

SMITHY OF THE SOUL: RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL AND NEOCOLONIAL EDUCATION. SUSAN MARIE MARTIN, UCC

ABSTRACT

In recent decades education throughout much of the English-speaking world has been dominated by socio-economic interests that insist on a “lean state” and corporate-friendly economy; the health of the marketplace is positioned as the key to a healthy and content citizenry. Lost in the resulting culture of achievement are students’ powers of self-determination, identities beyond earning power, and connection to community beyond the economy. If democracy is compromised through the simple political equation with the free-market, it is further compromised by the absence of an education geared to democratic participation and action.

Resistance-via-education to such indoctrination was formulated and put into practice during an earlier imperial mission--that of the British Empire in Ireland. A closer look at the work and writing of educator Padraig Pearse reveals that they do--in spite of a separation across space and time--converge with those of critical pedagogists Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. Opposition to neo-liberal attempts to indoctrinate students, parents, and educators into a market-driven educational ethos demonstrate that these “new” missions are not so new: the mission of an “empire” is to produce obedient citizens and workers in a global, capitalist enterprise.

INTRODUCTION

The current economic and political global climate is a “global political economy of the production and circulation of subjectivities (Olaniyan: 139).” As an active partner within this swirl education does, simply put, make “us both subjects of and subjects to relations of power (Giroux et al: 4).” How is it, then, that education succeeds in this imperialising mission? Why is it that students and their parents will choose to surrender their powers of self-determination to the will of the system? The prevailing narratives from the centre of power posit that benevolence is at the heart of the system: the ability to allow students to determine their futures and find material success within global, free-market capitalism. The promise of success implicit in the

curriculum and its delivery inoculate those subject to the system and its narrative against voices of resistance. Activist Maude Barlow, writing of the neoliberal educational reforms in Canada in the 1990s, observes that “survival of the fittest is the message, but for public consumption, right-wing education reform must be couched in the language of excellence and achievement (Barlow et al: 121).” The content of this neo-colonial education “directly validates particular points of view and teaches assumptions about privilege and power through the topics it evades as well as those it addresses (Barlow et al: 125).” Earlier in this same era of reform, Jane Gaskell observed that “The emphasis on making students ‘employable’ leads to a classroom discourse that...reproduces the class relations of the workplace.” In a simple equation, “Students want to get jobs; teachers want to get them jobs...to do this...is to learn what the employers want employees to do (Gaskell: 268).”

Writing of another colonial epoch in another place, Terry Eagleton offers that “Nineteenth-century Ireland is a striking illustration of Karl Marx’s dictum that those who dominate the means of material production will also tend to control the means of intellectual production (Eagleton: 29).” The attempted annihilation of the Irish language and identity through a colonial project of state-sponsored education began in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century when “the belief [was] in government circles that it was through education that the Irish would be socialized and politicized along loyal, law abiding lines (McManus: 237).” Education as a means for indoctrination and obedience across the British Empire was not unique: it was critical the success of this mission and Ireland was no exception. The potential for social reproduction that curriculum and its delivery offered then and now make education a critical site to justify and perpetuate “empires” founded on a goal of world economic domination.

In contemporary writing about public education in the post-industrial developed world, the idea that students are reduced to common denominators within a market-driven system of schooling, not unlike the colonial subjects of the British Empire, is commonplace among critical and radical pedagogists. Focusing on current curricula and classroom practices that embrace neo-liberal dogma, corporate partnerships with schools, and standardized testing, these seemingly new trends simply follow the basic premises of colonial education. The result is the “contradictory nature of schooling” which “like other institutions within capitalism...constrains human potential that is otherwise necessary for social progress (Wotherspoon: 34).” Education

geared to obedience, subordination, and marginalisation by schools and their relationship with the prevailing economic narratives in a given society provides the vital link between education critics of the late twentieth century and the work of Padraig Pearse and his educational project at St. Enda's school in the early twentieth century. This link, in turn, provides an understanding of these historical movements, separated by time and space; via this backward glance, a deeper understanding is offered of how neo-liberal economic agendas shape and articulate the mission of schools and the lives of students in the early twenty-first century.

In a culture of inoculation by what Paulo Freire refers to as "the bourgeois appetite for personal success" (Freire 2003: 149), to deny and resist mainstream, state-prescribed education and is to be seen as hindering one's success in the system at large, becoming, in the process, a barrier to the growth of that economic system. Writing of school life from another twentieth century economic power and a former imperial power, Japan, Norma Field observes that, "School and work are becoming increasingly continuous, such that the goals of education fail to suggest even a modicum of autonomy from the goals of the economy (Field: 62)." Writing of school life from another contemporary economic power and a former imperial power, Great Britain, Mary John observes: "with regard to the educational process, what roles are children being prepared for in adult life?...we are preparing children to compete, to look after their own interests, to attach differential values to other children in terms of their abilities/disabilities." Equating education with self-determination, capitalism with the means to self-actualization and, ultimately, equating the free-market with democracy has meant that "the nation's politics of self-seeking individualism has become children's everyday psychology in school (John: 116)."

