1993, Atlanta, Georgia. It was the first year that Joe realized his work was actually being read. We lived in South Carolina, so put our weimaraner, Amber, in the van and drove to Atlanta. We were excited to meet up with Peter and Jenny McLaren, and to meet Yvonna Lincoln. Peter had arranged a meeting with Joe and Yvonna to discuss a project. Joe was pretty overwhelmed at the idea of meeting and lunching with Yvonna, his work was grounded in Lincoln and Guba, and he had no idea what Peter had in mind. Earlier that morning, Jenny and I were off somewhere (it was our first meeting and we were instantly friends) and Joe and Peter were at the hotel on the terrace eating breakfast with Amber sitting at Joe's feet. They were crazed laughing, as was their habit, creating their own language much like twins do. It was at that conference that Joe and Peter determined they had to be twins from different mothers, that they were obviously zygotes who were separated at birth. At any rate, they turned to look at the man eating next to them and realized with glee that it was Red Skelton. They both jumped on the opportunity to meet Red and to listen to him tell stories. However, their notion of being star-struck took new meaning as Skelton continually spewed scrambled eggs in their faces. But the time Yvonna got there, Joe and Peter were hardly the controlled scholars they intended to be.

The reason for the meeting was clarified almost instantly. After Joe and Yvonna did their redneck southern roots bonding, and an instant rapport emerged with the three, Yvonna invited Joe to join Peter in writing a piece for Norm Denzin's and her new Handbook of Qualitative Research. As she named the scholars who would be included in the book, Joe couldn't contain his shock and pleasure at being invited to work with Peter on this project. Indeed, Peter insisted Joe be the lead author on the chapter, which has become known throughout the research world as a seminal piece on critical theory and research, first published in 1994, 2000, and this piece in 2005 and 2010. Neither Joe nor I could read this piece without thinking of the weimaraner, Red Skelton, the zygote twins, and Yvonna Lincoln. This little sidebar is a note of love and friendship to Peter McLaren and Jenny McLaren, and to Yvonna and Norm for inviting "the boys" to contribute this piece. SS

JOE L. KINCHELOE AND PETER MCLAREN

12. RETHINKING CRITICAL THEORY AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

THE ROOTS OF CRITICAL RESEARCH

Some 70 years after its development in Frankfurt, Germany, critical theory retains its ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo. In the process, it elicits highly

charged emotions of all types—fierce loyalty from its proponents, vehement hostility from its detractors. Such vibrantly polar reactions indicate at the very least that critical theory still matters. We can be against critical theory or for it, but, especially at the present historical juncture, we cannot be without it. Indeed, qualitative research that frames its purpose in the context of critical theoretical concerns still produces, in our view, undeniably dangerous knowledge, the kind of information and insight that upsets institutions and threatens to overturn sovereign regimes of truth.

Critical theory is a term that is often evoked and frequently misunderstood. It usually refers to the theoretical tradition developed by the Frankfurt school, a group of writers connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. However, none of the Frankfurt school theorists ever claimed to have developed a unified approach to cultural criticism. In its beginnings, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse initiated a conversation with the German tradition of philosophical and social thought, especially that of Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Weber. From the vantage point of these critical theorists, whose political sensibilities were influenced by the devastations of World War I, postwar Germany with its economic depression marked by inflation and unemployment, and the failed strikes and protests in Germany and Central Europe in this same period. The world was in urgent need of reinterpretation. From this perspective, they defied Marxist orthodoxy while deepening their belief that injustice and subjugation shape the lived world (Bottomore, 1984; Gibson, 1986; Held, 1980; Jay, 1973). Focusing their attention on the changing nature of capitalism, the early critical theorists analyzed the mutating forms of domination that accompanied this change (Agger, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Giroux, 1983, 1997; Kellner, 1989; Kincheloe, & Pinar, 1991; McLaren, 1997).

Only a decade after the Frankfurt school was established, the Nazis controlled Germany. The danger posed by the exclusive Jewish membership of the Frankfurt school, and its association with Marxism, convinced Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse to leave Germany. Eventually locating themselves in California, these critical theorists were shocked by American culture. Offended by the taken-for-granted empirical practices of American social science researchers, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse were challenged to respond to the social science establishment's belief that their research could describe and accurately measure any dimension of human behavior. Piqued by the contradictions between progressive American rhetoric of egalitarianism and the reality of racial and class discrimination, these theorists produced their major work while residing in the United States. In 1953, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Germany and reestablished the Institute of Social Research. Significantly, Herbert Marcuse stayed in the United States, where he would find a new audience for his work in social theory. Much to his own surprise, Marcuse skyrocketed to fame as the philosopher of the student movements of the 1960s. Critical theory, especially the emotionally and sexually liberating work of Marcuse, provided the philosophical voice of the New Left. Concerned with the politics of psychological and cultural revolution, the New Left preached a Marcusian sermon of political emancipation (Gibson, 1986; Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997; Surber, 1998; Wexler, 1991, 1996b).

Many academicians who had come of age in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s focused their scholarly attention on critical theory. Frustrated by forms of domination emerging from a post-Enlightenment culture nurtured by capitalism, these scholars saw in critical theory a method of temporarily freeing academic work from these forms of power. Impressed by critical theory's dialectical concern with the social construction of experience, they came to view their disciplines as manifestations of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them. The "discourse of possibility" implicit within the constructed nature of social experience suggested to these scholars that a reconstruction of the social sciences could eventually lead to a more egalitarian and democratic social order. New poststructuralist conceptualizations of human agency and their promise that men and women can at least partly determine their own existence offered new hope for emancipatory forms of social research when compared with orthodox Marxism's assertion of the iron laws of history, the irrevocable evil of capitalism, and the proletariat as the privileged subject and anticipated agent of social transformation. For example, when Henry Giroux and other critical educators criticized the argument made by Marxist scholars Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis—that schools are capitalist agencies of social, economic, cultural, and bureaucratic reproduction—they contrasted the deterministic perspectives of Bowles and Gintis with the idea that schools, as venues of hope, could become sites of resistance and democratic possibility through concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical framework. Giroux (1988), in particular, maintained that schools can become institutions where forms of knowledge, values, and social relations are taught for the purpose of educating young people for critical empowerment rather than subjugation.

CRITICAL HUMILITY: OUR IDIOSYNCRATIC INTERPRETATION OF CRITICAL THEORY AND CRITICAL RESEARCH

Over the past 20 years of our involvement in critical theory and critical research, we have been asked by hundreds of people to explain more precisely what critical theory is. We find that question difficult to answer because (a) there are many critical theories, not just one; (b) the critical tradition is always changing and evolving; and (c) critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists. To lay out a set of fixed characteristics of the position is contrary to the desire of such theorists to avoid the production of blueprints of sociopolitical and epistemological beliefs. Given these disclaimers, we will now attempt to provide one idiosyncratic "take" on the nature of critical theory and critical research at the beginning of the millennium. Please note that this is merely our subjective analysis and there are many brilliant critical theorists who will find many problems with our pronouncements.

In this humble spirit we tender a description of a reconceptualized, end-of-century critical theory that has been critiqued and overhauled by the "post-discourses" of the 20th century (Bauman, 1995; Carlson, & Apple, 1998; Collins, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Kellner, 1995; Roman, & Eyre, 1997; Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1998) In this context a

reconceptualized critical theory questions the assumption that societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the nations in the European Union, for example, are unproblematically democratic and free. Over the 20th century, especially since the early 1960s, individuals in these societies have been acculturated to feel comfortable in relations of domination and subordination rather than equality and independence. Given the social and technological changes of the last half of the century that led to new forms of information production and access, critical theorists argued that questions of self-direction and democratic egalitarianism should be reassessed. In this context critical researchers informed by the "post-discourses" (e.g., postmodern, critical feminism, poststructuralism) understand that individuals' views of themselves and the worlds even more influenced by social and historical forces than previously believed. Given the changing social and informational conditions of late-20th-century media-saturated Western culture, critical theorists needed new ways of researching and analyzing the construction of individuals (Agger, 1992; Flossner, & Otto, 1998; Hinchey, 1998; Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996; Quail, Razzano, & Skalli, 2000; Smith, & Wexler, 1995; Sünker, 1998). The following points briefly delineate our interpretation of a critical theory for the new millennium.

A RECONCEPTUALIZED CRITICAL THEORY

In this context it is important to note that we understand a social theory as a map or a guide to the social sphere. In a research context it does not determine how we see the world but helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring it. A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system.

Critical enlightenment. In this context critical theory analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society—identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. Privileged groups, criticalists argue, often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages; the dynamics of such efforts often become a central focus of critical research. Such studies of privilege often revolve around issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Carter, 1998; Howell, 1998; Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998; McLaren, 1997; Rodriguez, & Villaverde, 1999; Sleeter, & McLaren, 1995). In this context to seek critical enlightenment is to uncover the winners and losers in particular social arrangements and the processes by which such power plays operate (Cary, 1996; Fehr, 1993; King, 1996; Pruyn, 1994; Wexler, 1996a).

Critical emancipation. Those who seek emancipation attempt to gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community. Here critical research attempts to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives. In this way greater degrees

of autonomy and human agency can be achieved. At the beginning of the new millennium we are cautious in our use of the term *emancipation* because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced him or her. Also, many have questioned the arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate "others." These are important criticisms and must be carefully taken into account by critical researchers. Thus, as critical inquirers who search for those forces that insidiously shape who we are, we respect those who reach different conclusions in their personal journeys (Butler, 1998; Cannella, 1997; Kellogg, 1998; Knobel, 1999; Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1998; Weil, 1998).

The rejection of economic determinism. A caveat of a reconceptualized critical theory involves the insistence that the tradition does not accept the orthodox Marxist notion that "base" determines "superstructure"—meaning that economic factors dictate the nature of all other aspects of human existence. Critical theorists understand at the beginning of the 21st century that there are multiple forms of power, including the aforementioned racial, gender, sexual axes of domination. In issuing this caveat, however, a reconceptualized critical theory in no way attempts to argue that economic factors are unimportant in the shaping of everyday life. Economic factors can never be separated from other axes of oppression (Aronowitz, & DiFazio, 1994; Carlson, 1997; Gabbard, 1995; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Gibson, 1986; Haymes, 1995; Kincheloe, 1995, 1999; Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1999; Martin, & Schumann, 1996; Rifkin, 1995).

