Power, Emancipation, and Complexity: employing critical theory

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ABSTRACT Critical theory, if nothing else, is a moral construct designed to reduce human suffering in the world. In the critical theoretical context, every individual is granted dignity regardless of his or her location in the web of reality. Thus, the continuation of human suffering by conscious human decision is a morally unacceptable behavior that must be analyzed, interpreted and changed. In this context the genesis of this type of decision-making process is uncovered and new ways of thinking that would negate such activity are sought. As critical theorists have engaged in this process, they have come to describe a set of practices that contribute to forms of decision making that perpetuate human suffering. This article focuses on a few of these dynamics in order to situate the moral dimensions of a twenty-first-century reconceptualized critical theory. The authors' notion of critical theory is described as 'reconceptualized' in that it is more sensitive to modes of domination that involve race and gender and to the complexity of lived experience than in the Frankfurt School's original articulation of the notion in the 1920s in Germany. It is also informed by what they describe as the theoretical bricolage, which infuses numerous theoretical advances formulated in the eight decades since the inception of critical theory.

The Theoretical Bricolage:
the contemporary reconceptualization of critical theory

In this reconceptualized context, contemporary critical theory argues that so-called democratic societies are not as democratic as generally believed. Democratic citizens are regulated by the forces of power operating in a general climate of deceit. In this contemporary condition individuals are acculturated and schooled to feel comfortable in relations of either domination or subordination rather that equality and interdependence. Given the social and technological changes that have led to a hyperreality of electronic information saturation, critical theoretical concerns with self-direction and moral social relationships have been reassessed. As critical theorists consider the politics of thinking in the electronic maze of contemporary communications, many have recognized the need for a serious conversation between critical assertions and counter-Cartesian or postmodern modes of social and educational critique (Young, 1990; Morrow, 1991; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2001a, 2008).

Such critiques include feminist theory, ecological theory, Foucauldian genealogy, post-structualist psychoanalysis, Santiago enactivist cognitive theory, complexity theories, post-colonialist theory, discourse analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, and other concerns. In our own work we have referred to this melange of theories and their interaction in terms of a theoretical and methodological bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001b; Steinberg, 2006). The synergy of the conversation between the postmodern critique and critical theory involves the interplay of the informed moral practice of criticality and the lenses of complexity of the counter-Cartesian domain. As it invokes its emancipatory system of meaning, critical theory provides postmodern modes of analysis with a normative grounding.

Without such groundwork the more postmodern forms of critique are ever vulnerable to nihilism and inaction. The bricolage advocated here insists that a reconceptualized critical theory make connections to the egalitarian impulses of modernism. In this way a complex critical orientation becomes a valuable tool in the formulation of an emancipatory democracy. In this neo-critical context educators and social analysts can extend the project of an emancipatory democracy and the schooling that supports it. Buoyed by our bricolage, critical theorists can gain new understandings of how power operates and in the process incorporate groups who had previously been excluded by their race, class, gender, sexuality or geographical place (Welch, 1991; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Kincheloe, 2001a, 2008; Steinberg, 2011).

An example of how such a reconstructed critical theory might operate might involve the deployment of semiotics, the study of symbol systems and cultural signs, in the analysis of contemporary power. As hyperreality confronts us with unprecedented forms of mystification and oppression, semiotics becomes one of the most pragmatic analytical techniques it employs. The development of information-based societies places a high value on a form of study that analyzes codes and symbols in the communication process. A critical semiotics can be used to dislodge hidden mystifications, power, and oppression in political communiqués and the general fare of electronic media. As it uncovers such hidden dimensions of contemporary hyperreality, semiotics helps equip individuals with a new critical consciousness – a way of seeing that empowers men and women to move beyond beliefs that have been shaped by domination and moral regulation.

As individuals take what they learned via critical semiotics about the hidden power of hyperreality, they employ their critical mode of meaning making to develop a democratic vision of what they can become. This vision can be used to fuel the resistance groups that are always forming at the margins of hyperreality (Luke, 1991; Kincheloe, 2002). As our doctoral students, for example, learn to employ critical semiotics, they often uncover emancipatory meanings in particular television programs. They integrate such meaning into their own teaching, engaging students both intellectually and at the level of pleasure in the emancipatory struggle. Their students, in the process, learn to identify with marginalized groups who traditionally have been ignored or degraded in the schools setting.