Resistance takes many forms. The Czech playwright, dissident, and political leader Vaclav Havel offers that a parallel structure is a system created by resisters to "usurp the role of the [oppressive] system" to "have an impact on society, not to affect the power structure" (Briton: 103). For students obtaining an education in a parallel classroom, this structure affords them the opportunity to live "in the truth" while refusing "to live in the lie" (Briton: 102). In his time Padraig Pearse forged parallel structures when he educated Irish children and youth to serve the self-generated interests of those students and their parents, rather than the interests generated from the centre of power. His mission and work may have predated that of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and other liberation pedagogists, and reveals deviations specific to his social, political,

and historical contexts, but his work as an educator and activist is connected, nonetheless, across time and space.

Patrick Pearse established St. Enda's in 1908 at a time when state-prescribed education was examination-driven and "informed by colonial assumptions about the relationship between Ireland and England (Walsh: 221)." The emphasis on performance standards and a curriculum geared to educating children for the world of work spoke directly to the goals of the capitalist system that fueled the British Empire; these imperial colonial assumptions established primacy for the colonial culture--a political phenomenon that preserved and justified the imperial mission of the British Empire and the place of its colonies in cementing its global economic domination. In such an environment, Pearse the educator came to see education as political act which, serving a colonial mission, was geared to producing obedient member of the British Empire (Walsh: 222). Likewise, he recognized that education could serve as an alternative political act: a pervasive, domesticating system of control over the Irish conscience "could be subverted by a system in opposition" (Walsh: 224); accordingly, Pearse designed a school that embodied the subversion of the imperial mission in content, pedagogy, and its day-to-day operation.

As a young man Pearse's "involvement in the Gaelic League convinced [him] of the primary importance of educational reform in securing 'the intellectual independence of Ireland' (O'Buachalla: ix)." If the colonial power offered the English language as the superior language--the unifier, homogenizer, and the language of commerce--Pearse came to believe that a subjugated population's vernacular language "was a principle characteristic of [their] nationhood, reflecting a sense of 'otherness' or separateness (Walsh: 221)." Moving beyond concerns over the language of instruction to focus on the content and skills prescribed by the curriculum, Pearse seized an opportunity to counter the capitalist and imperialist oppression of the state-mandated education: "The modern child," he wrote, "is coming to regard his teacher as an official paid by the State to render him certain services; services which it is in his interest to avail of, since by doing so he will increase his earning capacity later on (Pearse: 377)." If liberation for Ireland started with education, then liberation for the Irish did too; and in the context of the classroom, "Freedom for the individual lay in a child-centred curriculum which sought to 'discover the hidden talent that is in every normal soul' (Sisson: 18)."

As subtle yet dangerous such a political proviso and mission might sound considering both the times and the regime, the reality was that, on the cusp of the twentieth century, the revolutionary, political ambitions of Pearse's later life were very distant from the political conscience of the man when he first embarked on his educational project. On the contrary, Pearse believed that intellectual independence was possible and desirable so that the Irish could fulfill a "special role in the intellectual advancement of mankind (Augusteijn: 11)." The vision this belief fostered for an education that would inspire a new nation, resuscitate a culture, and forge an independent Irish consciousness was not centred solely on the teaching of the Irish language. A survey of the existing system of education made it clear that "progress at [the] primary level" on the cultural front was not likely "in the existing secondary schools"; Pearse's vision for "saving the Irish nation was a long-term process in which a totally Irish school could play a pivotal role (Augusteign: 14)."

According to one commentator, the methods and curriculum Pearse offered students at St. Enda's seem, "Even by today's standards....modern, liberal and engaging..." (Sisson: 37); in contemporary terms, he pioneered a child-centred education. Indeed. As a secondary school educator who had been trained and spent most of her life teaching in Canada, I was struck upon visiting St. Enda's which now stands as the Pearse Museum with how closely Pearse's work mirrors that of what are now called "best practices". What are now called "cutting-edge" student-centred classrooms that offer student-generated assignments, performance-based assessments, authentic assessments, and discovery learning at faculties of education across Ontario, set the foundation for Pearse's project at St. Enda's. At the time I was preparing to complete an MA in Educational Studies and Global Change that relied heavily on critical pedagogy to interrogate contemporary efforts by politicians in Canada and elsewhere to graft a business ethos into curriculum and the life of schools via direct partnerships with corporations. Upon my visit to St. Enda's I was struck by how current the liberating focus of Pearse's project was when launched one hundred years ago.

