

## **Feminist Critical Pedagogy and Critical Theory Today**

### **Feminist Critical Pedagogy**

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Current Feminist Pedagogy is at a crossroads. One force draws it to an ethnocentric foundationalist emancipatory commitment, while using postmodern rhetoric which negates essentialism, foundationalism and any sort of universalism and collectivism. A different force directs it to save some of the Enlightenment's ideals while criticizing central elements of present day's postmodern discourse and paying tribute to others. This trend manifests a weaker ethnocentrism than the other. In some aspects it is theoretically weaker than the separatist essentialist and ethnocentrist version of Feminist Pedagogy which negates altogether the humanist emancipatory commitment in education. In both versions, one represented by Kathleen Weiler, the other by Elizabeth Ellsworth, present-day Feminist Pedagogy's attitude towards Critical Theory and its realization as Critical Pedagogy sheds light on its essence, goals, possibilities, and limitations. Both versions of Feminist Pedagogy are philosophically problematic and politically dangerous, as they lack a general Critical Theory or a philosophical framework that will protect them from being drawn into a strategic-instrumentalist orientation, which by definition is fundamentally violent. In the absence of anti-instrumentalist and dialogical elements, they are drawn to serve and reflect the repression typical of other versions of strategic-oriented education. Feminist Critical Pedagogy and Feminist Pedagogy do not contribute to the advance of emancipatory counter-education and for an essentially more human reality.

Feminist Critical Pedagogy, however, does have many critical and potentially emancipatory elements, primarily because it is a genuine political and philosophical challenge to Western hegemonic educational ideologies. It questions educational praxis as well as education's philosophical, psychological, and gender context. The differences in feminist philosophies are responsible for the differences in the differences in feminist pedagogies. Basically, these differences spring from the different postmodern versions they are committed to. According to Weiler, "Feminist theory, like other contemporary approaches, validates differences, challenges universal claims to truth, and seeks to create social transformation in a world of shifting and uncertain meanings. In education, these profound shifts are evident on two levels: first, at the level of practice, as excluded and formerly silenced groups challenge dominant approaches of learning and to definitions of knowledge; and second, at the level of theory, as modernist claims to universal truth are called into question" (Weiler 1991, 449-450). Feminist Critical Pedagogy is a progressive element within the current realm of self-evidence. However, it is meaningless without a general concept of the current totality, the powers that produce, control, and challenge this totality, and intersubjectivity whereby the feminist movement, in all its versions, is but a dynamic element within other powers. The problem of constituting a general Critical Theory, or for that matter of constituting a defensible theory of negating a general Critical Theory as part of reality and its change, challenges today's Feminist Critical Pedagogy. Feminist Critical Pedagogy cannot escape this challenge, which emphasizes its importance, its weaknesses, and its dangers.

To a great extent "Feminist Pedagogy" (Weiler 1991, 449-474) is not to be understood outside the framework of Critical Theory. According to Kathleen Weiler, Feminist Pedagogy, as evolved in the United States, is a historical example of Critical

Pedagogy in action (Weiler 1991, p. 450). The Critical Pedagogy on which this kind of Feminist Pedagogy is based is explicitly conceived as having strong ties with, if not being constituted from Critical Theory. This connection is important in three respects: from the point of view of Feminist Pedagogy's self-understanding as an emancipatory project; from the view point of its self-understanding as an alternative to this paternalistic Critical Theory (and the paternalistic Critical Pedagogy derived from it); and the possibility of reformulating Critical Theory or Critical Pedagogy in light of some central elements in Feminist Pedagogy's critique of the humanist emancipatory project and the postmodern discourse in general.

Below I will refer to Feminist Pedagogy as different from Critical Pedagogy, noting that at least one trend is still committed to central elements of Critical Pedagogy. As the quotation from Weiler shows, rhetorically here too the detachment from Critical Pedagogy is complete. However, in contrast to its explicit claims, philosophically the split is not yet total, in the absence of an alternative philosophical framework. In this sense, it is justified to refer to this trend as Feminist Critical Pedagogy. This is despite the fact that at its margins the break with Critical Theory and paternalistic Critical Pedagogy is a constitutive principle of the new orientation. Its declared aim is to constitute daily pedagogical situations that empower students, to demystify canonical knowledge, and to show the ways in which relations of domination oppress the subjects in terms of gender, race, class, and many other characteristics of their difference (Luke and Gore 1992, 1).

