

Introduction: *Critical Theory and Educational Research**

The malaise of the Left is that the old is dying but the new cannot yet be born. We are searching for a new political language. We can imagine it resounding in our ears. But it is not yet on the tips of our tongues. Embarking on this search is risky. But it is inescapable.

— Beatrice Campbell, et al., “Manifesto for New Times:
Realignment of Politics” (1990)

As the history of Orientalist education demonstrates, a curriculum may incorporate the systems of learning of a subordinate population and still be an instrument of hegemonic activity. . . . Until curriculum is studied less as a receptacle of texts than as activity, that is to say, as a vehicle of acquiring and exercising power, descriptions of curricular content in terms of their expression of universal values on the one hand, or pluralistic, secular identities on the other are insufficient signifiers of their historical realities.

— Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* (1989)

The promise and justification of science and social science have always been linked to their capacity to join theory and warranted knowledge to enlightenment and the liberation of the individual and society. The classical Enlightenment conception of scientific inquiry, though deeply flawed by historical biases, arose in direct opposition to certain moral and political ideas, such as dogmatism, authoritarianism, and centralized power, and in support of other moral and political ideas, such as rationality, freedom, and democracy. However, in the modern transmogrification of scientific inquiry into positivism, these latter ideals have been rendered officially meaningless and denied their validity by methodological prohibitions against evaluative statements in scientific inquiry. The consequence has been that positivistic science undermines its own origins in the Enlightenment ideal; thus positivism cannot fulfill its scientific or social purpose.

In recent years, many scholars in the humanities and social sciences have pursued alternative forms of research, truer in their

fundamental epistemological, ontological, and ethical assumptions to the Enlightenment ideal, under the rubric of interpretive or qualitative inquiry. Although there is much to commend in the centrality this multiplicity of approaches gives to questions of meaning, intersubjectivity, and the social construction of knowledge, a nagging paradox persists. If interpretive research argues that it gives richer, thicker, more meaningful descriptions of the world than positivism, but cannot evaluate these descriptions, then it collides with the positivist separation of knowledge and value. If truth is interpretation and all interpretations are equally coherent within a given system, the capacity to make judgments about the relative merits of different systems becomes problematic. Richard Bernstein (1976) argues that when we talk about structures in the social world, we must attend to the fact that these structures reflect different interests and that these differences are not arbitrary, but rather are based on concrete social groupings that contain power to shape social structure, meaning, and typification differentially. The "pluralism" of the interpretive, qualitative researcher masks the fact that some versions of social reality are thought to be and are enforced as being more legitimate than others for reasons having nothing to do with their truth, beauty, or goodness. Thus, although the interpretive researcher may offer "new and improved" descriptions, or interpretations, of social reality, the methodological and ontological prohibitions against evaluating these interpretations results in a mimicry of positivism. As Bernstein writes, "It is not the business of philosophy to 'award prizes,' but it is indeed the business of philosophy and genuine theory to provide the basis for critical evaluation of the forms of life" (74).

Critical theory is, at its center, an effort to join empirical investigation, the task of interpretation, and a critique of this reality. Its purpose is to reassert the basic aim of the Enlightenment ideal of inquiry; to improve human existence by viewing knowledge for its emancipatory or repressive potential. In this way, a standard of judgment and value becomes possible. Like interpretivism, critical theory holds that knowledge is socially constructed, contextual, and dependent on interpretation. In contrast to interpretivists, critical theorists see a need and a basis for forming and understanding hierarchies of contexts and types of knowledge and evaluating them for their possibilities of contributing to progressive material and symbolic emancipation. Of course, this does not settle the debate. What kinds of knowledge best serve human emancipation? However, unlike positivism and interpretivism, mainstream quantitative and qualitative approaches, critical theory puts this problem at the core of inquiry.

The chapters of this book, though differing in many ways, all attempt to go beyond the qualitative and share an interest in examining the practical and theoretical problems related to the central aims of a critical theory of social inquiry. This collection has been assembled in order to further unpack contemporary debates within critical social theory and to tease out some of their implications for educational research and practice. As cultural workers currently residing in the United States, we find this a particularly pressing agenda, given the vitriolic character of the debates on education that have followed in the wake of what is currently being described as the crisis of schooling. Our primary concern in putting together this book has been to provide a conceptual and political ground from which to launch a politics of refusal against the concerted attacks by neoconservatives on what is perceived as the “political correctness” of the “leftist academy.”

