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Critical pedagogy and language learning in the age of social media?

Pedagogia crítica e aprendizagem de línguas na era das mídias sociais?

Christian W. Chun*

*Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Massachusetts Boston
Boston, Massachusetts / United States of America
christian.chun@umb.edu

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the possibilities of critical pedagogy in our era of social media. With the emergence of social media over the past 10 years, these online spaces have facilitated what has been called “public pedagogy” – the varied educational and learning activities occurring in public domains beyond traditional educational institutions. These sites and practices of public pedagogy “are just as crucial, if not more so, to our understanding of the formation of identities and social structures as the teaching that goes on within formal classrooms” (BURDICK & SANDLIN, 2010, p. 349) inasmuch as these “informal and everyday spaces and discourses themselves [are seen] as innately and pervasively pedagogical” (p. 350). For quite some time now, with the increase in digital devices with constant Internet access, many have been engaging in ‘digital literacies’, with frequent texting, posting, and commenting through various media sources. Without subscribing to a ‘moral panic’ over a sometimes non-stop Internet use among some youth, the learning spaces in which a digital disconnection is warranted also needs to be examined. In both of these online and offline spaces, how can critical pedagogy facilitate language learning through students’ encounters with the language and discourses used to construct hegemonic and naturalized societal representations they face in the classroom and online?

KEYWORDS: critical pedagogy; social media; digital literacies; hegemony; interpellation.

RESUMO: Este trabalho examina as possibilidades da pedagogia crítica na era das mídias sociais. Com a emergência dessas mídias nos últimos 10 anos, esses espaços online facilitaram o que se tem chamado de “pedagogia pública” – as várias atividades educacionais e de aprendizagem que ocorrem em domínios públicos além das instituições educacionais tradicionais. Esses locais e práticas de pedagogia pública “são tão cruciais, se não mais, para nosso entendimento da formação de identidades e estruturas sociais quanto o ensino que acontece dentro das salas de aula formais” (BURDICK; SANDLIN, 2010, p. 349) na

medida em que esses “espaços e discursos informais e cotidianos são eles mesmos inerente e generalizadamente pedagógicos” (p. 350). Com o aumento de dispositivos digitais com acesso constante à Internet, muitos têm colocado em prática os chamados ‘letramentos digitais’ com mensagens de textos, postagens e comentários frequentes, por meios de várias mídias. Sem aderir a um ‘pânico moral’ em relação ao uso, por vezes ininterrupto, da Internet entre alguns jovens, os espaços de aprendizagem em que uma desconexão digital se justifica também precisam ser examinados. em ambos os espaços online e off-line, como a pedagogia crítica pode facilitar a aprendizagem de línguas por meio dos encontros dos aprendizes com a linguagem e os discursos usados para construir representações sociais hegemônicas e naturalizadas que eles encontram na sala de aula e online?

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: pedagogia crítica; mídias sociais; letramentos digitais; hegemonia; interpelação.

Introduction

In this paper, I address the highly problematic affordances of online social media as a site of what has been called “public pedagogy”, that is, the various educational and learning activities occurring beyond the traditional classroom spaces of mainstream educational institutions. The domains of public pedagogy, comprised of both virtual and geographic material spaces, co-construct learning sites and practices, which “are just as crucial, if not more so, to our understanding of the formation of identities and social structures as the teaching that goes on within formal classrooms” (BURDICK & SANDLIN, 2010, p. 349) inasmuch as these “informal and everyday spaces and discourses themselves [are seen] as innately and pervasively pedagogical” (p. 350). Thus, we need to examine the everyday spaces of social media and discourses circulating throughout society for their pedagogical implications and impact on all learning, including language learning, in order to further conceptualize and, in some instances, even problematize critical pedagogy approaches to language learning and accompanying student engagement today both in the classroom and in these online public pedagogy spaces.

Indeed, with the spread of social media over the past 10 years, these digital spaces have in part facilitated and enabled extensive language, textual, and discursive engagements across multiple online platforms, although this supposed global interconnectivity is not exactly as extensive as it has been promoted. For example, in my home country, the US, there are numerous

rural communities that still do not have high-speed Internet access, and even within urbanized areas, many people cannot afford the monthly expenses of high-speed connections at home, nor state-of-the-art digital devices, such as laptops or iPads. This also applies to many other communities and countries around the world. In addition, the hyped global community on the Internet is problematic inasmuch as corporations such as Google, Yahoo, and Facebook pre-select what we see on our screens based on the viewing data they collect on us, which manifests itself in individual rather than universal search results, news-feeds, and product placements, all of which in effect serve or aim to limit and accordingly shape our views of society and the world. In some countries where Facebook and YouTube are banned, alternative social media are created, which often results in a closed-circuit society or bubble, as can be seen in some countries, which negates the claims to a global community on the Internet.