Weiler represents an almost general feminist understanding of the relations between Critical Pedagogy and Critical Theory and the way to constitute a Feminist Critical Pedagogy. According to Weiler, Critical Pedagogy in general, and Freire's version in particular, are based on a vision of social transformation. Feminist

Pedagogy is presented within this framework, and it also shares the assumptions about oppression and the possibilities of historical change. Implicitly negating Marx's theory on the relations between base and superstructure, Weiler claims that the two pedagogies share an assumption that human existence, in specific material conditions, is framed within repressive conditions which are part of consciousness; both pedagogies understand consciousness as something which is more than the sum of dominant discourses. Both view consciousness as having a critical potential, and both conceive human beings as subjects and as functioning within historical horizons. At the same time, both are committed to a vision of emancipatory possibilities, to a better world where (Weiler 1991, 450) justice prevails in the end.

Within the framework of Feminist Pedagogy, some emphasize the differences between Feminist Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy to the point of complete detachment, and some try to maintain some of its central elements within the framework of Feminist Critical Pedagogy. The critique of Critical Theory and "paternalistic" Critical Pedagogy takes place on two levels, the political one and the philosophical. This division is important for understanding the central problems of today's Critical Pedagogy. Oppositional stands on the political level largely incubate and obscure basic agreement with the philosophical conceptions of Critical Theory. By contrast, relatively minor disagreements on the political level sometimes hide commitments to basically different philosophical projects. This is partially elaborated by the degree of postmodern and multiculturalist influences on Feminist Pedagogy, namely the extent to which Feminist Pedagogy is framed within the framework of the Enlightenment's project. In this sense, without always being aware, two contrasting feminist pedagogies have developed within the framework of Feminist Pedagogy,

even if politically they share the same project. These may be termed Feminist Critical Pedagogy, and Post-critical Feminist Pedagogy.

Elizabeth Ellsworth, a central figure of the Feminist Pedagogy discourse, started her project from within Critical education (Ellsworth 1987, 33). She criticizes Critical Pedagogy with a postmodern rhetoric and negates Critical Theory and the arrogance of the Enlightenment's entire emancipatory project. Ellsworth's negation of metaphysics, foundationalism, and metanarratives amounts to anti-intellectualism and abandonment of every speculative theory or even any general theory. In this she represents the abandonment of the critical spirit and the struggle for human emancipation. No wonder that Ellsworth founds her critique on her "personal experience". The guiding "experience", which replaces reflection and the "personal" or "subjectivity" and its drives, strivings, and emotions as an alternative to the speculative reflective mind, do not represent Nietzschean alternative another unmediated/manipulated source, drive, and telos. To my mind, she pretends to liberate the feminist educational project from a defined theoretical stand, but she inevitably enslaves the emancipatory spirit to dogmatic essentialist solipsism/ethnocentrism. She dismisses any theory that is rationally dependable and exposed to the sort of critique that modern patriarchalism constructed as elitist knowledge which was manifested, tested, or realized violently within the framework of human, class, national, or other emancipatory projects. This critique which also refers to the horizons, orientations, and foundations of technological and scientific developments, is important and targets the basic problems of Critical Pedagogy. However, it does so in a way that is philosophically wrong and politically dangerous.

Ellsworth attacks the nativity of Critical Pedagogy's concept of dialogue. She emphasizes its repressive-paternalistic dimensions, as manifested in the Critical

Pedagogies of Freire, McLaren, Shor, and Giroux, which are founded on one dimension of Critical Theory in its first stage of development. They are committed to positive utopianism and are thus potentially repressive. Ellsworth criticizes, for example, Giroux's concept of dialogue in the classroom, where students are supposed to manifest "trust, partnership and commitment to develop human conditions" (Giroux 1988, 72). An important element in Giroux's theory is that the specific assertions of his positive utopianism are not predetermined. However, even by his theory the community taking part in the dialogue must agree on the purpose of the dialogue. According to his scheme, all voices and differences are united in their efforts to identify and challenge certain moments of human suffering and are obliged to overcome the conditions that reproduce this kind of suffering (Giroux 1988, 72). Ellsworth denounces the illusion of such a dialogue and challenges the oppressive potential of the "we" that is supposed to be a precondition to the revolt of the oppressed, as characterized by Giroux and the other patriarchs of Critical Pedagogy (Ellsworth 1989, 315). Like Judith Butler, Ellsworth emphasizes the omnipotence of social and cultural manipulations of the consciousness, its theories about the world and about the self. However, if the subject is totally constructed (Butler 1993, p. 124), there is no way to escape, criticize, or genuinely change it for the better. This is where this trend, represented by Ellsworth's postmodernism, differs from the other trend, represented by Weiler, who shares with Freire and other critical thinkers the Enlightenment's concept of the autonomy and reflective potential of men and women in their communities: "Thus, like Freirean pedagogy, Feminist Pedagogy is grounded in the vision of social change. And like Freirean pedagogy, Feminist Pedagogy rests on truth claims of the primacy of experience and consciousness that are grounded in historically situated social change movements" (Weiler 1991, 456). However, within

the postmodern setting of both trends in present-day Feminist Pedagogy there is no way of challenging the “experience”, and the “world” as a metaphor for intersubjectivity in given conditions that have to be critically reconstructed, developed, and rationally changed as part of an ongoing dialogue. This is a Utopia that is daily negated, but the retreat from theoretically and politically challenging the totality of being is not a way of saving individuality, but rather the opposite; it surrenders the idea and the human potential of the autonomy of the subject by seeking refuge in dogmatic solipsism. By so doing this position abandons human need and potentials of solidarity (non-violent intersubjectivity) and transcendence (overcoming the self-evidence). A dialogic self-constitution of persons realizing themselves in the public and private sphere as a manifestation of “the wholly other” is threatened much more than the present order of things in the Post-critical Feminism that Ellsworth suggests.