In the United States, educators who work in the public schools and the universities are currently witnessing a well-orchestrated frontal assault on efforts by progressive educators to make race, class, and gender issues central to educational research. That this is occurring at a time when race relations in the universities and throughout the larger society are in sharp decline, and racial incidents across the country are on the rise is particularly telling. The new left literacies that have been influenced by continental social theories, feminist social theories, and critical social theories in their many forms (e.g., postmodernist, postcolonialist, poststructuralist) are being attacked by conservative critics for being a subversion of the political neutrality and ideological disinterestedness that they claim the enterprise of education is all about. Of course, the real fear here is that the call among critical social theorists to rewrite the cultural, political, and social codes and privileging norms of the dominant society will threaten the linguistic, academic, and racial borders currently in place. There is also a concern among mainstream educators that the burgeoning interest in critical social theory may replace those Western forms of intellectual authority that are most in harmony with their own status as Mandarin metropolitan intellectuals. The recent debate over “political correctness” in the American academy is largely a reaction against the transdisciplinary character of much of what is occurring in recent literary theory and the social sciences and its capacity to reterritorialize the structures of academic discourse to the disadvantage of colonialist and neocolonialist species of intellectual labor. Interest in new forms of scholarship such as poststructuralism, feminist theory, deconstruction and postcolonialist criticism is being met by conservatives with the admonition that much of it translates

pedagogically into forms of political indoctrination and leftist academic terrorism. This book challenges such an interpretation.

Another serious concern in putting together this book is to address what appears to be an increasing trend among leftist educators in the United States to retreat into the language of "plainspeak." There is growing evidence that a new species of anti-intellectualism is afoot that has affected both left and right curricular and pedagogical practice. As far as the leftist agenda is concerned, it appears to be transforming itself into a catch-all radicalism that dresses its dissent in the romantic anticapitalist-activist garb of the grassroots union organizer. Paulo Freire has referred to this as "basism." This is not to disparage the importance of community activism or direct political intervention at local, state, or federal levels; rather, it is to call attention to the current retreat from theory and the assault on educational ideas that do more than make simplistic appeals to common sense, union-style politics, and the supposedly self-evident truths of personal experience (Giroux and McLaren, 1992). Although it is certainly true, notes Larry Grossberg (1988), that the critical labor of intellectual life does not guarantee a progressive politics or form of political intervention, and that critical discourses are both constrained and empowered by their conditions and modes of production (i.e., access to specialized vocabularies, sites of intellectual production and distribution), this does not exclude the fact that intellectual life can have transformative social and political effects. Tony Bennett (1990) defends the production of an oppositional space within the educational system in a way that captures the dilemma we have attempted to sketch out above. He writes that

Work in educational institutions, which involve extended populations for increasingly lengthy periods of their life cycles, is in no way to be downgraded or regarded as less vital politically than the attempt to produce new collective forms of cultural association with which criticism might engage. Politically committed teachers face enough discouragement without the added suggestion that the "real work" lies elsewhere. Before we all abandon the education system and set up camp in the counter-public sphere, a little head counting would do no harm. There is little doubt that, if the numbers reached by radical critical practices in the two spheres were weighed in the balance, the scales would tip decisively in favour of the former. Nor is there any doubt that, without the sustenance provided by the contradictory spaces within the educational system, the institutions comprising the counter-public sphere would have a hard

time of it: put simply, socialist and feminist publishing houses, radical theatre groups, and so on are massively dependent on the sales and audiences generated, in part, by the contradictory critical spaces that have been won within the education system. (239)

The project underlying this text can also be seen as a means of rethinking cultural assimilation and neo-colonialism—a conservative agenda in which differences are perceived as a threat to what is labeled as Western Culture and the significance of Greek and Roman antiquity. The concept of difference is crucial to educational practice, especially as it relates to recognizing how identity, subjectivity, and “otherness” are shaped. One important task is to acknowledge the historical and social situatedness of the discourses that frame and “colonize” our experiences and *locate* ourselves *in* our experiences. But schooling is also about forms of ethical address (Giroux 1992)—that is, about the relationships that we construct between ourselves and others (McLaren, in press). In other words, the process of becoming schooled is always already implicated in the borders that distinguish “us” from “them.”

When we say that schooling constructs borders, we mean that it enables and/or constrains relations of power (both discursive and extradiscursive) and that these relations not only influence cognitive capacities but also speak to the way in which power is inscribed in the body, culture, space, and subjectivity. What does it mean to create a research practice and pedagogy as a language and practice of difference? First, it means rethinking research and pedagogical practices as the creation of multi-accental meaning as distinct from a monolithic, totalizing, and premature closure on meaning. A language and practice of difference does not suggest that diversity in and of itself is necessarily progressive, but it does suggest that school curricula should be organized in ways that enable students to make judgments about difference, that is, about how society is historically and socially constructed both within and outside a politics of diversity and how existing social practices within the various public spheres are implicated in relations of equality and justice as well as how they structure inequalities around racism, sexism, homophobia, violence, exclusion and other forms of oppression. Second, it suggests that students need to cross over into different zones of cultural diversity in order to rethink the relationship of self and society, of self and other, and to deepen society’s moral vision and political imagination. Further, a language and practice of difference raises the questions of how the categories of race, class and gender, sexual orientation, and other differences are shaped within the margins and center of society and how students can engage

the relationships among history, culture, and language as a way of reclaiming power and identity (McLaren 1993).