The critique of instrumental or technical rationality. A reconceptualized critical theory sees instrumental/technological rationality as one of the most oppressive features of contemporary society. Such a form of "hyperreason" involves an obsession with means in preference to ends. Critical theorists claim that instrumental/technical rationality is more interested in method and efficiency than in purpose. It delimits its questions to "how to" instead of "why should." In a research context, critical theorists claim that many rationalistic scholars become so obsessed with issues of technique, procedure, and correct method that they forget the humanistic purpose of the research act. Instrumental/technical rationality often separates fact from value in its obsession with "proper" method, losing in the process an understanding of the value choices always involved in the production of so-called facts (Alfino, Caputo, & Wynyard, 1998; Giroux, 1997; Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, 1993; McLaren, 1998; Ritzer, 1993; Stallabrass, 1996; Weinstein, 1998).

The impact of desire. A reconceptualized critical theory appreciates poststructuralist psycho analysis as an important resource in pursuing an emancipatory research project. In this context critical researchers are empowered to dig more deeply into the complexity of the construction of the human psyche. Such a psychoanalysis helps critical researchers discern the unconscious processes that create resistance to progressive change and induce self-destructive behavior. A poststructural psycho-analysis, in its rejection of traditional psychoanalysis's tendency to view individuals

as rational and autonomous beings, allows critical researchers new tools to rethink the interplay among the various axes of power, identity, libido, rationality, and emotion. In this configuration the psychic is no longer separated from the socio-political realm; indeed desire can be socially constructed and used by power wielders for destructive and oppressive outcomes. On the other hand, critical theorists can help mobilize desire for progressive and emancipatory projects. Taking their lead from feminist theory, critical researchers are aware of the patriarchal inscriptions within traditional psychoanalysis and work to avoid its bourgeois, ethnocentric, and misogynist practices freed from these blinders, poststructuralist psychoanalysis helps researchers gain a new sensitivity to the role of fantasy and imagination and the structures of sociocultural and psychological meaning they reference (Alford, 1993; Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Barrows, 1995; Block, 1995; Britzman, & Pitt, 1996; Elliot, 1994; Gresson, 2000; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Villaverde, 1999; Pinar, 1998; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995; Samuels, 1993).

A *reconceptualized critical theory of power: hegemony.* Our conception of a reconceptualized critical theory is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness. Power, critical theorists have learned, is an extremely ambiguous topic that demands detailed study and analysis. A consensus seems to be emerging among criticalists that power is a basic constituent of human existence that works to shape the oppressive and productive nature of the human tradition. Indeed, we are all empowered and we are all unempowered, in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use out abilities. Because of limited space, we will focus here on critical theory's traditional concern with the oppressive aspects of power, although we understand that an important aspect of critical research focuses on the productive aspects of power- its ability to empower, to establish a critical democracy, to engage marginalized people in the rethinking of their sociopolitical role (Apple, 1996b; Fiske, 1993; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Macedo, 1994; Nicholson, & Seidman, 1995).

   In the context of oppressive power and its ability to produce inequalities and human suffering, Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony is central to critical research. Gramsci understood that dominant power in the 20th century is not always exercised simply by physical force but also through social psychological attempts to win people's consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church. Gramscian hegemony recognizes that the winning of popular consent is a very complex process and must be researched carefully on a case-by-case basis. Students and researchers of power, educators, sociologists, all of us are hegemonized as our field of knowledge and understanding is structured by a limited exposure to competing definitions of the sociopolitical world. The hegemonic field, with its bounded sociopsychological horizons, garners consent to an inequitable power matrix- a set of social relations that are legitimized by their depiction as natural and inevitable. In this context critical researchers note that hege-monic consent is never completely established, as it is always contested by various groups with different agendas (Grossberg, 1997; Lull, 1995; McLaren, 1995a, 1995b; McLaren, Hammer, Reilly, & Sholle, 1995; West, 1993).

A reconceptualized critical theory of power: ideology. Critical theorists understand that the formulation of hegemony cannot be separated from the production of ideology. If hegemony is the larger effort of the powerful to win the consent of their "subordinates" then ideological hegemony involves the cultural forms, the meanings, the rituals, and the representations that produce consent to the status quo and individuals' particular place within it. Ideology vis-à-vis hegemony moves critical inquirers beyond simplistic explanations of domination that have used terms such as *propaganda* to describe the way media, political, educational, and other socio-cultural productions coercively manipulate citizens to adopt oppressive meanings. A reconceptualized critical research endorses a much more subtle, ambiguous, and situationally specific form of domination that refuses the propaganda model's assumption that people are passive, easily manipulated victims. Researchers operating with an awareness of this hegemonic ideology understand that dominant ideological practices and discourses shape our vision of reality (Lemke, 1995, 1998). Thus our notion of hegemonic ideology is a critical form of epistemological constructivism buoyed by a nuanced understanding of power's complicity in the constructions people make of the world and their role in it (Kincheloe, 1998). Such an awareness corrects earlier delineations of ideology as a monolithic unidirectional entity that was imposed on individuals by a secret cohort of ruling-class czars. Understanding domination in the context of concurrent struggles among different classes, racial and gender groups, and sectors of capital, critical researchers of ideology explore the ways such competition engages different visions, interests, and agendas in a variety of social locales- venues previously thought to be outside the domain of ideological struggle (Brosio, 1994; Steinberg, 2000).

A reconceptualized critical theory of power: linguistic/discursive power. Critical researchers have come to understand that language is not a mirror of society. It is an unstable social practice whose meaning shifts, depending upon the context in which it is used. Contrary to previous understandings, critical researchers appreciate the fact that language is not a neutral and objective conduit of description of the "real world." Rather, from a critical perspective, linguistic descriptions are not simply about the world but serve to construct it. With these linguistic notions in mind, criticalists begin to study the way language in the form of discourses serves as a form of regulation and domination. Discursive practices are defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessings of authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant. In an educational context, for example, legitimated discourses of power insidiously tell educators what books may be read by students, what instructional methods may be utilized, and what belief systems and views of success may be taught. In all forms of research discursive power validates particular research strategies, narrative formats, and modes of representation. In this context power discourses undermine the multiple meanings of language, establishing one correct reading that implants a particular hegemonic/ideological message into the consciousness of the reader. This is a process often referred to as the attempt to impose discursive closure. Critical researchers interested in the construction of

consciousness are very attentive to these power dynamics (Blades, 1997; Gee, 1996; Lemke, 1993; Morgan, 1996; McWilliam, & Taylor, 1996; Steinberg, 1998).

Focusing on the relationships among culture, power, and domination. In the last decades of the 20th century, culture has taken on a new importance in the effort to understand power and domination. Critical researchers have argued that culture has to be viewed as a domain of struggle where the production and transmission of knowledge is always a contested process (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1997; Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1997; Steinberg, 1998). Dominant and subordinate cultures deploy differing systems of meaning based on the forms of knowledge produced in their cultural domain. Popular culture, with its TV, movies, video games, computers, music, dance, and other productions, plays an increasingly important role in critical research on power and domination. Cultural studies, of course, occupies an ever-expanding role in this context, as it examines not only popular culture but the tacit rules that guide cultural production. Arguing that the development of mass media has changed the way the culture operates, cultural studies researchers maintain that cultural epistemologies at the beginning of the new millennium are different from those of only a few decades ago. New forms of culture and cultural domination are produced as the distinction between the real and the simulated is blurred. This blurring effect of hyperreality constructs a social vertigo characterized by a loss of touch with traditional notions of time, community, self, and history. New structures of cultural space and time generated by bombarding electronic images from local, national, and international spaces shake our personal sense of place. This proliferation of signs and images functions as a mechanism of control in contemporary Western societies. The key to successful counterhegemonic cultural research involves a) the ability to link the production of representations, images, and signs of hyperreality to power in the political economy; and b) the capacity, once this linkage is exposed and described, to delineate the highly complex effects of the reception of these images and signs on individuals located at various race, class, gender, and sexual coordinates in the web of reality (Ferguson, & Golding, 1997; Garnham, 1997; Grossberg, 1995; Joyrich, 1996; Thomas, 1997).

The role of cultural pedagogy in critical theory. Cultural production can often be thought of as a form of education, as it generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity. From our perspective, such a framing can help critical researchers make sense of the world of domination and oppression as they work to bring about a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society. In recent years this educational dynamic has been referred to as cultural pedagogy (Berry, 1998; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 1995; McLaren, 1997; Pailliotet, 1998; Semali, 1998; Soto, 1998). *Pedagogy* is a useful term that has traditionally been used to refer only to teaching and schooling. By using the term *cultural pedagogy*, we are specifically referring to the ways particular cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing. In our critical interpretive context, our notion of cultural pedagogy asserts that the new "educators" in the electronically wired contemporary era are those who possess the financial resources to use mass media. This corporate-dominated pedagogical

process has worked so well that few complain about it at the beginning of the new millennium—such informational politics doesn't make the evening news. Can we imagine another institution in contemporary society gaining the pedagogical power that corporations now assert over information and signification systems? What if the Church of Christ was sufficiently powerful to run pedagogical "commercials" every few minutes on TV and radio touting the necessity for everyone to accept that denomination's faith? Replayed scenes of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, and Methodists being condemned to hell if they rejected the official pedagogy (the true doctrine) would greet North Americans and their children 7 days a week. There is little doubt that many people would be outraged and would organize for political action. Western societies have to some degree capitulated to this corporate pedagogical threat to democracy, passively watching an elite gain greater control over the political system and political consciousness via a sophisticated cultural pedagogy. Critical researchers are intent on exposing the specifics of this process (Deetz, 1993; Drummond, 1996; Molnar, 1996; Pfeil, 1995; Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1997).

