Critical pedagogy in the twenty-first century: Evolution for survival

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I am dedicated to the basic themes of critical pedagogy. I have been for years and assume I will continue to be for the rest of my life. At the same time because I am dedicated to the principles of criticality, I am by necessity a vehement critic of the tradition. Adherence to such critical notions, many believe, requires those of us within the tradition to criticize and move it to new plateaus while recognizing our own failures and the failures of the domain. It is in this spirit that Peter and I entered into our work on Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now? Bound by our enduring friendship and common commitment to a wide range of critical concepts, together we move into the next phase of critical pedagogy. As I reference my role as a “vehement critic” of the critical tradition, I offer such criticism in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s radical love. I don’t want to assess the successes and failures of critical pedagogy in the posture of one who knows best where we should be going—I don’t possess such prescience. In the spirit of Paulo I offer my critiques humbly, painfully aware of my own shortcomings as a teacher-scholar.

Concurrently, I refuse to attack my fellow critical pedagogues in some mean-spirited, ad hominem way simply because they might disagree with me. I find that on the vast majority of issues I am a committed ally of proponents of critical pedagogy with whom I have profound disagreements. In such contexts I seek a synergistic conversation, knowing that any disagreement we have around a theoretical or social action-oriented concept can be analyzed within a larger context of sociopolitical and pedagogical solidarity. With this critical harmony and radical love as the foundation that grounds my conception of critical pedagogy, I offer this chapter as a call for critical solidarity in an era that might be described as “less than friendly” to many of our perspectives on social,
cultural, political, economic, epistemological, ontological, psychological, social, theoretical, and pedagogical issues of the day. Didn’t Ben Franklin once say something about it being better to hang together than to hang separately? In this era of a new U.S. Empire, political economic globalization, a corporatized politics of knowledge, a “recovered” dominant race, class, gender, sexual, and religious supremacy, and a grotesque anti-intellectualism, I would argue that Franklin’s eighteenth-century perspective on the dynamics of hanging is quite relevant for twenty-first-century practitioners of critical pedagogy.

Keeping critical pedagogy relevant: Diverse dialects—open access writing and speaking

If critical pedagogy is to matter as we move toward the second decade of the twenty-first century, if it is to be more than a historical blip on the educational landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, then it must meet several contemporary challenges. From my perspective a vibrant, relevant, effective critical pedagogy in the contemporary era must be simultaneously intellectually rigorous and accessible to multiple audiences. In an era when open-access publishing on the Internet is a compelling issue in the politics of knowledge (Willinsky, 2006), I contend that open-access writing and speaking about critical pedagogy are also profoundly important. Such a populist form of criticality does not in any manner undermine our intellectual rigor and theoretical sophistication; instead, it challenges our pedagogical ability to express complex ideas in a language that is understandable and germane to wide audiences.

Make no mistake, there is a central place in the lives of academic critical pedagogues for scholarly, peer-reviewed publications—such an enterprise is a dynamic
dimension of being a scholar and improving our intellectual skills. Such a practice occupies a central place in the cultivation of the intellect and in all of our efforts to become adept transformative intellectuals. In the research and scholarship of every critical pedagogue there is an important role for both scholarly peer-reviewed journal publication and writing aimed at diverse audiences: teachers, social workers, parents, students at a variety of grade levels, labor groups, women’s groups, sexual groups, racial/ethnic groups, religious organizations, etc. Our imagination is the only limit to the audiences critical pedagogues might address. Indeed, we have important insights to pass along to diverse groups; consequently we need to seek out these audiences, publish for them, and convince university tenure and promotion committees of the significance of such work in our larger research and publishing agendas.

Critical pedagogues are public intellectuals, public activists, and as such we need to develop diverse languages to address divergent audiences. Many African Americans, Latinos, indigenous peoples, and first-generation college students from all racial backgrounds know that the language they speak at the university is significantly different from the “dialect” they speak at home and in their communities. As a Southern Appalachian, I knew that the way I spoke with my three Aunt Effies back in Tennessee and Virginia was profoundly different from my presentation on critical postformal thinking at an academic conference. And when I screwed up and talked in too academic a language for my Aunt Effie Kincheloe Bean, she let me know it. “Think you’re pretty smart, don’t you, Mr. Professor,” she would tell me in her best, exaggerated East Tennessee mountain accent. I listened to her loving chiding carefully, trying to devise a better way to tell her about the topic at hand. Though she is long departed from this
planet, I often write to her in some of my books and essays about critical pedagogy. Some folks see dead people; I write to them.

In a related context I analyze why critical pedagogy as a discourse doesn’t speak to many different subcultural groups in divergent societies. When I attend and speak at critical pedagogical conferences around the world, I see far too few indigenous peoples, individuals of African descent, and Asians. In the North American context I am simply appalled by the small numbers of African Americans at critical pedagogical events. Indeed, one of the greatest failures of critical pedagogy at this juncture of its history involves the inability to engage people of African, Asian, and indigenous backgrounds in our tradition. I call for intense efforts in the coming years to bring more diversity into our ranks for two purposes: 1) Critical pedagogy has profound insights to pass along to all peoples; and 2) Critical pedagogy has much to learn from the often subjugated knowledges of African, African American, Asian, and indigenous peoples.

Indeed, a significant dimension of the future of critical pedagogy rests with the lessons to be learned from peoples around the world. Thankfully, critical pedagogy is supported and informed by numerous Latin and South American peoples. My fear, however, is that critical pedagogy has become too much of a North American (and often European) “thing,” as White North American scholars appropriate a South American discourse. North Americans must be demanding in their efforts to make sure that Paulo Freire and his South/Latin American colleagues and progeny are viewed as the originators of this hallowed tradition. In the spirit of Paulo, a confident yet humble approach to our work—a critical humility—seems to serve us well. Critical pedagogy does not find its origins as a North American phenomenon, and if critical pedagogues cannot learn this simple lesson then they will have little positive impact on the world.
In addition, despite what proponents of different positions might argue, critical pedagogy is not simply for one interest group. Critical pedagogy serves both teachers and cultural workers who engage in social activism outside the boundaries of schools. Some of the most depressing moments I have spent engaged in critical pedagogy have occurred either when teachers view the classroom as the central if not only domain for critical pedagogical analysis and action or when cultural workers see schools as “lost places” where nothing matters because the institution is flawed. In these cases, I have actually seen cultural worker/social activists roll their eyes at one another when teachers reference classroom practice. My god, the activist labor that critical pedagogically informed cultural workers perform is profoundly important and has much to teach teachers—and teachers, of course, have much to teach such cultural workers.

Those academics who study the politics of knowledge, the macrodynamics of education, cultural pedagogies promoted in the twenty-first-century global marketplace, and many other ideological/educational phenomena have much to teach everyone. My point here is obvious: until we come to see the work of these different groups of critical pedagogues as synergistic rather than hierarchical, the achievements of the tradition will be acutely undermined. Qualitative hierarchies of importance segregating those who engage in critical pedagogy into status-laden groups will destroy our efforts to address power inequities and the human suffering such disparity causes. We are too smart to allow such egocentric status seeking to subvert our struggle for justice. If we’re not able to overcome such pathology, then to hell with us—we don’t deserve to survive.

Getting started: The origins of critical pedagogy and its uses in a conflicted, complex world
With these concerns in mind, let’s briefly examine the origins of critical pedagogy. In the early twenty-first century it has become clichéd among many pedagogical scholars to describe education as a Janus-faced institution with its two faces looking toward opposite goals and outcomes: in one direction, a democratic, inclusive, socially sensitive objective concerned with multiple sources of knowledge and socioeconomic mobility for diverse students from marginalized backgrounds; and in the other, a standardized, exclusive, socially regulatory agenda that serves the interest of the dominant power and those students most closely aligned with the social and cultural markers associated with such power.

Thus, in the contemporary era educational scholars on faculties of education at colleges/universities and educators in elementary and secondary schools walk through a complex terrain of contradictions in their everyday professional pursuits, as educational researchers tend to find evidence of both progressive and regressive purposes in most educational institutions. As critical pedagogues observe such phenomena, they understand that the notion of “becoming a teacher” or a cultural worker concerned with social justice involves far more complex bodies of knowledge and conceptual insights than is sometimes found in teacher education and educational research programs, not to mention the knowledge that the mass media makes available to the public.

Emerging from Paulo Freire’s work in poverty-stricken northeastern Brazil in the 1960s, critical pedagogy amalgamated liberation theological ethics and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany with progressive impulses in education. Critical pedagogy gained an international audience with the 1967 publication of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and its English translation in 1970. By the mid-1970s several scholars in education and other disciplines adapted Freire’s conception of critical
pedagogy into a so-called first-world context. Over the next decade, critical pedagogy influenced pedagogical practice, teacher education, and sociopolitical and educational scholarship in South and North America. In the twenty-first century, the field is at a conceptual crossroads as researchers contemplate the nature of its movement to the next phase of its evolution. Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now? is intent on providing a series of speculations and tentative answers to questions concerning where we are now and where we go from here.