The language and practice of difference to which we refer is built on the concept of border identity and the development of a politics of location as border-crossers (Giroux 1992). The politics of difference that undergirds this critical perspective examines how differences rearticulate and reshape identity such that identities are transformed and in some instances broken down, but are never lost. That is, they are identities immersed not in a centrist politics of consensus that leaves individuals to function as obeisant servants of the state, but rather in a politics of location that invites individuals to be reshapers of history. The diversity and difference we are describing is radically distinct from the liberal pluralism of consensus; it is more in keeping with Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of social and ethnic diversity. This distinction has been captured by Robert Stam (1991):

In counterdistinction to a liberal discourse of tolerance, [Bakhtin] sees all utterance and discourse in relation to the deforming effects of social power. Second, Bakhtin does not preach a pseudo-equality of viewpoints; his sympathies, rather, go clearly to the nonofficial viewpoint, to the marginalized, the oppressed, the peripheralized. Third, whereas pluralism is grudgingly accretive—it benevolently allows another voice to add itself to the mainstream (“to those who have yet to share the benefits of the American dream” in the formulaic discourse of the politicians)—Bakhtin's view is polyphonic and celebratory. A Bakhtinian approach thinks “from the margins,” seeing Native Americans, African Americans and Hispanics, for example, not as interest groups to be added on to a pre-existing pluralism, but rather as being at the very core of the American experience from the beginning, each offering an invaluable “dialogical angle” on the national experience. Fourth, a Bakhtinian approach recognizes an epistemological advantage on the part of those who are oppressed and therefore bicultural. The oppressed, because they are obliged by circumstances and the imperatives of survival to know both the dominant and marginal culture, are ideally placed to deconstruct the mystifications of the dominant group. Fifth, Bakhtinian dialogism is reciprocal, not unilateral; any act of verbal or cultural exchange leaves both interlocutors changed. (259–60)

Bakhtin's perspective on difference bears much in common with Chandra Mohanty's (1989–90) notion that difference cannot be for-

mulated as simple negotiation among culturally diverse groups against a backdrop of presumed cultural homogeneity. Difference is the recognition that knowledges are forged in histories that are riven with differentially constituted relations of power; that is, knowledges, subjectivities, and social practices are forged within “asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres” (181).

The perspectives of Bakhtin and Mohanty offer educators a common ground for challenging the categorical function of pedagogy and research as it is currently understood and practiced. This ground also can set the stage for overcoming the relentless and incorrigible despair that have been generated by current political realities and utopian possibilities. It is first and foremost a call for solidarity over consensus and for constructing a preferential option for the peripheralized and the dispossessed. It follows Slavoj Žižek’s (1990) insight that when we negate the Other, we are also externalizing our autonegativity and self-hindrance. We therefore need to think of social and educational reform as a chain of equivalences that are *always open and incomplete*. As a practice that enables us to “refuse to narrativise our work in ways which reinscribe the absolute hierarchies of modernist epistemologies” (Grossberg 1988, 68), critical pedagogy stands in opposition to Habermas’s ideal speech situation as a model for noncoercive communication (See McLaren herein). Žižek, for instance, has drawn attention to the fetishistic logic of Jürgen Habermas’s position on the “ideal speech situation.” He claims that it actually masks an acknowledgment of the limitations of the signifying field. For instance, he notes that “The way Habermas formulates the ‘ideal speech situation’ already betrays its status as fetish; ‘ideal speech situation’ is something which, as soon as we engage in communication, is ‘simultaneously denied and laid claim to’, i.e. we must presuppose the ideal of an unbroken communication to be already realized, even though we know simultaneously that this cannot be the case” (259).

The postmodern/postcolonial pedagogical and research practices that we envision reject an impartial universal absolutism or foundationalism in favor of an engaged and dialogical pluralism. However, we recognize Zygmunt Bauman’s (1987) claim that a danger exists in moving from an impartial universal absolutism of foundationalism to a “multiple absolutism” within a pluralist worldview of local narratives (129). We agree that local, partial, and contingent discourses must prevent their localized character from becoming colonized by an incipient absolutism, but this need not lead to the abandonment of a search for community. The fact that we cannot rely on absolutist referents from the standpoint of either a modernist

universalism or a local or "militant" particularism (the metalanguages of structuralism or poststructuralism) need not discourage educators from inventing themselves according to a provisional external ideal or from recognizing that there is no "truth about truth"; rather, inspiration can be drawn from the realization that identity need not be fixed in advance by internal necessity or as a function of race, class, or gender construction, but can be forged anew by exercising our sociological imagination and building new social spaces, an "arch of social dreaming," that will encourage students to contest the debilitating limitations of "mono-logical" thought.