CRITICAL RESEARCH AND THE CENTRALITY OF INTERPRETATION: CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

One of the most important aspects of a critical theory-informed qualitative research involves the often-neglected domain of the interpretation of information. As we have taught and written about critical research in the 1990s, this interpretive or hermeneutical aspect has become increasingly important. Many students of qualitative research approach us in classes and presentations with little theoretical background involving the complex and multidimensional nature of data interpretation in their work. Although there are many moments within the process of researching when the *critical* dynamic of critical theory-informed research appears, there is none more important than the moment(s) of interpretation. In this context we begin our discussion of critical qualitative research, linking it as we go to questions of the relationship between critical hermeneutics and knowledge production (Madison, 1988; Slattery, 1995).

The critical hermeneutic tradition (Grondin, 1994; Gross, & Keith, 1997; Rosen, 1987; Vattimo, 1994) holds that in qualitative research there is only interpretation, no matter how vociferously many researchers may argue that the facts speak for themselves. The hermeneutic act of interpretation involves in its most elemental articulation making sense of what has been observed in a way that communicates understanding. Not only is all research merely an act of interpretation, but, hermeneutics contends, perception itself is an act of interpretation. Thus the quest for understanding is a fundamental feature of human existence, as encounter with the unfamiliar always demands the attempt to make meaning, to make sense. The same, however, is also the case with the familiar. Indeed, as in the study of commonly known texts, we come to find that sometimes the familiar may be seen as the most strange. Thus it should not be surprising that even the so-called objective writings of qualitative research are interpretations, not value-free descriptions (Denzin, 1994; Gallagher, 1992; Jardine, 1998; Smith, 1999).

Learning from the hermeneutic tradition and the postmodern critique, critical researchers have begun to reexamine textual claims to authority. No pristine interpretation exists— indeed, no methodology, social or educational theory, or discursive form can claim a privileged position that enables the production of authoritative knowledge. Researchers must always speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world, "in relation to…" As creatures of the world, we are oriented to it in a way that prevents us from grounding our theories amid perspectives outside of it. Thus, whether we like it or not, we are all destined as interpreters to analyze from within its boundaries amid blinders. Within these limitations, however, the interpretations emerging from the hermeneutic process can still move us to new levels of understanding, appreciations that allow us to "live our way" into an experience described to us. Despite the impediments of context, hermeneutical researchers can transcend the inadequacies of thin descriptions of decontextualized facts and produce thick descriptions of social texts characterized by the contexts of their production, the intentions of their producers, and the meanings mobilized in the processes of their construction. The production of such thick descriptions/ interpretations follows no step-by-step blueprint or mechanical formula. As with any art form, hermeneutical analysis can be learned only in the Deweyan sense— by doing it. Researchers in the context practice the art by grappling with the text to be understood, telling its story in relation to its contextual dynamics and other texts first to themselves and then to a public audience (Carson, & Sumara, 1997; Denzin, 1994; Gallagher, 1992; Jardine, 1998; Madison, 1988).

CRITICAL HERMENEUTICAL METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

These concerns with the nature of hermeneutical interpretation come under the category of philosophical hermeneutics. Working this domain, hermeneutical scholars attempt to think through and clarify the conditions under which interpretation and understanding take place. The critical hermeneutics that grounds critical qualitative research moves more in the direction of normative hermeneutics in that it raises questions about the purposes and procedures of interpretation. In its critical theory-driven context, the purpose of hermeneutical analysis is to develop a form of cultural criticism revealing power dynamics within social and cultural texts. Qualitative researchers familiar with critical hermeneutics build bridges between reader and text, text and its producer, historical context and present, and one particular social circumstance and another. Accomplishing such interpretive tasks is difficult, and researchers situated in normative hermeneutics push ethnographers, historians, semioticians, literary critics, and content analysts to trace the bridge-building processes employed by successful interpretations of knowledge production and culture (Gallagher, 1992; Kellner, 1995; Kogler, 1996; Rapko, 1998).

Grounded by the hermeneutical bridge building, critical researchers in a hermeneutical circle (a process of analysis in which interpreters seek the historical and social dynamics that shape textual interpretation) engage in the back-and-forth of studying parts in relations to the whole and the whole in relation to parts. No final interpretation is sought in this context, as the activity of the circle proceeds with no

need for closure (Gallagher, 1992; Peters, & Lankshear, 1994; Pinar et al., 1995). This movement of whole to parts is combined with an analytic flow between abstract and concrete. Such dynamics often tie interpretation to the interplay of larger social forces (the general) to the everyday lives of individuals (the particular). A critical hermeneutics beings the concrete, the parts, the particular into focus, but in a manner that grounds them contextually in a larger understanding of the social forces, the whole, the abstract (the general). Focus on the parts is dynamic that brings the particular into focus, sharpening our understanding of the individual in light of the social and psychological forces that shape him or her. The parts and the unique places they occupy ground hermeneutical ways of seeing by providing the context-ualization of the particular- a perspective often erased in traditional inquiry's search for abstract generalizations (Gallagher, 1992; Kellner, 1995; Miller, & Hodge, 1998; Peters, & Lankshear, 1994).

The give-and-take of the hermeneutical circle provokes analysts to review existing conceptual matrices in light of new understandings. Here the analysts reconsider and reconceptualize preconceptions so as to provide a new way of exploring a particular text. Making use of an author's insights hermeneutically does not mean replicating his or her response to his or her original question. In the hermeneutical process the author's answer is valuable only if it catalyzes the production of a new question for our consideration in the effort to make sense of a particular textual phenomenon (Gallagher, 1992). In this context participants in the hermeneutical circle must be wary of techniques of textual defamiliarization that have become clichéd. For example, feminist criticisms of Barbie's figure and its construction of the image of ideal woman became such conventions in popular cultural analysis that other readings of Barbie were suppressed (Steinberg, 1997). Critical hermeneutical analysts in this and many other cases have to introduce new forms of analysis to the hermeneutical circle— to defamiliarjze conventional defamiliarizations—in order to achieve deeper levels of understanding (Berger, 1995; Steinberg, 1998).

Within the hermeneutical circle we may develop new metaphors to shape our analysis in ways that break us out of familiar modes. For example, thinking of movies as mass-mediated dreams may help critical researchers of popular culture to re-conceptualize the interpretive act as a psychoanalytic form of dream study. In this way, critical researchers could examine psychoanalytic work in the analysis of dream symbolization for insights into their cultural studies of the popular culture and the meanings it helps individuals make through its visual images and narratives. As researchers apply these new metaphors in the hermeneutical circle, they must be aware of the implicit metaphors researchers continuously bring to the interpretive process (Berger, 1995; Clough, 1998). Such metaphors are shaped by the socio-historical era, the culture, and the linguistic context in which the interpreter operates. Such awarenesses are important features that must be introduced into the give-and-take of the critical hermeneutical circle. As John Dewey (1916) observed decades ago, individuals adopt the values and perspectives of their social groups in a manner that such factors come to shape their views of the world. Indeed, the values and perspectives of the group help determine what is deemed important and what is not, what is granted attention and what is ignored. Hermeneutical analysts are

aware of such interpretational dynamics and make sure they are included in the search for understanding (Madison, 1988; Mullen, 1999).

Critical researchers with a hermeneutical insight take Dewey's insight to heart as they pursue their inquiry. They are aware that the consciousness, and the interpretive frames, they bring to their research are historically situated, ever changing, ever evolving in relationship to the cultural and ideological climate (Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999). Thus there is nothing simple about the social construction of interpretive lenses—consciousness construction is contradictory and the result of the collision of a variety of ideologically oppositional forces. Critical qualitative researchers who understand the relationship between identity formation and interpretive lenses are better equipped to understand the etymology of their own assertions—especially the way power operates to shape them. Linguistic, discursive, and many other factors typically hidden from awareness insidiously shape the meanings researchers garner from their work (Goodson, 1997). It was this dynamic that Antonio Gramsci had in mind when he argued that a critical philosophy should be viewed as a form of self-criticism. The starting point, he concluded, for any higher understanding of self involves consciousness of oneself as a product of power-driven sociohistorical forces. A critical perspective, he once wrote, involves the ability of its adherents to criticize the ideological frames that they use to make sense of the world (see Coben, 1998). Analyzing Dewey's and Gramsci's notions of self-production in light of the aims of critical hermeneutics vis-à-vis critical qualitative research, we begin to gain insight into how the ambiguous and closeted interpretive process operates. This moves us in a critical direction, as we understand that the "facts" do not simply demand particular interpretations.

HERMENEUTICAL HORIZONS: SITUATING CRITICAL RESEARCH

Researchers who fail to take these points into account operate at the mercy of unexamined assumptions. Because all interpretation is historically and culturally situated, it is the lot of critical researchers to study the ways both interpreters (often the analysts themselves) and the objects of interpretation are constructed by their time and place. In this context the importance of social theory emerges. Operating in this manner, researchers inject critical social theory into the hermeneutical circle to facilitate an understanding of the hidden structures and tacit cultural dynamics that insidiously inscribe social meanings and values (Cary, 1996; Gallagher, 1992; Kellner, 1995). This social and historical situating of interpreter and text is an extremely complex enterprise that demands a nuanced analysis of the impact of hegemonic and ideological forces that connect the micro-dynamics of everyday life with the macro-dynamics of structures such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and class elitism. The central hermeneutic of many critical qualitative works involves the interactions among research, subject(s), and these situating sociohistorical structures.

When these aspects of the interpretation process are taken into account, analysts begin to understand Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1989) contention that social frames of reference influence researchers' questions, which, in turn, shape the nature of interpretation itself. In light of this situating process, the modernist notion that a social text has one valid interpretation evaporates into thin air. Researchers, whether

they admit it or not, always have points of view, disciplinary orientations, social or political groups with which they identify (Kincheloe, 1991; Lugg, 1996). Thus the point, critical hermeneuts argue, is not that researchers should shed all worldly affiliations but that they should identify those affiliations and understand their impacts on the ways the researchers approach social and educational phenomena. Gadamer labels these world affiliations of researchers their "horizons" and deems the hermeneutic act of interpretation the "fusion of horizons." When critical researchers participate in the fusion of horizons, they enter into the tradition of the text. Here they study the conditions of its production and the circle of previous interpretations. In this manner they begin to uncover the ways the text has attempted to over determine meaning (Berger, 1995; Ellis, 1998; Jardine, 1998; Miller, & Hodge, 1998; Slattery, 1995).