This reconceptualized critical theoretical identification with the marginalized produces a suspicion of Cartesianism's penchant for boundary fixing, its tendency to subordinate or exclude. Thus the semiotic decoding of the media, of text, of schools, of world becomes an irreverent moral reading, an exploration of embedded ideology, dominant cultural norms, and oppressive stereotypes. Whether the text is the canon of Western civilization or popular culture, such readings are consistent in their iconoclasm. This is reconceptualized critical theory in action, negating the dominant culture's tendency to use schools as training grounds for the marketplace. In this educational context students do not engage in moral reasoning, they do not analyze the complexity, the lived complications of the moral realm. They are taught how to adjust to rather than to analyze and contest the established culture of power. As it counters the mainstream, a reconceptualized critical theory decenters the unchallenged interpretations, employing both semiotics and a tranformative hermeneutics to engage with the previously excluded. In this context it helps drag us out of the stagnant moral pond of twenty-first-century Western culture.

Defining the Critical: the origins of critical theory

With these reconceptualized notions of criticality in mind it is important to historicize the origins of critical theory. The term 'critical', as used here, comes form the concept of critical theory. The term refers to the social analysis tradition developed by the Frankfurt School, a group of writers and researchers connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. However, none of the Frankfurt School theorists ever claimed to have developed a unified approach to cultural criticism. During the establishment of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse initiated a conversation with the German tradition of philosophical and social thought, especially that of Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Weber. From the vantage point of these critical theorists – whose political sensibilities were influenced by the devastation of World War I, post-war Germany, with its economic depression marked by inflation and unemployment, and the failed strikes and protest in Germany and Central Europe in this same

period – the social world was in urgent need of reinterpretation. From this perspective, they defied Marxist orthodoxy while deepening their belief that injustice and subjugation shaped the lived world (Jay, 1973; Held, 1980; Bottomore, 1984; Gibson, 1986, Hinchey, 1998; McLaren, 2000). Focusing their attention on the changing nature of capitalism, the early critical theorists analyzed the mutating forms of domination that accompanied the change.

Only a decade after the Frankfurt School was established, the Nazis controlled Germany. The danger posed to the Jewish membership of the Frankfurt School convinced Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse to leave Germany. Eventually locating themselves in California, these critical theorists were shocked by American culture. Offended by the taken-for-granted positivistic empirical practices of American social science researchers, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse were challenged to respond to the social science establishment's positivist belief that their research could describe and accurately measure any dimension of human behavior. In their critique of American positivism they also criticized the separation of the moral realm from that of the scientific. This fragmentation represented an important aspect of what they referred to as the irrationality of Western forms of rationality.

Piqued by the contradiction between progressive American rhetoric of egalitarianism and the reality of racial and class discrimination, these theorists produced their major work while residing in the United States. In 1953, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Germany and re-established the Institute of Social Research. Significantly, Herbert Marcuse stayed in the United States, where he would find a new audience for this work in social theory. Much to his own surprise, Marcuse skyrocketed to fame as the philosopher of the student movements of the 1960s. Critical theory, especially the emotionally and sexually liberating work of Marcuse, provided the philosophical voice of the New Left. Concerned with the politics of psychological and cultural revolution, the New Left preached a Marcusian sermon of political emancipation (Gibson, 1986; Wexler, 1991; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Hinchey, 1998; Surber, 1998).

Many academicians who had come of age in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s focused their scholarly attention on critical theory. Frustrated by forms of domination emerging from a post-Enlightenment culture nurtured by positivism and capitalism, these scholars saw in critical theory a method of temporarily freeing academic work from these forms of power. Impressed by critical theory's approach to the social construction of experience, they came to view their disciplines as manifestations of the discourse and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them. The discourse of moral possibility implicit within the constructed nature of social experience suggested to these scholars that a reconstruction of the social sciences could eventually lead to a more egalitarian, democratic, and ethical social order.