For those who can afford it, with the easy availability of digital devices with 24/7 Internet access, many students, including English language learners (but certainly far from all) in predominantly English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, the US, and the UK, have, for quite some time now, been implementing the so-called ‘digital literacies’ with their almost non-stop texting, posting, reading (or skimming as it suits), and commenting through social media apps. These public online spaces, in which a mere text or comment solely intended for a private audience can now be instantly disseminated worldwide with a simple screenshot, demand our attention as educators for both the possibilities and limitations of digital connectivity in the ways in which they shape and enable our students’ literacy and language skills. In addition, without subscribing to a seemingly simplistic ‘moral panic’ over unrelenting Internet use among not only our students, but also the rest of us, the affordances and meanings of physical learning spaces in which a digital disconnect is warranted also need to be examined. In both of these online and offline spaces, how can critical pedagogy facilitate English language learning through students’ encounters with the language, text, and discourses used to construct the hegemonic and naturalized societal representations they face in the classroom and society?

Contested notions of critical pedagogy

The term ‘critical pedagogy’ itself is heavily contested, which should not be particularly surprising, given that, as with any academic construct or notion, it invites debates and invested disagreements over its intended meaning(s). As Joe Kincheloe (2005, p. 5-6) observed, “all descriptions of critical pedagogy – like knowledge in general – are shaped by those who devise them and the values they hold.” Kincheloe (2010, p. 10) himself argued that “a central dimension of critical pedagogy involves its understanding and use of knowledge” and in so doing must “appreciate a variety of perspectives on the way knowledge is produced and deployed.” Thus, a key tenet is that “teachers take a position and make it understandable to their students. *They do not, however, have the right to impose these positions*” on them (KINCHELOE, 2005, p. 11, italics in the original). Moreover, contrary to the notion that critical pedagogues have an agenda already in place which they aim to impress upon students, teachers “cannot predict which text will erupt in class” (JANKS, 2010, p. 221). It is these texts that erupt in class (e.g., racist, sexist, homophobic) that can call into being critical pedagogy practices that would enable students to make sense of the language and discourses used to co-construct the framework of these texts to make dominant and hegemonic meanings (CHUN, 2015). In making sense of how language, text, and discourse are interrelated in meaning-making, students would gain insight into how particular forms of knowledge are privileged over others in curriculum materials, classrooms, communities, and society. In this manner, Sara Amsler (2013) suggested that critical pedagogy can be “identified with themes of formation and transformation, creativity, plurality and multiplicity, imagination, affective experience, and the creation of friendships, communities and solidarities” (p. 72). She maintained that these concepts “resonate with key principles of radical democracy, including the epistemology of ambiguity; a generous faith in human possibility; respect for a plurality of knowledges, including the affective and embodied; and an embracing of practices of experiment and encounter” (p. 72).

Thus, one core component and aim of critical pedagogy is that it seeks ways to engage with students in interrupting and naming how our societies attempt to control and manage dominant interpretations and representations of the worlds in which they live, which is fundamentally a political project (FREEBODY, 2008). These attempts to co-construct consent is a hallmark of hegemony and the ensuing common-sense understandings (GRAMSCI,

1971). The understandings and naming of how hegemonic common-sense beliefs are constructed about society, government, economy, and the accompanying social relations is essential for any critical, dialogic engagement with others who may hold and believe in various hegemonic views, although they themselves are not part of the hegemonic dominant class (CHUN, 2017). Any meaningful critical pedagogy practice with students and the public at large must listen *actively* to those who, though they are oppressed, still take sides with the oppressors for a number of complex reasons (e.g., adhering to discourses promoting cultural and moral ‘values’, religion, and/or racism). In the US (and perhaps in other countries as well), it has been a fault amongst many from the left-wing (or at least those who identify themselves as ‘liberals’) to dismiss the white working class for their racism and other retrograde views, such as adamant gun ownership and fervent religious beliefs (BAGEANT, 2007; FRANK, 2016). The result has, unfortunately, been a further alienation of many in the working class in the US from those who are critical of the political-economic system, such as select academics, intellectuals, and journalists, many of whom cannot see why others are not critical, since the system is clearly not serving their interests – at least from their vantage points. As a result, the chances of any broad-based coalition working for social and economic justice remain slim due to these disconnections between educated, primarily upwardly mobile progressives and those in the working class who have never gone to university.