In my own work I have explored this “next phase” of critical pedagogy in relation to the issues raised at the beginning of this chapter and in recognition of the complexity of everyday life (Kincheloe, 2004). Attention to this complexity with the rigorous scholarship it demands—multiple forms of knowledge coming from around the globe as well as diverse research methodologies—forces proponents of critical pedagogy to ask revealing questions about the purposes of existing educational practices and their consequences. Such questions and the answers scholars provide will help shape the next phase of critical pedagogy. In this context we move to a new terrain of intellectually rigorous and highly practical cultural and educational work.

What is the relation between classroom practice and issues of justice? How do schools reflect or subvert democratic practices and the larger culture of democracy? How do schools operate to validate or challenge the power dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, indigenous/aboriginal issues, physical ability-related concerns, etc? How do such processes play out in diverse classrooms located in differing social, cultural, and economic domains? How do the knowledges schools and other social institutions choose to transmit replicate political relationships in the larger society and affect the academic performance of students from dissimilar socioeconomic and cultural
backgrounds? What roles do diverse media play in the ideological education of societies? What is the pedagogical role of popular culture? What are the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic dimensions of new technologies? How do we use critical methodologies and understandings to tap into the libidinal energy of individuals in a way that will produce joy and happiness as they pursue learning and transformative social action? The ability to provide well-informed and creative answers to such questions that lead to practical educational policy and practice is a key dimension of critical pedagogy.

As we look back from the perspective of the first decade of the twenty-first century to the innovative scholarly work on epistemology and research of the last several decades, one understanding becomes increasingly clear: producing knowledge about the world and understanding the cosmos is more complex than we originally thought. What we designate as facts is not as straightforward a process as it was presented to us. Critical pedagogues operating with this understanding of complex multilogicality or what many have called “the bricolage” (Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe and Berry, 2004; Kincheloe, 2005) know that what most people consider the natural social world is a conceptual landmine wired with assumptions and inherited meanings.

Critical researchers have learned that what is unproblematically deemed "a fact" has been shaped by a community of inquirers and sociopolitical forces. All of these researchers accept, often unconsciously, a particular set of theoretical assumptions. Engaging in knowledge work without a deep understanding of the tacit sociopolitical rules of the game is not a manifestation of rigor. Indeed, such a lack of knowledge profoundly undermines the effort to produce compelling and useful data about the world around us (Horn, 2004; Fischer, 1998). Great scholars in diverse historical and cultural settings have admonished individuals not to take fixed viewpoints and concepts as reality
(Varela, 1999). Critical pedagogues as bricoleurs heed such a warning as they move into a zone of critical complexity.

Roymeico Carter (2004) extends this critical complex concept into the world of the visual. The complexity of researching the visual domain is often squashed by the formal methods of Cartesian aesthetics. Carter reminds us that the intricate layers of visual meaning must be studied from numerous perspectives as well as diverse cultural and epistemological traditions. But such diversity of perception lets the cat out of the bag; it relinquishes control of how we are to see the world. According to Ilya Prigogine, complexity demands that researchers give up the attempt to dominate and control the world. The social and physical worlds are so complex that they can only be understood like human beings themselves: not machine-like, but unpredictable, dependent upon context, and influenced by minute fluctuations (Capra, 1996). Thus, bricoleurs focus their attention on addressing the complexity of the lived world, understanding in the process that the knowledge they produce should not be viewed as a transhistorical body of truth. In this framework, knowledge produced by bricoleurs is provisional and "in process." Bricoleurs know that tensions will develop in social knowledge as the understandings and insights of individuals change and evolve (Blackler, 1995).

A critical researcher, for example, who returns to an ethnographic study only a few years later may find profound differences in what is reported by subjects. The categories and coding that worked three years ago may no longer be relevant. The most important social, psychological, and educational problems that confront us are untidy and complicated. As we wade through the swamp of everyday life, research methods that fail to provide multiple perspectives at macro-, meso-, and microlevels do not provide the insights that we need.
It is one thing to find out that schools, for example, do not provide many poor students a path to social mobility.

It is quite another thing to take this macro finding and combine it with the mesodynamics of the ways particular schools and school leaders conceptualize the relationship between schooling and class mobility. It is also important that these findings be viewed in a context informed by everyday classroom and out-of-classroom interactions between teachers and students and students and their peers. Obviously, different research methodologies will be used to explore the differing questions emerging at the different levels. Once data from these diverse layers are combined we begin to discern a picture of the multiple dynamics of the relationship between socioeconomic class and education. Only a multidimensional, complex picture such as this can help us formulate informed and just strategies to address such issues.

Critical complications: A research and pedagogical agenda for a globalized, multilogical world

If critical pedagogical scholars/researchers refuse to move into the multileveled swamp of complexity or to integrate the diverse forms of data found at its different levels, they may find themselves asking pedestrian questions of profoundly complicated issues. Simple, unproblematic questions about the domain of schooling and socioeconomic class, for example, tend to be the least significant to the society at large. Positivistic standards of rigor as presently employed by many social, psychological, and educational researchers actually preclude the complex, multidimensional, multimethodological work necessary to producing meaningful and usable research data (Schon, 1995). Francisco Varela (1999) writes about "the situated embodiments of simple acts" (p. 8), maintaining
that such complexity in everyday life undermines total reliance on computational methods where "knowledge is a manipulation of symbols by logic-like rules, an idea that finds it fullest expression in modern digital computers" (p. 7).

In the domain of cognitive science, Varela concludes, even the simplest acts—even those performed by insects—rest outside the understanding of the computational strategy. Varela's pronouncements tell critical bricoleurs not to throw out computational strategies but to understand what they can and cannot tell us and to carefully consider how we might use them in the bricoleur's pursuit of complexity in the social, political, psychological, and educational spheres. As we examine “where we are now” in critical pedagogy, we must understand these elements of complexity in order to become more rigorous scholar-researcher-educators and more effective agents of socially just political and educational change. We have no choice if we want to remain relevant in the emerging era. Hyperreality, with its bombardment of communicative messages and ideologically inscribed images, demands no less.

Even simple acts of cognition, social interaction, learning, and textual analysis are more complex than researchers first suspected. “Just give me the facts”, is not as simple a command as it seemed to appear to Cartesian sensibilities. The situated nature of knowledge questions a variety of Cartesian assumptions. When we pick particular attributions of meaning about specific phenomena, we must consider a variety of factors. Such choices are inevitably political and ideological and have nothing to do with efforts to be objective. Even the decisions researchers make about what to study reflect these same political and ideological dynamics. In the highly ideologically charged first decade of the twenty-first century, do educational researchers study how to improve student test scores in the suburbs or the impact of racism on lower-socioeconomic-class African
American students in urban schools? The problems and issues that are chosen by researchers are marked by subjective judgments about whose problems are deemed most important.

These interpretative decisions are always complex and influenced by a plethora of social, cultural, political, economic, psychological, discursive, and pedagogical dynamics. As a critical discourse, the bricolage always considers the normative dimension of what should be as well as what is. When Horkheimer and Adorno’s concept of immanence (the examination of what is in relation to what should be) is added to the complex dynamics surrounding decision making and interpretation in the realm of research, critical pedagogues as bricoleurs move to yet a higher domain of complexity. Reflecting on the research process from a perspective shaped by these concerns, critical bricoleurs gain new insights into the ideological consequences of reductionism. For example, when rational inquiry is positioned in opposition to the emotional, affective, and value-laden dimensions of human activity, then it has removed itself as a means of gaining insight into the social, psychological, and educational domains. Life in these domains simply cannot be understood without careful attention to the emotional, affective, and value-laden aspects of human behavior (Williams, 1999; Reason and Bradbury, 2000). Indeed, a rational inquiry that devalues the role of irrationality will sink under the weight of its own gravitas.

Because of this damned complexity, advocates of a critical pedagogy understand that no simple, universally applicable answers can be provided to the questions of justice, power, and praxis that haunt us. Indeed, such questions have to be asked time and again by teachers and other educational professionals operating in different historical times and diverse pedagogical locales. Critical pedagogy understands that no educator who seeks to
promote individual intellectual development, sociopolitical and economic justice, the production of practical transformative knowledge, and institutional academic rigor can escape the complex contextual specificity of these challenging questions. The pedagogical and research agenda of a complex critical pedagogy for the twenty-first century must address these realities as it constructs a plan to invigorate the teaching and study of such phenomena in the new phase of critical pedagogy that I am proposing for North America and around the world.

Proponents of a complex critical pedagogy appreciate the fact that all educational spaces are unique and politically contested. Constructed by history and challenged by a wide variety of interest groups, educational practice is an ambiguous phenomenon as it takes place in numerous settings, is molded by numerous and often invisible forces and structures, and can operate under the flag of democracy and justice in oppressive and totalitarian ways. Practitioners of critical pedagogy report that some teacher education students, educational leaders, parents, and members of the general public often have difficulty appreciating the fact that schooling can be hurtful to particular students from specific backgrounds in unique social, cultural, and economic settings—for example, indigenous and aboriginal students. Many individuals often have trouble empathizing with students harmed by such negative educational dynamics because schooling in their experience has played such a positive role in their own lives.