Like many other radical feminists of the last decade, following Michel Foucault, Ellsworth tries to avoid being committed to a project that is devoted “to control justice and truth”, as part of a non-hierarchical feminist alternative to the elitism and the immanent violence of the modern rationalistic emancipatory project. As a realization of this alternative, Ellsworth’s Feminist Pedagogy is suggests “a politics of partial narratives”(Ellsworth 1989, 303), and it is of vital importance for her to separate her Feminist Pedagogy from Critical Pedagogy (ibid., 116). Even Critical Pedagogy’s attempt to proceed from Marcuse’s ontological and epistemological universal assumptions and obligations to more modest assumptions, like Habermas’s ambition to develop the critical discursive abilities of the speech community (Habermas 1981), as pedagogically presented in the Critical Pedagogy of Stanley Aronowitz, Wolfgang Klafki, and others, is denounced and negated. Perhaps because of Habermas’s aim of

synthesizing subjectivity and intersubjectivity, *Zwekrationalitaet* and *Vertrationalitaet*, which brings him to the point of representing himself as the one to develop and correct the “old Critical Theory” (Habermas 1981, 562), it is criticized as a violent alternative that is committed to silencing the different “voices” of the students (Ellsworth 1989, 304) with different cultural, gender, or racial backgrounds. However, in my view, her attempt to escape what is conceived as the immanent violence of every “theory” and enter the safe haven of the self-evidence of the oppressed or abstracted nihilism does not represent any anti-elitism or alternative spiritual power. On the contrary, this stand is to be understood as the manifestation of the power dynamics and the conceptual limitations of the system against which this Feminist Pedagogy is supposed to rebel. Such a response to postmodern rhetoric fashion does not represent a new spirit and does not open a space for a hermeneutics of the individual and collective self, nor is it a struggle against the mythisations of current power relations in the present realm of self-evidence. Ellsworth’s alternative has no room for struggle for more equality, justice, freedom, and understanding, and therefore not for happiness either insofar as it does not constitute space for anti-collectivism which seeks human solidarity and other dimensions of negative utopianism that condition the type of dialogue representing “the heavenly Eros” of Plato or “negative imagination” of Adorno and the humanist tradition in its best. For this tradition, universalism, emancipation, and general theory were unsupported by individualism within non-repressive intersubjectivity that constitutes, and constantly reformulates and transcends, the individuals’ potentialities and realities. The negative impulse of the dialogue is part of human solidarity implicit in this tradition, and it acquires meaning only by realizing itself rationally within the totality of the world’s

components, their concepts and subjects. Post Critical Pedagogy abandons the critical impulse, with its denunciation of intellectualism, universalism, and “metaphysics”.

It is difficult to offer a sharp distinction between this trend in Feminist Pedagogy and other versions of Feminist Pedagogy that conceive themselves as being within the framework of Critical Pedagogy. They too are trying to develop an anti-elitist pedagogical practice founded on the “voice” and the self-evident knowledge of the group emphasizing their gender with its different dimensions, presenting it as the most advanced version of Critical Pedagogy. The silenced voice that receives legitimacy is supposed to evolve into a reflection on alternative life possibilities and as such contains real emancipatory dimensions. However, this potential is not realized since this version of postmodernism is regularly drawn into an automatic negation of theoretical and speculative work. In this sense, this version of Critical Theory does not have any “Critical Theory” - only an alternative educational praxis. Feminist Critical Pedagogy, however, is intellectually restless on this point. As Critical Theory’s rebellions pupils these women are still committed to reflection and to critique, and as postmodernists they are bona fide elitists. This raises the problematics of the position of the intellectual and her authority within the framework of Feminist Pedagogy. While paying tribute to the experience and the knowledge of the oppressed reassures the supremacy of the (feminist) intellectual as an educator, “feminist educators like Fisher and Bunch accept their authority as intellectuals and theorists, but they consciously attempt to construct their pedagogy to recognize and encourage the capacity of their students to theorize and to recognize their own power” (Weiler 1991, 462). In this sense there is no difference between the “paternalistic” and “authoritative” dimensions of Freire’s Critical Pedagogy and those of Feminist Critical Pedagogy. The foundation of the authority claimed here is the good intentions

of the feminist intellectual, and this is quite a weak justification: “the authority of the feminist teacher as intellectual and theorist finds expression in the goal of making students themselves theorists of their own lives...” (ibid.). Other feminists question this position as “simply a patriarchal mode of gaining and maintaining power, a way of negating women’s everyday experience, a means of separating some women from the rest...” (Fischer 1984, 202).