In this moral realm, the critical theorists argued that new conceptualizations of human agency and their promise that men and women can, at least in part, determine their own existence offered new hope for emancipatory forms of socio-educational research and action. This was especially apparent when these critical theoretical notions were compared with orthodox Marxism's iron laws of history, the irrevocable evil of capitalism and the proletariat as the privileged subject and agent of social transformation. For example, critical theoretical educators criticized the argument made by Marxist scholars Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis (1976) that schools are intractable capitalist agencies of social, economic, cultural, and bureaucratic control. In their analysis they contrasted Bowles & Gintis's deterministic perspectives with the idea that schools, as venues of hope, could become sites of resistance and possibility. In this spirit of possibility criticalists believed that schools could encourage moral and democratic work within a critical educational framework. Many critical educators maintained that schools could become institutions where forms of knowledge, moral critique, values, and social analysis are taught for the purpose of educating young people for critical empowerment rather than for subjugation.

It is important to note in this context that the moral concerns and critique of our reconceptualized critical theory involve the development of possible ways of seeing and acting in the world. In education, for example, criticality does not determine how we see the world nor does it provide a blueprint for particular actions. Critical theory helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring them. It helps us contemplate the nature of the moral actions that might be derived from such explorations. Indeed, a key feature of a reconceptualized critical theory is its humility in light of the complexity of everyday life and the moral decisions all human beings must make within

this foggy context. In this reality critical theory grapples with issues of power, justice, and moral action and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, gender, and sexuality, ideologies, discourses, religion, education, and other social dynamics interact to construct the social systems that shape our consciousnesses.

Moral Iconoclasm: eight features of a reconceptualized critical theory

Critical Enlightenment

Here critical theory analyzes competing power interests among groups and individuals within a society, identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. Privileged groups, critical analysts 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 study. In this context, to seek critical enlightenment is to uncover the winners and losers in particular social arrangements and the processes by which such power operates. In the complexity of the reconceptualized critical theory we may find that in some situations particular individuals have access to social power, while, in other contexts, the very same individuals do not – e.g. poor men who subjugate their wives. Thus, no moral attributions may be made on the basis of positionality alone – that those who are subjugated are bestowed by history with moral capital. Indeed, the analysis of power interests is always complex and contradictory. Also, in this context of complexity critical enlightenment does not mean that we finally see the truth or gain access to 'true morality'. Critical analysts understand that the socio-educational world is much too complex for such arrogant proclamations.

Critical Emancipation/Empowerment

Those who seek emancipation attempt to gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community. Here criticalists attempt to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives. In this way, greater degrees of freedom from the regulation of power, interconnectedness, and moral 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. Also, many have questioned the arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate others. Many feminists, as we will discuss later in this article, raise the concern that emancipation has often been conceptualized as the pursuit of autonomy and self-direction. These features, they maintain, must be balanced by a view of emancipation that allows for new forms of connectedness with others. These are important criticisms and must be carefully taken into account by critical analysts. Thus, as critical educators who search for those forces that insidiously shape who we are, we respect those who reach different conclusions in their personal journeys.

The Rejection of Economic Determinism

Critical theorists do not accept the orthodox Marxist contention that 'base' determines 'superstructure' – meaning that economic factors dictate the nature of all other aspects of human existence. In this context they refuse to conflate the moral realm with economic relationships. Such reductionism is an affront to the complexity of human experience. Criticalists understand in the reconceptualized theoretical context of the twenty-first century that there are multiple forms of power, including racial, gender, and sexual axes of domination, as well as class. In issuing this caveat, however, critical theory in no way attempts to argue that economic factors are unimportant in the shaping of everyday life. Economic factors can never be separated from other axes of oppression. This traditional Marxist economistic notion focuses attention on merely one form of oppression as being more important than any other. As the economic takes precedence over all other modes of subjugation, lost is an understanding of the diversity of oppression,

especially in different historical times and different cultural contexts. Erased is a sensitivity to the particularity of moral dilemmas in diverse settings.