Thus, a complex critical pedagogy is a domain of research and practice that asks much from those who embrace it. Critical pedagogical teacher education and leadership, for example, involve more than learning pedagogical techniques and the knowledge required by the mandated curriculum. In addition to acquiring teaching methods, teachers and leaders steeped in critical pedagogy also understand the social, economic,
psychological, and political dimensions of the schools, districts, and systems in which they operate. They also possess a wide range of knowledge about information systems in the larger culture that serve as pedagogical forces in the lives of students and other members of society: television, radio, popular music, movies, the Internet, podcasts, and youth subcultures; alternative bodies of knowledge produced by indigenous, marginalized, or low-status groups; the ways different forms of power operate to construct identities and empower and oppress particular groups; and the modus operandi of the ways sociocultural regulation operates.

Democracy is a fragile entity, advocates of critical pedagogy maintain, and embedded in educational policy and practice are the very issues that make or break it. Understanding these diverse dimensions and structures that shape schooling and the knowledge it conveys is necessary, critical pedagogues believe, to the very survival of democratic schooling—not to mention the continued existence of democracy itself. The analysis of the ways these complex forces evolve in a globalized, technological, electronic communications-based era marked by grand human migrations is central to the complex critical pedagogy proposed here.

The future of critical pedagogy involves addressing this complexity head on and making sure—as I maintained at the beginning of this chapter—that critical pedagogues listen carefully to marginalized groups from diverse corners of the planet. In such a context, a complex, humble critical pedagogy for a new era promotes research, analysis, and the use of subjugated, repressed, and indigenous knowledges in relation to the academy in general, teaching and learning, and epistemological and ontological understandings central to educational policy and practice. Indigenous knowledge has been and continues to be difficult to define. Always aware of the possibility of Western
exploitation of particular forms of indigenous knowledge, this new phase of critical pedagogy views its usage with respect and reverence for its producers. For the millions of indigenous peoples of Africa, Latin America, Asia, Oceania, and North America, indigenous knowledge is an everyday way of making sense of the world, the self, and the relationship between them that rewards individuals who live in a given locality.

In this context indigenous knowledge reflects the dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize their knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, history, and teaching and learning to enhance their lives (Keith & Keith, 1993; Dei, 1995; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Dei and Kempf, 2006). Paulo Freire—among many other scholars—was committed to the potential transformative power of subjugated and indigenous knowledges and the ways that such information and its accompanying conceptual frameworks could be used to foster empowerment and justice in a variety of cultural contexts—for both indigenous peoples themselves and Western scholars who came to understand indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

As Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez (1989) wrote, indigenous knowledge is a rich social resource for any justice-related attempt to bring about social change. In this context, indigenous ways of knowing become a central resource for the work of academics, whether they be professors in the universities or teachers in elementary and secondary schools. Intellectuals, Freire and Faundez conclude, should "soak themselves in this knowledge...assimilate the feelings, the sensitivity" (p. 46) of epistemologies that move in ways unimagined by many Western academic impulses. Thus, a central dimension of the new phase of critical pedagogy involves researching subjugated and indigenous knowledges, incorporating them into the development of the discipline of critical pedagogy, and using
them to enhance education in general and indigenous/aboriginal education in particular in a multilogical, globalized world.

**Critical pedagogy and the contemporary challenge to democracy**

Critical theory—especially in the post-9/11 era of global political, economic, and military empire building—questions the assumption that societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the nations in the European Union, for example, are unproblematically democratic and free. Over the twentieth century, especially after the early 1960s, individuals in these societies were acculturated to feel uncomfortable with equality and independence and more content with relations of social regulation and subordination. Given the social and technological changes of the last half of the century that led to new forms of information production and access, critical theorists argued that questions of self-direction and democratic egalitarianism should be reassessed. In this context critical researchers informed by the “post-discourses” (e.g., critical feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, indigenous studies) came to understand that individuals' views of themselves and the world were even more influenced by social and historical forces than previously believed. Given the changing social and informational conditions of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century media-saturated Western culture, critical theorists have needed new ways of researching and analyzing the construction of identity and selfhood (Agger, 1992; Flossner & Otto, 1998; Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996; Smith & Wexler, 1995; Sünker, 1998; Steinberg, 2001; Wesson & Weaver, 2001). Thus, one begins to understand the need for an evolving notion of criticality—a critical social theory—in light of these changing conditions.
In this context it is important to note that a social theory as used in this context is a map or a guide to the social sphere. A social theory should not determine how we see the world but should help us devise questions and strategies for exploring it. A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2003; Flecha, Gomez, and Puigvert, 2003). Critical theory and critical pedagogy—in the spirit of an evolving criticality—is never static; it is always evolving, changing in light of new theoretical insights, fresh ideas from diverse cultures, and new problems, social circumstances, and educational contexts.

The list of concepts making up this description of an evolving critical theory/critical pedagogy indicates a criticality informed by a variety of discourses emerging after the work of the Frankfurt School of Social Theory in post-World War I Germany. Indeed, some of the theoretical discourses, while referring to themselves as critical, directly call into question some of the work of Frankfurt School founders Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. Thus, diverse theoretical traditions have informed our understanding of criticality and have demanded understanding of diverse forms of oppression including class, race, gender, sexual, cultural, religious, colonial and ability-related concerns. In this context critical theorists/critical pedagogues become detectives of new theoretical insights, perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience. They become sleuths on the trail of those ever-mutating forces that threaten power-sensitive forms of democracy around the world.

Thus, criticality and the knowledge production and pedagogy it supports are
always evolving, always encountering new ways to engage dominant forms of power and to provide more evocative and compelling insights. It is in this context that a pervasive theme of this chapter and book emerges yet again: criticalists must engage with diverse peoples around the world and listen carefully to and humbly learn from them. Employing these diverse cultural knowledges, the forms of social change an evolving critical pedagogy supports position it in many places as an outsider, an awkward detective always interested in uncovering social structures, discourses, ideologies, and epistemologies that prop up both the status quo and a variety of forms of privilege.

In the epistemological domain White, male, class-elitist, heterosexist, imperial, and colonial privilege often operates by asserting the power to claim objectivity and neutrality. Indeed the owners of such privilege often own the “franchise” on reason, rationality, and truth. An evolving criticality possesses a variety of tools to expose such power politics. In this context it asserts that criticality is well-served by drawing upon numerous discourses and including diverse groups of marginalized peoples and their allies in the nonhierarchical collection of critical analysts. Here rests the heart of critical multilogicality, with its feet firmly planted in an understanding of political and economic conditions and its ear attuned to new ways of seeing the world. Moving these ideas to the cognitive domain, I have worked over the last couple of decades to produce a new mode of thinking, an alternate rationality labeled “postformalism” (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1993; Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Hinchey, 1999; Thomas and Kincheloe, 2006; Kincheloe, 2007).

Obviously, an evolving criticality does not promiscuously choose theories to add to the bricolage of critical theories/pedagogies. It is highly suspicious of theories that fail to understand the workings of power, that fail to critique the blinders of Eurocentrism,
that cultivate an elitism of insiders and outsiders, that do not understand the complexities and complications of what is referred to as democratic action, and that fail to discern a global system of inequity supported by diverse forms of hegemony and violence. It is uninterested in any theory—no matter how fashionable—that does not directly address the needs of victims of oppression and the suffering they must endure.

Indeed, the very origins of criticality—the tradition that lays the groundwork for critical pedagogy and is concerned with power and its oppression of human beings and regulation of the social order—are grounded on this concern with human suffering. Herbert Marcuse, one of the founders of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and Paulo Freire were profoundly moved by the suffering they respectively witnessed in post-World War I Germany and Brazil of the 1950s and 1960s. The brilliant and critical racial insights of W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Carter Woodson, Horace Mann Bond, and many others in the early decades of the twentieth century were grounded on their understanding of the suffering of their fellow African Americans. The insights these scholars produced constitute a powerful compendium of critical theoretical data—even though the scholars themselves did not employ the term critical.

Though my own notion of a critical pedagogy is one that continues to develop and operates to sophisticate its understandings of the world and the educational act, this evolving criticality in education should never lose sight of its central concern with human suffering. One does not have to go too far in this world to find people who are suffering: battered women, indigenous peoples attempting to deal with Western efforts to destroy their cultures, working-class people unable to find jobs, victims of racism and ethnic bias, individuals subjected to religious persecution, dirt-poor colonized peoples in poor nations, children with AIDS, men and women punished by homophobes, young women
in developing countries working for less than subsistence wages from North American-owned transnational companies—unfortunately, the list goes on and on.

In the North American context suffering is often well hidden, but a trip to inner cities, specific rural areas, or indigenous reservations and reserves will reveal its existence. Outside of the North America context we can go to almost any region of the world and see tragic expressions of human misery. My articulation of critical pedagogy asserts that such suffering is a humanly constructed phenomenon and does not have to exist. Steps can be taken in numerous domains—education in particular—to eradicate such suffering if the people of the planet and their leaders had the collective will to do so. In recent years, however, globalized political economic systems with their de-emphasis on progressive forms of education and social policy have exacerbated poverty and its attendant suffering. An evolving criticality develops new ways to deal with such developments and new modes of education and political action to subvert their effects.