The political resemblance between this Feminist Critical Pedagogy and the rhetoric of Post-critical Feminist Pedagogy enables the latter, as in the case of Ellsworth, to take advantage of the former. The important educational work of Feminist Critical Pedagogy, which is represented by women like Gore and Weiler (that is, explicitly anti-elitist and non-academic), is ultimately forced to serve the academic success of the feminist elitism that Ellsworth represents. In representing an elitist alternative, Ellsworth does not offer an alternative to naive positive utopianism nor any alternative educational theory (Burbules and Rice 1991, 399).

Ellsworth suggests a feminist-oriented multiculturalism that demands/envision the peaceful coexistence of different communities and identities which are committed to and constituted by different knowledge, criteria to judge knowledge, interests, and goals. Within the framework she proposes, the different bodies of knowledge and the different conceptions about knowledge are all conceived as legitimate and incommensurable, and there is no way to evaluate one or some of them as better, valid, or invalid. The aim of education should be, according to Ellsworth, the nurturing of competence for cooperation across differences that will constitute temporary, local, and partial agreements for the sake of “the common good”. Under these conditions, according to Ellsworth, women will be emancipated. However, she cannot guarantee the success of deconstructing universals, and praise of the local,

partial, and temporary will not be successful unless the category of “woman” is totally dissolved. Within the framework of this project, “woman” as a category and as a specific and concrete identity might disintegrate into innumerable identities, interests, and knowledge that will strive to fully realize themselves. They might be objects for endless deconstruction and border-crossings of identities that are never within themselves, never have a “self”, never are a concrete “identity” or subject. Linda Alcoff admits this danger of extreme deconstruction of essences and identities for unrepressed feminism, and she looks for a Foucaultian philosophical and political solution within the framework of “cultural feminism” (Alcoff 1988, 406), which has important educational potential that should have attracted more attention within postmodern Feminist Pedagogy. As Seyla Benhabib observes, the “strong” postmodernist version of the “Death of the Subject” is not compatible even with the goals of feminism (Benhabib 1995, p. 20). Benhabib’s claim is valid against postmodern feminism as reflected in Ellsworth Post-Critical Feminist Pedagogy when she asserts-asks: “If this view of the self is adopted, is there any possibility of changing those ‘expressions’ which constitute us?” (Benhabib 1995, p. 21). Therefore she negates postmodern feminism’s understanding of the subjectivity as merely extensions of our histories on the one hand, and the postmodern essentialism in its multicultural and solipsist versions on the other. While accepting parts of the postmodern critique of humanist universalism (Benhabib 1992, p. 3), as a woman committed to feminist and human emancipation in general, Benhabib resists the attempts to abandon the Enlightenment’s Utopia of human emancipation as a rational process and sees it as a point of departure for a radical transformation of the present (Benhabib 1995, p. 30). This stand is a starting point not only for criticizing post-

critical Feminist Pedagogy, but also for its critique as part of the kind of educational violence that counter-education or real Critical Pedagogy has to overcome.

### **The Importance of Feminist Critical Pedagogy's Critique**

Post-critical Feminist Pedagogy is an echo of postmodern rhetoric or functions as one of its manifestations. It does so in two versions that are theoretically incompatible but politically and rhetorically often amalgamated. The first, is feminist retreat from any “theory”, solidarity, and transcendence into the “self” as a contingent a network of meaningless strivings, passions, and needs that reflect powers and structure that manipulate the self as their agent. Within this concept the abandoning of Critical Pedagogy's Utopia of dialogue, solidarity, and rational change of reality is negated with no Nietzschean alternative. The second version, which negates Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy's humanistic universalism, retreats into the realm of self-evidence of the marginalized thre controlled, controlled and the powerless. It abandons humanistic universalism and its Utopia, and introduces instead an unreflective optimism and functionalist instrumentalism. Instead of the “common good”, truth, beauty, or universal human needs and potentialities as a utopia that should be striven for and should empower the critique of its actual negation, this Post-critical Feminist Pedagogy represents the self-evidence, the false-conciseness and the impotence of the marginalized as foundations or “truth” to be empowered and directed against the self-evidence of the hegemonic ideology. In this educational framework critique is used as an anti-transformative element directed against the marginalized. Still, Post-critical Pedagogy is an important and valuable philosophical stand and pedagogical praxis.

