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BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

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Rethinking Freire and Illich: Historical, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives

University of Toronto Press, 2023. 352 pp.

Rethinking Freire and Illich is published at a time when there has been a surge in work on counter-hegemonic movements, policies, and practices in education. Given the growing power and influence of neoliberal, neoconservative, and authoritarian populist movements in so many nations, such work is important and necessary. There are two fundamental motivations behind such critically oriented work in education. The first is understanding the complex dynamics of exploitation, domination, and subordination that all too often structure our societies and their constitutive relations inside and outside of education. Yet, while understanding is absolutely crucial, it is not sufficient. Emerging out of such understandings is a commitment to interruption. Both understanding and interruption have their basis in a set of ethical and political—and as this book reminds us, at times religious—commitments that are simultaneously collective and personal. And both are crucial to this particular volume.

The volume is the result of the symposium “Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Ivan Illich’s *Deschooling Society: Fifty Years Later*,” sponsored by the University of St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto. In recent years, there have been many events to celebrate Paulo Freire’s influence in particular. But among the things that set this volume apart is both the sometimes surprising connections between Freire and Illich and the collection’s genesis as a “tribute to the Catholic underpinnings of these public intellectuals” (3).

It is not that usual to think of Freire and Illich together. But the work of both became more internationally visible at around the same time. Illich played a significant role in the development of an entire generation of romantic anti-school critics, and helped generate support among a largely middle-class population for these critics and for movements such as homeschooling. Freire became perhaps the most powerful and influential figure in the theories and practices of the more socially critical and politically engaged aspects of critical education. Yet even with these very evident differences, as the book documents these two figures did have an ongoing relationship with each other.

The politics of reception plays a significant role here. In much of his work, Wittgenstein¹ reminds us that we should think that the meaning of something is in its use. Thus, language can be employed for critique, description, explanation, legitimation, and mobilization. This is helpful in understanding the meanings attached to both Freire and Illich. Freire's work was justifiably largely taken up in education by socially and culturally critical groups and oppressed populations and performed many of these linguistic functions. Illich's analyses and arguments on the other hand were mostly used by much more individualistically inclined figures. His work became more closely associated with an emphasis on individual choice and what were seen as romantic views of childhood freedom.

It is not just reception that is significant here. It is also important to understand what traditions influenced Freire and Illich. *Rethinking Freire and Illich* discusses some of the theological and intellectual figures who had an effect on both Freire and Illich. At the same time, it also describes the diverse educational activities in which they and their followers engaged internationally.

While the collection focuses on both Freire and Illich, somewhat more attention is given to Freire. In my own book *Can Education Change Society?*², I attend to the complex tasks of the "critical scholar/activist" in education, and it is therefore unsurprising that Paulo Freire plays a key role in my discussion. Furthermore, having myself spent a good deal of time with him, the overall picture of Freire that is presented in these varied contributions certainly adds nuance to our understanding of his intellectual, political, and theological history, influences, and commitments.

While I do also have a good deal of respect for Illich, as early as the 1970s I published material that was critical of his work on deschooling. It is to the credit of the discussion of Illich in *Rethinking Freire and Illich* that I came away from it with an appreciation of a number of his insights and arguments, even when I still disagree with many of them.

Finally, the book makes other contributions that are increasingly significant today. Ultra-conservative groups have taken centre stage in the debates over what should and should not be taught in schools, over what books should be permitted and what should be banned, and over whether a more honest and inclusive history should be included to counter the historical amnesia that currently dominates school curricula. A large portion of these rightist arguments are grounded in religious nationalist assumptions and commitments.

Many scholars and activists on the Left in a number of countries tend to automatically mistrust groups who find meaning in religious understandings. This mistrust risks marginalizing progressive religious motivations and traditions that have underpinned decades of actions against relations of exploitation, domination, and subordination. Yet, it is impossible to fully understand the history and current actions of many grassroots movement around race, class, gender, sexuality, peace, the environment, and so much more if one ignores the roles that religious texts and

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, 1963).

2 Michael Apple, *Can Education Change Society?* (Routledge, 2013).

impulses have played and often play now. Certainly, as this volume makes clear, one cannot fully understand Freire and Illich without recognizing the fact that there were religious roots for key parts of their understandings and actions.

These actions at times went in different directions. But those of us in the multiple traditions of critical education should be very wary of often marginalizing progressive faith communities and the texts that give them justifications for their counter-hegemonic actions at a time when rightist movements are taking up that space. One of the things that *Rethinking Freire and Illich* does is assist us in remembering this.

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Jason Mayernick

Not Alone: LGB Teachers Organizations from 1970 to 1985

Rutgers University Press, 2023. 242 pp.

The steady development of LGBTQ history of education scholarship is stretching knowledge about education's fraught yet vital relationship with its queer and gender-fluid constituents. Jason Mayernick's, *Not Alone: LGB Teachers' Organizations from 1970 to 1985*, contributes a valuable layer to this textured landscape through his study of LGB teachers' professional groups and teacher unions' advocacy for the rights of LGB teachers and, in turn, the students they served. In the first book exploring teacher unions' and groups' activism for LGBTQ rights, Mayernick focuses on two national US teacher unions and select teachers' groups active between 1970 and 1985 in major US cities. Small but mighty in their accomplishments, these groups forged communities, increased LGB visibility, and advocated for teachers. This book details how organizing for LGB teachers' rights varies across contexts and animates teacher groups' collective contributions to gay liberation history—scholarship that too often leaves out educators. With useful analysis, Mayernick, an Assistant Professor of Social Foundations and Leadership at the University of North Georgia (USA), contributes to labour, LGBTQ, and educational history by representing efforts to advance LGB school workers' rights.

Mayernick is explicit about his study parameters, which include select US teachers' groups, a fifteen-year time frame, and focusing on LGB rather than transgender educators, which is an area for future study. The politics of the queer archive, archival damage, and sparse records educators leave behind are well-known aspects of the complexities of the LGBTQ history of education scholarship, which Blount detailed years ago, often leaving scholars scrambling for precious archival crumbs for insights into queer pasts.³ Although Mayernick encounters such silences in his quest

3 Jackie Blount, *Fit to Teach: Same-Sex Desire, Gender, and Schoolwork in the Twentieth Century* (State University of New York Press, 2005).