Critical pedagogy in the era with no name: The intersection of the macrosocial with the microindividual

If Clint Eastwood played “The Man With No Name,” then we now live in an era with no name. Most of us by now understand that we live in a new era—but even after several decades of trying we still don’t know what to call it. The postmodern condition? Hyperreality? Late capitalism? Late modernity? The post-9/11 world? The age of empire? The globalized world? The era of neocolonialism? Pax America? ad infinitum. Many will probably agree that this new era demands a new form of education that deals with macroglobal changes and the recursive dimension of the sociopsychological construction of the individual. In an evolving criticality, critical
pedagogues have to come to terms with this new complex and unnamed world, developing insights and modes of praxis in the process that help educators, parents, students, and individuals around the world understand the complicated relationship between the larger sociopolitical domain and the life of the individual. As I asserted at the beginning of this chapter, this is where open-access publishing, speaking, and writing become central to our larger critical project. In this context, critical pedagogy works to develop both in-school and larger cultural pedagogies, always keeping in mind the omnipresent relationship between the social and individual.

I believe that a successful critical pedagogy for the future must be deeply concerned with the relationship between the sociopolitical domain and the life of the individual. A compelling synthesis of these provinces is necessary to catalyzing critical social action, civic contribution, and successful teaching from elementary to graduate school. In order to begin a rigorous analysis of a macro-micro evolving criticality—a critical pedagogy concerned with the sociopolitical realm, the individual, and the relationship that connects them—an appreciation of its critical social and educational theoretical traditions, its culture and the forces that are changing it, and its identity and the increasingly complex ways in which it is being shaped is necessary. I believe such an analysis will be helpful in the first chapter of Critical pedagogy: Where are we now? to situate our book in the larger critical literature and conceptually situate the chapters that follow.

The attempt to make sense of contemporary culture and identity formation is enhanced by an appreciation of the critical social theoretical tradition. Peter and I have published versions of the following points elsewhere (Kincheloe, 2004; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005) in our attempts to introduce critical theory to a wide audience. The
following is an abbreviated version of the central points of critical theory. Keep in mind that in the spirit of an evolving criticality the subsequent points are part of an elastic, ever-evolving conceptual matrix. It changes with every theoretical innovation, integration of new cultural knowledge, and shifting of the zeitgeist. The points that are deemed most important in one time period may have little in common with the important points of a new era.

1. Critical enlightenment. In this context critical theory analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society—identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. Privileged groups, criticalists argue, often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages; the dynamics of such efforts often become a central focus of critical research.

2. Critical emancipation. Those who seek emancipation attempt to gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community. Here, critical research attempts to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives. In this way greater degrees of autonomy and human agency can be achieved. In the first decade of the twenty-first century we are cautious in our use of the term “emancipation” because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her. Concurrently, many have used the term to signal the freedom an abstract individual gains by gaining access to Western reason—i.e., becoming reasonable. Our use of emancipation in an evolving criticality rejects any use of the term in this context.
3. **The rejection of economic determinism.** A caveat of a reconceptualized critical theory involves the insistence that the tradition does not accept the orthodox Marxist notion that “base” determines “superstructure”—meaning that economic factors dictate the nature of all other aspects of human existence. Critical theorists understand that in the twenty-first century there are multiple forms of power, racial, gender, and sexual axes of domination. In issuing this caveat, however, an evolving critical theory in no way attempts to argue that economic factors are unimportant in the shaping of everyday life.

4. **The critique of instrumental or technical rationality.** An evolving critical theory sees instrumental/technology rationality as one of the most oppressive features of contemporary society. Such a form of “hyperreason” involves an obsession with means in preference to ends. Critical theorists claim that instrumental/technical rationality is more interested in method and efficiency than in purpose. It delimits its questions to “how to” instead of “why should.”

5. **The impact of desire.** An evolving critical theory appreciates poststructuralist psychoanalysis as an important resource in pursuing an emancipatory research project. In this context, critical researchers are empowered to dig more deeply into the complexity of the construction of the human psyche. Such a psychoanalysis helps critical researchers discern the unconscious processes that create resistance to progressive change and induce self-destructive behavior. A poststructural psychoanalysis, in its rejection of traditional psychoanalysis’s tendency to view individuals as rational and
autonomous beings, allows critical analysts new tools to rethink the interplay among the various axes of power, identity, libido, rationality, and emotion. In this configuration the psychic realm is no longer separated from the sociopolitical one; indeed, desire can be socially constructed and used by power-wielders for destructive and oppressive outcomes. On the other hand, critical theorists can help mobilize desire for progressive and emancipatory projects.

6. *The concept of immanence.* Critical theory is always concerned with what could be, what is immanent in various ways of thinking and perceiving. Thus, critical theory should always move beyond the contemplative realm to concrete social reform. In the spirit of Paulo Freire, our notion of an evolving critical theory possesses immanence as it imagines new ways to ease human suffering and produce psychological. Critical immanence helps us get beyond egocentrism and ethnocentrism and work to build new forms of relationships with diverse peoples.

7. *A reconceptualized critical theory of power: hegemony.* Our conception of a reconceptualized critical theory is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex ways that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness. Power, critical theorists have learned, is an extremely ambiguous topic that demands detailed study and analysis. A consensus seems to be emerging among criticalists that power is a basic constituent of human existence that works to shape both the oppressive and productive nature of the human tradition. In the context of oppressive power and its ability to produce inequalities and human suffering, Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is central to critical research. Gramsci understood that dominant power in the
twentieth century was not always exercised simply by physical force but also through social psychological attempts to win people’s consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church. Gramscian hegemony recognizes that the winning of popular consent is a very complex process and must be researched carefully on a case-by-case basis.

8. **A reconceptualized critical theory of power: ideology.** Critical theorists understand that the formation of hegemony cannot be separated from the production of ideology. If hegemony is the larger effort of the powerful to win the consent of their “subordinates,” then ideological hegemony involves the cultural forms, the meanings, the rituals, and the representations that produce consent to both the status quo and to individuals’ particular places within it. Ideology vis-à-vis hegemony moves critical inquirers beyond explanations of domination that have used terms such as propaganda to describe the way media, political, educational, and other sociocultural productions coercively manipulate citizens to adopt oppressive meanings.

9. **A reconceptualized critical theory of power: Linguistic/discursive power.** Critical theorists have come to understand that language is not a mirror of society. It is an unstable social practice whose meaning shifts, depending upon the context in which it is used. Contrary to previous understandings, criticalists appreciate the fact that language is not a neutral and objective conduit for description of the “real world.” Rather, from a critical perspective, linguistic descriptions are not simply about the world but serve to construct it. With these linguistic notions in mind, criticalists begin to study the way language in the form of discourses serves as a form of regulation and domination.
10. **Focusing on the relationships among culture, power, and domination.** In the last decades of the twentieth century, culture took on a new importance in the critical effort to understand power and domination. Critical theorists have argued that culture has to be viewed as a domain of struggle where the production and transmission of knowledge is always a contested process. Dominant and subordinate cultures deploy differing systems of meaning based on the forms of knowledge produced in their cultural domain. Popular culture, with its television, movies, video games, computers, music, dance, and other productions, plays an increasingly important role in critical research on power and domination. Cultural studies, of course, occupies an ever-expanding role in this context, as it examines not only popular culture but the tacit rules that guide cultural production.

11. **The centrality of interpretation: Critical hermeneutics.** One of the most important aspects of a critical theory-informed education and scholarship involves the often-neglected domain of interpretation. The critical hermeneutic tradition holds that in knowledge work there is only interpretation, no matter how vociferously many analysts may argue that the facts speak for themselves. The hermeneutic act of interpretation, in its most elemental articulation, involves making sense of what has been observed in a way that communicates understanding. Not only is all research merely an act of interpretation, but (hermeneutics contends) perception itself is an act of interpretation. Thus the quest for understanding is a fundamental feature of human existence, as encounter with the unfamiliar always demands the attempt to make meaning, to make sense.
The role of cultural pedagogy in critical theory. Cultural production can often be thought of as a form of education, as it generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity. From the perspective of a book on critical pedagogy, such a framing can help critical teachers and students make sense of the world of domination and oppression as they work to bring about a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society. In recent years this educational dynamic has been referred to as cultural pedagogy. “Pedagogy” is a useful term that has traditionally been used to refer only to teaching and schooling. By using the term “cultural pedagogy,” criticalists are specifically referring to the ways dominant cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing. In our critical interpretive context, the notion of cultural pedagogy asserts that the new “educators” in the electronically wired contemporary era are those who possess the financial resources to use mass media. This is very important in the context of critical pedagogy, as teachers in the contemporary era must understand not only the education that takes place in the classroom but also that which takes place in popular culture.

Informed by these points, we are better able to conceptualize a critical pedagogy that cultivates a rigorous, intellectual ability to acquire, analyze, and produce both self-knowledge and social knowledge. Grounded by such knowledge and scholarly facility, individuals would be equipped to participate in the democratic process as committed and informed citizens. A basic assumption in this civic context involves the belief that, in terms of a democratic social education, Western public life and public education have failed. Corporations, transnational organizations, and other power-wielders have gained increasing control over the production and flow of information. Here, public
consciousness is aligned in a complex and never completely successful process with the interests of power.