This raises yet another issue – what do we actually mean by the ‘critical’? At the core of the contested notions surrounding critical pedagogy is what meaningfully constitutes being critical, both in the classroom and in public domains. Is it simply coming to recognize, see, understand, and then name practices of power and domination in the interconnected spheres of political governance, economic systems of production, distribution, and appropriation; social relations based on class, gender, race, and sexuality; and the accompanying mediatized and mediated discourses in circulation? Is it only talking and writing about these hegemonic exercises of coercion and consent? Or is it more, as Shirley Steinberg (2007, p. ix) contended, that critical pedagogy has “the right to be angry, and to express anger...at the uses of power and at injustices through the violations of human rights. Critical pedagogy isn’t a talk – liberals talk. Critical pedagogy takes language from the radical – radicals must do.” Yet, before any of us actually *do*, what

do we *want*, exactly? Importantly, Richard van Herrtum (2009, p. 103) has argued that “critique has come to dominate radical pedagogies without the accoutrement of an alternative vision.”. Although critique has long been a hallmark of critical pedagogy, with many who identify as critical pedagogues calling for social justice and change, what are the precise changes we envision for our societies? Perhaps nothing could illustrate this generalized clarion call for ‘change’ more than the ‘feel-good’ ambiguity and ideologically muddled call for “hope and change” by Barack Obama in his 2008 US Presidential campaign. His notion of ‘change’ amounted to relatively very little for the majority of Americans in the ensuing years of the 2008 global financial meltdown that impacted many, not only in the US, but also worldwide (CHUN, 2017).

In fact, relatively few scholars in the Applied Linguistics field have called for any radical or revolutionary change to society, unlike those in the field of Education (e.g., ALLMAN, 2010; FREIRE, 1970; MCLAREN & JARAMILLO, 2010). What might then some alternative visions be for our societies, communities, and classrooms? Would it merely be palliative measures to alleviate the worst excesses of a global capitalist system wreaking havoc on the planet, such as a call for the return to the more progressive aims of the social-welfare state? Or would an alternative vision go beyond this? These questions need to be asked, for as history has shown us, the changes to capitalism in US society to ameliorate the devastation caused by the Great Depression in the 1930s, which resulted in the New Deal social welfare state, were effectively rolled back and dismantled beginning in the late 1970s, and accelerated during the Presidential administration of Ronald Reagan (and elsewhere, such as the Thatcher government in the UK). This latter era and its policies of returning to an unfettered capitalism – that is, from a state-managed capitalism to a private one (WOLFF, 2012) – has come to be known as ‘neoliberalism’. Thus, any attempts at change that do not involve meaningful structural changes to the political-economic system will eventually be undone. In the present era of rapid climate change that is literally destroying the planet, and which has been caused by a global capitalist economy in the pursuit of profits in the ongoing oil and coal industries, a critical public pedagogy must call for the overthrow of capitalism in the name of a communal democracy not only at the polling booths, but, just as importantly, at the workplace itself, where many of us are forced to spend the majority of our waking hours (CHUN, 2017; WOLFF, 2012).

Social media as a public space for critical pedagogy?

I would argue that any inquiry into the grounded approaches or praxis of critical pedagogy in our classrooms and the public spaces beyond this must address this crucial question: how do media, software, hardware, and the ensuing genres all mutually interact to mediate and shape our meaning-making processes through which we understand and view the world? One prominent example to illustrate this would be the now-common digital practice that many of us engage in on a regular basis – the act of taking the ‘selfie’ – that is, using our phone as a camera and taking photos of ourselves in the sometimes daily or weekly documentation of our facial and physical appearances in all their various mutations, both hand-crafted, such as makeup, hairstyles, clothing, and so on, and natural, such as the ongoing aging process. However, selfies are not a recent practice that only came about in the present digital age.