Drawing on the Gaelic tradition of education-as-fosterage, "and the notion of learning as craft rather than process, Pearse identified the significance of learning as a transaction; a deeply human activity in which the learner is encouraged, not simply to become learned, but good...education was a moral activity (Walsh: 227)." In "quasi-monastic terms", Pearse envisioned school as "a type of retreat where children could engage in learning without being

troubled by the coercion of state examinations (Walsh: 229).” Culture and politics, in this sense, make for a bridge between content and methods in the classroom, the life of the school beyond, and students’ understanding of their relationship to authority. The school’s vast, natural setting allowed for more of the authentic, experiential learning that Pearse favoured; the venue known as the “classroom” also varied as students were “encouraged to work outdoors, both in the garden [and] on the playing field (Sisson 37)”. The extensive gardens and natural setting allowed for the teaching of relevant courses in, say, agriculture and botany developed according to student demand. The School Museum permitted students to examine first-hand “zoological, botanical, and geological specimens”; students were also “encouraged to collect specimens for this Museum during their country rambles.”¹

The curriculum was broad and made a variety of classic and contemporary subjects and studies accessible to those enrolled. The school offered European languages (French, German, Italian, and Spanish), botany, zoology and geology, “as well as more vocational subjects such as typewriting, book-keeping and shorthand (Sisson: 37).” Other subjects listed in the prospectus of St. Enda’s for the 1910-11 school year included: “Experimental Science (Chemistry and Physics), Mathematics (Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, and Trigonometry)”; in the arts, “Drawing...Vocal and Instrumental Music, Dancing”, and “Physical Drill”. Perhaps most appealing to parents and students “a suitable course [was] selected for each pupil. In making this selection, not only the wishes of the parents or guardians, but...the wishes and inclinations of the pupil himself [were] carefully consulted.” Contrary to the nature of an imperialist, colonizing and standardizing education, Pearse offered that “No pupil of St. Enda’s is forced into a groove of study for which he evinces no special talent or native inclination.”

The arts held a special place at St. Enda’s. Across the first half of the twentieth century notable “progressive educators such as William Curry and A. S. Neill insisted upon the place of the arts in schooling”; Pearse practiced this principle through a variety of activities, demonstrating “the importance [he] placed on the arts as imperative to an enlightened understanding of education (Walsh: 227).” This mission combined well with Pearse’s embrace of authentic and performative assessment for students: “Between 1908 and 1912 the boys performed in seven different plays at the Abbey Theatre” and “also acted in at least six open-air pageants of Irish history” (Sisson: 8). In addition to the school magazine Pearse compiled for

public consumption, the students compiled their own in-house publication, *An Scholaire* or “The Scholar” (Walsh: 227).

To deepend his goal of de-centring the teacher, ultimately advocating for “a re-conceptualisation of the teacher-pupil relationship”, Pearse also promoted and practiced “changes in teaching methodology, all of which became characteristic of radical educators” (Walsh: 228) later in the twentieth century. The colonial rigor of the prevailing system’s culture and the “examination regimes and practices...formed a complex web of social and economic practices which continually privileged English over Irish (Sisson: 24)”, and fostered the Darwinian individual drive for success that resonates today. St. Enda’s was, in contrast, “a ‘republic of childhood’ in which, for example, the boys were allowed to vote on whether they would play hurling or cricket in the summer term (Kiberd: 73-74).” Students were encouraged to peer edit work in class (Walsh: 228), a task which in contemporary thinking privileges the potential each students has as a teacher, cementing his/her acquired knowledge through the practice of teaching others. Students were left to organize and administer their own branch of the Gaelic League in order to promote “ ‘the formation of a sense of civic and social duty’, an allegiance to Irish-Ireland and represented ‘earnest efforts towards the awakening of a spirit of patriotism’ (Sisson: 37).” According to the prospectus of 1910-11: “The central purpose of the School is not so much the mere imparting of knowledge...as the formation of its pupils’ characters, the eliciting and development of the individual bents and traits of each, the kindling of their imaginations, the placing before them of a high standard of conduct and duty.”

In the prospectus for 1910-11 Pearse notes that at St. Enda’s “The course enters at every point into relations with actual life and is framed with particular reference to the needs and conditions which preavail in our own country at the present day.” Further, their aims and goals were “not at all the ‘cramming’ of boys with a view to success at examinations”. It is not surprising, then, that St. Enda’s embodied a theory of education that Pearse forged in response to the colonial experience. In the years between the establishment of St. Enda’s and his execution, 1908 - 1916, Pearse wrote and spoke publicly about education, consolidating his educational philosophy while examining its connection to politics. In January 1916, working from his office at St. Enda’s, he published a pamphlet entitled *The Murder Machine*--a compilation of previously published articles on the education system and notes made for a public lecture; he referred to it in the Preamble as “a series of studies of the English education system in Ireland

(*The Murder Machine*).” In the main text of the pamphlet he reiterated that “Education should foster...inspire...harden” and yet under the prevailing system, “this education is meant to repress...is meant to enervate (Pearse: 372).”