One of the most important goals of public life over the last few decades has been the cultivation of more and more social obedience and less democracy. The effort to win the consent of the public (hegemony), via appeals to both logic and affect, for privatization projects that may not be in the public's best interests has been frighteningly successful. In the same context, and driven by many of the same forces of power, public schooling has failed to promote a rigorous, democratic social education. Operating in the shadow of Frankfurt School critical social theorist, Theodor Adorno, we reference his notion of "half-education" in which he described the way mainstream education perpetuates students' alienation from knowledge of the social and the self. In this process, the possibility of agency, of self-direction, is lost in a sea of social confusion (Sünker, 1994b). To confront this alienation, social analysts must provide specific examples of formal and informal educational programs that promote a progressive education that fights alienation. Understanding the affective dimensions of these programs, educators analyze why students and other individuals are emotionally invested in specific programs, why energy is produced and absorbed by participants, and why the disposition to imagine and create new projects is cultivated in some programs and not in others.

**Schools as venues for critical democracy: The triumph of standardization and pseudo-democracy**

In the contemporary Age of Empire—or whatever we may call it—Western schools have not been concerned with educating democratic citizens. Indeed, schools
have not been particularly concerned with any positive public role in the larger society. The traditional public role of pedagogy has been undermined by a private corporate view of the role of education. In addition to its role as supplier of regulated labor to the economy, schools in this privatized view have come to be seen as commodities, subject to the dictates of the free market. In this milieu, students are transformed from citizens into consumers, capable of being bought and sold. The logic of this right-wing social reeducation involves the replacement of government service agencies with private corporate services, the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the wealthy, and the construction of a private market system that promotes the values of isolated individualism, self-help, corporate management, and consumerism in lieu of public ethics and economic democracy. Thus, the social curriculum being taught in twenty-first-century Western schools often involves a sanctification of the private sphere in a way that helps consolidate the power of corporations and the interests of the empire. In this context, the freedom of the corporation to redefine social and educational life in ways that serve its financial interests is expanded.

This conservative reeducation project with its corporatized politics has been difficult for critical pedagogy to counter because it has been adeptly couched in the language of public improvement and democratic virtue. The public sphere has failed, the apostles of privatization proclaim. The private market is a much more effective mechanism in the effort to achieve socioeconomic improvement. Since market forces govern the world, students, citizens, and schooling itself must learn to adapt to this reality. A key element of this conservative social education involves this adaptation, the attempt to promote a market philosophy. Corporations now sponsor schools or enter into school-business partnerships. Upon analysis, one begins to perceive a pattern
in the lessons taught to students in the corporate curriculum of privatized schooling. Imperial education is grounded on a set of free-market goals. Schools are expected to graduate students who will help corporations: 1) increase worker output for the same wages; 2) reduce labor turnover; 3) decrease conflict between management and workers; 4) convince citizens that labor and management share the same goals; and 5) create a workforce loyal to the corporation and the goals of the empire. Unfortunately, critical pedagogy must enter the conversation about the purposes of schools with these realities in mind.

This political process of privatization grounds a well-hidden ideological education embedded in the information environment of twenty-first-century Western societies (Sünker, 1994b). In these societies, such an education occurs both in and outside of schools in a variety of social and cultural venues. Thus, the imperial ideological education takes into account the changing social conditions of an electronically mediated society, especially the new conditions under which information is produced. In this context, an imaginative critical pedagogy must understand that contemporary education and knowledge production emerge at the intersection of the political economy and the culture. Understanding these dynamics, an important aspect of a transformative critical pedagogy is its analytic project, its mapping of the ways political meanings are made in both schools and sociocultural locales. Here advocates of critical pedagogy initiate the important task of interpreting how domination takes place on the contemporary political economic, informational landscape. In an interpretive sense, an evolving critical pedagogy becomes a holographic (a dynamic where the whole is contained in all of its parts) hermeneutics that analyzes the ways oppressive ideologies produced by sociopolitical structures (the whole) embed
themselves in the individual (the part). What is the relationship between macro-power and the subjectivity of individual human beings?

**Understanding the sociopolitical construction of the individual in contemporary education**

This intersection of the social and the individual—the macro and the micro—is a central dimension in an evolving critical pedagogy. Indeed, as critical pedagogical analysis reintegrates the political, the economic, and the cultural on the new historical plane of the globalized, imperial, and “recovered” society of the twenty-first century, we work to rethink and reassert the importance of subjectivity (pertaining to the domain of personhood, consciousness) in this context. In many ways, such a move is controversial in the critical tradition, as numerous social analysts criticize—many times for good reason—the contemporary concern with individualism, self-actualization, and identity politics. Understanding the problems inherent within these often liberal dynamics, I still believe that there are emancipatory possibilities embedded within this emphasis on self-development. Drawing upon the work of Philip Wexler (1997) and my own work in developing a critical ontology (Kincheloe, 2003), a key feature of an evolving criticality involves the effort to extract the transformative elements in the education of the individual in the age of empire.

Since ideological education takes place in a variety of domains, study is demanded of not only the social (macro-) and individual (micro-) level but the institutional (meso-) one as well. In this integrative approach, the interactions of these three levels in the process of ideological education, the ways they operate in the construction of the social and individual, are significant. In such analysis, these
multilevel concerns induce educators to avoid one-sided approaches of any variety. For example, I am concerned with not only the social construction of the individual's knowledge but also with the individual's responsibility for his or her actions. This attention to individual volition is often missing from some articulations of critical education. This notion of individual volition must be carefully reconsidered in light of liberal celebrations of individual freedom and deterministic laments of a totalized domination. Individuals frequently defeat the power of capital, White supremacy, homophobia, and patriarchy; at the same time, however, the structures of oppression too often induce individuals to acquiesce to dominant power's ways of viewing the world.

There is nothing simplistic about ideological education. How does one get across an understanding of the complementarity of the self-directed (autonomous) and the social individual? Such a complementarity refuses the collapse of the social and the collapse of the individual; instead, it seeks a third way. This third-way critical pedagogy embraces the complexity of the topic rather than avoiding it. It addresses head-on the contradictions inherent in the interaction of autonomy and belonging. The essence of this notion of the ideological education of selfhood involves the nature of the relationship between independence and interaction. The sociability of the individual within this complex relationship involves much more than just understanding the social context. While an appreciation of context is necessary, this articulation of ideological education involves the development of individual human senses. In this context, Philip Wexler's concept of "revitalization," emanating from the concern with “enlivenment” in contemporary society, is added to the critical theoretical mix. An evolving critical pedagogy takes Wexler's revitalization seriously, analyzing its problems and
potentialities in relation to our larger concerns with equity and justice. The possibilities for social change and self-transformation offered by revitalization are compelling in this context.

**The ideological construction of subjectivity: Three “takes”**

The reconceptualized notion of the intersection of the social and the individual offered here can be used by critical teachers. Informed by the critical theoretical tradition as articulated by German social analyst Heinz Sünker (1994a, 1994b, 1998), the reconstruction of individual identity as developed by Philip Wexler (1997, 2000) and critical ontology (Kincheloe, 2003), and my own concerns with cultural pedagogy, a new concept of critical pedagogy for a hyperreal age of empire emerges.

*Tradition*

Heinz Sünker (1994a, 1994b, 1998) maintains that education is one social practice connected to and mediated by other social practices; in this context, he asks what is “good” in a good upbringing of youth. Utilizing theorists from both the Frankfurt School as well as German critical educational theorists Heinz-Joachim Haydorn and Georg Theunissen, a critical canon of ideological education is constructed. This body of work takes seriously one's contribution to the good life as a member of society, a contribution based on an awareness of the nature of the social construction of both consciousness and the social fabric. Such a canon understands the importance of intersubjectivity (relations of various individuals, interpersonal interaction) in the construction of subjectivity. In this context, historical educational efforts to act on such understandings are analyzed. Questions are asked about the reasons for their failures
and successes and their relevance for contemporary practice. To better answer these questions, Sünker (1994b) introduces Heydorn's articulation of Bildung, focusing on its concern with emancipation, maturity, and self-determination.

The tradition of Bildung is especially important to ideological education in its interest in the production of subjectivity in the context of intersubjective relations. Sünker advocates the relevance of Bildung to contemporary criticality by emphasizing two dimensions: 1) the mediating processes between the individual and society; and 2) the processes involved with the construction of the subjectivity of the individual. In this way, Bildung transcends hegemonic education's effort to normalize the individual so as to adjust him or her to the existing social order. Rejecting bourgeois liberalism's effort to form the individual without referencing extant social conditions, Bildung is interested in individual development in the context of relational consciousness and the development of social competencies. In this context, Bildung mediates materialist (political economic) understandings of the world and concerns with everyday life, connecting the macro to the micro in the process. According to the concept of Bildung, learning is conceived of as an activity taking place as part of a larger democratic struggle, with one eye on the cultivation of the intellect and the other on democracy.

With our critical canon of ideological education firmly grounded on a knowledge of Bildung, we move to other traditions for insights into our conception. As previously mentioned, our multidimensional model of critical education is also informed by Philip Wexler's efforts to reclaim ancient knowledges abandoned since the European Enlightenment and the birth of Cartesianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If the modern era is ending (or at least changing), the problems we are called on to solve are mutating as well. As these social/cultural/political changes have
occurred, Wexler points out the way religion has returned to the forefront of social practice and cultural consciousness. Moving in different directions simultaneously, religion moves backward, before modernity, and forward, past imperial hyperreality, to provide differing grounds for ways of seeing and acting. Wexler warns progressives and critical theorists not to reject such religious insights in a materialist knee-jerk presumption of religion as merely a tool of dominant ideology. Through the theological window, social educators can explore premodern modes of sacralization and mystical insights. Carefully avoiding commodified and distorted "New Age" articulations of these traditions, Wexler views them through the lenses of an exacting and rigorous critical sociological tradition. In his hands, new applications for such knowledge emerge.