The Critique of Instrumental or Technical Rationality

Critical theory sees instrumental rationality as a key aspect of the contemporary positivism that tacitly shapes twenty-first-century schooling with its standardization and high-stakes testing. Critical analysts see instrumental rationality as one of the most oppressive features of Western societies. Such a form of 'hyperreason' involves an obsession with means in preference to ends. Criticalists claim that instrumental rationality is more interested in method and efficiency than in moral dimensions of human action and socio-educational and political purpose. It delimits questions to 'how to' instead of 'why should'. In an educational context, critical theorists claim that many rationalistic scholars become so obsessed with issues of technique, procedure, and correct method that they forget its moral and humanistic purpose. The standardized standards movement of the last decade reflects such instrumental rationality and test scores take precedence over more fundamental educational concerns. Instrumental rationality often separates fact from value in its obsession with 'proper' method, losing in the process an understanding of the moral and value choices always involved in the production of so-called facts. This feature is central to the moral dynamics of critical theory, as knowledge is often tacitly inscribed with moral assumptions. The task of the critical theorist is to bring these moral inscriptions to the surface so they can be examined.

The Impact of Desire

Critical theory appreciates post-structuralist psychoanalysis as an emancipatory moral education. Post-structuralism is a postmodern way of seeing that understands the complexity of causation and asserts that social structures cannot simply determine human consciousness and behavior in some type of cause–effect rationalistic process. 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 morally corrupt and self-destructive behaviors. A post-structural psychoanalysis, in its reflection of traditional psychoanalysis's tendency to view individuals as rational and autonomous beings, allows critical researchers new tools to rethink the interplay among the various axes of power: identity, libido, rationality, and emotion. In this configuration, the psyche is no longer separated from the sociopolitical realm; indeed, desire can be socially constructed and used by power wielders for destructive and oppressive outcomes. Critical theorists mobilize desire for progressive and emancipatory moral projects. Taking their lead from feminist theory, critical analysts are aware of the patriarchal inscriptions within traditional psychoanalysis and work to avoid its bourgeois, ethnocentric, and misogynist practices. Freed from these blinders, post-structural psychoanalysis helps researchers gain a new sensitivity to the role of fantasy and imagination and the structures of sociocultural and psychological meaning they reference.

Focusing on the Relationships among Culture, Power, and Domination: 'habitus' and the construction of consciousness

In critical theory culture takes on a new importance in the effort to understand the moral and political realms and issues of domination. Critical educators, operating with an understanding of this dimension, appreciate that culture is 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. Recognizing that popular culture is not a trivial domain but has become the primary location in hyperreality for the construction of political consciousness, students of cultural studies examine not only the popular domain but also the hidden rules that shape cultural production in general. All cognitive activity is connected to power relations, criticalists maintain. If all perspectives are shaped by power, then one of the key roles of a critical educator involves the effort

to illustrate the nature of this influence. French social analyst Pierre Bourdieu used the term 'habitus' to describe the situation in which an individual is culturally located. Habitus is an important critical theoretical concept as it exposes the embodied culture that shapes styles of knowing, learning, and morally relating to the world. Students, for example, embody their habitus as they walk into classrooms, in the ways they conceptualize the role of education in their lives, in their disposition toward learning the skills and concepts that make up a curriculum. A sensitive teacher can sense quickly the ways this embodied culture positions different students' relationship to the school, other students, and to the curriculum.

Strengthening Democracy: building communities of solidarity

Critical theory is always concerned about the nature of democracy, the way it is subverted in the name of democracy, and the relationship between democracy and community. Critical democratic educators understand that in the United States democracy and community have been consistently subverted by the distortions of power and the inability of dominant culture to deal with power difference – racial, gender, religious, and sexual differences in particular. To establish a working democracy, critical theorists make use of voices and perspectives that have been traditionally excluded. Such viewpoints help social studies educators clarify cultural, political, and economic values, an exercise that keeps power elites from using dominant ideologies as modes of control. With these subjugated perspectives, critical educators tell suppressed stories: marginalized perspectives on race, Native American perspectives on the Westward Movement, and women's viewpoints form their location in the socioeconomic order. These stories illustrate what feminist theologian Sharon Welch refers to as the power of difference. Communities gain great moral strength when they are based not on consensus and homogeneous values but on a solidarity that validates and employs this power of difference. Consciousness itself is spurred by difference, in that our first awareness of who we are occurs only when we become aware that we exist independently of another or another's way.