His “early conceptualisation of schools as a means of resistance--an act of defiance--had antecedents in the nonconformist movements of the early nineteenth century” in England that “so disrupted the machinery that ensured the maintenance of the social elite (Walsh: 224).” That said, Pearse “recognized, long before the development of theories of education as resistance, that it could be subverted by a system in opposition, a network of Irish-Ireland schools” (Walsh: 224). That said, the notion of schooling as a post-colonial project that addresses the indoctrination and domestication of old resonates throughout Pearse’s work and elsewhere in what was once the British Empire. According to one commentator, his pamphlet *The Murder Machine* “anticipates [Kenyan writer] Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s critique of an imposed and unrepresentative curriculum (Ghairbi: 163).” The “importance of nationalist schooling as a conduit for ideas about nationhood” that Pearse pushed is a principle that has been borne out in “The Indian postcolonial theorist Partha Chatterjee’s study of the emergence of nationalism in India” (Sisson: 4).

Central to Pearse’s theory of education “was a protest against the fact that everyone was made to read the same books, think the same thoughts, be decidable in an instant (Kiberd: 30).” In short: the only standard was standardisation in content, delivery, output, and the very shaping of student lives beyond the classroom and graduation. Writing of the larger cultural and political sphere beyond the walls of the school in a 1916 pamphlet entitled *The Sovereign People*, Pearse offered that “A nation is bound together by natural ties...an empire is at best held together by ties of human interest and at worst by brute force. The nation is the family at large, an empire is a commercial corporation at large (qtd. Ghairbhi: 161).” In *The Murder Machine* he likened pupils in Irish schools to “raw material” to be “churned out to the pattern of Civil Service Commissioners, devoid of any imagination, creativity or inspiration (qtd. Sisson: 35).”

Here, then, is the connection between schooling and the practices and ideology of the prevailing political-economy: if “capitalist/imperialist imperatives were the predominant context for the marginalisation of Gaelic culture” then it follows, Pearse through believed “that an inherent tension [existed] between political economy and the alternative worldview of native Gaelic culture” (Ghairbhi: 159) that he and other cultural revivalists were working towards.

Further, he believed “that the teacher was becoming popularly regarded as an official whose task it was to assist pupils’ ‘earning capacity later on’ ” (Walsh: 225).” Instead his work as an educator and theorist “embodies and embraces his vision of identity and culture as fluid, evolving and perennially renewable (Ghairbi: 167).” Hence the critical ideal he practiced of keeping “the learning transaction...free from prescribed texts, set curricula and terminal examinations” (Walsh: 227).

According to Elaine Sisson, “His indictments against the brutality of colonial systems, the subjugated positions of the self under colonial rule...resonate through the writings of more recent postcolonial critics” including Franz Fanon and Paulo Freire (Sisson: 1-2). However, in spite of the recent re-examination of Pearse’s work and theories, and the evaluation of that work against that of contemporary post-colonial and cultural theorists, Brendan Walsh offers that “his conceptualisation of schooling as an agent of political and cultural resistance anticipated the work of later radical thinkers such as Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire and has generally remained unacknowledged.” In light of the “evolution” of this area of theory and socio-political criticism, a closer look at his work against of these radical educators is warranted (Walsh: 220). In light of the current debates about Ireland’s future as a knowledge economy and smart society, and Ireland’s sovereignty under the influence of neo-liberal, international financial institutions and multi-nationals, it is timely.

Midway through the twentieth century, approximately forty years after the execution of Pearse, Paulo Freire conducted ground-breaking educational work with the impoverished population of his native Brazil. The cornerstone of Freire’s work was the transformation of education from a domesticating tool that serves the privileged to a liberating tool that serves the needs of all via social transformation. His seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is founded on the lived experiences of labourers and the middle-class persons, urban and rural; accordingly, he stipulates early in his writing, his theory is applicable to rural or urban workers as well as the middle-class: he considers both locations and classes to be oppressed and subject to the domination of a controlling elite.

How is it that education delivered across disparate sites to such diverse populations can have such a singular, sweeping and complete influence? The answer rests in the remedy: there must be a “change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression...[and]...the

expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order” (Freire 2003: 54-55). These are, in Freire’s ethos, two elements that allow for oppression and, ultimately, inoculation of the masses against the reality of oppression-via-education; the two work hand-in-hand in constant harmony, cloaking oppression in a myth of the benevolent mission of education. Freire is careful to define oppression lest it be taken as a condition that is only marked by traditional notions of tyranny and violence. He reduces it to “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person”. He goes on to allude to the myths and narratives that prevail in a given society to dilute the appearance of oppression and its opposition: such exploitation “constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human (Freire 2003: 55).” Rather than mount an opposition, he cautions, the “oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them (Freire 2003: 62).” The notion of achieving material success by emulating and following the dictates of the dominant class or oppressors makes the middle class particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon.

Having set the groundwork for how oppression works in a given society, Freire moves on to present his observations on the role traditional education plays in perpetuating this oppression. In a wide-angle view of the system, “the teacher-student relationship...inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character. The relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students) (Freire 2003: 71).” Narrowing the focus on the process at hand, the daily workings of classrooms are depicted as employing the “banking” concept endemic to an oppressive society. Here, the “more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them”, then, ultimately, “the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world (Freire 2003: 73).” Moving away from narration and banking requires dialogue as opposed to monologue.