The hermeneutical tradition puts the politics of interpretation at center stage. Like ordinary human beings, critical researchers make history and live their lives within structures of meaning they have not necessarily chosen for themselves. Understanding this, critical hermeneuts realize that a central aspect of their sociocultural analysis involves dissecting the ways people connect their everyday experiences to the cultural representations of such experiences. Such work involves the unraveling of the ideological codings embedded in these cultural representations. This unraveling is complicated by the taken-for-grantedness of the meanings promoted in these representations and the typically undetected ways these meanings are circulated into everyday life (Denzin, 1992; Kogler, 1996). The better the analyst, the better he or she can expose these meanings in the domain of the "what-goes-without-saying," that activity previously deemed noise unworthy of comment.

At this historical juncture, electronic modes of communication become extremely important to the production of meanings and representations that culturally situate human beings in general and textual interpretations in particular (Goldman, & Papson, 1994; Hall, 1997). In many ways it can be argued that the postmodern condition produces a secondhand culture, filtered and performed in the marketplace and constantly communicated via popular and mass media. Critical analysts understand that the pedagogical effects of such a mediated culture can range from the political/ideological to the cognitive/epistemological. For example, the situating effects of print media tend to promote a form of rationality, continuity, and uniformity; on the other hand, electronic media promote a nonlinear immediacy that may encourage more emotional responses that lead individuals in very different directions (duGay, Hall, Janes, MacKay, & Negus, 1997; Shelton, & Kincheloe, 1999). Thus the situating influence and pedagogical impact of electronic media of the postmodern condition must be assessed by those who study cultural and political processes and, most important at the turn of the millennium, the research processes itself (Bell, & Valentine, 1997; Berger, 1995; Bertman, 1998; Denzin, 1992; Kellner, 1995).

CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK OF CRITICAL RESEARCH

Critical hermeneutics is suspicious of any model of interpretation that claims to reveal the final truth, the essence of a text or any form of experience (Goodson, &

Mangan, 1996). Critical hermeneutics is more comfortable with interpretive approaches that assume that the meaning of human experience can never be fully disclosed—neither to the researcher nor even to the human who experienced it. Because language is always slippery, with its meanings ever "in process," critical hermeneutics understands that interpretations will never be linguistically unproblematic, will never be direct representations. Critical hermeneutics seeks to understand how textual practices such as scientific research and classical theory work to maintain existing power relations and to support extant power structures (Denzin, 1992). As critical researchers we draw, of course, on the latter model of interpretation, with its treatment of the personal as political. Critical hermeneutics grounds a critical research that attempts to connect the everyday troubles individuals face to public issues of power, justice, and democracy. Typically, within the realm of cultural studies and cultural analysis in general critical hermeneutics has deconstructed sociocultural texts that promote demeaning stereotypes of the disempowered (Denzin, 1992; Gross, & Keith, 1997; Rapko, 1998). In this context critical hermeneutics is also being deployed in relation to cultural texts that reinforce an ideology of privilege and entitlement for empowered members of the society (Allison, 1998; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Kincheloe et al., 1998; Rains, 1998; Rodriguez, & Villaverde, 1999).

In its ability to render the personal political, critical hermeneutics provides a methodology for arousing a critical consciousness through the analysis of the generative themes of the present era. Such generative themes can often be used to examine the meaning-making power of the contemporary cultural realm (Peters, & Lankshear, 1994). Within the qualitative research community there is still resistance to the idea that movies, television, and popular music are intricately involved in the most important political, economic, and cultural battles of the contemporary epoch. Critical hermeneutics recognizes this centrality of popular culture in the postmodern condition and seeks to uncover the ways it impedes and advances the struggle for a democratic society (Kellner, 1995). Appreciating the material effects of media culture, critical hermeneutics traces the ways cultural dynamics position audiences politically in ways that not only shape their political beliefs but formulate their identities (Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1997). In this context, Paulo Freire's (1985) contribution to the development of a critical hermeneutics is especially valuable. Understanding that the generative themes of a culture are central features in a critical social analysis, Freire assumes that the interpretive process is both an ontological (pertaining to being) and an epistemological (pertaining to knowledge) act. It is ontological on the level that our vocation as humans, the foundation of our being, is grounded on the hermeneutical task of interpreting the world so we can become more fully human. It is epistemological in the sense that critical hermeneutics offers us a method for investigating rile conditions of our existence and the generative themes that shape it. In this context we gain the prowess to both live with a purpose and operate with the ability to perform evaluative acts in naming the culture around us. This ability takes on an even greater importance in the contemporary electronic society, where the sociopolitical effects of the cultural domain have often been left unnamed, allowing our exploration of the shaping of our own humanness to go unexplored in

this strange new social context. Critical hermeneutics addresses this vacuum (Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1997; Peters, & Lankshear, 1994).

Critical hermeneutics names the world as a part of a larger effort to evaluate it and make it better. Knowing this, it is easy to understand why critical hermeneutics focuses on domination and its negation, emancipation. Domination limits self-direction and democratic community building, whereas emancipation enables them. Domination, legitimated as it is by ideology, is decoded by critical hermeneuts who help critical researchers discover the ways they and their subjects have been entangled in the ideological process. The exposé and critique of ideology is one of the main objectives of critical hermeneutics in its effort to make the world better. As long as our vision is obstructed by the various purveyors of ideology, our effort to live in democratic communities will be thwarted (Gallagher, 1992). Power wielders with race, class, and gender privilege (Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997) have access to the resources that allow them to promote ideologies amid representations in ways individuals without such privilege cannot (Bartolomé, 1998; Carlson, & Apple, 1998; Denzin, 1992; Gresson, 1995; Hinchey, 1998; Jipson, & Paley, 1997; Leistyna et al., 1996; Peters, & Lankshear, 1994; Pinar, 1998).

PARTISAN RESEARCH IN A "NEUTRAL" ACADEMIC CULTURE

In the space available here it is impossible to do justice to all of the critical traditions that have drawn inspiration from Marx, Kant, Hegel, Weber, the Frankfurt school theorists, Continental social theorists such as Foucault, Habermas, and Derrida, Latin American thinkers such as Paulo Freire, French feminists such as Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous, or Russian sociolinguists such as Bakhtin and Vygotsky—most of whom regularly find their way into the reference lists of contemporary critical researchers. Today there are criticalist schools in many fields, and even a superficial discussion of the most prominent of these schools would demand much more space than we have available.

The fact that numerous books have been written about the often-virulent disagreements among members of the Frankfurt school only heightens our concern with the "packaging" of the different criticalist schools. Critical theory should not be treated as a universal grammar of revolutionary thought objectified and reduced to discrete formulaic pronouncements or strategies. Obviously, in presenting our idiosyncratic version of a reconceptualized critical theory, we have defined the critical tradition very broadly for the purpose of generating understanding; as we asserted earlier, this will trouble many critical researchers. In this move we decided to focus on the underlying commonality among critical schools of thought, at the cost of focusing on differences. This, of course, is always risky business in terms of suggesting a false unity or consensus where none exists, but such concerns are unavoidable in a survey chapter such as this. We are defining a criticalist as a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription;

that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and, finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997).

In today's climate of blurred disciplinary genres, it is not uncommon to find literary theorists doing anthropology and anthropologists writing about literary theory, or political scientists trying their hand at ethnomethodological analysis, or philosophers doing Lacanian film criticism. We offer this observation not as an excuse to be wantonly eclectic in our treatment of the critical tradition but to make the point that any attempts to delineate critical theory as discrete schools of analysis will fail to capture the hybridity endemic to contemporary critical analysis.

Readers familiar with the criticalist traditions will recognize essentially four different "emergent" schools of social inquiry in this chapter: the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory associated with the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse; the genealogical writings of Michel Foucault; the practices of post-structuralist deconstruction associated with Derrida; and postmodernist currents associated with Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Ebert, and others. In our view, critical ethnography has been influenced by all of these perspectives in different ways and to different degrees. From critical theory, researchers inherit a forceful criticism of the positivist conception of science and instrumental rationality, especially in Adorno's idea of negative dialectics, which posits an unstable relationship of contra-diction between concepts and objects; from Derrida, researchers are given a means for deconstructing objective truth, or what is referred to as "the metaphysics of presence." For Derrida, the meaning of a word is constantly deferred because the word can have meaning only in relation to its difference from other words within a given system of language; Foucault invites researchers to explore the ways in which discourses are implicated in relations of power and how power and knowledge serve as dialectically reinitiating practices that regulate what is considered reasonable and true. We have characterized much of the work influenced by these writers as the "ludic" and "resistance" postmodernist theoretical perspectives.

Critical research can be best understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspired to the name *critical* must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label *political* and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory conscious-ness. Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guard rail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world.

Traditional researchers see their task as the description, interpretation, or reanimation of a slice of reality, whereas critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself. Horkheimer (1972) puts it succinctly when he argues that critical theory and research are never satisfied with merely increasing knowledge (see also Agger 1998; Andersen, 1989; Britzman, 1991; Giroux, 1983, 1988, 1997; Kincheloe, 1991; Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1993; Quantz, 1992; Shor, 1996; Villaverde, & Kincheloe, 1998).

Research in the critical tradition takes the form of self-conscious criticism—self-conscious in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, inter-subjective, and normative reference claims. Thus critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site. Upon detailed analysis, these assumptions may change. Stimulus for change may come from the critical researchers' recognition that such assumptions are not leading to emancipatory actions. The source of this emancipatory action involves the researchers' ability to expose the contradictions of the world of appearances accepted by the dominant culture as natural and inviolable (Giroux, 1983, 1988, 1997; McLaren, 1992a, 1997; San Juan, 1992; Zizek, 1990). Such appearances may, critical researchers contend, conceal social relationships of inequality, injustice, and exploitation. For instance, if we view the violence we find in classrooms not as random or isolated incidents created by aberrant individuals willfully stepping out of line in accordance with a particular form of social pathology, but as narratives of transgression and resistance, then this could indicate that the "political unconscious" lurking beneath the surface of everyday classroom life is not unrelated to practices of race, class, and gender oppression but rather intimately connected to them.