The importance of Post-critical Feminist Pedagogy lies both in its ability to concretize the weakness of radical multiculturalism and in its justified and sharp critique of central elements of Critical Pedagogy. Both the radical and the more modest versions of Feminist Pedagogy, that remain within the framework of Critical Pedagogy have important critical remarks on patriarchal Critical Pedagogy and suggest important alternatives of their own.

Weiler sees Feminist Pedagogy as a perfected version of Critical Pedagogy. According to Weiler, the source of the chief problems of Critical Pedagogy is the modernistic conceptualizations of the Critical Pedagogy thinkers, who use concepts such as “class”, while the context of many of them, as in the case of Freire, contradicts the background and the possibilities of Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy, as the ones possible in technologically advanced countries. Weiler rightfully claims that even the dichotomy between oppressors and oppressed is too brute and should be problematized in Critical Pedagogy (Weiler 1991, 452). Another important element in this critique challenges the sexist attitude of Critical Pedagogy. Even if one can find some traces of it in Freire’s work, it is wrong to blame Shor, McLaren, and Giroux for it. This is politically-oriented rhetoric founded on a common philosophical ground, such as that concerned with the concept of human beings held by Carmen Luke, Jennifer Gore, Kathleen Weiler, and Henry Giroux.

Weiler aims at saving Critical Pedagogy’s emancipatory project via the Feminist Pedagogy (ibid., 455). She combines sensitivity to differences and personal experience as a founding element of knowledge (ibid., 463, 466) with the commitment to universal emancipation. However, in keeping with the fashionable rhetoric in postmodern and radical feminism, she negates “essentialism” and general Critical Theory, hence the concept of a certain “identity” that has to be emancipated.

She is on the verge of an antithesis on this matter, insofar as this stand is philosophically grounded. However, she avoids theoretical elaboration of this contradiction, which might lead to total refutation of the Enlightenment's emancipatory project, and therefore to the negation of Critical Pedagogy, to which she is explicitly committed.

A critique of Critical Pedagogy bordering on philosophical elaboration may be seen in the work of Carmen Luke. Luke rightfully seeks the source of Critical Pedagogy's problematic in its relations to Critical Theory. In our technological, social, and cultural context, what value can the Critical Theory of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse have, asks Luke (Luke 1992, 45). She shares Post-critical Feminist Pedagogy's critique of the pedagogical actualization of Critical Theory as leading to or based on androgynous essentialism and naive realism. Such an education leads to the quest for controlling the masses and activating them in a unified collective manner that will make "liberation" possible. She criticizes this stand as detached from real history and from the acknowledgment of real power relations and discourse (ibid.). However, at the same time she tries to avoid the kind of relativism into which Ellsworth and other postmodern Feminist Pedagogies are drawn, and she does not give up her modernist theoretical commitment to the power of grand narratives for reconstruction and creation. In my mind, to the extent that this Feminist Pedagogy remains critical, it stays within the philosophical dimensions of the pedagogy developed by current Critical Pedagogy's thinkers and adopts some elements, sensitivities, and targets of postmodern and feminist discourses within the framework of a humanistically-oriented emancipatory project.

### **Critical Theory's Critique of Feminist Critical Pedagogy**

The concept of reason of Critical Theory is very different from the one founding Feminist Critical Pedagogy and the Utopia of liberation by means of counter-education and revolution. In some respects, late Critical Theory is much closer to the concepts of reason held by Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jean Lyotard than to the ones held by Juergen Habermas, Kathleen Weiler, Carmen Luke, and Elisabeth Ellsworth. This issue is studied in *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*. The Critical Theory that was overlooked, both by Critical Pedagogy's thinkers and their rivals, is deciphering and reconstructing the historical development and the concrete social and cultural circumstances of the instrumentalization of reason as a non-reversible development. Within the framework of Critical Theory, it is elaborated that unless an unpredictable interference occurs, no good intentions and progressive talent of educators devoted to counter-education will be of much help in countering these developments. On the historical level, the instrumentalization of rationality is reconstructed as representing and serving the growing needs of technological progress and economic development. Instrumental reason becomes "a magic essence", and it is right to describe it as the coming back of *mythos*. In such a reality, there is no place for positive utopianism or for a positive critical stand towards the present order, its apparatuses and powers (Horkheimer 1974, p. 26). The constitution of an order that represents extreme and unchallenged rationality in such a context is irrational from traditional objective reason's point of view (ibid. 159). This rationality is realized by almost complete control of the psychic structure and the consciousness constitution of individuals and collectives. However, this does not mean that under such conditions there is no place for "pluralism" for false critical consciousness. From Critical Theory's point of view, this consciousness can be manifested in the naive

emancipatory project of “paternalist” Critical Pedagogy and in the alternative Critical Pedagogies like the one presented by Feminist and Multiculturalist Pedagogies. The historical reconstruction of Instrumental Rationality’s victory has an ontological dimension which is of vital importance for the possibilities of the grounding of the hermeneutics of the self and the possibilities of a new educational dialogue grounded in the sensitivity and understanding of “difference”.