The problem of binary thinking that informs logocentric discourse has been discussed at length by thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche, Benita Parry, and Michel Pêcheux and is worth summarizing. In his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche discusses the revolt of the slave against the master. His perspectivist account locates the discourse of the master in terms of the evaluative polarity of the existing antonymic pairs "good" and "bad" (Nietzsche 1967; Redding 1990). The noble is the measure of all that is "good," whereas his "other," the slave, is the measure of all that is "bad." But as Paul Redding (1990) notes, when the slave conceives of the master as "the evil enemy," he or she reactively inverts the evaluative polarity of the good/bad couplet, leaving the original pattern of indexicality intact. That is, the indexical "center" is still the way of life of the noble speaker. The slave's actions are determined from the perspective of the noble since the slave has no means of encoding any other way of life except from the perspective of the master and there is no opportunity to make "action-guiding" judgments of one's own. All that the slaves can do is reverse the evaluative polarity of the existing antonymic pairs. In this regard, Steven Connor (1989) notes that in its defense of the colonized and marginalized, critical theory must be "prepared to surrender its sense of its own territorial right to codify and manage the margins, determining the conditions under which speech from the margins is possible." This must be done in order to avoid what Connor calls the "romance of the marginal" that leads to "a Manichean universe of absolute opposites which is barely responsive to the actual complexities and overdeterminations of the situation under consideration" (236).

Michel Pêcheux has constructed a useful typology for understanding how discourses are engaged by various groups in contemporary social life. To *identify* with a discourse means that a group lies within the terms generated by the discourse; to *counter-identify* with a discourse means living within its governing structure of ideas but to reverse its terms; to *disidentify* with a discourse means going beyond

the structure of oppositions and sanctioned negations that it supplies. Part of what we mean by a politics and pedagogy of difference is captured by Pêcheux's notion of disidentification. To disidentify means to deny the very frames of references that split off the marginalized from the dominators and to create, in pedagogical terms, new vocabularies of resistance that do not separate pedagogy from gender politics, values from aesthetics, pedagogy from power (see McLaren, 1993; Connor 1989).

In Benita Parry's terms (1987), a critical practice must do more than repossess "the signifying function appropriated by colonialist representation" or demystify or deform the rhetorical devices that "organize colonialism's discursive field." Rather, the founding concepts of colonialism's "received narratives" and the "monolithic figures and stereotypes of colonialist representations" must be refused. For Parry, resistance must include a critique of imperialism that does not treat race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as identical forms of oppression and that enables counterdiscourses to develop that are able to displace imperialism's dominant system of knowledge (28).

While the construction of disidentificatory discourses seems the most urgent option for critical educators, there is a danger in the possible abandonment of a universal application of the principles of freedom and justice in an attempt to get outside the metanarratives of value and morality. We need, in other words, to ground our theory of resistance (counterhegemony) as we struggle to negotiate among competing discourses and among multiple centers of identity. We court disaster unless we realize that totality and universality should not be rejected outright, but only when they are used unjustly and oppressively as global, all-encompassing, and all-embracing warrants for thought and action in order to secure an oppressive regime of truth. This is why the development of counterpublic spheres should not just occur in spaces outside and in opposition to the state (Bennett 1990), but also within the spaces of contradiction that exist in the larger social order. A politics of difference needs to sustain, develop, and exploit "the multiple contradictions generated within state bureaucracies" (239). In order to be able to appropriate the possibilities generated by these contradictions, we need to have a moral, ethical, and political ground—albeit a provisional one—from which to negotiate among multiple interests. Unless we have some provisional narrative of liberation, we can easily and unknowingly establish pedagogies and research practices that fall prey to the very error that critical educators seek to correct, that duplicate the original silencing of the Other, that replicate the

concepts and systems of power they seek to revoke, that relegitimize the very terms they seek to reject.

That is, by repudiating domination without at the same time establishing some ethical bearings for a transcultural struggle for freedom, critical pedagogy and research practices could recover such domination in different forms. The pedagogies and research practices that both carry and are carried by this vision need not be so strategically pure that they checkmate mechanisms of oppression in every instance; rather they offer oppositional spaces for students to take up identificatory subject positions that speak to strategies and tactics of liberation and politically empowering forms of address and social practices. We need to ask these questions: Are our pedagogies and research practices built upon a normative backdrop that privileges Eurocentric and patriarchal representations and interests? Are our multicultural and feminist pedagogies and research practices mortgaged to theoretical formulations that, however deconstructed, still reaffirm the primacy of Western individualism, patriarchy, and class privilege?