A Politics of Skepticism that Metamorphosizes into a Pedagogy of Hope

A critically grounded education is dedicated to challenging comfortable assumptions about politics, culture, psychology, human potential, and the moral domain. What are the consequences of schooling? Is the United States really a democratic society? Is intelligence genetically determined? When one has exposed asymmetrical power relations and their harmful effects on human beings, what moral actions are mandated? These are only a few of the questions that emerge from a critical politics of skepticism. Operating within such a political framework, democratic teachers encourage students to question both the information delivered to them as fact and the moral pronouncements provided to them as inviolable. In this context critical theorists work to research and analyze alternative perspectives, to cultivate their political and moral imaginations, and to make ethical and democratic choices in their lives. Such activities take place with the knowledge that the information we are provided about the world is partial, incomplete, and shaped by social, political, and economic interests. Such power dynamics produce inequities in the ability of individuals to discern, delineate, and realize their own best interests, as well as the best interests of the larger society. As criticalists act on their politics of skepticism, they gain insight into whose interests are being served in particular constructions of morality and specific social arrangements. Such knowledge provides them the ability to act in empowering ways that were previously impossible.

Constructing a Critical Moral Pedagogy

In light of these characteristics of critical theory a critical moral pedagogy can be constructed – a theoretical orientation that accounts for cultural difference, the complexity of everyday life, and the demands of a rigorous democratic education. Grounded on a detailed awareness of the bricolage including indigenous knowledges (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008), African-American epistemologies (Collins, 1990), subjugated knowledges (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Steinberg, 2006), and the moral insights of liberation theology, our critical moral pedagogy

seeks more complex approaches to understanding the relationship between self and world. How do students and teachers come to construct their views of reality, critical moral educators ask. Guided by the critical moral pedagogy, educators come to understand the social construction of world and self. In this context they focus on the forces that shape individual perspectives. Why are some constructions of reality and moral action embraced and officially legitimated by the dominant culture while others are repressed? Asking such questions and aided by a rigorous understanding of knowledge production, critical educators grasp how schools often identify, sometimes unconsciously, conceptions of what it means to be educated in the terms of upper-middle-class white culture. Expressions of working-class or non-white culture may be viewed as uneducated and morally inferior (Kincheloe, 2008).

Critical teachers thus come to understand that the culture of the school may force students to sever identification with their minority group or working-class backgrounds in the name of school success. Thus, the school privileges particular practices and certain methods of discerning truth. In this context Michel Foucault argues that truth is not relative but is relational – constructions considered true are contingent on the power relations and historical context in which they are formulated and acted upon. The question that grounds the effort to formulate a critical moral pedagogy asks: If what we designate as truth is relational and not certain, then what set of assumptions can we use to guide our vision of 'what can be'? This is why the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1985) and liberation theology are so important in this context. With its roots deep in the Latin American struggle against poverty and colonialism, liberation theology facilitates the formulation of a moral starting line to rethink contemporary education.

Liberation theology makes no apology for its identification with the perspective of those who are excluded and subjugated. Proclaiming their solidarity with the marginalized, liberation theologians work alongside them in their attempt to expose the existing social order as oppressive and immoral. All aspects of a critical moral pedagogy are connected to this identification with the perspectives of the oppressed. Accordingly, one of the main goals of a critical moral education is to reveal the ways that mainstream schooling and the socioeconomic order serve to perpetuate the hopelessness of the subjugated (Welch, 1991; Oldenski, 1997; McLaren, 2000; Oldenski & Carlson, 2002; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2006). On the basis of this knowledge, of the dangerous memories of the oppressed, economic and educational strategies for overcoming such oppression can be grounded.