Dialogue in a classroom means more than providing time and space for student voices in education; dialogue is “a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it (Shor et al: 98).” It is through “dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know [that] we can then act critically to transform reality (Shor et al: 99).” In a series of published dialogues published nearly thirty years after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire and respondent Ira Shor re-examined the phenomenon of dialogue and added the qualifier

“liberatory” to dialogue; they emphasise that “liberatory dialogue is a *democratic* communication which disconfirms domination and illuminates while affirming the freedom of the participants to re-make their culture.” Otherwise, “Traditional discourse confirms the dominant mass culture and the inherited, official shape of knowledge (Shor et al: 99).”

If dialogue appears, in theory, to lack the science or structure of “conventional” teaching and learning, Freire--having worked with the concept for more than thirty years--stipulates that the method is not “laissez-faire” because “education is always directive...The question is to know towards what and with whom it is directive (Shor et al: 109).” When the rigor of his method is questioned, Freire offers that “Scientific rigor comes from an effort to overcome a naive understanding of the world”; in short, science is simply “superposing critical thought on what we observe in reality, after the starting point of common sense (Shor et al: 106).” His theory, what he later came to call radical pedagogy, “must never make any concessions to the trickeries of neoliberal ‘pragmatism’, which reduces the educational practice to the technical scientific training of learners, *training* rather than *educating* (Freire 2004: 19).”

The “political activity [of] the dominant elites”--in schools, classrooms, academic disciplines, or the world beyond the walls of the institution--that which they use to “encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter’s (sic) ‘submerged’ state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to ‘fill’ that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom (Freire 2003: 95).” This “fear of freedom” is, ironically, denied via the “freedom” offered by the comfort of conforming to an oppressive regime. Freire recognizes the overwhelming task at hand; and so “One of the methods of manipulation...is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success (Freire 2003: 149).” Here, Freire challenges his audience to consider that there is no such thing as self-empowerment: liberation must be a social act because “if you are not able to use your *recent* [individualized] freedom to help others to be free by transforming the totality of society, then you are exercising only an individualist attitude towards empowerment or freedom (Shor et al: 109).”

And, for “an alienated person, conditioned by a culture of achievement and personal success, to recognize his situation as objectively unfavourable seems to hinder his own possibilities of success (Freire 2003: 157).” In North America, for example, the entire notion of empowering education has been captured in the U. S. “by private notions of getting ahead (Shor et al: 110).” The overwhelming culture of individualism has come to perpetuate a culture that is

“a strident pillar of capitalism” that “serves the system’s commercial, conformist culture, contradicting the very individualism it proposes (Shor et al: 111).” Dialogue, as a contrary discourse in its organic and thorough, ever-evolving reporting, uncovers the truth of all oppressions. According to Freire, “my insistence on starting with [students’] description of *their* daily life experiences is based in the possibility of starting from concreteness from common sense, to reach a rigorous understanding of reality (Shor et al: 106).” Through dialogue the idea of a classroom dynamic where the teacher is actively re-learning core and peripheral concepts as the students learn (Shor et al: 100) becomes a method that evolves into “situated pedagogy”. This, in turn, “presents subjective themes in their larger social context to challenge the givens of our lives and the surrounding system dominating daily life (Shor et al: 105).”

One observer reports that “If the heart of Freire’s program [was]...its method--dialogue--the soul of his program was its objective--consciousness raising, what he referred to as ‘conscientization’ (Finn: 171).” Conscientization via dialogue “refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of relations (Freire 2003: 35).” Here is where dialogue chips away at the prevailing narratives that inoculate, and a curriculum that serves the wheels of capitalism. Dialogue, conscientization, “literacy, and collective struggle pursued simultaneously” shaped “Freire’s program” (Finn: 172). Literacy, in this sense, is not the basic literacy and numeracy required for the workplace; instead “the progressive literacy educator”, Freire writes, “must not be satisfied with the teaching of reading and writing that disdainfully turns its back on the reading of the world (Freire 2003: 16).”

The breadth and completeness of this program and its emphasis on changing perspectives to prompt real social change came from Freire’s interest in “helping the poor recognize the social and economic interests that bind them...to take strength from their group identity and begin to struggle to further their interests through democratic means” (Finn: 172). The critical consciousness and intelligence that is fostered and grows “results in knowledge as fundamental as it is obvious: there is no culture or history that is immobile. Change is a natural realization of culture and of history (Freire 2004: 4).” It is imperative “that education, rather than trying to deny risk, encourages men and women to take it (Freire 2004: 5).” Education, then, is a deeply political act, and “progressive education...must never, in the name of discipline, eradicate the learner’s sense of pride and self worth, his or her ability to oppose, by imposing on him or her a

quietism which denies his or her being (Freire 2004: 8).” Freedom takes root and grows, naturally, “from learning, early on, how to build internal authority by introjecting the external one” (Freire 2004: 10).