For example, selfies, otherwise more respectfully known as ‘self-portraits’ (as in the named art genre), were a common feature during the European Renaissance era, dating back 500 years, with well-known artists such as Caravaggio and Rembrandt portraying themselves in various guises and poses, which continued into the 19th century with Van Gogh’s famous self-portrait. More recently, starting with the 19th century and continuing into the 20th with the invention and various technological instantiations of the camera, which became increasingly smaller and thus easier to carry as a travel or even daily accessory for many who could afford it, everyday artists and photographers have often taken self-portraits beyond the confines of one’s home, such as in the streets and other communal urban spaces, or even in outer space, as the US astronaut Buzz Aldrin did during the NASA Gemini mission in 1966.

What these examples attest to is that media, whether in the form of physical objects, such as a painting (itself of course a highly-valued and subsequently priced commodity depending on the status of the artist); virtual space, as in posted digital representations; as well as and its accompanying hardware, be they paintbrushes, canvas, or laptops and cellphones, have historically and socially co-animated specific genres that present, frame, and illustrate our views of not only our displayed identities, but also our roles in society in the ways we present ourselves to others in our attempts to control or at least influence how others perceive us through

our carefully crafted self-presentations, be they performative, discursive, interactional, all of which are manifested in varying degrees through the act of taking the 'selfie'.

This is directly relevant to our students' (and our) language and literacy practices in that, in addition to visual texts, such as the selfie, through various written texts in the form of online blogs, comments, posts or status updates, we present ourselves in specifically selected ways to our intended audiences, be they fellow bloggers, followers, and/or friends, as well as, today, those who have not been specifically addressed or invited but who may show up unannounced, as in the readers of Facebook posts and comments that have so-called privacy settings set to 'Public' or 'Friends of friends'. How do we actually portray ourselves through our posts and comments? Some may be fairly obvious, such as in a posting or a link to an article or blog in favor of a particular current political position, like the Black Lives Matter movement, which is then viewed as an identifiable part of the person who posted this information as a member, or at least an ally, in solidarity with the movement. If our Facebook posts are set to Friends only, then presumably there will be a good portion of those friends who may be empathetic to our posts, or if they are not, they can choose to ignore, un-follow us, or even un-friend us, as some did in the wake of the 2016 US Presidential election. If our posts are set to the Public, this setting in turn invites possible commentary, as well as potential trolling, by those looking to cyber-shame, or cyber-bully, those who hold opposing views and opinions.

However, this brings us to the next issue regarding what I see as the highly problematic connections between these manifold digital literacies and capitalism at work. This is perhaps what we can think of as the unintended or apparently uninvited audience. Every time we post something on the Internet, visit a webpage, and click a 'Like' or now, 'Love', 'Wow', 'Sad', or 'Angry' on someone's Facebook status, link, or post, the algorithms created by corporations are busy collecting this data on us. In doing so, they create specific profiles of us as consumer subjects, and then adjust what we see onscreen in our online searches, news feeds, and websites with particular product advertisement placements designed to reflect our 'tastes' in consumption patterns. In contrast to a hardcopy version of a newspaper or a magazine in which everyone is viewing and reading (should they choose to do so) the same content in both news stories and advertisements,

the websites of these media outlets are differentiated according to the individuated profiling from algorithmic data collected on us.

These digital engagements of not only liking (or disliking) someone's post or comments, but also our own ever-expanding dialogic engagements through argumentation and viewpoints expressed in our replies, bloggings, and postings, have been termed as "communicative capitalism" by the political science scholar Jodi Dean, who argues:

contestations today rarely employ common terms, points of reference, or demarcated frontiers. In our highly mediated communications environments we confront instead a multiplication of resistances and assertions so extensive as to hinder the formation of strong counterhegemonies. The proliferation, distribution, acceleration, and intensification of communicative access and opportunity result in a deadlocked democracy incapable of serving as a form for progressive political and economic change. I refer to this democracy that talks without responding as communicative capitalism. (2009, p. 22)

Indeed, Dean (2009, p. 17)) notes that, in communicative capitalism, "expansion in networked communications media reinforce the hegemony of democratic rhetoric. Far from de-democratized, the contemporary ideological formation of communicative capitalism fetishizes speech, opinion, and participation." Furthermore, contrary to the notion or argument that the Internet has enabled uprisings or political revolt, like the 2011 Occupy Movement, Dean argues that:

expanded and intensified communicativity neither enhances opportunities for linking together political struggles nor enlivens radical democratic practices – although it has exacerbated left fragmentation, amplified the voices of right-wing extremists, and delivered ever more eyeballs to corporate advertisers. Instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles coincides with extreme corporatization, financialization, privatization across the globe. (p. 23).