There is no doubt that our critical moral pedagogy and the social action it fosters will elicit charges of educational politicization, of tainted, biased teaching. A critical moral pedagogy asserts that such forms of pious pseudo-objectivity must be confronted. If critical teachers cave in to such objectivist critics, the possibility of taking a moral stand in education, of seeing teaching as something more than a technical act, will be destroyed. As objectivist critics argue that we must keep politics out of education, they misrepresent the basic tenets of a critical moral pedagogy. Such critics miss the point that research is never neutral. When researchers attempt to remain neutral, like many German churches in the Third Reich, we support the prevailing power structures. Why is it, criticalists ask, that teaching that supports existing arrangements is objective and morally neutral while teaching that challenges the status quo is biased. Asserting a position is not the same as imposing a position on students. Critical educators understand that their students and colleagues have the right to reject everything they assert.

Uncritical advocates of objective and neutral teaching are just as value-invested in their teaching as any advocate of a critical moral pedagogy. To assume a position that refuses to seek the structural sources of human suffering and exploitation is to support oppression and the power relations that sustain it. The arguments of objectivist educators that any teaching grounded on explicit moral assumptions is subjective to the point of worthlessness is similar to the nineteenth-century ruling class idea that engaging in social criticism violated a 'gentlemanly' code of civility. It is similar to a contemporary notion of 'positive thinking' – in the tradition of pop psychologists and motivational speakers – that views overt oppositional behavior as a form of negativity that is not only politically wrongheaded but distasteful as well. Indeed, the difference between teaching that subscribes to a critical moral theory and traditional objectivist teaching rests on the critical theorists' willingness to reveal their allegiances, to admit their solidarities, their value structures, and the ways such orientations affect their teaching.

Post-structuralist Feminist Theory and the Critical Moral Pedagogy

Feminist theory – especially of a post-structuralist variety – plays an important role in the construction of a critical moral pedagogy. By revealing what can be learned from the everyday, feminist scholars and teachers have opened a whole new area of moral insight. They have uncovered the existence of silences and absences where traditional scholars had only seen 'what was there'. Feminist scholars have been able to uncover such absences by applying their own lived experiences to their inquiry and observations. More Cartesian-oriented scholars had weeded out the self, denied their understandings of social and educational events (Reinharz, 1979, 1982, 1992; Britzman, 1991). Feminist educators realized that the objective science of Cartesian modernism was released form any social or moral responsibility. Objectivity in this context became a signifier for political passivity and an acceptance of a privileged socioeconomic position. Thus, scientific objectivity came to demand separation of thought and feeling, research and morality, and the devaluation of any perspective maintained with emotional conviction. Feeling in the objectivist context is designated as an inferior form of human consciousness. Feminist scholars have pointed out that the thought–feeling hierarchy is one of the structures historically used by men to oppress women. In intimate heterosexual relationships, if a man is able to present his position in an argument as the rational viewpoint and the woman's position as an emotional perspective, then he has won the argument – his is the voice worth hearing (Suleiman, 1992).

Feminist theory forces us to build a critical moral pedagogy that does not accept the fundamental ways human beings in Western societies relate to each other. A feminist ethic of caring values intimacy and understanding instead of distance and proof. Male-centered knowing pursues autonomy, the highest stage in the developmental taxonomies of Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Even some notions of emancipation privilege autonomous self-direction based on an understanding of the influences of one's past shape and mold. A post-structualist feminist reconceptualization of emancipation grounded on connected knowing uses this understanding of one's past to free oneself from its repressive characteristics but to facilitate connection with other people around moral visions of community.

Informed by complexity, criticalists now understand that not all men and women operate in what has been referred to as feminine and masculine ways. Thus, ascribing some essentialized notion of feminine behavior as the province of women and masculine behavior as the province of men is to walk on dangerously thin theoretical ice. In constructing our critical moral pedagogy we will make reference to feminine and masculine ways of being in a tentative, non-essentialized way: both of these constructions have to be examined in the context of intersecting dimensions of race, class, sexuality, and cultural/historical location. With these conditions in mind there seems to be an impulse based on connection and an ethic of responsibility associated with women and an impulse based on separation and an ethic of rights associated with men. This masculinist view tends to see the world as composed of physically and socially disembodied 'things' ruled by predictable laws that can be understood rationally and controlled by individuals. In this masculinist world, moral behavior involves the elaboration of rules that mediate competing rights between disembodied individuals. Justice is grounded on the equal application of rules in this view, while rights are individual and absolute.