As the work of Paulo Freire makes clear, a postcolonial pedagogy and politics of research must always be tied conceptually, politically, and ethically to a larger pedagogy of liberation (McLaren and Leonard, 1993; McLaren and Lankshear, 1994). In this context, resistance to domination and oppression must consist of more than a reactive transvaluation of dominant forms of knowledge and social practices—more than moral injunctions against dominant evaluative judgments and cultural forms. As long as resistance is reactive it positions itself as “other-centered” discourse (Redding 1990). Within a larger pedagogy of liberation, resistance must be an active, and not a reactive, transvaluation of dominant perspectives in order for it to constitute a project of possibility. It must be active if it is to generate new “action-guiding” perspectives that can allow cultural workers to escape the still invisible logic of domination that continues to underwrite many anticolonialist struggles and resistances.

In our attempts to understand the Other we do not need to take shelter in a universal citadel that houses Eurocentric, patriarchal, and colonialist narratives—one that stands above the messy terrain of textual, cultural, and geopolitical specificity or that removes us from the daily concrete struggles that characterize contemporary social life. However, as critical educators we do need to accept the responsibility that comes with giving the world meaning and for providing spaces for subjects to understand the literalness of the reality in which their subjectivities are inscribed, the contexts through which such a reality is articulated, and experiences which are imbricated in contradictory, complex, and

changing vectors of power. We need oppositional pedagogical and research spaces for upsetting the grudging banality of mainstream educational encounters and for producing alternate subject positions informed by provisional and collective visions about what might constitute the public good.

We must be aware of the controlling cultural mode of our own research and pedagogies and the ways, often multifarious and unwitting, in which our students and our relationship to them become artifacts of the epistemes that shape the direction of our theorizing. We need to follow Edward Said (1983) in condemning the endless celebration of difference and otherness in a manner that smothers the connections between the construction and legitimation of discourses of the center and margins and the construction of empire. We must refuse, as well, textualism's failure to situate adequately discourses in relationships of power and hierarchies of domination. In addition, we need to eschew what Gayatri Spivak calls "reverse ethnocentrism" that, according to Robert Young (1990), evokes the nativist position "through a nostalgia for a lost or repressed culture [that idealizes] the possibility of that lost origin being recoverable in all its former plenitude without allowing for the fact that the figure of the lost origin, the 'other' that the colonizer has repressed, has itself been constructed in terms of the colonizer's own self-image" (168). With this perspective in mind, it is important that the postcolonial educator not fall into the trap, mentioned by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991), of unwittingly joining a *comprador* intelligentsia of Western-trained intellectuals who "mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery"—who posit unitary cultures of difference over against a monolithic West—that is, who essentialize and romanticize difference and simply recode the other in another story of neocolonialism (348). The latter amounts to little more than education as the seduction of the West.

Paulo Freire's experience of exile from his native Brasil—his "borrowed reality of exile," as he puts it—and his work in literacy campaigns throughout the world (Brazil prior to 1964, Chile, Nicaragua, Guinea-Bissau, São Tome, Cabo Verde, Principe, and Tanzania) has taught us something about the process of colonization. It has taught us that there are specific and distinctive reading practices for making sense of the world, and although these are not homogeneous, they possess a definite geopolitical and discursive locus. One such locus is the physical border that separates one nation from another and the discursive borders-within-borders that demarcate those privileged zones in which identities are differentially inscribed. Such dominant practices for reading the word and the world are to a large extent tied to the

struggle for and the decline of empire—and to the ways in which the marginalized, the peripheralized, and the oppressed have attempted to resist reading practices that have been imposed by colonizer nations.

Perhaps the similarity that exists between European and American machineries of domination and structures of economic and political power—what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari would call “forms of capture”—and the apparent freedoms enjoyed at the level of the popular can be accounted for by the fact that capitalism is essentially an axiomatic system based on the exchange and circulation of money. As a formal system that is immanent to social life in so far as it requires the routine exchange of equivalences rather than the adherence to any particular values, it can allow for multiple forms of desire and expression without fear or threat to its operation (Patton 1988, 92–93). Yet at the same time capitalism requires specific modes of yearning, specific structures of desire, specific sites of investment, and a specific politics of feeling in order to secure its goals—in order to make sure that individuals are reproduced as consuming subjects. It has additionally struck us that the attempt to impose a “new world order” by empires of the center is not necessarily tied to a coalition of armies, but can be secured, perhaps even more effectively, through the hyperreality of signs and images that are used by the mass-media empires of multinational corporations to market national identity and to assimilate differences under the guise of unity and solidarity. It is the nature and power of the various media apparatuses such as television that have largely effected the collapse between the local and the universal and created what Tony Fry (1988) calls “the drift to a convergence of a world order of economic systems and ecological abuse.” Fry strikes a hyperreal chord of menace and resignation when he notes: “Coca-Cola says it all—‘We are not a multinational but a multilocal’ ” (78).

Building an Arch of Social Dreaming

It is a historical irony that the 1980s marked the defeat of democracy by capitalism in the United States and the triumph of democracy over state communism in the Soviet Bloc countries.