This should make us pause, for if we encourage our students to engage in expressing their viewpoints online in forums via social media with the aim of promoting engagement in critical literacies, are these activities simply contributing to the ever-expanding corporate edifice of

communicative capitalism that rejoices in the ever-more widening pool of data containing opinions, viewpoints, and posts, no matter how provocative or radical in calling for political and social change?

However, as always, context is crucial here for, as Dean (2009, p. 24) reminds us, “what in one context enhances the potential for political change, in another submerges politics in a deluge of circulating, disintegrated spectacles and opinions.” To take the example of the 2011 Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt (although the extent to which the Internet enabled these uprisings has been debated as well), activists in those countries were able to connect with one another to build community and support, much like the Occupy Movement later that year. Yet both were violently suppressed in the end, helped in part by the State’s surveillance of the very online platforms that enabled these activities in the first place. Here, the paradox and contradictions of encouraging dialogic communication and engagement as a hallmark of critical pedagogy becomes clear in that corporate social media thrives on the very intensification of debates through the amplification of information and discussion which reduces political activity to merely communicative acts of texting, commenting, and posting in explaining, refuting, arguing, and trolling, which perpetuates notions of democracy in terms of only deliberative endless cyclical discussions (DEAN, 2009). In fact, all these online engagements whether in the name of being critical or even radical, support and encourage “a vision of ourselves as active political participants. Think of the rhetoric encasing any new device, system, code, or platform. A particular technological innovation becomes a screen upon which all sorts of fantasies of political action are projected” (DEAN, 2009, p. 36). As Jodi Dean (2009) noted, in 1984, the Apple Corporation ran an ad in France, showing the volumes of the works of Mao Tse-Tung, Frederich Engels, V. I. Lenin, Karl Marx, and Leon Trotsky next to the new Macintosh computer. The copy read “Il était temps qu’un capitaliste fasse une revolution” (It’s time for a capitalist to make a revolution). This discourse by Apple, which cleverly collocated political revolution with changes in hardware and software technology leading to the so-called ‘personal computer revolution’, illustrates how changes in mediated communication are often presented as ‘revolutionary’ changes in society. Indeed, these revolutionary technological changes manifested in handheld digital devices such as the mobile phone have enabled activists to

document police abuses while at the same time providing surveillance and tracking data to the authorities.

The right to look?

Should any of this be a concern for us? Is there any harm in global corporations collecting immense data on us and storing it for future use? Aren't they in effect doing us a service or favor by showing us what we want to see? Perhaps therein lies the problem – what exactly do we want to see? How do we want to view the world? Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) argued that “the right to look is not about seeing... The right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity” (p. 1). In keeping with the idea of a ‘free’ and thus uncensored Internet available to all in terms of easily accessible multimodal forms of knowledge, “the opposite of the right to look is not censorship, then, but ‘visuality’, that authority to tell us to move on, that exclusive claim to be able to look” (p. 1-2). Mirzoeff (2011) reminds us that instead of being the latest trendy concept referring to visual modalities, *visuality* in fact is “an early-nineteenth-century term meaning the visualization of history” (p. 2). As Mirzoeff (2011) argued, *visuality* first manifested itself in the surveillance of the 19th century slave plantations in the US, with the sole right to ‘see’ given to the overseer acting on behalf of the slave plantation owner. Thus embedded within this *visuality* is supposed self-evident authority, which goes beyond merely “visual perceptions in the physical sense”, but rather is “formed by a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight into a rendition of physical and psychic space” (p. 3). These physical and psychic spaces are discursively constructed in hegemonic ways with material effects through “a series of operations” by first, classifying “by naming, categorizing, and defining”; second, separating the classified groups “as a means of social organization”; and third, making these separated classifications “seem right and hence aesthetic” (p. 3), all forming what Mirzoeff (2011) calls “a complex of *visuality*” (p. 4).