BABES IN TOYLAND: CRITICAL THEORY IN HYPERREALITY

Postmodern Culture

Over the last quarter of the 20th century, traditional notions of critical theory have had to come to terms with the rise of postmodernism. Our reconceptualized notion of critical theory is our way of denoting the conversation between traditional criticalism amid postmodernism (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Tippins, 1999). We will first analyze postmodernism and then address the relationship between it and our notion of critical theory.

In a contemporary era marked by the delegitimation of the grand narratives of Western civilization, a loss of faith in the power of reason, and a shattering of traditional religious orthodoxies, scholars continue to debate what the term *postmodernism* means, generally positing it as a periodizing concept following modernism. Indeed, scholars have not agreed if this epochal break with the "modern" era even constitutes a discrete period. In the midst of such confusion it seems somehow appropriate that scholars are fighting over the application of the term *postmodernism*

to the contemporary condition. Accepting postmodernism as an apt moniker for the end of the 20th century, a major feature of critical academic work has involved the exploration of what happens when critical theory encounters the postmodern condition, or hyperreality. *Hyperreality* is a term used to describe an information society socially saturated with ever-increasing forms of representation: filmic, photographic, electronic, and so on. These have had profound effects on the construction of the cultural narratives that shape our identities. The drama of living has been portrayed so often on television that individuals, for the most part, are increasingly able to predict the outcomes and consider such outcomes to be the "natural" and "normal" course of social life (Fraser, 1995; Gergen, 1991; Heshusius, & Ballard, 1996; Kellner, 1994; Morley, & Chen, 1996; Nicholson, & Seidman, 1995).

As many postmodern analysts have put it, we become pastiches, imitative conglomerations of one another. In such a condition we approach life with low affect, with a sense of postmodern ennui and irremissible anxiety. Our emotional bonds are diffused as television, computers, VCRs, and stereo headphones assault us with representations that have shaped our cognitive and affective facilities in ways that still remain insufficiently understood. In the political arena, traditionalists circle their cultural wagons and fight off imagined bogeymen such as secular humanists, "extreme liberals," and utopianists, not realizing the impact that postmodern hyperreality exerts on their hallowed institutions. The nuclear family, for example, has declined in importance not because of the assault of radical feminists but because the home has been redefined through the familiar presence of electronic communication systems. Particular modes of information put individual family members in constant contact with specific subcultures. While they are physically in the home, they exist emotionally outside of it through the mediating effects of various forms of communication (Gergen, 1991; McGuigan, 1996; McLaren, 1997; Poster, 1989; Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1997). We increasingly make sense of the social world and judge other cultures through conventional and culture-bound television genres. Hyperreality has presented us with new forms of literacy that do not simply refer to discrete skills but rather constitute social skills and relations of symbolic power. These new technologies cannot be seen apart from the social and institutional contexts in which they are used and the roles they play in the family the community, and the workplace They also need to be seen in terms of how "viewing competencies" are socially distributed and the diverse social and discursive practices in which these new media literacies are produced (Buckingham, 1989; Hall, 1997; Taylor, & Saarinen, 1994).

Electronic transmissions generate new formations of cultural space and restructure experiences of time. We often are motivated to trade community membership for a sense of pseudo belonging to the mediascape. Residents of hyperreality are temporarily comforted by proclamations of community offered by "media personalities" on the 6 o'clock *Eyewitness News*. "Bringing news of your neighbors in the Tri-State community home to you," media marketers attempt to soften the edges of hyperreality, to soften the emotional effects of the social vertigo. The world is not brought into our homes by television as much as television brings its viewers to a quasi-fictional place—hyperreality (Luke, 1991).

Postmodern Social Theory

We believe that it is misleading to identify postmodernism with poststructuralism. Although there are certainly similarities involved, they cannot be considered discrete homologies. We also believe that it is a mistake to equate postmodernism with post-modernity or to assert that these terms can be contrasted *in* some simple equivalent way with modernism amid modernity. As Michael Peters (1993) notes, "To do so is to frame up the debate in strictly (and naïvely) modernist terminology' which employs exhaustive binary oppositions privileging one set of terms against the other" (p. 14). We are using the term *postmodernity* to refer to the postmodern combination that we have described as *hyperreality* and the term *postmodern theory* as an umbrella term that includes antifoundationalist writing in philosophy and the social sciences. Again, we are using this term in a very general sense that includes poststructuralist currents.

Postmodern theoretical trajectories take as their entry point a rejection of the deeply ingrained assumptions of Enlightenment rationality, traditional Western epistemology, or any supposedly "secure" representation of reality that exists outside of discourse itself. Doubt is cast on the myth of the autonomous, transcendental subject, and the concept of praxis is marginalized in favor of rhetorical undecid-ability amid textual analysis of social practices. As a species of criticism, intended, in part, as a central requestioning of the humanism amid anthropologism of the early 1970s, postmodernist social theory rejects Hegel's ahistorical state of absolute knowledge and resigns itself to the impossibility of an ahistorical, transcendental, or self-authenticating version of truth. The reigning conviction that knowledge is knowledge only if it reflects the world as it "really" exists has been annihilated in favor of a view in which reality is socially constructed or semiotically posited. Further-more, normative agreement on what should constitute and guide scientific practice amid argumentative consistency has become an intellectual target for epistemo-logical uncertainty (Pinar et al., 1995; Shelton, 1996).

Postmodern criticism takes as its starting point the notion that meaning is constituted by the continual, playfulness of the signifier, and the thrust of its critique is aimed at deconstructing Western metanarratives of truth and the ethnocentrism implicit in the European view of history as the unilinear progress of universal reason. Postmodern theory is a site of both hope and fear, where there exists a strange convergence between critical theorists and political conservatives, a cynical complicity with status quo social and institutional relations and a fierce criticism of ideological manipulation and the reigning practices of subjectivity in which knowledge takes place.

Ludic and Resistance Postmodernism

Postmodernist criticism is not monolithic, and for the purposes of this essay we would like to distinguish between two theoretical strands. The first has been astutely described by Teresa Ebert (1991) as "ludic postmodernism" (p. 115)—an approach to social theory that is decidedly limited in its ability to transform oppressive social and political regimes of power. Ludic postmodernism generally occupies itself with

a reality that is constituted by the continual playfulness of the signifier and the heterogeneity of differences. As such, ludic postmodernism (see, e.g., Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard) constitutes a moment of self-reflexivity in the deconstruction of Western metanarratives, assenting that "meaning itself is self-divided and undecidable."

We want to argue that critical researchers should assume a cautionary stance toward ludic postmodernism critique because, as Ebert (1991) notes, it tends to reinscribe the status quo and reduce history to the supplementarity of signification on the free-floating trace of textuality. As a mode of critique, it rests its case on interrogating specific and local enunciations of oppression, hut often fails to analyze such enunciations in relation to larger dominating structures of oppression (Aronowitz, & Giroux, 1991; McLaren, l995a; Sünker, 1998).

The kind of postmodern social theory we want to pose as a counterweight to skeptical and spectral postmodernism has been referred to as "oppositional post-modernism" (Foster, 1983), "radical critique-al theory" (Zavarzadeh, & Morton, 1991), "postmodern education" (Aronowitz, & Giroux, 1991), "resistance postmodernism" (Ebert, 1991), "affirmative post-modernism" (Slattery, 1995), "critical postmodernism" (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1992b, 1997; McLaren, & Hammer, 1989), amid "post-formalism" (Kincheloe, 1993, 1995; Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1993; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Villaverde, 1999). These forms of critique are not alternatives to ludic postmodernism but appropriations and extensions of this critique. Resistance postmodernism brings to ludic critique a form of materialist intervention because it is not based solely on a textual theory of difference but rather on one that is also social and historical. In this way, post-modern critique can serve as an interventionist and transformative critique of Western culture. Following Ebert (1991), resistance postmodernism attempts to show that "textualities (significations) are material practices, forms of conflicting social relations" (p. 115). The sign is always an arena of material conflict and competing social relations as well as ideas. From this perspective we can rethink a signifier as an ideological dynamic ever related to a contextually possible set of signifieds. In other words, difference is politicized by being situated in real social and historical conflicts.

The synergism of the conversation between resistance postmodernism and critical theory involves an interplay between the praxis of the critical and the radical uncertainty of the postmodern. As it invokes its strategies for the emancipation of meaning, critical theory provides the postmodern critique with a normative foundation (i.e., a basis for distinguishing between oppressive amid liberatory social relations). Without such a foundation the post-modern critique is ever vulnerable to nihilism and inaction. Indeed, the normatively ungrounded postmodern critique is incapable of providing an ethically challenging and politically transformative program of action. Aronowitz, Giroux, Kincheloe, and McLaren argue that if the postmodern critique is to make a valuable contribution to the notion of schooling as an emancipatory form of cultural politics, it must make connections to those egalitarian impulses of modernism that contribute to an emancipatory democracy. In doing this, the post-modern critique can extend the project of an emancipatory democracy and the

schooling that supports it by promoting new understandings of how power operates and by incorporating groups who had been excluded because of race, gender, or class (Aronowitz, & Giroux, 1991; Codd, 1984; Godzich, 1992; Kincheloe, 1995, 1999; Lash, 1990; McLaren, 1997, 1999; Morrow, 1991; Pinar, 1994, 1998; Rosenau, 1992; Steinberg, & Kincheloe, 1998; Surber, 1998; Welch, 1991; Wexler, 1996a, 1997; Yates, 1990).

Cultural Research and Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that functions within the dynamics of competing definitions of culture. Unlike traditional humanistic studies, cultural studies questions the equation of culture with high culture; instead, cultural studies asserts that myriad expressions of cultural production should be analyzed in relations to other cultural dynamics and social and historical structures. Such a position commits cultural studies to a potpourri of artistic, religious, political, economic, and communicative activities. In this context, it is important to note that although cultural studies is associated with the study of popular culture, it is not primarily about popular culture. The interests of cultural studies are much broader and generally tend to involve the production and nature of the rules of inclusivity and exclusivity that guide academic evaluation—in particular the way these rules shape and are shaped by relations of power. The rules that guide academic evaluation are inseparable from the rules of knowledge production and research. Thus cultural studies provides a disciplinary critique that holds many implications (Abercrombie, 1994; Ferguson, & Golding, 1997; Grossberg, 1995; Hall, & du Gay, 1996; McLaren, 1995a; Woodward, 1997).