—Douglas Keller, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (1990)

One purpose of this book is to construct the beginnings of a politics of solidarity that is respectful of identity politics but is more fundamentally concerned with establishing an ethics of commitment

that precedes asking others to reveal or justify their own politics of location. This idea is present in the work of Richard Kearney and is worth summarizing. Kearney (1988) writes that "An other in need makes the ethical demand upon me—'where are you?' before I ask of the other the epistemological question—'who are you?' " Kearney follows this with the astute reading: "We are responsible for the suffering of the other before we know his or her credentials" (362). According to Kearney, this entails a correlative priority of praxis over and the primacy of questions dealing with the good and the just over those dealing with epistemology, ontology, or identity politics. Ethical action is, however, not uncritical action. In fact, it effectively demands acts of ethical discernment before making epistemological deductions.

Kearney writes that "When a naked face cries 'where are you?', we do not ask for identity papers. We reply, first and foremost, 'here I am.' " This is, Kearney emphasizes, not a return ticket to the humanism of yesterday. We do not, Kearney notes, need to go back to Sartre's cult of autonomous subjectivity in which the self is defined as an act of pure negation; rather we need to struggle to attain what Kearney refers to as an "ethical imagination." An ethical imagination is a fitting response to the postmodern condition because such an imagination entails deconstructive criticism but goes beyond it. It is "an imagination able to respond to *here I am*, even in the midst of the euphoric frissons of apocalyptic mirror play" (364). In other words, it poses a response to the signifying systems of play and parody, *différance* and dissemination, aporia and apocalypse, because the fact of the other will never let the ethical imagination rest. Perhaps it is a *neo-modern* rather than *post-modern*, response (see the chapter by McLaren, p. 278).

The face-to-face relation between self and other is not a ideological position but rather an ethical *disposition*. The "I" is disposed to speaking in solidarity with the other, not, we should emphasize, *as* the other. Kearney notes that the face-to-face is not a matter of two self-constituted subjects entering into a rapport of mutual presence, but rather "entails an ethical proximity of self to other which undercuts the comfortable notion of a co-presence" (452). It also "transcends the exclusiveness of 'I-Thou' intimacies" (452). It is always a contingent relation that "dispossesses me, decentres me, and by extension, disposes me to be an ethical subject-in-process (in Kristeva's sense)—a self always imbricated in a narrative temporality wherein its difference from itself, and the difference between itself and the other as *face*, is essential" (465). Kearney's phrase, "here I stand" always implicates a 'we' in the "I" and a 'there' in the "here." In this way, the ethical statement "I stand"

surpasses the epistemological statement “I think” since the “I” derives from the call of the other (“where are you?”) and can be understood to mean “I stand up for and in for the other.” As Kearney puts it, “We cannot subscribe to apocalyptic emptiness because we cannot renege on our responsibility to the other” (365).

This collection of essays is an attempt to pose some questions about the politics of schooling, educational research, and the construction of historical agency that can perhaps lay some groundwork for an arch of social dreaming—that can reintroduce the practices of the ethical imagination and a politics of solidarity and social transformation into what Hegel called our *Sittlichkeit*, our *shared social customs* and everyday cultural practices.

However, a postcolonial pedagogy and research practice avoids a collusion with the antinomies of essential oppositions such as self/other by refusing the Hegelian foundationalism of positing the self-identical ground of all difference. In this context, self-identity must always be understood as a situated practice and not as an inviolable, self-contained, and unified state as if there exists some uniform representationality or metaphysical edition of ourselves that can be won—as marketplace logic tells us—through hard work, perseverance, and self-sufficiency. The practice of critical pedagogy and critical theory have created an important crucible for reformulating and transforming both the meaning and direction of identity politics. In this time of momentous geopolitical transformation, we are witnessing a congruence of the space of subjectivity with a prefigured space of nationalist hegemonic unity. Within such a crucible, the vocabularies of the old left and new left brush vigorously against each other, sometimes merging into hybrid categories, more frequently clashing. Such a context also invites a postcolonial praxis to emerge that avoids the current politics of blame and guilt undergirding separatist attempts at critical pedagogy and research. The ideological-sensitive field of critical pedagogy must—in the domain of the academy and elsewhere—guard against its appropriation and reinscription by the discourses of liberal humanism. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990) provides one example of such reinscription involving the notion of “interdisciplinary.” Once a straight counterdiscourse, the term has now been co-opted in such a way that it has been emptied of its emancipatory possibilities. She writes:

The notion is usually carried out in practice as the mere juxtaposition of a number of different disciplines together. In such a politics of pluralist exchange and dialogue, the concept of “inter” (trans)formation and growth is typically reduced to a question of

proper accumulation and acquisition. The disciplines are simply added, put next to one another with their boundaries kept intact; the participants continued happily to speak within their expertise, from a position of authority. It is rare to see such a notion stretched to the limits so that the fences between disciplines are pulled down. Borderlines remain then strategic and contingent, as they constantly cancel themselves out. (4)

