

**A Review of *Silencing Ivan Illich Revisited: A Foucauldian Analysis of Intellectual Exclusion*  
by David Gabbard**

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I first encountered Ivan Illich's (1970) *Deschooling Society* in an undergraduate Educational Foundations course at the University of Saskatchewan. This introduction sparked an intense and long-lasting intellectual engagement with Illich's work. The instructor was Dr. Robert Carlson, an adult educator at the University of Saskatchewan, committed to the disestablishment of schooling, and in many ways at the fringe of what the College of Education was offering. Given the thesis of Gabbard's book, it might seem that my experience is an exception; however, it may be an exception that proves his point. That the only place I could encounter Illich was outside of the mainstream suggests something about the repressive force of dominant ideas in education.

The kind of intellectual exclusion that David Gabbard takes up in this work is unrelated to the current politicized notion of "cancel culture." Although there is some recognition of sanctions as part of the mostly American culture wars of the 1990s, the arguments in this book bear no resemblance to the current iteration of conservative hand-waving over public accountability. Rather, *Silencing Ivan Illich Revisited* is about the much deeper mechanisms that dominant educational discourses utilize to conserve and reproduce their central theses. In fact, this work stresses how there can be varied and deep (and sometimes contradictory) criticisms allowed within the archive of educational thought, as long as those ideas do not contradict the "messianic" principle of inclusion, which states:

You must present the institution of state-mandated, compulsory schooling as a benevolent institution capable of delivering the individual and/or society into some condition of secular salvation. (p. 3)

According to Gabbard, Ivan Illich's failure to even minimally uphold this principle accounts for his exclusion from mainstream educational discourse.

Following from Gabbard's dissertation work, this book is rooted in Foucauldian archaeology. Archaeological analysis seeks a "description of the archive," those collections of statements/practices that can be spoken, or are intelligible from within a particular discursive formation. Marking Foucault's own move away from the fixedness of the language of archaeology, Gabbard defines his approach as "theoretico-activist." In order to adopt this analysis of discourse, it is necessary to view discourse itself as a practice, recognizing that power and knowledge are mutually constitutive. Relatedly, this approach insists that both theory and practice are "at the same level," that theory is imagined within practices, and therefore it is not necessary/possible to meaningfully separate theory as being somehow above, or more important than the practices that produce/reify those theories. According to Gabbard, the work of a theoretico-activist analysis surfaces and explains the rules that govern the discursive formation.

Ivan Illich became something of an international educational celebrity in the early 1970s with his critiques of institutions, namely the Catholic Church, schools, and medicine. Chapter 3 is dedicated to excavating the main ideas that reinforce Illich's transgression of the messianic principle (without naming him specifically as the "critical functionary"). The chapter explores the rules of discursive formation that shape "the school" as an object in Illich's work. By tracing

some of the myths articulated in Illich's writing, Gabbard outlines how, "the human need for education has been transformed into a consumer's demand" (p. 43), which then can only be fulfilled by schools. While learning is innately human, translating this need into the framework of consumerism—through prepackaged curricula, the promise of "measurable values" (and the subsequent credential afforded successful achievement in school) and other mechanisms—affords obligatory schooling a monopoly on the supply of education. In contrast, Gabbard highlights Illich's imagining of a convivial institution, building on inter-relationships and authenticity to imagine a de-schooled society.

Chapter 4 explores the exclusion of Ivan Illich's work through cataloguing the two major sources of critique (what Gabbard refers to as discursive "commentary"). The chapter gathers a number of "meritocratic" commentaries, which focus on the individual and how schools produce leadership and professional expertise. These commentaries emphasize the way that merit is measured and rewarded through compulsory schooling, ensuring that the most worthy individuals develop the social capital to enable/justify their eventual leadership in the society. De-schooling, however, would create a space for elitism to flourish. Gabbard also gathers a number of critiques that he refers to as "social reconstructivist" commentaries. While the authors of these commentaries allow that Illich's critiques of school are useful, they offer that schools are also the place where societal change can happen. Schools can play a role in working against injustice, toward greater equality. De-schooling would remove a mechanism for constructive social change. It is necessary to note that Gabbard's text is not trying to argue that we should embrace Illich's ideas; this is not a book about the value or necessity of Illich. Rather, it is about the way some ideas can be excluded because of their transgression of the messianic principle in education. Because both the meritocratic and social reconstructionist critiques uphold the messianic principle, their critiques of schooling are allowed space, are rendered as intelligible, and included within dominant educational discourse.

I appreciate the way that this book takes up the conserving momentum of dominant educational discourses. What can be considered, thought about, and imagined is constrained through powerful discursive moves that render (some forms of) critique unintelligible. Gabbard brings to the fore some of the deep ways that dominant ideas about schooling are maintained. Another strength of this text is the careful attention to the theories that underlie the methodological choices. While it makes for a technically challenging read, the text bears up as a meaningful exploration of a theoretico-activist approach. Methodologically, this is an interesting example of archaeological work. Foucault does not offer a road-map to follow, or a narrow set of processes to work through; the methodological terrain is vast and confusing. Practitioners may read this as a valuable example of how archaeology might be performed.

On a different note, I was struck by Chapter 5. After the heavy lifting and narrow discursive focus of the previous chapters, to use Illich's relationships with the institutional church as an example of how the messianic discourse functions was revealing. It was also a more human picture of Illich's work/convictions. I understand why the author chose to strip some of this humanity away for the previous chapters, but I really appreciated these connections. Ivan Illich's convivial approach requires this sort of contextualization in order to serve as an antidote to the dehumanizing work of institutions.

As this book's title announces it represents a "revisiting" of an earlier work. Gabbard notes that after the book was originally published he had two choices: a negative path of critique

(to work in teacher preparation, encouraging preservice teachers to understand the propaganda of school reform); or, a positive path of building from Illich's ideas towards a de-schooled society. He followed the path of critique for decades, and in *Revisited* wanted to take up the more positive task. While the ending of the book suggests some starting places for this work, especially in a defense of discursive freedom, I was left unconvinced that that the pursuit of theoretico-activism would lead to the building of something other.

Gabbard's description of Illich's exclusion from mainstream educational discourse seems important in this moment. More than reactionary political takes, this work stresses some of the deep ways that dominant discourses function. Scholars interested in especially Foucauldian approaches to discourse will find this work useful. Scholars interested in Illich will perhaps be disappointed in the narrow emphasis on educational exclusion that necessitates the (temporary) erasure of Ivan Illich in the writing.