The feminine view identifies with an identity of relatedness and an ethic of care, and as such forms a basis for the critical moral pedagogy. The feminine world is composed of physically and socially embodied 'things' that are concrete, particularistic, and connected to one another. Since these things are connected with desires and needs, they tend to resist rational control. Knowledge is produced by personal contact and is particularistic and contextual. Criticalists draw on this feminist connectedness to extend the domain of the critical and to sophisticate the critical moral pedagogy. In this way it can be deployed to reconceptualize the moral dimensions of our daily interpersonal relationships while at the same time reinventing our social institutions. Schools and workplaces are particularly vulnerable to the malformations of bureaucratic hierarchies with their dominant/subordinate relationships. In its critique of hierarchy, feminist theory helps us expand the application of our moral system of meaning to the analysis of diverse manifestations of power relations.

Hermeneutics and the Critical Moral Pedagogy:
the power of the bricolage

The critical moral pedagogy developed here cannot be separated from a critical notion of hermeneutics. Long concerned with the theory and practice of interpretation, hermeneutics is a form of philosophical inquiry that focuses on the cultural, social, political, and historical nature of research. In this context hermeneutics maintains that meaning making cannot be quarantined from where one stands or is placed in the web of social reality. Thus, in a hermeneutic context interpretation is denaturalized in the sense that certain events and/or phenomena do not imply a particular interpretation of their meaning. Interpretation is far more complex than assumed, far more a product of social forces than admitted. And as we interpret Hans-Georg Gadamer, interpretation is always a central component of moral reasoning and moral action.

Thus, critical theory reconceptualized via the bricolage focuses great attention on the act of interpretation in research, pedagogy, and moral action, appreciating the distinctions and connections between describing a phenomenon, understanding it, and acting in relation to it. Because of this relationship, critical theorists informed by the bricolage and hermeneutics understand that moral action cannot be separated from the development of rigorous modes of research. The deeper our understanding of a phenomenon, the better prepared we are to initiate moral action in relation to it. Thus, the following hermeneutical concepts harbor moral implications:

- connecting the object of inquiry to the many contexts in which it is embedded;
- appreciating the relationship between researcher and that being researched;
- connecting the making of meaning to human experience;
- making use of textual forms of analysis while not losing sight that living human beings are the entities around which and with which meaning is being made.

Too often in objectivist forms of research, criticalists maintain, these interpretive understandings are deemed irrelevant.

The form of hermeneutics employed here is a critical hermeneutics – critical in the sense that in the bricolage it has merged with critical theory and its concern with power and justice. In this hybrid context critical hermeneutics pushes interpretation in research and pedagogy to new levels, moving beyond what is visible to the ethnographic eye to the exposure of concealed motives that move events and shape everyday life. As critical hermeneutics observes the intersection of power and omnipresent, pre-reflective cultural meanings, a sensitive and rigorous understanding of the socio-educational world begins to take shape. Critical hermeneutics takes the concept of historical contextualization to a new conceptual level, as it specifies the nature of the historicity that helps produce cultural meaning, the consciousness of the researcher, the construction of the research process, and the formation of human subjectivity. In this interpretive context critical theoretical concerns with praxis-based notions of social change are more easily addressed, as moral action informed by thick description and rigorous understanding of a social and political circumstance is made possible (Zammito, 1996; Lutz et al, 1997; Steinberg, 2006). Intellectual rigor is thus reclaimed by criticalists and removed from its right-wing deployment as a mode of exclusion and hierarchy.