Picking up on Wexler's theoretical move, I attempt to contribute to the canon of a transformative ideological education by bringing previously referenced subjugated and indigenous knowledges to the pedagogical table. Derived from dangerous memories of history that have been suppressed and information that has been disqualified by social and academic gatekeepers, subjugated and indigenous knowledges play an important role in a critical pedagogy concerned with the way dominant power inculcates ideology in the contemporary era. Through the conscious cultivation of these “low-ranking” knowledges, alternative democratic and emancipatory visions of society, politics, cognition, and social education are possible. The subjugated knowledge of Africans, indigenous peoples from around the world, women in diverse cultural contexts, working-class people, and many other groups have contested the dominant culture's view of reality. At the very least, such subjugated knowledges inform students operating within mainstream schools and society that there are multiple perspectives on all issues. A critical pedagogy that includes subjugated ways of seeing teaches a lesson
on the complexities of knowledge production and how this process shapes our view of ourselves and the world around us.

Individuals from dominant social formations have rarely understood (or cared to understand) how they look to marginalized others. As a result, women often make sense of men's view of women better than men understand women's view of men; individuals from Africa, or with African heritages, understand the motivations of White people better than the reverse; and low-status workers figure out how they are seen by their managers more clearly than the managers understand how they appear to workers. Obviously, such insights provide critical pedagogues and their students with a very different view of the world and the processes that shape it. Critical educators who employ such subjugated viewpoints become transformative agents who alert the community to its hidden features, its submerged memories, and in the process help specific individuals to name their oppression or possibly understand their complicity in oppression.

In this context, transformative critical educators search out specific forms of subjugated insights, such as indigenous knowledges. Indigenous knowledges are special forms of subjugated knowledges that are local, life-experience-based, and not produced by Western science. Such knowledges are transmitted over time by individuals from a particular geographical or cultural locality. Only now, in the twenty-first century, are European peoples just starting to appreciate the value of indigenous knowledges about health, medicine, agriculture, philosophy, spirituality, ecology, and education. Traditionally, these are the very types of knowledges Western ideological education have tried to discredit and eradicate. A transformative critical education works hard to save such knowledges, which are, unfortunately, disappearing from the face of the earth. Thankfully, many individuals from indigenous backgrounds and their allies are
working to reverse this trend.

*Culture*

This section focuses on the expanding role of the cultural realm in the domain of contemporary ideological education. If a new era has dawned, then critical educators must search for the places where new ways of ideological education are taking place. The emergence of a new role, an expanded political and educational function for the cultural domain is a cardinal feature of the new social condition. The contemporary era confronts critical pedagogy with new contradictions and new ways of thwarting emancipation. In this new era, cultural capital has reorganized itself in ways that make it more flexible, innovative, and powerful. New technological and organizational developments have allowed capital greater access to both the world at large and human consciousness in particular. Reorganized transnational capital has embraced an aesthetic that celebrates the commodification of difference, ephemerality, spectacle, and fashion. In this observation, we uncover the central concern of the ideologically reorganized cultural realm: this new flexible aesthetic of capital gains its hegemonic force from its ability to employ the cultural realm for ideological indoctrination. Thus, the cultural domain emerges as a central political venue, a place where ideological consciousness is constructed, a new locale for ideological education.

Thus, in this context contemporary critical educators learn an invaluable lesson: everyday life takes place on a new ideological template—a semiotic matrix shaped in part by corporate-produced images. A new ideological education is produced by capital that is designed to regulate the population, as affectively charged consumers operating in a privatized domain lose consciousness of what used to be called the public sphere.
This privatized domain is both globalized and decentralized/localized at the same time, distorting traditional concepts of space and time. The past is commodified and politicized, turning public memory into Disney's "Frontierland"—a powerful ideological educational venue. In this context, time is rearticulated and everyday life becomes an eternal present. Without critical intervention, the public space deteriorates and critical consciousness is erased. The disorientation that the informational overload of the new cultural condition induces moves individuals to seek more expert help, more therapeutic involvement in their everyday affairs. In the HBO series *The Sopranos*, for example, Tony, the Mafioso leader, is so distraught and confused by changing cultural conditions that he seeks psychological therapy and is prescribed Prozac for his depression. Even those who pride themselves on being self-sufficient outlaws cannot escape the effects of cultural disequilibrium. Working in the realm of information control and the production of pleasure, capital embeds positive images of itself at the deepest levels of our subconscious. Many come to associate the "good things in life" and happiness with the privatized realm of consumption. As powerful as crime boss Tony Soprano may be, for example, he cannot get his own son's attention while the boy (A.J.) plays his Nintendo video game.

Pleasure is a powerful social educator, and the pleasure produced by capital teaches a very conservative political lesson: since corporations produce pleasure, we should align our interests with them. In this way our "affect" is organized in the service of capital: lower corporate taxes, better business climates, equation of the corporate bottom line with social well-being, larger executive salaries, lower labor costs, fewer environmental regulations, and support for imperial wars, to name just a few. Hegemony in this new context operates where affect and politics intersect: the cultural
realm. The revolutionary feature of this repressive, capital-driven ideological education is that culture shapes the political. Critical pedagogues have sometimes failed to appreciate this circumstance, not to mention its dramatic impact on the shaping of political consciousness and subjectivity.

Thus, transformative critical educators must understand the new affective dynamics at work in the production of selfhood. When we speak of the cultural realm, of course, a central feature of this domain involves popular culture and its relationship to power. Popular culture involves television, movies, video games, music, Internet, instant messaging, iPods, shopping malls, theme parks, etc. These are the sites of a contemporary cultural pedagogy of commodification that meets people where they exist in their affective fields. As it provides fun, pleasure, good feelings, passion, and emotion, this capital-inscribed ideological education connects ideology to these affective dynamics. In contemporary society, ideologies are only effective to the degree that they can be articulated along the affective plane. Affect is complex in that both pleasure and displeasure are affective responses. One's affective dislike of hip-hop, for example, can be inscribed ideologically with particular meanings about youth with African heritages around the world. Though complex, the power produced and deployed along this affective plane is profound in its ability to shape subjectivity and ways of seeing the world.

Our critical vision of a transformative education, an evolving critical pedagogy recognizes these contemporary politicocultural dynamics and analyzes their consequences at both the macro- and microlevels. One of the most important effects of this corporate colonization of affect has involved, of course, the phenomenon of depoliticization. At the heart of this phenomenon exists a paradoxical reality: while
many Westerners have invested affectively in the emerging privatization of the social order, they do not rationally buy into the political-economic policies of conservatism. In this bizarre context, individuals remain politically uncommitted and civically inactive. Except for a significant minority of citizens on the Right, individuals have removed themselves from the political realm. I don't want to discount the importance of struggles such as janitors' fight for economic justice, protests against the World Trade Organization, and the brief outpouring of antiwar sentiment before the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, but these actions are still the exceptions. In addition, the depoliticization process has produced a staggering illiteracy around political language and concepts, especially among the young. This ideological dynamic is so important that critical educators simply cannot do their jobs if they don't understand it.

In the electronic, mediated culture of the twenty-first century, youth are no longer shielded from the esoteric knowledge of adulthood. Young people, in a sense, know too much to retain the idealism traditionally associated with this phase of life. In their knowledge of the world, many young people have become jaded to the point that they know of nothing worthy of their faith outside the intrinsic value of pleasure and affect in and of themselves. In their unshockability, many young people (and many adults as well) become emotional only about emotion—certainly not about some complex political issue. In such a culture-driven context, political discourse is reduced to "gut-level" emotion, to affective investments directly tied to self-interest. Politics becomes successful only when it is represented as "not politics." Questions of racial justice become important only when many White citizens perceive that Blacks and government leaders, via affirmative action, are taking their jobs away. Issues of social policy and public morality are irrelevant in this context: "Non-Whites, aided by big
government, are stealing ‘our’ jobs." Rational political debate is irrelevant; affirmative action is an affective issue. Effective television campaign advertisements do not make a rational case for ending affirmative action; they depict a Black hand taking a job application away from a working-class White hand. Professional political consultants chant their mantras: "Keep it on the affective plane, stupid." A transformative ideological education in this media-saturated context can never be the same.

Identity

After having established a critical canon for a transformative ideological education and explored the changing cultural conditions of a twenty-first-century electronic, globalized society, attention needs to be focused on questions of identity and the production of the individual. In this context, that Philip Wexler’s (1997, 2000) argument catalyzes our notion of an evolving criticality in an age of dominant power’s highly successful ideological education. The affect-centeredness of electronically mediated reality, Wexler posits, contains within it a decentered social movement that offers possibilities for emancipatory social education.