Already in its first stage, the ontological dimension was central to Critical Theory in terms of the possibilities of emancipation and the success of counter-education in a reality where Instrumental Rationality is celebrating its victory. It is manifested, as an example, in Walter Benjamin’s *To the Critique of Violence* (1974), in which political violence is elaborated in the historical context where there is no place for redemption but where, at the same time, last reality is absent. The real is conceived within a framework in which history is just one of its moments.

To the fully developed Critical Theory, the return of the myth within the framework of Instrumental Rationality is even worse today than its ancient version in its penetrating possibilities (Adorno and Horkheimer 1985, 9). In this context, the erosion of the possibilities for the very existence of an autonomous subject, which Critical Theory thinkers understood as central for any alternative to the present reality, is totally neglected by Critical Pedagogy’s thinkers. This does not mean that Critical Theory’s thinkers abandoned Utopia, or that from here one should ignore the educational meanings, some of which are quite close to some central conceptions and sensitivities of current postmodernism. However, one should not ignore the fact that such a Critical Theory repudiates the central characteristics of Critical Pedagogy and its different alternatives.

In Feminist Critical Pedagogy the claim for liberation is grounded in a dialectical acceptance of the equality of different identities and cultures, and the very possibility of defending and developing the category of “feminism” or “woman” becomes an impossibility. As a result, the commitment to solidarity, as the possibility of developing and defending feminine identity and knowledge, is to be decided by symbolic and other manifestations of violence. This version of Critical Pedagogy, like other major trends in current Critical Pedagogy, did not succeed in synthesizing the problematics of essentialism, foundationalism, and transcendence, as well as the recognition of the “other’s” suffering, rights, and potentialities with the preconditions and claims of a philosophy demanding human reflectivity and emancipation.

Fully developed Critical Theory understood the realization of Enlightenment in our era as a mass deception within the framework of culture industry, in which the subject too is transformed into a commodity, including critical knowledge. The rationalization of all levels and dimensions of life and the progress of instruments and possibilities of controlling the subjects by the system (Poster 1989, 67) brought to its peak the use of the subject as a totally committed agent of reproduction of the realm of self-evidence. Under such conditions, it is impossible to escape the omnipotence of the system (Horkheimer 1974, 95-96). The historical reconstruction of dynamics suitable for the demolition of the ideal of the rational subject and its concrete possibilities is realized here on one level. On the other, theoretical, level, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, from the very beginning “the individual” is nothing but an illusion that normally serves the strengthening of the control over people’s consciousness and the construction of life possibilities that will enable the maximization of their productivity in the service of the system in which they are activated (ibid. 141). This productivity is conditioned by the degree of their normalization, and that is the real aim of

education. This two-level concept of Adorno and Horkheimer is in agreement with Benjamin's two-level concept of time, revolution, and redemption.

From this perspective, the consensus reached by the reflective subject taking part in the dialogue offered by Feminist Critical Pedagogy is naive, especially in light of its declared anti-intellectualism on the one hand, and its pronounced glorification of "feelings", "experience", and self-evident knowledge of the group on the other. Critical Pedagogy, in its different versions, claims to inhere and overcome the foundationalism and transcendentalism of Enlightenment's emancipatory and ethnocentric arrogance, as exemplified by ideology critique, psychoanalysis, or traditional metaphysics. Marginalized feminist knowledge, like the marginalized, neglected, and ridiculed knowledge of the Brazilian farmers, as presented by Freire or Weiler, is represented as the legitimate and relevant knowledge, in contrast to its representation as the hegemonic instrument of representation and education. This knowledge is represented as the foundation for an alternative to hegemonic education, and the knowledge it represents in the center as relevant, legitimate, and superior. To constitute and represent an identity is both desirable and a promised "successful" functioning within the framework of reality. However, neither the truth value of the marginalized collective memory nor knowledge is cardinal here. "Truth" is replaced here by knowledge whose supreme criterion is in the power of its being self-evident, namely in the potential productivity of its creative violence, while the dialogue in which adorers of "difference" take part is implicitly represented as one of the desired productions of this violence. According to my argument, in principle the marginalized and repressed self-evident knowledge has no advantage over the self-evident knowledge of the oppressors. Reliance on the knowledge of the weak, controlled, and

marginalized groups, on their memory and their conscious interests, is naive and dangerous, no less than reliance on hegemonic knowledge.

A pedagogy that overemphasizes the importance of the effectiveness of the revolutionary praxis and whose yardstick is power is not to be counted as part of Critical Education or Critical Pedagogy. A Critical Pedagogy that does not suffer from these weaknesses must present itself within the framework of the elaboration of the possibility of an alternative spirituality, and as part of an effort to transcend reality and the present realm of self-evidence.