In this manner, the pre-selected news and image feeds, search engine results, and suggested links and product placements are all forms of a complex of *visuality* on the Internet. Because if what we see in terms of media stories on our computer and digital screens is different from one another, do these differentiated news feeds help shape our views of the world accordingly? By repeatedly clicking on one particular story over

another, does this action serve to confirm and reinforce our own ideas, views, prejudices, and opinions of and about the society in which we live? We might think that the Internet opens up for us a wide range of how to see the world through multiple sites and posts, but corporate algorithms are actually limiting our scale and scope of seeing, viewing, and perhaps thinking through their authority of visibility, which is opposed to our right to 'look' in an attempt to make sense of the world. The corporatized complex of visibility on the Internet presents major challenges to those of us who are advocating the Internet as a public space for critical pedagogy inasmuch as students need to first be taught how to look at the world and then exercise their right to look in, thus becoming autonomous from corporate authority. It is indeed "a claim of the right to the real as the key to a democratic politics" (MIRZOEFF, 2011, p. 4).

This has major implications for our students' literacy development and language engagement. If before students were encouraged to read a major respected newspaper that featured a range of views (although newspapers have always either leaned more toward conservative or liberal politics in their editorials and framing of news stories, and their reader audiences usually reflected this accordingly), which was supposedly the basis on which to form their own opinions in the tradition of the free press and freedom of speech in any nominally working democracy, then what does it mean for critical pedagogy approaches in how we view a preselected news feed that is mutually reinforcing of one's view of the world? The counter-argument here of course is that, traditionally, a reader would usually read her or his own preferred newspaper depending on their educational background, literacy level, sociopolitical inclinations, and cultural capital, whereas with news stories on the Internet, one can easily select among the many different news outlets, comparing how one website frames an event in contrast to another. However, when I survey my students on how they select the news to read, the majority of them, time and time again, say that they only use the news-feed presented to them on Facebook, which of course has been preselected for them based on their algorithmic and consumer profiling.

Interestingly, already back in the 1930s, the cultural theorist and critic Walter Benjamin (2008) noted that "impatience is the state of mind of the newspaper reader" (p. 359). This was in reference to the newspaper reader as a skimmer of information, glancing vertically down the various columns of newsprint, as opposed to reading it horizontally in books, as Benjamin

(2008) had observed. Do the contradictions and compatibilities of digital literacies and capitalism have a similar relationship as traditional literacies had (and have) with capitalism? Again, as Benjamin (2008) argued, “The reader is at all times ready to become a writer – that is, a describer or even a prescriber” (p. 359). If this was true in the 1930s when he wrote these words, during the time when only a few letters to the editor would be published in any major newspaper, then the easy availability of today’s readers being able to post comments, which sometimes number into the thousands, in response to online news articles, opinion columns, and editorials, all of which reflect a wide spectrum of views, aptly illustrates Benjamin’s notion. If traditional literacies have always been in part about targeting the workplace functionalities of reading and writing in their specific contexts, be they reading for comprehension of the text for work purposes, such as a manual or workplace regulations announcements and reports, or being able to write down instructions to operate machinery in a factory, for example, as well as about how these served specific class interests in making corporations run smoothly with the eye on the bottom line, or in the case of reading newspapers and digesting carefully crafted presentations of information about society, then have digital literacies fundamentally changed these relationships with capitalism? In other words, have the digital spaces and enactments of reading and writing enabled and fostered spaces of resistance to the capitalist order in ways that the traditional outlets did not? Or is it merely one of degree in its scale, reach, and availability? Beyond its scope, how have the blog and Facebook group announcement posts replaced the written hard copy pamphlets and flyers distributed in person or attached to walls and telephone poles that called for protest marches and collective action? Much has been written about revolution in the age of social media, with the Arab Spring of 2011 and the Occupy Movement later that year in which people were mobilized and called to collective action via the Internet. However, these digital means did not prevent both movements from petering out from the lack of actual on-the-ground organization and mobilization, time-consuming commitment, and certainly with Occupy, the refusal to articulate any specific calls for concrete political action and change. Most importantly, online activism did not prevent these movements from being shut down from violent government suppression, and the very fact they were online enabled this, as mentioned before. It is of course a two-way street, as what is known as “cyber-dissent diplomacy” was conducted online

by the US Department of State, Department of Defense, and the CIA as a means to advance the US hard power in regions such as the Middle East. For example, the CIA's Open Source Center monitors Facebook, Twitter, chat rooms, blogs to gather intelligence on activist networks and strategies (Herrera, 2014).

Social media as phantasmagoria?