There is, he contends, an alternative rationality that often operates affectively to revitalize those caught in the commodified information environment of the present—a revitalization ignored by critical pedagogy. Just as affective measures can be used by power to hegemonize individuals and social groups, they can also be deployed by individuals to make certain things matter in ways that assert their self-direction and group solidarity by using the positive productive ability of power. From this conceptual foundation, Wexler moves to take critical advantage of what is available on the contemporary cultural landscape. If the self is the locus of historical change in the
twenty-first century, then an evolving critical pedagogy must seize the opportunity to produce meaningful selves.

Aware of the politicocultural dimensions previously described, critical educators study the various ways individuals protect their identities from the power flows of capital. In such defensive actions, individuals not only shield themselves from the social earthquakes shaking the cultural terrain on which they live, but also forge new forms of collective alliances. Examples of such actions can be found on the Internet, as individuals morph their identities and connect with a wide range of similar web surfers. In such virtual lives, traditional boundaries of self are blurred in the interactions of dematerialized beings. In the electronic informational cosmos, Wexler's recognition of a retreat to a defensive inner world becomes an important understanding for the critical educator.

The revolution of social being described by Wexler is grounded on the possibilities offered by such an inward turn and the effort to reshape consciousness that accompanies it. At this important point there is a convergence of Sünker’s Bildung-based assertion that consciousness is the central element of the educational process, new cultural technologies of consciousness construction, and Wexler's analysis of the consequences of the opportunities provided by the "inner turn." At this intersection, the new ideological education finds its purpose and the possibility for the construction of a new critical ontology—a transformative, self-aware way of being human. Central to this synthetic dynamic is Wexler's understanding of the potentialities of alternate rationalities and enlivenment in the emancipatory reconstruction of consciousness and identity.

Picking up on Wexler's theoretical move, I attempt to contribute to the canon of
a transformative ideological education in a larger critical pedagogical context by
bringing critical ontology to the recipe. In this context, critical educators engage in the
excitement of attaining new levels of consciousness and "ways of being." In a critical
ontology, individuals who gain such an awareness understand how and why their political
opinions, religious beliefs, gender roles, racial positions, or sexual orientations have been
shaped by dominant perspectives. They understand the nature and complexity of the ways
dominant power works to construct subjectivity/consciousness via education, the media,
and other cultural sites.

A critical ontological vision helps us in the effort to gain new understandings and
insights as to who we can become. Such a vision helps us move beyond our present state
of being—our ontological selves—as we discern the forces that have made us that way.
The line between knowledge production and being is blurred, as the epistemological and
the ontological converge around questions of identity and the social construction of
selfhood. As we employ the ontological vision we ask questions about ethics, morality,
politics, emotion, and gut feelings, seeking not precise steps to reshape our subjectivity
but a framework of principles with which we can negotiate. Employing the insights of
ontology, we explore our being in the world. Thus, we join the quest for new, expanded,
and more just and interconnected ways of being human.

A key dimension of a critical ontology involves freeing ourselves from the
machine metaphors of Cartesianism. Such an ontological stance recognizes the
reductionism of viewing the universe as a well-oiled machine and the human mind as a
computer. Such "ways of being" subvert an appreciation of the amazing life force that
inhabits both the universe and human beings. This machine cosmology has positioned
human beings as living in a dead world, a lifeless universe. Ontologically, this
Cartesianism has separated individuals from their inanimate surroundings, undermining any organic interconnection of the person to the cosmos. The life-giving complexity of the inseparability of human and world has been lost and social/cultural/pedagogical/psychological studies of people abstracted—removed from context. Such a removal has exerted disastrous ontological effects. Human beings, in a sense, lost their belongingness to both the world and to other people around them.

The importance of indigenous (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999) and other subjugated knowledges reemerges in this ontological context. With the birth of modernity and the scientific revolution, many premodern, indigenous ontologies were lost, ridiculed by Europeans as primitive. While there is great diversity among premodern worldviews and ways of being, there do seem to be some discernible patterns that distinguish them from modernist perspectives. In addition to developing systems of meaning and being that were connected to cosmological perspectives on the nature of creation, most premodern viewpoints saw nature and the world at large as living systems. Western, Christian observers condescendingly labeled such perspectives as pantheism or nature worship and positioned them as an enemy of monotheism. Not understanding the subtlety and nuance of such indigenous views of the world, Europeans subverted the sense of belonging that accompanied these enchanted views of nature. European Christomodernism transformed the individual from a connected participant in the drama of nature to a detached, objective, depersonalized observer.

The Western modernist individual emerged from the process, alienated and disenchanted. As Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) puts it, Cartesianism tore apart "the relationship between the microcosmos and the macrocosmos" (p. 18). Such a fragmentation resulted in the loss of cosmological significance and the beginning of a
snowballing pattern of ontological imbalance. A critical ontology involves the process of reconnecting human beings on a variety of levels and in numerous ways to a living social and physical web of reality, to a living cosmos. Critical pedagogues with a critical ontological vision help students connect to the civic web of the political domain, the biotic web of the natural world, the social web of human life, and the epistemological web of knowledge production. In this manner, we all move to the realm of critical ontology where new ways of being and new ways of being connected reshape all people.

In a critical ideological education, critical ontology sets the stage for alternative identities in a Western world with truncated possibilities for selfhood.

Here we can see the mergence of Wexler’s ideas and critical ontology. Grounded on his understanding of these ontological issues, Wexler contends that an intuitive disenchantment with this Cartesian fragmentation and its severing of the self-environment relationship is fueling a diffuse social revaluation. He employs the term, revitalization, for this mass, decentered movement taking place throughout Western societies. It constitutes an attempt, he contends, to resacralize our culture and our “selves.” Such an effort exposes the impact of Eurocentrism and Cartesianism on what human beings (or our identities) have become, as, at the same time, it produces an ontological "change from within." Understanding the problems with Cartesianism's lack of self-awareness or concern with consciousness and interconnectedness, Wexler's resacralization picks up on wisdom traditions, both premodern and contemporary, to lay the foundation for profound ontological change. In the emerging ontology the Cartesian bifurcation of the mind and body is repaired, and new relationships with the body, mind, and spirit are pursued. In the transcendence of modernist notions of bodily ego-greed, a new understanding of the body's role in meaning making and human being is attained. A
new world of identity formation is constructed.

Picking up on these insights, a critical ontology positions the body in relation to the complexity of cognition and the process of life itself. The body is a corporeal reflection of the evolutionary concept of autopoiesis, self-organizing or self-making of life (Varela, 1999). Autopoiesis involves the production of a pattern-of-life organization. Cognition in this ontological context involves the process of self-production. Thus life itself, the nature of being, is a cognitive activity that involves establishing patterns of living, patterns that become the life force through self-organization. If life is self-organized, then there are profound ontological, cognitive, ideological, and pedagogical implications. By recognizing new patterns and developing new processes, humans exercise much more input into their own evolution than previously imagined. In such a context human agency and possibility is enhanced—we can overcome the neofascist elements of contemporary Western ideological oppression.

With these ideas and this hope in mind, it is important to note that Wexler maintains that one aspect of the electronic informational culture of the contemporary era involves the emergence of a new concern with the worldview and methods of classical mysticism. Even though this mediated culture has often served to shatter identities, Wexler identifies a new power in people's minds. Moving past the Cartesian Enlightenment, the new consciousness of social being emerges around a resacralization of cultural codes, the globalizing synthesis of cultural expressions that exposes the ethnocentrism of European science and epistemology, and a new historicism that reengages the premodern, the ancient, and the archaic. Revitalization of the self and the new identities it encourages take shape in this synthetic context. Directly responding to the fragmenting effects of informational hyperculture, revitalization uses imaginative
power to protect the self from threats posed by informationalism in hyperreality. Fueled by these recognitions and an understanding of the traditions of critical theory and cultural studies, Wexler conceptualizes the synergy between a resacralized self-realization and a critical education.

The emancipatory power of this synergy hinges on the articulation of these conceptual intersections and the consciousness, agency, and praxis that emerge therein. Wexler understands that self-realization, in both its bodily and psychic expression, must transcend its roots in narcissism and plant itself firmly in the transcendent or the cosmological to be of benefit to what I call an evolving critical pedagogy. Employed at the sacred level, self-realization, à la revitalization, provides a compelling strategic grounding in the struggle against the alienation of commodification, rationalization, and ideological indoctrination. As it embraces desire and vitality in everyday life and discerns how to use them in an emancipatory rather than a manipulative way, self-realization reexamines the relationship between self and environment. A transformative ideological education takes advantage of this conceptual opening, drawing upon the vitality of this new individualism and connecting it to Sünker's canon and my own cultural concerns. Here self engages other in a strong union that constructs a vision for a reinvigorated, ever-evolving critical practice.