### **The Educational Implications of Critical Theory**

The educational implications of Critical Theory draws on its metaphysical level which connects it to the philosophical tradition of Anaximander, Heraclitus, Plato, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault, but also to the tradition that includes the evolution from the time of Democritus and Aristotle to Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Freud. From here can be understood the deep link between Critical Theory and some central elements of postmodernism, as well as the elaboration of the basic contradiction between these two projects. Heidegger presented the human being who is called to struggle over realizing his/her authenticity as a captive of the play of being, which, in the advanced technological era, is hidden more than ever. However, Heidegger did not deny the possibility of an essential turn, though not the one frequently called “revolution”. Technological progress is understood by Heidegger as the “spiritual fall of the earth”, and his critique pinpoints one of humankind manifestations of retreat from human “destination” through the drift of *techne* into modern technology and the context that enables it. The “nihilism” of Western science

and technology demands, according to Heidegger, that one overlook the “meaning of being” and its hiding in the technological and scientific “progress” that mocks the human being. For Adorno and Horkheimer, Instrumental Rationality’s characteristics are very close to Heidegger’s characterization of reason and technology (Gur-Ze’ev 1996, 183). Yet Adorno and Horkheimer presented a general and systematic historical and contextual reconstruction of power apparatuses, symbolic dynamics, and manipulation instruments that constitute the conditions and the orientation of Westerners in the 20th century. Their reconstruction is historical and utopistic, but not of the kind presented by orthodox Marxism or Critical Pedagogy’s thinkers. Even if there is an important affinity between Critical Theory and the postmodern discourse regarding the understanding of apparatuses of truth production and regarding the understanding of the subject as an agent of the system and a manifestation of the system’s symbolic dynamics and power games, they differ in treating the socio-cultural network.

Foucault’s disclosure of power/knowledge relations, which are manifested institutionally and produce subjects to be researched, punished, taught, and administered, and the reproduction of the system does not totally contradict Critical Theory. The critical reconstruction of culture industry, for example, does not exclude Foucault’s research on clinics, prisons, and so forth, and the conclusions regarding the normalized subject and his/her possibilities for intellectual autonomy, “authenticity”, or “freedom” have much in common. The understanding of (instrumental) rationality as a dimension that is not an emancipator and does not promise equality and justice but greater control over human beings is another central element common to Foucault, Adorno, and Horkheimer. Even the surrender of traditional categories like “class”, estrangement, and “ideology critique” within the framework of a revolutionary theory

and praxis that promises liberation are common to both projects. There is no essential difference between concepts of power and signalization. However, there are important differences and they contain important educational implications.

Critical Theory that is committed to universal emancipation, in the sense that I have presented, does not necessarily have to become dogmatic and negate the plurality of narratives and the acknowledgment of the life or death struggle between different narratives that constitute the conceptual apparatuses and the consciousness of those enclosed within the horizons. Critical Theory has to acknowledge this plurality. However, this recognition must denote that it is not a mere plurality in which “everything goes”; it is possible and even necessary within the framework of a certain order that is to be reconstructed, criticized, and resisted.

The universality of capitalist production and the omnipotent globalizing power of technological progress and its needs are the foundation for the concrete appearance of “difference” today. They are the substrate of the obligatory and “objective” meaning of the power of fashion and the efficiency of the symbolic violence of narratives, identities, and different educational apparatuses. Critical Education should acknowledge it in the following manner. On the level where differences are denoted, the epistemological possibilities are determined by the violence of fashion and by the aggressiveness of educational practices. On the universal level, technological progress and capitalist development, as well as the local system’s constructions, enjoy universal validity on the one hand and an omnipotent compulsory dimension on the other, as it is manifested in the road nets, in the internet, or in realized principles of the market economy. The dialectic between these two levels determines the possibilities and limitations of human beings, as well as the constitution of their concrete and most specific life possibilities.

## **The Possibility of a Non-Repressive Critical Pedagogy**

The educational implications of this understanding are to be presented on two levels. On the first, educational implications are deflected from confronting the bottom depths of the constitution of the realms of self-evidence and the systems that reflect every realm of self-evidence, hiding games of the camouflaged being. Such acknowledging is not “pessimistic” or “optimistic”, even if historically it was elaborated within the history of philosophical pessimism (Foucault 1980, 114-115). The possibilities of understanding the limits of dialogue and the real horizons in which obligatory power rules are of vital educational potential, even for the ideal of dialogue and the struggle over its conditions and its possible realization. The fulfillment of the obligation to struggle to understand the ways in which the subject is produced, as well as knowledge, power, and the system’s context of their realization, transformation, and determination, is endangered if one refuses to acknowledge and strike the bottom depth. Non-repressive education might then be tested only on its surface. Normal Critical Pedagogy is part of this bottom depth.