The borders between disciplines are often surreptitiously kept in place, even in so-called interdisciplinary programs that fall under the category of “cultural studies.” A postcolonial pedagogy and research practice requires the dismantling of discursive borders and the opening up of what Homi Bhabha (1988) calls a space of translation that both accepts and regulates the moment of intervention in history. For Bhabha, the space of translation refers to the creation of a temporal space in which the act or event of theory “becomes the *negotiation* of contradictory and antagonistic instances” in which “hybrid sites and objectives of struggle” may be won. The hybrid moment of political change is a temporal space of rearticulation and translation “of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both” (13).

Bhabha notes that Western discourses of theoretical knowledge—even within various strands of critical theory—can serve as strategies of containing the Other, foreclosing on the Other, and turning the Other into a “‘fantasy’ of a certain cultural space” (16) within a “closed circle of interpretation.” In such instances:

The “Other” loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its “desire,” to split its “sign” of identity, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. However impeccably the content of an “other” culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its *location* as the “closure” of grand theories, the demand that, in analytical terms, it be always the “good” object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination and is the most serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory (16).

There is always a tension that exists within critical theory between its institutional containment and its revisionary force. One way out of this dilemma, suggests Bhabha, is to relocate the referential and institu-

tional demands of such theoretical work not in the domain of cultural diversity but rather in the sphere of cultural difference. In order to maximize the emancipatory possibilities of postcolonial theory, we need another site for theory—the site of cultural difference. Whereas, Bhabha notes, cultural diversity places culture as an object of imperial knowledge, as “unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations,” cultural difference “is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as ‘knowledgeable,’ authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification” (18). That is, it is a “process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity” (18). This distinction is important.

Unlike cultural diversity, cultural difference calls into question the authority of culture as a knowledge of referential truth. The enunciation of cultural difference displaces cultural meaning into a time a cultural uncertainty and representational undecidability—a “zone of occult instability” and fecund hybridity where the subject of enunciation is split and where mimetic and transparent meaning and reference are ruptured and made relentlessly ambivalent. Cultural difference speaks to a necessary ambivalence in the act of interpreting cultural meaning. It also refers to a liminal zone of both translation and negotiation which ruptures the homogeneous, serial time of Western narrative structure with its imperialist forms of Othering and enables oppressed peoples to “negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference” (22) in order to rehistoricize and read anew the meaning of their lives within a praxis of emancipation. It is to the construction of liminal zones of translation and negotiation that a practice of postcolonial pedagogy and research aspires (McLaren, 1995).

Overview of the Essays

The essays in this book fall into no neat disciplinary divisions or categories of theory versus practice. The “border play” is a large part of their intent and engagement.

Henry Giroux’s chapter, which introduces the rest, makes the Foucauldian point that discourse is not language seen as symbolic representation of reality. As David Jones and Stephen Ball write in their chapter, discourse does violence to things, it is an imposition. Giroux is concerned that the demands for commonsense clarity and unambiguous language, many from critical and progressive educational

theorists, in the end accede to the power of the symbol to represent "reality" and ignore the fact that theory is *produced* and that in this production lies the possibilities for new expressions and norms of difference, negotiation, and resistance. Whose clarity? Whose ambiguity? In a fitting beginning for the essays to come, Giroux makes the production, texts, and practices of critical educational research themselves subjects of critical theory and educational research.

Like Giroux, much of contemporary critical theory is concerned with discourse, discursive practices, and power, and thus, many of the authors represented in this book make discourse a central problematic. David Jones and Stephen Ball focus specifically on one, though certainly not the only, perspective on discourse, that of Foucault. While wary of any simple-minded generation of "implications," Jones and Ball point to a number of Foucauldian concerns that might shape an educational research agenda.

Nick Burbules's treatment of ideology-critique, an important element in historical and contemporary varieties of critical theory, analyzes the many meanings of ideology and the implicit educational theories they assume. Burbules is ultimately interested in overcoming divisions between knowers, the process of knowing, the known, and the consequences of inquiry. He advocates a pedagogical view of ideology-critique that requires individuals to go beyond critique to the consideration of emancipatory ends.

Joe Kincheloe explores the borders between action research and postmodernism. For Kincheloe, action research is a logical educational extension of postmodern critical social theory. In stark contrast to "policy studies," whose aim is to provide "useful," expert knowledge for institutional planning, the core of critical action research involves its participatory and communally discursive structure and the cycle of action and reflection it initiates. The knowledge enabled through such reflexive and shared study leads not to bureaucratic directives, but, more important, to the possibility for emancipatory change, as Kincheloe puts it, "knowledge with the potential to wreak havoc."