Social media might have made it easier for these movements to begin and grow exponentially, but it still could not sustain them for any meaningful duration. Where then can any critical public pedagogy then take hold? Our incessant scrolling on the many social media apps, including our personalized Facebook, Instagram, Twitter pages, and for some, Tinder and Bumble, is perhaps the 21st century version of Walter Benjamin's "flâneur" strolling through the Arcades. In his Arcades project, Benjamin noted that with the development and rise of fashionable shopping districts in Paris, with their iron and glass structures enclosing and creating urban spaces in which new identities of the consumer on public display could be enacted, the flâneur was the traditionally the epitome of the leisurely stroller, spectator, and observer of the city. However, in a sense, the flâneurs also met their demise paradoxically from a consumer capitalist society in which the flâneur was no longer unique or special inasmuch as more and more people could stroll about the streets carrying and wearing their purchased goods for conspicuous display, as not only spectators of the consumer delights that the Arcades could offer, but also self-spectacles in their own right, observing other shoppers as well as hoping to be observed as active participants in the commodity circuits. Our strolling through the arcades of Facebook with its so-called 'suggested' advertisements of goods and services appealing to us, and our own self-presentations on social media that are carefully selected can be seen in this parallel manner. Viewed in this sense, Benjamin's (2008, p. 32) observation that "the representation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being's self alienation," applies to our social media society now more than ever.

This self-alienation is reflective of what Benjamin insightfully conceptualized as "phantasmagoria", which he used to describe his experiences with the Paris Arcades. Developing Marx's notion of the commodity as an all-consuming fetish object, which obscures its own

material and social relations of production by its de-contextualized and seemingly eternal appearance that formulated a certain phantasmagorical power in all its spectral projections and presentations, which is difficult to escape in our lives, Benjamin extended this notion of phantasmagoria to describe the entire commodity culture in which we are saturated through endless advertisements in our urban and suburban landscapes, including billboards, transportation, street posters, print media, and now online in all its multimodal forms. If our activities on our social media apps and the ensuing mutually reinforcing reflections of ourselves constitute a seeming phantasmagoria in its own right, to what extent does this actually serve to conceal our activities on social media as socioeconomic practices and a construct in its own right? If it may not make our over-worked and highly-stressed lives more bearable, a social media's appeal apparently presents a more pleasant alternative escape from our everyday mundane matters in ways that television perhaps offered in the not-so-distant past.

Showing up uninvited: Our misinterpellation

Social media, and in particular, Facebook, might not be an escape from our daily routine lives and work after all. It in fact functions as what Christian Fuchs (2015) has termed “unpaid digital labor”, that is, our user labor producing both a data commodity and attention commodity, adding another form to the pile of our unpaid labor (such as housework, working overtime without the accompanying compensation, and so on). We may spend hours on Facebook for what seems to be pleasure or at least a harmless distraction, but our online activities contribute to an ever-increasing data base enabling corporations to refine their profiling of us as consumers, and in doing so, reap ever more profits. Yet are there any affordances from social media regarding reproducibility that can name and challenge power and authority via critical pedagogy practices? One such example is what has been termed “Black Twitter”, in which thousands of African Americans have taken to Twitter as a platform for resistance and change, which has manifested in both the online and on-the-ground Black Lives Matter movement. The phrase itself, “Black Lives Matter”, started in fact as a hashtag on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin.

The online and on-the-ground Black Lives Matter movement can be viewed in the historical and contextual legacy of all the social justice and revolutionary movements, including the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s in the US, the abolitionist movement during the 19th century, and the Haitian revolution in the early 1800s. The Haitian revolution in which the colonial slaves revolted against the French rule can serve as a template for not only on-the-ground movements of the present, but also perhaps for online engagements. In what James Martel (2017) has recently termed the “misinterpellated subject”, he draws and builds upon Louis Althusser’s (1971) famous notion of interpellation. Althusser (1971) suggested that “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation...called interpellation or hailing” (p. 174). This idea of interpellation was presented by Althusser in his well-known example of an individual walking down the street, only to turn around in response to the police hailing them, ‘Hey, you there!’ By this very act of responding to the hailing, according to Althusser, the individual becomes an ideological subject in her recognizance of the police hailing that is intended for, or aimed at, her rather than someone else. This was conceptualized by Althusser to frame people who respond to certain discourses as interpellated subjects. For example, the recent discourse in the US of “Make America great again”, which was Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign slogan, hails some people in order for them to see that this discourse is speaking to them, that is, *he* (Trump) understands how *I* feel, and by wearing that red baseball cap with this saying, I present myself as the hailed subject of that discourse, in effect distinguishing myself from others who are not interpellated by this discourse, either from conscious refusal to heed the call (‘hey, you there!’) or perhaps not even hearing it.