**Key dimensions of the critical synthesis**

In a contemporary culture that finds it increasingly difficult to mobilize itself for political action, advocates of critical pedagogy must take place on uncharted social and cultural territory. In the complexity and high-speed change of hyperreality, efforts to address alienation, oppression, and ideological indoctrination seem somehow outside the
spirit of the times. Our synthesis of these diverse domains must be not only conceptually compelling but also sufficiently contextually aware to operate on the bizarre sociocultural landscape that confronts us in the twenty-first century. The central features of our new evolving critical pedagogical synthesis of the critical theoretical tradition, an understanding of the power of dominant cultural pedagogies, and the importance of identity construction include:

1. *The development of a socioindividual imagination.* At the basis of our multilevel evolving critical pedagogy rests the ability to imagine new forms of self-realization and social collaboration that lead to emancipatory results. An important aspect of these emancipatory results involves the rethinking of educational practice, knowledge production, and engaged forms of citizenship. These dynamics interact to help us imagine new forms of consciousness and cognition grounded on creative images of a changing life. These new forms of consciousness cannot be separated from the educational realm and the democratic effort to reframe learning as part of the struggle against multiple forms of domination. Framed in this manner, an evolving criticality plays a central role in the development of our individual imagination. Here, an ideologically aware education induces individuals to rethink their subjectivities in order to emphasize the role of democratic community and social justice in the process of human development. An education for individual imagination becomes increasingly more important in a society torn asunder by commodified informationalism (McLaren, 1994, 2000, 2006).
2. *The reconstitution of the individual outside the boundaries of abstract individualism.* The reconstitution of the individual that is connected to our evolving critical pedagogy’s celebration of self-realization must be articulated carefully in light of the use of the concept of individualism in the Western tradition. Our notion of self-realization is a corrective of both a critical tradition that rejects the possibilities of an authentic individuality and a market-based individualism that rejects the importance of social context. In critical communitarianism, the importance of the community consistently takes precedence over the interests of the individual—a position that poses great danger to the health of the democratic impulse. In the market context, egocentrism is equated with action for the common good, creating in the process powerful forms of regulatory power that ultimately destroy the social fabric. When our notion of criticality expresses its concern for individualism, this should by no means be interpreted as a naïve acceptance of the Cartesian notion of the "abstract individual." This individual subject is removed from the effects of complex power relations and endowed with abstract political rights that mean little when disconnected from the regulatory and disciplinary aspects of economic, social, and cultural forces.

3. *The understanding of power and the ability to interpret its effects on the social and the individual.* Of course one of the most important horizons within which critical educators analyze the world and its actors involves the context of power. Transformative educators are interested in both how power operates in the social order and the ways it works to produce
subjectivity. In this context they focus on the nature of ideology and the process by which it imprints itself on consciousness, the ways hegemonic forces mobilize desire in the effort to win the public's consent to the authority of various power blocs, the means by which discursive powers shape thinking and behavior via the presences and absences of different words and concepts, and the ways that disciplines of knowledge are used to regulate individuals through a process of normalization. In this context an evolving critical pedagogy studies the methods individuals and groups use to assert their agency and self-direction in relation to such power plays. With this in mind, critical pedagogy is especially concerned with the complex relationship connecting individuals, groups, and power. Such an interaction never occurs around a single axis of power, and the ambiguity of the subjectivity that is produced never lends itself to simple description or facile prediction of ways of seeing or behaving. Mainstream forms of Western education have consistently ignored this effort, trivializing, in the process, the role of social analysis.

4. The provision of alternatives to the alienation of the individual. A central concern of our evolving critical pedagogy involves providing an alternative to social and educational alienation. Individuals in contemporary society experience social reality mainly as a world of consumerism and not as the possibility of human relations. In a consumerist hyperreality, both young people and adults are alienated from daily life and cultural and educational capital. Such alienation affects individuals from different social locations in
divergent ways. Men and women from more dominant locales suffer an informational alienation that erases issues of power, justice, and privilege. Those from less-dominant locales are denied access to institutions that provide tickets to social mobility by the use of a rhetoric of standards, excellence, and values. Less-privileged individuals are induced to blame themselves for their lack of access to various forms of capital via the deployment of such discursive strategies and regulatory forms. Such a reality can be described as a form of "second-degree alienation," a state that is unconscious of the existence of alienation. In this alienated circumstance, the possibility of self-direction fades. In this context, our social education, drawing on the German Bildung tradition, provides individuals alternatives to their alienation. Here again Philip Wexler’s concepts of resacralization and enlivenment and my concept of critical ontology become central to the generation of empowering alternatives.

5. The cultivation of a critical consciousness that is aware of the social construction of subjectivity. An evolving critical pedagogy produces conscious individuals who are aware of their self-production and the social conditions under which they live. With this in mind, our critical pedagogy is concerned not just with how individuals experience social reality but how they often operate in circumstances that they don't understand. A critical consciousness is aware of these dynamics, as it appreciates the complexity of social practices and their relationships with other practices and structures. Indeed, our education promotes a critical consciousness of self-production that not only understands the many planes
of history on which an individual operates but how subjectivity is specifically colonized on these various planes. In this context, questions of the social construction of identity are viewed through the lenses of affect and emotion. Empowered by such knowledge, individuals with a critical consciousness are able to use their insights to overcome alienation and construct social and individual relations with other social actors. If democracy is to succeed, then large numbers of individuals need to reflect on the effects of the social on the individual. Via this consciousness-producing activity, the public space/political cultural is reconstructed.

6. The construction of democratic community-building relationships between individuals. The development of the individual coupled with the construction of a democratic community is central to a transformative pedagogy. Embracing a critical alterity (an awareness of difference) involving responsiveness to others, the new social education works to cultivate an intersubjectivity that develops both social consciousness and individual agency. The notion of an individual's relational existence becomes extremely important in this context as we focus attention on the power of difference in social education. Utilizing its understanding of how power relations shape individual subjectivity, an evolving critical pedagogy explores the power-inscribed nature of group difference. In this context, students learn how power shapes lives of privilege and oppression in ways that tear the social fabric and deny community. Students, workers, and other citizens who belong to diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual groups can
learn much from one another if provided the space to exchange ideas and analyze mutual difficulties. As such a powerful force, difference must not simply be tolerated, but cultivated as a spark to human creativity and evolution. Relational existence is not only intrinsically important in a democratic society; it also holds cognitive and educational benefits for self-development. Understandings derived from the perspective of the excluded, the culturally different, or the colonized allow for an appreciation of the nature of justice, the invisibility of the process of oppression, and the difference that highlights our own social construction as human beings.

7. The reconceptualization of reason—understanding that relational existence applies not only to human beings but concepts as well. Drawing upon its critical roots, an evolving critical pedagogy understands the irrationality of what has sometimes passed for reason in the post-Enlightenment history of Western societies. Thus, an important aspect of our transformative education involves the reconstruction of reason. Such a process begins with the formulation of a relational reason. A relational reason understands conventional reason's propensity for conceptual fragmentation and narrow focus on abstraction outside of a lived context. The point here is not to reject rationality but to appreciate the limits of its conventional articulation in light of its relationship to power. Such a turn investigates various rationalities from the subjugated to the ancient, as it analyzes the importance of that deemed irrational by dominant Western power and its use-value in sociopolitical affairs and the construction of a critical consciousness. Such
alternative ways of thinking are reappropriated via the realization of conventional decontextualization: individuals are separated from the culture, schools from society, and abstract rights from power. An evolving critical pedagogy critiques traditional Western reason's tendency—based on a Cartesian ontology—to view an entity as a thing-in-itself. All things are a part of larger interactive dynamics, interrelationships that provide meaning when brought to the analytical table. Indeed, our evolving critical pedagogy finds this relational reason so important and so potentially transformative that we see the interaction between concepts as a living process. These relational dynamics permeate all aspects of not only our social education but also of critical consciousness itself.

8. The production of social skills necessary to active participation in the transformed, inclusive democratic community. As a result of an evolving critical pedagogy, teachers and students will gain the ability to act in the role of democratic citizens. Studying the ideological in relation to self-development, socially educated individuals begin to conceptualize the activities of social life. Viewing their social actions not only through the lenses of the political but also the economic, the cultural, the psychological, the epistemological, and the ontological, individuals analyze the forces that produce apathy and passivity. In this manner, critical pedagogy comes to embody the process of radical democratization, the continuing effort of the presently excluded to gain the right and ability to have input into civic life. As individuals of all stripes, ages, and backgrounds in contemporary hyperreality search for an identity, critical pedagogy provides them an affective social and individual vision in which to invest. Making connections between the political, the economic, the cultural,
the psychological, the epistemological, the ontological, and the educational, individuals gain insight into what is and what could be as well as the disposition to act. Thus, as political agency is cultivated, critical pedagogy becomes a democratic social politic. Once again, social consciousness and the valorization of the individual come together to produce an emancipatory synergy.

**Conclusion**

These are just a few of the ideas that can be used to get the conversation started and to introduce *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* I am always amazed with how quickly the world changes, the acceleration of the pace of change, and the expansion of the power of power. Given such dynamics it is inconceivable that critical pedagogy would not be ever-evolving, changing to meet the needs posed by new circumstances and unprecedented challenges. Peter and I hope that this book will provide us a basis for better understanding the possible forms such changes in critical pedagogy might take in the bizarre new era in which we find ourselves—an era where the smell of a new and more effective form of fascism seeps into every room of our apartments and houses and into our (un)consciousnesses. In such dire circumstances we need critical pedagogy more than ever. Where are we now? Wedged between an ideological rock and a hegemonic hard place with a relatively small audience. I believe critical pedagogy contains the imaginative, intellectual, and pragmatic power to free us from that snare. Such an escape is central to the survival of not just critical pedagogy but also to human beings as a species.

**References**