Margaret LeCompte explores similar themes in her chapter on critical collaborative research. Moving deftly between an examination of the historical roots and traditions of action research and her own journey as a researcher, LeCompte faces head-on how issues of power, agenda, and voice distinguish and make more difficult the transition from action research to *critical, collaborative* research.

These issues are echoed in the next several chapters. Ron Sultana reminds us that the positivist and interpretivist emphasis on description fails to account for the "silences" in social reality, what cannot or does

not get said in descriptive accounts. Sultana's essay explores the political implications behind the epistemology and ontology of ethnography and echoes Burbules's concern for a kind of research that occurs *with*, rather than *on*, others and is thus informed by a dialogue aimed at mutual understanding.

Kathleen Weiler also focuses on "silences" in texts. She examines the oral-history narratives of women and stresses the need to go beyond simple description through an analysis of the oppositions, gaps, and contradictions that emerge between our memories of the past and the material and symbolic contexts in which these memories are shaped.

Finally in this section, Lynda Stone's chapter on feminist educational research wrestles with the twin aims of critique and change central to the critical tradition. Although Stone recounts the multiple varieties of feminism and critical theory and the problematic history of their association, she also argues for an "*overt politics*, an endeavor to get beyond the skirmishes of the left. . . a proposal for educational alliance. . . that allows for significant and continuing theoretical differences yet allows for a praxiological 'coming together.' "

The normalization of poverty and violence in our cities and schools give us good reason to make such alliances. Yet to know what and how to make real, transformative change is itself opaque. David Jones's essay on the discourses of the urban school seeks to make problematic the assumption that "to know is to improve." In this Foucauldian view, Jones ably demonstrates how specific "school improvement" policies, practices, and texts in England and Wales can be read as species of contested discourses shaped by normative strategies of power, biopower, and archived constraint.

Phil Carspecken offers an analysis at the school level of an experiment in progressive educational change. Carspecken's careful analysis of the pragmatics of speech from the perspective of someone who was at once a researcher, participant, and political actor is a fine example of research *as* education, ideology-critique *as* pedagogical participation.

Lois Weis's essay echoes concerns with voice, silencing, and listening in discourse. Her examination of how identity is constructed through the "discursive underground" of white, working-class, male practices in high school, while reminiscent of Paul Willis's work on the "lads," engages all typifications of the "Other."

Wendy Kohli and Carlos Alberto Torres give us examples of the possibilities and constraints on critical research and progressive educational change in concrete settings. Where Torres rightly describes the difficulties associated with doing a Freirean-based model of

participatory action research and popular education from within the educational agencies of a capitalist state, Kohl's essay on critical educational research and reform in the Soviet Union reminds us that *all* forms of centralized power are hostile to emancipatory educational and social ends.

The interview between Paulo Freire and Moacir Gadotti, published here in English for the first time, is a model of honest dialogue between democratic educators. Reflective, humble, yet resilient and unflinching, Freire, as always, grounds the critical spirit in a pedagogy of hope.

Finally, Peter McLaren's article on critical ethnography demonstrates the shortcomings of mainstream qualitative and ethnographic inquiry, while echoing the need for critical educational researchers to enter into relations of cooperation, mutuality, and reciprocity with those whom we research, as well as one another. McLaren's sustained treatment of the body helps us break through one of the most persistent images of mainstream inquiry, "the talking head," and revision a form of embodied inquiry in which desire, particularity, solidarity, and hope are as important as truth.

These essays suggest, indeed insist, that we rediscover, even reinvent, our self-images as researchers, our practices of research, and our ideas of the aims of inquiry. They present models, ideas, examples, and theories to prod that reflexivity, but have no interest in offering the false solace of method. Where emancipation is the interest, all methods give way to dialogue. Our authors hope and believe that such dialogue is possible and invite your participation.

Peter L. McLaren and James M. Giarelli

Notes

* Slightly altered sections of this introduction will appear in Christine Sleeter and Peter McLaren, eds., *Multiculturalism and Critical Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press) and Peter McLaren, Rhonda Hammer, David Sholle, and Susan Reilly, *A Critical Pedagogy of Representation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers). Some sections of this introduction have appeared in Peter McLaren, "Multiculturalism and the Postmodern Critique: Towards a Pedagogy of Resistance and Transformation," *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (1993): 118-46 (which also appeared in Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders*, New York: Routledge); Peter McLaren, "Critical Pedagogy, Multiculturalism, and the

Politics of Risk and Resistance: A Response to Kelly and Portelli," *Journal of Education* 173 no. 3 (1991): 29-59 (which also appeared in Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools*, 2nd edition, White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, Inc. 1994; and James M. Giarelli, "Critical Theory and Educational Research: An Introduction," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 5, no. 1 (1992): 3-5.

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