Jennifer Seminatore

One example mentioned in the chapter we read for session #5 that was not addressed in class is the school voucher system. Specifically, why would it not make more sense to just make all schools public and increase their quality rather than instituting a complicated and somewhat convoluted system of checks on the vouchers so as to ensure they do not have perverse consequences? **[I think the issue here is the extent to which we think (a) schooling is something that should be organized under the democratic and participatory control of parents and teachers, and (b) parents should be able to have considerable choice in the character of the schools their children attend. "Vouchers" are one way of accomplishing these two goals. In a sense the schools are still public because the rules imposed on them can insure that they are non-exclusionary and satisfy a range of curricular and other standards, but the functioning would be decentralized and under more school-centered democratic governance. Now, this might not be the optimal system. It is possible that "statist schools" are better for various reasons. We might not, for example, want parents to have that much control over the children's education. But a left wing egalitarian-democratic version of vouchers is something to think about.]**

In chapter 7, there are a couple of points I would like to address. First, does the division between "conscious" (ideology) and "unconscious" (culture) aspects of subjectivity make sense? Aren't a majority of values, beliefs, and theories tacit, implicit, and unarticulated? I bring up this concern because the tacit nature of the majority of people's worldviews might pose a dilemma for attempts to alter them – not that articulated and externalized ideologies are any easier to change. **[The term "values" would be relevant to both what I am calling ideology and culture. To count as an element of ideology it can be tacit so long as a person can call it to mind. Consider values and beliefs about competition: a person can believe that competition is a good thing and that it increases efficiency, etc. – those are elements of ideology and would figure in their defenses of capitalism and markets if they were in a debate about such matters at a picnic; but competitiveness is also part of the culture and is internalized as dispositions to action (habitus in Bourdieu's terminology). I think the distinction is important because it is possible to change people's beliefs about competition without first changing their dispositions: you can become convinced that it would be a good thing to reduce competitiveness in the society even if you have a competitive disposition.]**

I am also very interested in the "rules" mechanism of social reproduction. What sort of negative selection mechanisms built into the state work to enact only policies not destructive to capitalism? How exactly does this process work? **[It is not that rules are so perfectly designed that they completely block dysfunctional policies or actions, it**

is just that they make them much less likely. Capitalism-protecting rules include things like: the due process rules over protection f private property would count as a rule; the electoral rules of the game which make left parties harder to form; rules about money in politics; rules that insulate bureaucratic institutions from popular pressures; secrecy rules in government; etc.

Ofer Sharone

You claim: "For radical transformation to occur conditions must be 'ripe'; the contradictions and gaps in the processes of social reproduction must create real opportunities for strategy."

I am curious what this implies for radical activists. Does it imply that activists need to draw up plans, imagine viable alternatives, but then patiently wait for ripe conditions? **[The "ripeness" metaphor comes from Old Left strategic thinking and is probably too strong. There are two issues here: a) there may be "ripening strategies" – i.e. strategies now that enhance prospects for transformations down the road – the conditions are not parameters but can themselves be affected by strategy; b) "transformation" includes all sorts of things that can be done in the here and now that prefigure larger scale transformations. "Ripeness" then refers more to the conditions under which the replication and extension of those small scale processes can "take off".]** If so, how do we ever know when the conditions are 'ripe' for a given strategy? Given the limits of our knowledge about the actual effects of any given strategy, should we not always act on the assumption that conditions may indeed be ripe? I understand the argument that when a big overt crisis occurs, like the Great Depression, it makes sense to try to seize the moment. But at other times it may be the case that underlying conditions have changed in ways that we may not even understand, and thus strategies may be more effective than we might anticipate. Should we not always be pushing the limits even if we think we are not likely to succeed? **[Absolutely right: the only way of knowing the nature of limits is to push against the limits: the process of building alternatives is also a process of discovery of what can be built.]** If not, why not? Is it because of the potentially negative consequences of a failed attempt, such as allowing capitalists to develop a counter-strategy that will undermine use of this strategy again in the future? But, there may be lots of positive consequences of failed attempts as well, such as learning the counter-moves of capitalists, building more popular support for future attempts, etc. Can we know whether the negative consequences of a failed attempt will outweigh the positive?   **[There is a constant and pervasive problem in all efforts at social transformation of learning the wrong lessons from both successes and failures. This is because of the extreme difficulty of understanding the effects of context. That is, the general case is one in which "people make history but not just as they choose" where the "not just as they choose" bit is a thesis about *interactions* between context and strategy. Interaction models – to sound overly methodological here – are difficlt to study, because to fully learn the lesson one needs to vary the context and observe the effects of the same strategy. This would make it possible to**

know when the problem of failure, for example, lay in flawed strategy or unpropitious context. The causal logic is something like this:

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┌──────────────┐                             ┌────────────────────────┐
│   Strategy   │ ──────────────────────────► │ Transformative effects │
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