In his domain, Freire’s focus was on the poor and illiterate of Brazil. Much like Pearse he wasn’t interested in simply helping the poor and marginalised succeed within the existing system: the cornerstone of Freire’s work was the transformation of education from a domesticating tool that serves the privileged to a liberating tool that serves the needs of all via social transformation. His pedagogy sought to tackle oppression at its very core and across all the mechanisms that allow it to be perpetuated. In short, he attacked what Pearse had termed “the murder machine” and sought resistance that came from the core of his students. Across history the soul has served as the smithy that James Joyce offered as the means to forge “the uncreated conscience of my race”ⁱⁱ, persistently striking, shaping, and revealing resistances of culture and conscience. Like Pearse, Freire invoked this “smithy” of sorts when he positioned education as a vehicle for social change and liberation, and a key vehicle in the cultural change that is critical if the old order--in whatever form--is to yield once and for all.

Pearse saw the construction of power relations in Irish society under colonialism as organic, pervasive, and insidious; likewise, Freire defined oppression outside of concrete notions of tyranny and violence, a simple equation of one person objectively exploiting another, or hindering that person’s capacity for self-determination. Thus, schools can be--and frequently are--sites of tyranny and violence. Like Freire, Pearse identified and described the manipulation and skewed ideology found in the curriculum and its delivery. The system of education established by the British Empire in Ireland, he observed, “succeeded in making slaves of us. And it has succeeded so well that we no longer realise that we are slaves (*The Murder Machine*).”

Nearly fifty years after the execution of Pádraig Pearse, a particular breed of cultural critics identified as critical pedagogists would frame their educational project in much the same light: education, they offer, serves as both a moral and an immoral activity. Education is moral in the sense that it can be a source of liberation; immorally, education may, simultaneously, function to make students “both subjects of and subjects to relations of power”. As one of the leading figures in this school or approach, Henry Giroux observes that “pedagogy is a discourse that should extend the principles and practices of human dignity, liberty, and social justice by

engaging in social criticism that acknowledges the serious threats faced by schools, critical cultural spheres, and the state of democracy itself". He goes on to describe how the rush to global capitalism via neo-liberal economic policies in "the 1990's...made visible the colonialism at work in both cities in the United States and in other advanced industrial countries (Giroux et al: 4)." Colonialism has, in the vernacular of these cultural theorists and critical pedagogists, moved beyond the imperialism of one country annexing another; according to Giroux it has become a subjugating force within a country and its economy (Giroux 1992, 2003).

What this new brand has in common with past empires such as the British Empire is the colonial/imperial trickle-down impact on schools, curriculum, and students; to some this is not simply a pedagogical problem that requires a pedagogical solution, but a political problem in the pedagogical sphere that requires a political solution. In this sense then, "Critical pedagogy...questions...how culture is related to power--why and how it operates in both institutions and textual terms" (Giroux et al: 5). Thus the role of critical pedagogy is not isolated to schools or the classroom; likewise, critical pedagogists do not work on the proviso that education and learning activities and actions only take place in schools and classrooms. Instead, this ideology steps out of the confines of discussions about classrooms and curricula, acknowledging that education is equally a part of interactions that take place across multiple sites in a society. And just as post-colonial theorists have illustrated how education is part of the social communications, narratives, and exchanges in a colony that are used to oppress the subjugated masses, and that deconstructing same can be employed to repair a post-colonial community, Giroux offers that pedagogy "both within and outside of schools can be used to link not only learning to social change...and education to the promise of a radical and inclusive democracy (Giroux 2006: 4)." A "public pedagogy" is one that can be used as a "powerful resource for engaging people in robust forms of dialogue and activism (Giroux 2006: 4)."

At work inside or outside of schools, critical pedagogy delineates "schools and other educational spheres" as more than "instructional sites...places where culture, power, and knowledge come together to produce particular identities, narratives, and social practices (Giroux 2006: 4)." Thus, Giroux offers, schooling is about more than the "production of skills"; instead schools turn on the "construction of knowledge and identities that always presuppose a vision of the future". And so critical pedagogists seek to ask: "Whose future, story, and interests does the school represent (Giroux 2006: 4)?" It follows, then, that "Pedagogy is directive and is,

in part, about the struggle over identities, values, and the future (Giroux 2006: 8).” Otherwise a school is simply “another space dominated by private interests and market relations (Giroux 2006: 9).” To counter these ends, “school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students becomes the defining feature of schooling (Giroux 2006: 5).”