One of the most important sites of theoretical production in the history of critical research has been the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. Attempting to connect critical theory with the particularity of everyday experience, the CCCS researchers have argued that all experience is vulnerable to ideological inscription. At the same time, they have maintained that theorizing outside of everyday experience results in formal amid deterministic theory. An excellent representative of the CCCS's perspectives is Paul Willis, whose *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* was published in 1977, seven years after Colin Lacey's *Hightown Grammar* (1970). Redefining the nature of ethnographic research in a critical manner, *Learning to Labour* inspired a spate of critical studies: David Robins and Philip Cohen's *Knuckle Sandwich Growing Up in the Working Class City* in 1978, Paul Corrigan's *Schooling the Smash Street Kids* in 1979, and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* in 1979.

Also following Willis's work were critical feminist studies, including an anthology titled *Women Take Issue* (Women's Studies Group, 1978). In 1985, Christine Griffin published *Typical Girls?*, the first extended feminist study produced by the CCCS. Conceived as a response to Willis's *Learning to Labour, Typical Girls?* analyzes adolescent female consciousness as it is constructed in a world of patriarchy. Through their recognition of patriarchy as a major disciplinary technology in the production

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of subjectivity, Griffin and the members of the CCCS gender study' group move critical research in a multicultural direction. In addition to the examination of class, gender and racial analyses are beginning to gain importance (Quantz, 1992). Post-structuralism frames power not simply as one aspect of a society, but as the basis of society. Thus patriarchy is not simply one isolated force among many with which women must contend; patriarchy informs all aspects of the social and effectively shapes women's lives (see also Douglas, 1994; Finders, 1997; Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Franz, & Stewart, 1994; Shohat, & Stam, 1994).

Cornel West (1993) pushes critical research even further into the multicultural domain as he focuses critical attention on women, the Third World, and race. Adopting theoretical advances in neo-Marxist postcolonialist criticism and cultural studies, he is able to shed greater light on the workings of power in everyday life. In this context, Ladislaus Semali and Joe Kincheloe, in *What Is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy* (1999), explore the power of indigenous knowledge as a resource for critical attempts to bring about social change. Critical researchers, they argue, should analyze such knowledges in order to understand emotions, sensitivities, and epistemologies that move in ways unimagined by many Western knowledge producers. In this postcolonially informed context, Semali and Kincheloe employ concerns raised by indigenous knowledge to challenge the academy, its "normal science," and its accepted notions of certified information. Moving the conversation about critical research in new directions, these authors understand the conceptual inseparability of valuing indigenous knowledge, developing postcolonial forms of resistance, academic reform, the reconceptualization of research and interpretation, and the struggle for social justice.

In *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, Peter McLaren (1999) integrates post-structuralist, postcolonialist, and Marxist theory with the projects of cultural studies, critical pedagogy, and critical ethnography. He grounds his theoretical analysis in the poststructuralist claim that the connection of signifier and signified is arbitrary yet shaped by historical, cultural, and economic forces. The primary cultural narrative that defines school life is the resistance by students to the school's attempts to marginalize their street culture and street knowledge. McLaren analyzes the school as a cultural site where symbolic capital is smuggled over in the form of ritual dramas. *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* adopts the position that researchers are unable to grasp themselves or others introspectively without social mediation through their positionalities with respect to race, class, gender, and other configurations. The visceral, bodily forms of knowledge, and the rhythms and gestures of the street culture of the students, are distinguished from the formal abstract knowledge of class-room instruction. The teachers regard knowledge as it is constructed informally outside of the culture of school instruction as threatening to the universalist and decidedly Eurocentric ideal of high culture that forms the basis of the school curriculum.

As critical researchers pursue the reconceptualization of critical theory pushed by its synergistic relationship with cultural studies, postmodernism, and post-structuralism, they are confronted with the post-discourses' redefinition of critical notions of democracy in terms of multiplicity and difference. Traditional notions of

community often privilege unity over diversity in the name of Enlightenment values. Poststructuralists in general and poststructuralist feminists in particular see this communitarian dream as politically disabling because of the suppression of race, class, and gender differences and the exclusion of subaltern voices and marginalized groups whom community members are loath to engage. What begins to emerge in this instance is the movement of feminist theoretical concerns to the center of critical theory. Indeed, after the feminist critique, critical theory can never return to a paradigm of inquiry in which the concept of social class is antiseptically privileged and exalted as the master concept in the Holy Trinity of race, class, and gender. A critical theory reconceptualized by poststructuralism and feminism promotes a politics of difference that refuses to pathologize or exoticize the Other. In this context, communities are more prone to revitalization amid revivification (Wexler, 1996b, 1997); peripheralized groups in the thrall of a condescending Euro-centric gaze are able to edge closer to the borders of respect, and "classified" objects of research potentially acquire the characteristics of subjecthood. Kathleen Weiler's *Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class, and Power* (1988) serves as a good example of critical research framed by feminist theory. Weiler shows not only how feminist theory can extend critical research, but how the concept of emancipation can be reconceptualized in light of a feminist epistemology (Aronowitz, & Giroux, 1991; Behar, & Gordon, 1995; Bersani, 1995; Brents, & Monson, 1998; Britzman, 1995; Christian-Smith, & Keelor, 1999; Clatterbaugh, 1997; Clough, 1994; Cooper, 1994; Hammer, 1999; Hedley, 1994; Johnson, 1996; Kelly, 1996; King, & Mitchell, 1995; Lugones, 1987; Maher, & Tetreault, 1994; Morrow, 1991; Rand, 1995; Scott, 1992; Sedgwick, 1995; Steinberg, 1997; Young, 1990).

Focusing on Critical Ethnography

As critical researchers attempt to get behind the curtain, to move beyond assimilated experience, to expose the way ideology constrains the desire for self-direction, and to confront the way power reproduces itself in the construction of human consciousness, they employ a plethora of research methodologies. In this context, Patti Lather (1991, 1993) extends our position with her notion of catalytic validity. Catalytic validity points to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it. Noncritical researchers who operate within an empiricist framework will perhaps find catalytic validity to be a strange concept. Research that possesses catalytic validity will not only display the reality-altering impact of the inquiry process, it will direct this impact so that those under study will gain self-understanding and self-direction.

Theory that falls under the rubric of *post-colonialism* (see McLaren, 1999; Semali, & Kincheloe, 1999) involves important debates over the knowing subject and object of analysis. Such works have initiated important new modes of analysis, especially in relation to questions of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Recent attempts by critical researchers to move beyond the objectifying and imperialist gaze associated with the Western anthropological tradition (which fixes the image of the so-called informant from the colonizing perspective of the knowing subject), although laudatory

and well-intentioned, are not without their shortcomings (Bourdieu, & Wacquaat, 1992). As Fuchs (1993) has so presciently observed, serious limitations plague recent efforts to develop a more reflective approach to ethnographic writing. The challenge here can be summarized in the following questions: How does the knowing subject come to know the Other? How can researchers respect the perspective of the Other and invite the Other to speak (Abdullah, & Stringer, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995; Brock-Utne, 1996; Goldie, 1995; Macedo, 1994; Myrsiades, & Myrsiades, 1998; Pieterse, & Parekh, 1995; Prakash, & Esteva, 1998; Rains, 1998; Scheurich, & Young, 1997; Semali, & Kincheloe, 1999; Viergever, 1999)?

Although recent confessional modes of ethnographic writing attempt to treat so-called informants as "participants" in an attempt to avoid the objectification of the Other (usually referring to the relationship between Western anthropologists and non-Western culture), there is a risk that uncovering colonial and postcolonial structures of domination by, in fact, unintentionally validating and consolidating such structures as well as reasserting liberal values through a type of covert ethnocentrism. Fuchs (1993) warns that the attempt to subject researchers to the same approach to which other societies are subjected could lead to an "'othering' of one's own world" (p. 108). Such an attempt often fails to question existing ethnographic methodologies and therefore unwittingly extends their validity and applicability while further objectifying the world of the researcher.

Michel Foucault's approach to this dilemma is to "detach" social theory from the epistemology of his own culture by criticizing the traditional philosophy of reflection. However, Foucault falls into the trap of ontologizing his own methodological argumentation and erasing the notion of prior understanding that is linked to the idea of an "inside" view (Fuchs, 1993). Louis Dumont fares somewhat better by arguing that cultural texts need to be viewed simultaneously from the inside amid from the outside. However, in trying to affirm a "reciprocal interpretation of various societies among themselves" (Fuchs, 1993, p. 113) through identifying both transindividual structures of consciousness and transubjective social structures, Dumont aspires to a universal framework for the comparative analysis of societies. Whereas Foucault and Dumont attempt to "transcend the categorical foundations of their own world" (Fuchs, 1993, p. 118) by refusing to include themselves in the process of objectification, Pierre Bourdieu integrates himself as a social actor into the social field under analysis. Bourdieu achieves such integration by "epistemologizing the ethnological content of his own presuppositions" (Fuchs, 1993, p. 121). But the self-objectification of the observer (anthropologist) is not unproblematic. Fuchs (1993) notes, after Bourdieu, that the chief difficulty is "forgetting the difference between the theoretical and the practical relationship with the world and of imposing on the object the theoretical relationship one maintains with it" (p. 120). Bourdieu's approach to research does not fully escape becoming, to a certain extent, a "confirmation of objectivism," but at least there is an earnest attempt by the researcher to reflect on the preconditions of his own self-understanding—an attempt to engage in an "ethnography of ethnographers" (p. 122).

Postmodern ethnography often intersects—to varying degrees—with the concerns of postcolonialist researchers, but the degree to which it fully addresses issues of

exploitation and the social relations of capitalist exploitation remains questionable. Postmodern ethnography—and we are thinking here of works such as Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977), James Boon's *Other Tribes, Other Scribes* (1982), and Michael Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (I987)—shares the conviction articulated by Marc Manganaro (1990) that "no anthropology is apolitical, removed from ideology and hence from the capacity to be affected by or, as crucially, to effect social formations. The question ought not to be if an anthropological text is political, but rather, what kind of sociopolitical affiliations are tied *to* particular anthropological texts" (p. 35).

