent of the potential significances of cooptation and repressively tolerant modes (Marcuse 1965) of governmentality (Foucault 1991), and providing little by way of critical resources in the subsequent opportunities for critical textbooking. Such could be useful, for instance, to appreciate the potential downsides of demoralisation in the inflated expectations and liberal blandishments of the Obama phenomenon.

Added to this, the requirement for contextualisation with respect to the potentially dire consequences of deepening and/or 'resolving' the global financial and ecological crises in the absence of an analytical framework for critique, vocabulary and politics to recognise and address the structures built into the dominant political economy.

Thus more is required than is intimated in these books, to appreciate these concerns as topics and resources for *sociology and education* and/or *sociology for educators*.

Between and within themselves, these texts chart an instance in a kind of fate without which the game of academic community cannot be played. Their rhetorical forms symbolise *circumstances*, necessary ambiguities, *evils* perhaps of re-contextualisation.

Somebody has to fulfil the role and pick up the gelt by labouring to chart passages through canonical frameworks, horizons and iconic landmarks for each of the corners of academic capitalisation in its own history-making. Is this commodified authorship for remaking the community of practices, fields of aspiration and for fixing and recontextualising the re-contextualisers? Or is this educating the educators, in Marx's terms (Marx 1969)? There is lots of good stuff in these two books for educating and being educated in struggle so long as we maintain faith with the old boy's dialectical and materialist advice to keep in mind that the educators have always already been educated, including ourselves (and himself) as vital contestable *historical* moments, which in Durkheim's uncompleted task contributes concretely to doing and accounting for *morale* as equally highly contestable professional responsibility. It is not the materials on and between the covers that count, it is how they are deployed as material practices, articulating with other concrete practices in the here and now *as being*, that make the differences in potential for identifying and acting on *good sense*, not least on and in our relations of production. Do look at these two books if you get the chance.

Have fun, this is serious business.

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