But what if the ‘wrong’ people show up for that interpellative hailing? Perhaps not in response to the demagogic discourse of “Make America great again”, but for example, to the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man (gender noted) and Citizen? As Martel (2017) argued, this discourse of the rights of man and citizen was meant to interpellate only the White European male bourgeoisie at the time and yet, the slaves in Haiti, led by Toussaint Louverture, showed up unannounced to the opening sentence of the Declaration: “Men are born free and remain free and equal in rights.” However, the second sentence qualified this by declaring, “social distinctions

can be based only on public utility” (Declaration *apud* MARTEL, 2017, p. 62). Martel (2017) noted that the first sentence can be considered “a paradigmatic form of interpellation (akin to saying, ‘hey you there! You have universal rights!’ but then immediately following that up with ‘No, not you. YOU!’...)” (p. 62-63). In this “purposive misunderstanding” (p. 63), the Haitian slaves showed up for the interpellating call anyway. This misinterpellation, that is, responding to a discursive hailing not intended for them, suggests, as Martel (2017, p. 64) observed, “that even with as bogus and misleading a discourse as that of universal rights, once it is inserted into the world, it can have radical and entirely unintended results precisely due to the nonexistence and phantasmic nature of those rights.”

This historical act of purposeful misinterpellation has important implications and lessons for our students who are oppressed and marginalized because of racism and linguisticism in their schools, communities, and society, be it here in the US, or any other country for that matter. These agitative acts of misinterpellation can serve as examples for our students to engage (or disengage) with the discursive ideological interpellations they encounter endlessly on social media, that are socially circulated by not only the hegemonic powers that be, but also perpetuated by classmates, friends, and family. As Walter Benjamin (2008, p. 23) noted, “just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception.” The human collective has never been more dynamic and mobile than it is now, and thus our modes of perception are also in dynamic flux, largely shaped now by social media. Even within the confines and dictates of communicative capitalism, which we can disparage or dispute all we want, it is unlikely that our students, or at least a good portion of them, would ever digitally disconnect. Thus, if we want to change our modes of perception to encompass and enact aims for on-the-ground movements for great social justice and equality among all, we will also have to change the ways in which we interact with one another, and the ways in which we interact with the online dominant discourses in powerful social circulation. One such way is for our students to show up unannounced to these interpellations of hegemonic discourse, not only on social media but also, and more importantly, in their classrooms, schools, and communities as well.

If the aim of any language learning is to learn a language in its many variations, registers, genres, practices, interactional contexts, and so on, then

exactly what is the overall aim of critical pedagogy and what does language learning have to do with critical pedagogy? Is the aim of critical pedagogy simply to name the injustices many of our students and the rest of society face on an everyday basis, be it institutional or from those in the classroom and communities? To proclaim solidarity with all oppressed groups, be they women, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, LGBTQ communities, the underemployed and unemployed, the homeless including many military veterans, the abused, the drug addicted, and the rest of what the Occupy Movement famously called the “99%”? Or should there be a larger aim than all of this? Is it time for us to say to the over-arching political-economic system known as ‘capitalism’, your time is up? Is it time to go, not only leave, but to go into the dustbin of history? If capitalist ideology attempts to interpellate us with its call for ‘freedom of choice’ then as misinterpellated subjects, can we show up to announce that we prefer NOT to choose capitalism and instead opt for another alternative to capitalism? Because if there is no alternative, as Margaret Thatcher infamously claimed, then how can there be any freedom of choice if none exists?

But we will also need language for this, to counter those hegemonic discourses that there is no alternative to capitalism. And this is where language learning comes in, for if we do not have the language to co-construct our counter-narratives and our own discourses that expose the very phantasmagoria of capitalism and communicative capitalism, in all its profit-making iterations on social media, which we are now inescapably a part of, then we will continue as before, or even worse, as in my country, begin the descent into fascism. The teaching of language necessitates the teaching of discourses so that our students can meet the challenges they face and become the misinterpellated subjects who show up to create a truly democratic society.

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