Judith Newton and Judith Stacey (1992–1993) note that the current post-modern textual experimentation of ethnography credits the "post-colonial predicament of culture as the opportunity for anthropology to reinvent itself" (p. 56). Modernist ethnography, according to these authors, "constructed authoritative cultural accounts that served, however inadvertently, not only to establish the authority of the Western ethnographer over native others but also to sustain Western authority over colonial cultures" (p. 56). They argue (following James Clifford) that ethnographers can and should try to escape the recurrent allegorical genre of colonial ethnography— the pastoral, a nostalgic, redemptive text that preserves a primitive culture on the brink of extinction for the historical record of its Western conquerors. The narrative structure of this "savage text" portrays the native culture as a coherent, authentic, and lamentably "evading past," whereas its complex, inauthentic, Western successors represent the future (p. 56).

Postmodern ethnographic writing faces the challenge of moving beyond simply the reanimation of local experience, an uncritical celebration of cultural difference (including figural differentiations within the ethnographer's own culture), and the employment of a framework that espouses universal values and a global role for interpretivist anthropology (Silverman, 1990). What we have described as resistance postmodernism can help qualitative researchers challenge dominant Western research practices that are underwritten by a foundational epistemology and a claim to universally valid knowledge at the expense of local, subjugated knowledges (Peters, 1993). The choice is not one between modernism and postmodernism, but one of whether or not to challenge the presuppositions that inform the normalizing judgments one makes as a researcher. Vincent Crapanzano (1990) warns that "the anthropologist can assume neither the Orphic lyre nor the crown of thorns, although I confess to hear salvationist echoes in his desire to protect his people" (p. 301).

Connor (1992) describes the work of James Clifford, which shares an affinity with ethnographic work associated with Georges Bataille, Michel Lerris, and the College de Sociologic, as not simply the "writing of culture" but rather "the interior disruption of categories of art and culture correspond (ing) to a radically dialogic form of ethnographic writing, which takes place across and between cultures" (p. 251). Clifford (1992) describes his own work as an attempt "to multiply the hands amid discourses involved in 'writing culture' not to assert a naïve democracy of plural authorship, but to loosen at least somewhat the monological control of the executive writer/anthropologist and to open for discussion ethnography's hierarchy amid negotiation of discourses in power changed, unequal situations" (p. 100).

Citing the work of Marcus and Fischer (1986), Clifford warns against modernist ethnographic practices of "representational essentializing" and "metonymic freezing" in which one aspect of a group's life is taken to represent the group as a whole; instead, Clifford urges forms of multilocale ethnography to reflect the "transnational, political, economic and cultural forces that traverse and constitute local or regional worlds" (p. 102). Rather than fixing culture into reified textual portraits, culture needs to be better understood as displacement, transplantation, disruption, positionality, and difference.

Although critical ethnography allows, in a way conventional ethnography does not, for the relationship of liberation and history, and although its hermeneutical task is to call into question the social and cultural conditioning of human activity and the prevailing sociopolitical structures we do not claim that this is enough to restructure the social system. But it is certainly, in our view, a necessary beginning. We follow Patricia Ticineto Clough (1992) in arguing that "realist narrativity has allowed empirical social science to be the platform and horizon of social criticism" (p. 135). Ethnography needs to be analyzed critically not only in terms of its field methods but also as reading and writing practices. Data collection must give way to "rereadings of representations in every form" (Clough, 1992, p. 137). In the narrative construction of its authority as empirical science, ethnography needs to face the unconscious processes upon which it justifies its canonical formulations, processes that often involve the disavowal of oedipal or authorial desire and the reduction of differences to binary oppositions. Within these processes of binary reduction, the male ethnographer is most often privileged as the guardian of "the factual representation of empirical positivities" (Clough, 1992, p. 9).

New Questions Concerning Validity in Critical Ethnography

Critical research traditions have arrived at the point where they recognize that claims to truth are always discursively situated and implicated in relations of power. Yet, unlike some claims made within "ludic" strands of postmodernist research, we do not suggest that because we cannot know truth absolutely that truth can simply be equated with an effect of power. We say this because truth involves regulative rules that must be met for some statements to be more meaningful than others Otherwise truth becomes meaningless and, if that is the case, liberatory praxis has no purpose other than to win for the sake of winning. As Phil Carspecken (1993, 1999) remarks, every time we act, in every instance of our behavior, we presuppose some normative on universal relation to truth. Truth is internally related to meaning in a pragmatic way through normative referenced claims, intersubjective referenced claims, subjective referenced claims, and the way we deictically ground or anchor meaning in our daily lives. Carspecken explains that researchers are able to articulate the normative evaluative claims of others when they begin to see them in the same way as their participants by living inside the cultural and discursive positionalities that inform such claims.

Claims to universality must be recognized in each particular normative claim, and questions must be raised about whether such norms represent the entire group.

When the limited claim of universality is seen to be contradictory to the practices under observation, power relations become visible. What is crucial here, according to Carspecken, is that researchers recognize where they are ideologically located in the normative amid identity claims of others and at the same time be honest about their own subjective referenced claims and not let normative evaluative claims interfere with what they observe. Critical research continues to problematize normative and universal claims in a way that does not permit them to be analyzed outside of a politics of representation, divorced from the material conditions in which they are produced, or outside of a concern with the constitution of the subject in the very acts of reading and writing.

In his book, *Critical Ethnography Educational Research* (1996), Carspecken addresses the issue of critical epistemology, an understanding of the relationship between power and thought, and power and truth claims. In a short exposition of what is "critical" to critical epistemology, he debunks facile forms of social constructivism and offers a deft criticism of mainstream epistemologies by way of Continental phenomenology, poststructuralism, and postmodernist social theory, mainly the work of Edmund Husserl and Jacques Derrida. Carspecken makes short work of facile forms of constructivist thought purporting that what we see is strongly influenced by what we already value and that criticalist research simply indulges itself in the "correct" political values. For instance, some constructivists argue that all that criticalists need to do is to "bias" their work in the direction of social justice. This form of constructivist thought is not viable, according to Carspecken, because it is plainly ocular-centric; that is, it depends upon visual perceptions to form the basis of its theory. Rather than rely on perceptual metaphors found in mainstream ethnographic accounts, critical ethnography, in contrast, should emphasize communicative experiences amid structures as well as cultural typifications. Carspecken argues that critical ethnography needs to differentiate among ontological categories (i.e., subjective, objective, normative-evaluative) rather than adopt the position of "multiple realities" defended by many constructivists. He adopts a principled position that research value orientations should not determine research findings, as much as this is possible. Rather critical ethnographers should employ a critical epistemology; that is, they should uphold epistemological principles that apply to all researchers. In fecundating this claim, Carspecken rehabilitates critical ethnography from many of the misperceptions of its critics who believe that it ignores questions of validity.

To construct a socially critical epistemology, critical ethnographers need to understand holistic modes of human experience and their relationships to communicative structures. Preliminary stages of this process that Carspecken articulates include examining researcher bias and discovering researcher value orientations. Following stages include compiling the primary record through the collection of monological data, preliminary reconstructive analysis, dialogical data generation, discovering social systems relations, and using systems relations to explain findings. Anthony Giddens's work forms the basis of Carspecken's approach to systems analysis. Accompanying discussions of each of the complex stages Carspecken develops are brilliantly articulated approaches to horizontal and vertical validity reconstructions

and pragmatic horizons of analysis. In order to help link theory to practice, Carspecken uses data from his study of an inner-city Houston elementary school program that is charged with helping students learn conflict management skills.

Another impressive feature is Carspecken's exposition and analysis of communicative acts, especially his discussion of meaning as embodiment and understanding as intersubjective, not objective or subjective. Carspecken works from a view of intersubjectivity that combines Hegel, Mead, Habermas, and Taylor. He recommends that critical ethnographers record body language carefully because the meaning of an action is not in the language, it is rather in the action and the author's bodily states. In Carspecken's view subjectivity is derivative from intersubjectivity (as is objectivity), and intersubjectivity involves the dialogical constitution of the "feeling body." Finally, Carspecken stresses the importance of macro-level social theories, environmental conditions, socially structured ways of meeting needs and desires, effects of cultural commodities on students, economic exploitation, and political and cultural conditions of action.

Much of Carspecken's inspiration for his approach to validity claims is taken from Habermas's theory of communicative action. Carspecken reads Habermas as grasping the prelinguistic foundations of language and intersubjectivity, making language secondary to the concept of intersubjectivity. Yet Carspecken departs from a strict Habermasian view of action by bringing in an expressive/praxis model roughly consistent with Charles Taylor's work. Although Habermas and Taylor frequently argue against each other's positions, Carspecken puts them together in a convincing manner. Taylor's emphasis on holistic modes of understanding and time act constitution that Carspecken employs make it possible to link the theory of communicative nationality to work on embodied meaning and time metaphoric basis of meaningful action. It also provides a means for synthesizing Giddens's ideas on part/whole relations, virtual structure, and act constitution with communicative rationality. This is another way in which Carspecken's work differs from Habermas and yet remains consistent with his theory and the internal link between meaning and validity.

Recent Innovations in Critical Ethnography

In addition to Carspecken's brilliant insights into critically grounded ethnography, the late 1990s have witnessed a proliferation of deconstructive approaches as well as reflexive approaches (this discussion is based on Trueba, & McLaren, in press). In her important book *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994), Kamala Visweswaran maintains that reflexive ethnography, like normative ethnography, rests on the "declarative mode" of imparting knowledge to a reader whose identity is anchored in a shared discourse. Deconstructive ethnography, in contrast, enacts the "interrogative mode" through a constant deferral or a refusal to explain or interpret. Within deconstructive ethnography, the identity of the reader with a unified subject of enunciation is discouraged. Whereas reflexive ethnography maintains that the ethnographer is not separate from the object of investigation, the ethnographer is still viewed as a unified subject of knowledge that can make hermeneutic efforts to establish identification between the observer and the observed (as in modernist interpretive traditions).

