

READING GUIDE FOR:

Henry A. Giroux, excerpt from “Children’s Culture and Disney’s Animated Films,”
The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010)

- **Don’t worry if you feel a bit lost!** In this chapter, Giroux covers a lot of ideas and makes reference to a variety of thinkers and concepts with which you might be unfamiliar. It’s normal to feel a little overwhelmed if you’re not exactly sure what he’s talking about in every section, or you don’t know any of the people to whom he is making reference. So don’t be discouraged at having to read certain parts several times. In fact, it’s a good idea to first skim the reading in order to identify the overall structure, main points, and key passages...then carefully re-read the key passages. A good way to tell if you understand the reading (after you are finished) is to find someone who is not in the course and try to explain the main points him or her in a conversation.
- **About terminology and academic jargon.** Like many of the people we will read (or read about) this semester, Giroux uses terms that may seem strange or confusing if you have never run across them before. Some of this may simply be due to the way that he writes (his prose), and some of it may be due to the specific jargon used by cultural theorists (as well as other scholars who write about literature, film, mass media, anthropology, philosophy, and so on). First of all, I do NOT expect you to fully understand terms like ‘hegemony’ or ‘hyperreal’ the first time you run across them. That would be ridiculous! At the same time, I don’t want you to be dismissive of these terms, or the concepts, before we’ve had a chance to discuss them....or before you’ve had a chance to spend time thinking about what they mean, or why people use them. So, here’s two things to keep in mind:
 - *Every field has its own specific jargon.* For example, if you have never read anything about Sociology, the specific meanings of ‘correlation’ and ‘causation’ will initially seem as foreign to you as the vocabulary of professional music composers seems to most punk musicians (I speak from experience). But, it goes without saying that if you want to have a conversation about the methods used by sociologists, or the elements that form a traditional Balkan folk song versus an American pop tune, it’s important to understand what specific terms mean and how they are used by people in their respective fields, whether one is a scholar, a bike mechanic, a plumber, or an architect. Academic work that falls under the ‘cultural studies’ banner is no different, and it just takes some time to learn about the definitions and the uses of specific terminology. I’m not saying that you shouldn’t be critical of people who don’t write clearly, or that you shouldn’t strive to explain difficult concepts in concise terms, but I *am* saying that it might take you a while get the hang of things, and you will likely have to re-read assignments and use a dictionary (or the end-of-the-book glossary) to help you with difficult passages.
 - *Early in the semester, the concepts are more important than the terminology.* At the same time I want to encourage you to understand specific terms in our readings, I am far more interested (at this point in the semester) in whether you comprehend concepts from the readings, and whether you are using them to help you analyze, and think critically about, different cultural practices, cultural artifacts and cultural formations in the real world. Does this mean that you don’t have to worry about learning terms from our readings? No. But it does mean that you should initially be working on becoming a more careful and ‘close’ reader. If you learn how to do that early in the semester, then you will have no problem remembering what terms like ‘hegemony’ and ‘discourse’ actually mean (or why they are important, relevant, and/or historically significant).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER (FROM THE CHAPTER)

*These questions are simply meant to assist you with the reading.
You do not have to formally answer them or submit them for a grade.*

1. Giroux says that the question of whether Disney's films are good for kids has no easy answer. Still, he's trying to push us towards a more critical reading of Disney's films based on the fact that the culture of children is an "important site of contestation and struggle" (p. 98). What do you think he means by this? And what are some of the examples he uses to illustrate his point?
2. Giroux teaches in an education department and has written about education for years. For that reason, he's particularly interested in how Disney films function in a *pedagogical* way (as a form of education and instruction). What are some of the specific lessons that Disney 'teaches' children about gender, race and ethnicity? And how do you think these affect the way kids see the world (or other people)?