The key notions here are “public” and “lived experience” of students: the practices and content that shape schooling, then, are not generated by private interests or the marketplace, and are not generated or disseminated from the top down. In action, critical pedagogy has a direct impact on the lives of students, teachers, the information they exchange, and how that exchange is ordered. The place of the teachers in such an environment is transformed from that of civil servant to that of public intellectual and democratic practitioner. Giroux observes that teachers are trained “to be simply efficient technicians and practitioners” but must, instead, be given “both the time and the power to institute structural conditions that allow them to produce curricula, collaborate with parents, conduct research, and work with communities (Giroux 2006: 4).” If schools act as democratic spheres, in keeping with the goal of critical pedagogy, then teachers are educated “to be publicly engaged intellectuals who address the most pressing problems of their society as part of a wider politics and pedagogy of solidarity and democratic struggle” (Giroux 2006: 5).

The standardisation that has come to regulate the lives of students has directly, according to Giroux, come to regulate the lives of teachers. Hence his use of the term “technicians” to describe their roles in the lives of students and the workings of the school. In short, they deliver a prescribed curricula via prescribed methods and report individual results in the context of prescribed descriptors and rankings of achievement. Accordingly, he asserts, addressing the whole teacher is critical: teachers are “agents whose actions have enormous political, pedagogical, and ethical consequences...[they] must be able to analyze their relationship with the larger society in order to critically apprehend themselves as social agents”. Such a role--and the reimagining and recreation of one’s role--allows teachers to contribute to the de-colonisation of themselves and their students; not only do they stand to be a part of democratisation directly, but also through “recognizing how they might be complicitous with forms of oppression and human suffering (Giroux 2006: 7).” This revisionist role for teachers is spelled out in simple terms:

language, curriculum, and lived experiences. The means of communication within education and the lives of teachers must be “a language of possibility” which allows teachers to, among other things, “speak the unrepresentable, and to imagine future social relations outside of the existing configuration of power (Giroux 2006: 7).”

As direct agents of change, teachers must use this language to “construct curricula that draw upon the cultural resources that students bring with them to school”; in this construction they must draw on “the languages, histories, experiences, and voices of the students...integrating what is taught in schools with the dynamics of everyday life (Giroux 2006: 6).” A key medium in Giroux’s critical pedagogy is literacy. In an analogous vein, he places literacy in “a broader critical discourse grounded in a politics of representation” that allows students to “learn how to analyze the cultural and ideological codes” that exist in a variety of texts. In extending the definition of literacy he cautions that “Literacy should be seen not only as a practice of critical comprehension, but also as an act of intervention in the world”; literacy “should never be reduced to the learning of particular forms of knowledge”. It is “a condition for human agency” (Giroux 2006: 4). Heightened readings and understandings allow students to recognize “the presences and absences that mark knowledge and texts” (Giroux 2006: 5), and the consequences for authority and power in their lives.

Human agency in this sense involves “multiple literacies...social literacies that are functional, cultural, and critical”; these collections of literacies “recognize both the importance of cultural differences and the importance of individuals communicating across various social, cultural and political borders (Giroux 2006: 4).” Literacy then, in the most immediate sense, implies understanding and an ability to communicate via vocabulary, syntax, and diction. This understanding and communication, in turn, allows individuals to construct narratives and to de-construct narratives, speak to authority and to understand authority and, ultimately, to approach, enter, and navigate institutions. Literacy now becomes a more sweeping term that wraps around and comes to encompass what is also known as curricula. As has been noted, Giroux believes teachers should be writing curricula given particular provisos; and school, as a “democratic public sphere”, can prompt the “rewriting [of] the curriculum in order to address the lived experiences” of students “while not being limited to such knowledge (Giroux 2006: 5).”

Much of critical pedagogy’s attempt to create curricula involves revision of the existing curricula and the means by which it was generated; in this exercise any possible means of tyranny

and hegemony are addressed. For example, Giroux emphasizes interdisciplinary learning through “breaking down disciplines” in order to “create new forms of knowledge”. The process also provides for “a way of reading history as part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity”. Outside of the existing structures, curricula, and biases, critical pedagogy “rejects the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes people’s lived histories differently” (Giroux 2006: 5). Such privilegings provide a segway for Giroux to problematise class in education: at the start of the twenty-first century it is, he believes, “more relevant than ever” when considered in the broadest sense of the word as it is increasingly highlighted “Around the fault lines of power” (Giroux 2006: 10).

Getting a “good job” remains the goal for many students and their parents at both the secondary and the tertiary levels of education. Accordingly schools shape their course offerings and students plan their timetables “on the basis of their exchange value on the market, refusing to take courses or major in areas that embody noncommercialized values”. Of course this impetus runs contrary to the notion of democracy in education: “Neo-liberalism”, offers Giroux, “has a stake in uncritical education because it thrives on ignorance in order to proceed outside of democratic accountability (Giroux 2006: 18).” Giroux does not negate the need for students to learn skills that will assist them in the marketplace and the jobmarket, however “they need to be educated both as workers and as critical citizens (Giroux 2006: 18)”; educated via curricula that recognises students’ need to “be educated in order to govern and to exercise power” with the ultimate goal of allowing “them to be subjects rather than the objects of history (Giroux 2006: 6).” Shifting the centre of power allows schooling to be “organized to provide students [instead] with the full range of knowledge, skills, values, and competencies” that fosters the “ethical discourse that enables them to develop relations among themselves and others [to] encourage social, cultural, and economic democracy (Giroux 2006: 6).”