Deconstructive ethnography, in contrast, often disrupts such identification in favor of articulating a fractured, destabilized, multiply positioned subjectivity (as in postmodernist interpretive traditions). Whereas reflexive ethnography questions its own authority, deconstructive ethnography forfeits its authority. Both approaches to critical ethnography can be used to uncover the clinging Eurocentric authority employed by ethnographers in the study of Latino/a populations. The goal of both of these approaches is criticalist in nature: that is, to free the object of analysis from the tyranny of fixed, unassailable categories and to rethink subjectivity itself as a permanently unclosed, always partial, narrative engagement with text and context. Such an approach can help the ethnographer to caution against the damaging depictions propagated by Anglo observers about Mexican immigrants. As Ruth Behar (1993) notes, in classical sociological and ethnographic accounts of the Mexican and Mexican American family,

> Stereotypes similar to those surrounding the Black family perpetuated images of the authoritarian, oversexed, and macho husband and the meek and submissive wife surrounded by children who adore their good and suffering mother. These stereotypes have come under strong critique in the last few years, particularly by Chicana critics, who have sought to go beyond the various "deficiency theories" that continue to mark the discussion of African-American and Latina/Latino family life. (p. 276)

The conception of culture advanced by critical ethnographers generally unpacks culture as a complex circuit of production that includes myriad dialectically re-initiating and mutually informing sets of activities such as routines, rituals, action conditions, systems of intelligibility and meaning making, conventions of inter-retation, systems relations, and conditions both external and internal to the social actor (Carspecken, 1996). In her recent ethnographic study *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996), Kathleen Stewart cogently illustrates the ambivalent character of culture, as well as its fluidity and ungraspable multilayeredness, when she remarks:

> Culture, as it is seen through its productive forms and means of mediation, is not, then, reducible to a fixed body of social value and belief or a direct precipitant of lived experience in the world but grows into a space on the side of the road where stories weighted with sociality take on a life of their own. We "see" it ... only by building up multilayered narratives of the poetic in the everyday life of things. We represent it only by roaming from one texted genre to another—romantic, realist, historical, fantastic, sociological, surreal. There is no final textual solution, no way of resolving the dialogic of the interpreter/interpreted or subject/object through efforts to "place" ourselves in the text, or to represent "the fieldwork experience," or to gather up the voices of the other as if they could speak for themselves. (p. 210)

According to E. San Juan (1996), a renewed understanding of culture—as both discursive and material—becomes the linchpin for any emancipatory politics. San Juan writes that the idea of culture as social processes and practices that are thoroughly grounded in material social relations—in the systems of maintenance

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(economics), decision (politics), learning and communication (culture), and generation and nurture (the domain of social reproduction) must be the grounding principle, or paradigm if you like, of any progressive and emancipatory approach (p. 177; Gresson, 1995).

Rejecting the characterization of anthropologists as either "adaptationalists" (e.g., Marvin Harris) or "ideationalists" (e.g., cognitivists, Lévi-Straussian structuralists, Schneiderian symbolists, Geertzian interpretivists), E. Valentine Daniel remarks in his recent ethnography *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (1996) that culture is "no longer something out there to be discovered, described, and explained, but rather something into which the ethnographer, as interpreter, enter[s]" (p. 198). Culture, in other words, is cocreated by the anthropologist and informant through conversation. Yet even this semeiosic conceptualization of culture is not without its problems. As Daniel himself notes, even if one considers oneself to be a "culture-comaking processualist," in contrast to a "culture-finding essentialist," one still has to recognize that one is working within a logocentric tradition that, to a greater or lesser extent privileges words over actions.

Critical ethnography has benefited from this new understanding of culture and from the new hybridic possibilities for cultural critique that have been opened up by the current blurring and mixing of disciplinary genres—those that emphasize experience, subjectivity, reflexivity, and dialogical understanding. The advantage that follows such perspectives is that social life is not viewed as preontologically available for the researchers to study. It also follows that there is no perspective unspoiled by ideology from which to study social life in an antiseptically objective way. What is important to note here is the stress placed on the ideological situatedness of any descriptive or socioanalytic account of social life. Critical ethnographers such as John and Jean Comaroff (1992) have made significant contributions to our understanding of the ways in which power is entailed in culture, leading to practices of domination and exploitation that have become naturalized in everyday social life. According to Comaroff and Comaroff, hegemony refers to "that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies- drawn from a historically situated cultural field- that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it" (p. 23). These axiomatic and yet ineffable discourses and practices that are presumptively shared become "ideological" precisely when their internal contradictions are revealed, uncovered, and viewed as arbitrary and negotiable. Ideology, then, refers to a highly articulated worldview, master narrative, discursive regime, or organizing scheme for collective symbolic production. The dominant ideology is the expression of the dominant social group.

Following this line of argument, hegemony "is nonnegotiable and therefore beyond direct argument," whereas ideology "is more susceptible to being perceived as a matter of inimical opinion and interest and therefore is open to contestation" (Comaroff, & Comaroff, 1992, p. 24) Ideologies become the expressions of specific groups, whereas hegemony refers to conventions and constructs that are shared and naturalized throughout a political community. Hegemony works both through silences and repetition in naturalizing the dominant world-view. There also may

exist oppositional ideologies among subordinate or subaltern groups- whether well formed or loosely articulated- that break free of hegemony. In this way hegemony is never total or complete; it is always porous.

CONCLUSION: CRITICAL RESEARCH IN A GLOBALIZED, PRIVATIZEED WORLD

A critical postmodern research requires researchers to construct their perception of the world anew, not just in random ways but in a manner that undermines what appears natural, that opens to question what appears obvious (Slaughter, 1989). Oppositional and insurgent researchers as maieutic agents must not confuse their research efforts with the textual suavities of an avant-garde academic posturing in which they are awarded the sinecure of representation for the oppressed without actually having to return to those working-class communities where their studies took place. Rather, they need to locate their work in a transformative praxis that leads to the alleviation of suffering and the overcoming of oppression. Rejecting the arrogant reading of metropolitan critics and their imperial mandates governing research, insurgent researchers ask questions about how what is has come to be, whose interests are served by particular institutional arrangements, and where our own frames of reference come from. Facts are no longer simply "what is"; the truth of beliefs is not simply testable by their correspondence to these facts. To engage in critical postmodern research is to take part in a process of critical world making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is, in short, a pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason. The obstacles that critical postmodern research has yet to overcome in terms of a frontal assault against the ravages of global capitalism and its devastation of the global working class has led McLaren to a more sustained and sympathetic engagement with Marx and the Marxist tradition.

The educational left in the United States has not been able to provide a counter-force to resist the ferocious orbit of capital and what we believe is the creation of a transnational global society in which the nation-state as the principal form of social organization has been superseded. We see as already under way an integration of all national markets into a single international market and division of labor and the erosion of national affiliations of capital (Robinson, 1998). The transnationalism of labor and capital has brought about material shifts in cultural practices and the proliferation of new contradictions between capitalism and labor. The deepening instability following in the wake of global capitalism has been driven by over-accumulation, overinvestment, overcapacity, overproduction, and new developments in the theater of global finance. The bottom line is the production of goods must return a profit by selling at market prices. Despite efforts of working classes throughout the globe to resist capital's drive to exploit their labor, capitalism is able dynamically and continuously to reorganize and reengineer itself such that its drive to accumulate is unhampered. Efforts at regulating markets are not effective at overcoming capital's reign of global terror. What is called for is the overturning of the basic laws of capitalism and the defeat of the dominion of capital itself. Capitalism's concentration,

centralization, and transnationalism have reterritorialized the laws of motion of capital. We need to view the phenomena of globalized capitalism not merely in terms of market competition but rather from the perspective of production. Given that the logic of privatization and free trade—where social labor is the means and measure of value, and surplus social labor lies at the heart of profit—now odiously shapes archetypes of citizenship, manages our perceptions of what should constitute the "good society," and creates ideological formations that produce necessary functions for capital in relation to labor, it stands to reason that new ethnographic research approaches must take global capitalism not as an end point of analysis, but as a starting point. As schools are financed more by corporations that function as service industries for transnational capitalism, and as neoliberalism continues to guide educational policy and practice, the U.S. population faces a challenging educational reality (Kincheloe, 1999). It is a reality that is witnessing the progressive merging of cultural pedagogy and the productive processes within advanced capitalism (Giroux, & Searles, 1996; McLaren, 1997). Although, as researchers, we may not be interested in global capitalism, we can be sure that it is interested in us.

Critical ethnography faces a daunting challenge in the years to come, especially because capitalism has been naturalized as commonsense reality—even as a part of nature itself—and the term *social class* has been replaced by the less antagonistic term *socioeconomic status*. The focus of much recent postmodern ethnography is on asymmetrical gender and ethnic relations, and although this focus is important, class struggle has become an outdated issue (Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1999). When social class is discussed, it is usually viewed as relational, not as oppositional. In the context of discussions of "social status'' rather than "class struggle," postmodern ethnography has secured a privileged position that is functionally advantageous to the socially reproductive logic of entrepreneurial capitalism, private ownership, and the personal appropriation of social production (McLaren, 1995b) More than ever before research needs to address the objective, material conditions of the workplace and labor relations in order to prevent the further resecuring of the ideological hegemony of the neoliberal corporatist state.

In many ways the globalization process, and the strengthening of the free market capitalism that accompanies it, takes us back to the roots of critical research. As we have gained profound insights into the impact of the inscriptions of patriarchy, white supremacy, and class elitism on the consciousness of researchers operating under the banner of humanistic values, we also appreciate—mainly because it has profound implications for defeating the exploitation of human labor and the consolidation of a global ruling elite—critical insights into the domination of capital. In this context we envision important new developments of Marxist ethnographic -practices that both complement and extend many of the exciting new approaches that we are witnessing within the precincts of post-modern and postcolonial ethnography. Future practitioners of critical research must take all of these crucial dynamics into account if their work is to help create a more just, democratic, and egalitarian world. The realm of the critical has yet to reach the potential it envisions. We hope that this essay challenges its readers to engage in the hard work and research necessary to move critical praxis closer to its realization.

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