On the second level, counter-education is requested. Within the framework of counter-education human beings are called, as individuals, and only as individuals, to decipher the current realm of self-evidence and to demystify the codes and the manipulations of the powers constituting their conceptual possibilities, their life conditions, and their concrete limitations, as well as their dialogical possibilities for struggle and change. On this level, the projects of Critical Theory and some postmodern and feminist thinkers might be (partially) united, at least in their sensitivities, as might be exemplified in the works of philosophers like Seyla

Benhabib and Charles Taylor and educational thinkers like Carmen Luke, Nicholas Burbules, and Henry Giroux. The development of Critical Theory should be the development of critical philosophy, namely the development of philosophy. It should be theoretically interdisciplinary and politically committed to be involved in society. However, it is wrong to reduce it to mere political work and wrong to judge it according to its educational effectiveness, in political terms - as is common in Feminist Pedagogy and in the “paternalistic” versions of Critical Pedagogy.

Counter-education is anti-foundationalist yet it negates relativism and reassures the ontological stance of the human, men and women alike. Only as such does it call for dialogue, and the acknowledgment of difference. As such it reformulates Critical Pedagogy. The concept of Critical Education that I present cannot suggest any antidote. It has no positive and evident alternative to false consciousness, like “the memory” or “the knowledge” of women, minorities, or the marginalized and oppressed suggested in conventional Critical Pedagogy. Within the framework of the counter-education as the reformulated Critical Pedagogy here suggested, there is no place for any one-dimensional positive alternative, or for any evident foundation for the critique, as the one suggested in the Critical Pedagogy of Freire, Weiler, and Giroux. Even Foucault’s or Derrida’s abandonment of “meaning”, “understanding”, and “dialogue” (Foucault 1980, 114-115) is negated for the sake of the struggle over the possibilities of a kind of praxis and dialogue that are concerned with the development of the partners and the change made by them in the conditions that prevent or deviate from critical dialogue. On this level, Critical Pedagogy can offer no more than partial, local, and painful successes of practical reason, even within the limits of the current reality.

The counter-education here suggested differs from the normalization practices of hegemonic education in its responsibility to increase the awareness of the strategies and tactics of producing, controlling, representing, and activating reality, knowledge, and subjects as part of a revolt against the current realm of self-evidence, the deception of being, and the forgetfulness of challenging its deception as part of deception, namely as part of being human. However, this Critical Pedagogy does challenge the self-evidence, since with Benjamin it does not accept reality as having the last word. Understanding that there is no place for redemption within the framework of history - just for revolutions - should not prevent Critical Pedagogy from working out general historiosophic and historiographic theories and concrete social practices. The same is also true as for the reconstruction of the system's efficiency: this does not necessarily imply acknowledgment of the superiority of power apparatuses over the individual, or the superiority of the representation practices and symbolic dynamics over specific philosophical and political praxis. The system contains both (although the latter normally just as a potential), and it is activated by the dialectics between them. In this sense, counter-education as the reformulated Critical Pedagogy should educate to decipher and reconstruct reality, and to articulate its practices, possibilities, and limitations and act within and on behalf of the ideal dialogue. Here I do agree with Charles Taylor, who protects, quite successfully, the possibility of practical reason within the framework of struggle for developing the reflective potential of human beings and their ability for articulation of their world as a realization of their reason (Taylor 1995, 151).

Praxis education of this sort is conditioned by the possibility of developing people's competence to demystify reality, decode its codes, and critically reconstruct the demolished potential for human solidarity, cooperation, and the realization of their

dialogical essence, while acknowledging that at the current historical stage, these two missions contradict each other. This acknowledgment might become a power for moral elevation, as in the *Bildung* tradition to which it critically refers. This transcendence can receive its meaning only within the framework in which a dialogue is immanent, and might change it and enable the self-realization of individuals as part of a solidaristic partnership with other reflective politically-oriented human beings (Horkheimer 1988, 126). Until the establishment of conditions that will permit such a dialogue - conditions that are beyond the present historical horizon - such a Critical Pedagogy might be realized only for isolated individuals and can not become a matter of collectives. This conception of praxis is very far from the one common in today's standard versions of Critical Pedagogy, and it is committed and conditioned by spirituality, conceptual possibilities, and socio-cultural conditions that are described by standard Critical Pedagogy as "elitism". However, just as each human being has no shortcuts, counter-education in its realization as reformulated Critical Pedagogy should try its way by acknowledging that such a spirit, such conceptual possibilities, and such socio-cultural conditions are still a Utopia.

Critique is in this sense a prayer that cannot change the world, but allows transcendence from it. This is the only form of hope possible in such an educational project.

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