As students experience and learn, in turn, to “promote social justice, freedom, and equality” (Giroux 2006: 6), schools will then “be seen as a resource for the larger community...[and] should not lose their connection to the neighborhoods they are intended to serve (Giroux 2006: 7).” Critical pedagogy is, then, part of an effort “designed to address how the shared interests of politics, culture, and education can be articulated” (Giroux et al 2) through

“pedagogical practices that are not only interdisciplinary, transgressive, and oppositional” but are “connected to a wider public project to increase the scope of racial, economic, and social justice” (Giroux et al 2 -3).

As an advocate of democratic action in education, and as an advocate of democratic action in education as a means of creating democratic spaces in society at large, Pearse clearly takes a place alongside Giroux. Pearse may predate this and the democracy movements that haunt globalised trade and neo-liberal capitalism by more than fifty years, however he revealed early in the last century the firm correlation between social justice and the transformation of individuals and communities through a cultural re-tooling of education in Ireland. When he established St. Enda’s he did so by mandating educational practices with an “emphasis on the importance of interdisciplinary learning, the primacy of the pupil over the curriculum, the significance of place”; the school was, in the mind of Pearse, a “home-spun university of life” (Sisson: 19) in the face of an “empire [that] is a commercial corporation at large (qtd. Ghairbhi: 161).”

Giroux depicts democracy as an ideal that has been hijacked by capitalism through its equation with free markets in the global economy; this relationship has left it stripped “of its political context” because “under the onslaught of global capitalism [democracy] is transformed into market relations” (Giroux 2003: 56). When the impact of globalisation in the early twenty-first century is assessed, an imperial order or “empire” of a new scale and scope emerges. To completely structure and articulate individuals and communities, in the ethos of Giroux, neo-liberal economic ideology in the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and school governance serve to shape youths’ identities in terms of who they are as citizens and workers. This observation, analogous to those of Pearse, demonstrate that education is a means for the perpetuation of imperial powers of whatever stripe and source.

As a solution Giroux posits radical or performative pedagogy as a “practice that acknowledges the full range of multiple, shifting and overlapping sites of learning that, in part, produce, mediate, legitimate, and challenge those forces that are waging an assault on democratic public life” (Giroux et al: 5). Writing of his time and place Pearse observed that the English “have planned and established an education which more wickedly does violence to the elementary human rights of Irish children” (Pearse: 371). Education in a “State-controlled institution [is] designed to produce workers for the State” (Pearse: 376). He reduced the

prescribed program to an imposition “by an external authority upon every child in every school in a country” in direct violation of “the root idea involved in education (Pearse: 38).” A true education system, he offers, has two components: “freedom for the individual” and “adequate inspiration (Pearse: 378).”

To this end, as a cure for the aforementioned ills, Pearse created an anti-imperialist education that incorporated democratic principles across a variety of school-based spaces, and interactions between teachers and students. As Paula Allman encapsulates it, humankind moves closer to realising a democracy “when we decide to totally transform our societies so that we produce or work to meet human need rather than to create profit (Allman: 130).” In doing so Pearse, like Freire and Giroux *after* him, confronted the capitalist ethos implicit in the British Empire and confronted that Empire’s narratives of oppression by transforming teacher-student relations and the hegemony of the state-prescribed curriculum. As a post-colonialist working within active colonialism, he sought to separate truth from “truth” while reclaiming and making sense of history. For himself and later for his students, he systematically erased the imperial tattoo from the psyche.

The iconic educational activist Paulo Freire wrote and worked in the last half of the twentieth century amongst the poor of Brazil. The iconic cultural studies activist Henry Giroux works in North America and writes of schools, outlaw cultures, and neoliberal-global economics in the early twenty-first century. Educationalist and revolutionary Padraig Pearse wrote and worked in Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century. The commonalities and points of convergence among these educational and political movements speaks to the universality of their thinking and teaching. Likewise, this universality illustrates the ways and means by which pervasive colonialism as a political, cultural, and economic force crushes the potential for democracy in the public and private lives of subjugated populations. In an era of capitalist crisis when employability and gainful employment are increasingly linked to education at all levels, and nations jostle to shape the labours of their pliant workers to the demands of multinational corporations, educational reforms loom on economic and political agendas. The work of Pearse, Freire, and Giroux, and the notion of the “smithy” become particularly evocative if education is, at last, to serve the self-interests and self-conceived agendas of students, citizens, and communities over those of the mercurial marketplace.

Notes:

ⁱ Information regarding the school's programme of study is, unless noted otherwise, taken directly from the Prospectus of St. Enda's for the 1910-1911 school year.

ⁱⁱ The penultimate journal entry of Stephen Dedalus at the close of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

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