Indeed, in this hermeneutically informed bricolage critical theorists are concerned with empowering the subjects of research and giving voice to the subjugated and the marginalized – constructing new ways to better reduce suffering in the world. Such efforts raise numerous questions about the critical research process – a mode of knowledge production designed to enable moral action. For example, do the acts of empowerment and giving voice involve simply highlighting the specific words of the research subjects? Do they mean featuring the interactions of the participants and the researcher as the most important dimensions of the research narrative? While in *no* way dismissing the importance of these dimensions of the empowerment process in the bricolage, critical theorists worry that sometimes in the highlighting of the specific words of participants and featuring research participant interaction rigorous insights can be lost.

In the specifics of the process of interpretation emerging from the interaction of the particular with macro, social configurations cannot be set aside in the focus on the personal. Psychologistic representations of abstract individuals can crowd out the contextual concerns of the

hermeneutically informed bricolage (Steinberg, 2011). In such cases the rigor of complexity is displaced not by scientific reductionism but by an excessive fascination with unsituated personal experience. The possibility of moral action as an outcome of the knowledge production/interpretive process is snuffed out by narcissism. As Johnny Cash once put it, one must 'walk the line'; in this case the line separates the decontextualization of the idiosyncrasy of the personal from the unreflective, authoritarian, voice of truth of the reductionistic Cartesian researcher. The needs of critical moral reflection and knowledge production cannot be served without the integration of the macro-social with the personal domain.

Bricoleurs operating in a critical hermeneutical matrix work to record the voice of the subjugated but to expand its meaning by engaging in the hermeneutic circle of interpretation. Even subjugated voices are better understood when studied in relation to numerous social, cultural, political, economic, philosophical, historical, psychological, and pedagogical dynamics (Dicks & Mason, 1998). Kincheloe's book, *The Sign of the Burger: McDonald's and the culture of power* (2002), walked this line. By highlighting the voice of our ethnographic research subjects and always contextualizing their perspectives within the frames of macro-social, political, and economic concerns, the insights of social theory, and the discernment of critical hermeneutics, we try to provide an understanding of consciousness construction that leads to moral action. The rigorous demands of the bricolage insist that researchers engage in these deliberations and struggle with their implications for every project they undertake.

Researchers in this struggle draw strength from the multiple perspectives of the bricolage. Such multi-perspectivalism is enhanced by critical hermeneutics and the interpretive collisions it promotes in the hermeneutic circle – hermeneuts often refer to this dynamic as the fusion of horizons. Here we return to the very basis of bricolage, learning from the juxtaposition of divergent ideas and ways of seeing. Metaphors abound in this context as the work of the bricoleur is compared to that of a jazz musician, quilt maker, and the producer of pictorial montage. In all of these processes different dynamics are brought together in ways that produce a synergistic interaction – the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The hermeneutic fusion of horizons helps bricoleurs consider numerous representations of reality simultaneously. In this context the concept of simultaneity is important, as it takes precedence over more traditional research concerns with sequence and linearity. As hermeneutically-grounded bricoleurs watch these conceptual collisions, they adeptly sidestep some liberal eclecticism. Here in the hermeneutic circle they chart the ways that the divergent representations both inform and transform one another (Kellner, 1995; Paulson, 1995; Pryse, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The traditional critical category of emancipation becomes a far more complex and theoretically sophisticated concept in this context.

Conclusion

A reconceptualized critical theory with the benefits of postmodern complexity, feminist theory, hermeneutics, and the other dimensions of the bricolage provides an emancipatory moral pedagogy and research orientation for the twenty-first century. In the midst of these diverse theoretical orientations we retain the concept of critical theory because of its unique perspective on the purpose of social theory and social theorizing. To the critical theorist the theoretical realm does not exist merely for the idle speculations of the classroom or for sake of publication in esoteric academic journals. Critical theory demands an engagement with the suffering of the people of the lived world, with the moral dilemmas that face us in the complexity of everyday life. Whenever critical theory becomes the exclusive province of arcane academic discussion, it has been domesticated and lobotomized. It was developed to disrupt, to challenge, and to promote moral action. To accomplish these daunting tasks it must be reinvented and reformulated for every new generation.

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