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# Moral Panic, Schooling, and Gay Identity: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Resistance

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## **Moral Panic, Schooling, and Gay Identity: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Resistance**

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Human rights, dissidence, antiracism, the antinuclear movement, and the environment are gentle ideologies. They are easy, *post coitum historicum*, after the orgy; ideology for an agreeable generation—the children of crisis, who are acquainted with neither hard ideologies nor radical philosophies.

—Jean Baudrillard, “The Anorexic Ruins,” p. 43.

### **Moral Panic in the Age of the Hysterical Heterosexual**

We are living at a time in U.S. cultural history in which the autonomy and dignity of the human spirit is being threatened rather than exercised. What makes it bearable is what is hidden from us, what is repressively desublimated. The current historical juncture is precisely that perilous mixture of historical amnesia and cultural intensity in which society is attempting to reinvent itself without the benefit of knowing who or what it already is.

This decidedly postmodern combination of extreme wakefulness and forgetfulness has helped to create the contemporary moral panic surrounding sexuality. We rely as a society on perceptions that have been filtered through constellations of historical commentaries rooted in xenophobia, homophobia, racism, sexism, the commodification of everyday life, and the reproduction of race, class, and gender relations. Schools both mirror and motivate such perceptions, reproducing a culture of fear that contributes to a wider justification for vigilance surrounding sexual practices through polar definitions of youth as morally upright/sexually deviant, and approvingly decent/unrepentantly corrupt. This Manichaeian perspective on youth further supports a paternalistic and authoritarian politics and policing of the unconscious by limiting access to more progressive and liberatory vocabularies and practices of knowing.

The specter of AIDS reminds us all that death awaits us. While heterosexual and homosexual flesh choose not to mingle in life, in death both

will eventually end in the same compost of decay, melting through corruption to reveal the magnificent luminosity of the bones and the mocking smile that adorns each skull wiped clean of life. We are reminded that even the most putrid and decayed flesh tastes sweet to the triumphant worms and maggots and euphorically silent colonies of bacteria who perform in those invisible theatres of death where human 'filth' becomes nature's feast. It is when we most fully realize that those taut sheets of flesh produced in our youth inevitably become the sagging shroud that clings chillingly to our brittle frame during the ends of our days, that Death's lurid mockery of the living most profoundly disturbs us. It is then that we seek to give temporary relief to our fears through expulsion of those groups who remind us most of our frail finitude.

Again, what makes our age bearable is that which is hidden from us, and that which we choose to hide from ourselves, including our motivated forgetfulness surrounding the dangerous memories of victimization and marginalization that have haunted human societies through the centuries, from the lynching of blacks, Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews and homosexuals, the systematic violence against women, right up to the hollowed eyes that stare out from behind the barbed wire fences of Serbian prison camps. We remain shaken by the degree to which torture and brutality have assumed the form of law and madness the shape of reason.

**Subjects of the Media and Mediated Subjects:  
The Politics of Forgetfulness and Exclusion**

Henri Lefebvre (1990) warns that we are at this present time suffering an alienation from alienation, that is, a disappearance of our consciousness of existing in a state of alienation. This is a world of pure appearances, a self-ironizing world that has completely simulated itself through parodies of itself such that the media no longer serve as extensions of ourselves. Rather, we serve as the extensions of the media in terms of our inability to operate outside of what has already been said about ourselves through our positionalities as sub-

jects produced by the narratives and anti-narratives of postmodern media conventions. Here we only need to be reminded of the fate of the recent Children of the Rainbow curriculum that was part of a comprehensive multicultural project created by New York City's Board of Education. Gay-inclusive sections made up part of this curriculum, including respect for gay and lesbian families. However, anti-Rainbow efforts by right-wing affiliations, which included members of the Family Defense Council with active links to the Oregon Citizens Alliance (sponsors of that state's anti-gay ballot measure), eventually won the day, largely because they went unreported by the media. As Donna Minkowitz notes, the media, in covering the anti-Rainbow rallies, failed for the most part to report speakers who called for violence against lesbians and gay men. For instance, the media failed to mention the presence at such rallies of large contingents from the Society for the Preservation of Tradition, Family and Property, a right-wing paramilitary group active in Latin America. The dominant media fell silent when faced by remarks by elected officials, such as Senator Serphin Maltese, who described homosexuals as "pure evil and wickedness" (1993, p. 12). In fact, most newspaper accounts failed to dispute opponents' charges that the curriculum was designed to teach "oral and anal sex" in the first grade.

Minkowitz rightly notes that the most basic reason for including gays and lesbians in the multicultural education plan was the conviction that a truthful and accurate education means teaching students about the important role gays and lesbians have played—and continue to play—in history, literature, science and culture. Not surprisingly, there existed in the media a motivated amnesia surrounding this fundamental conviction behind the Children of the Rainbow project. In the midst of such a culture of silence, even the most well-intentioned heterosexual groups frequently choose to ignore the democratic imperatives of a just society by failing to respond to the AIDS crisis and by unwittingly creating a politics of exclusion and victimization of gay and lesbian

perspectives through their own unacknowledged homophobia. Regrettably, in a culture which chooses to motivate its subjects into moral inertia through a politics of forgetfulness and exclusion, even the most progressive liberals insist on turning democracy itself into an empty signifier that points to a better, more tolerant, and less homophobic future only on condition that such a future be eternally delayed.

### **The Multivocal Subject and the Politics of Desire**

In an age which artificially separates mind from the flesh, we do not like to be reminded that our bodies are integral aspects of who we are. Because such a reminder emphasizes that we are both different from others yet connected materially to civil society through intersubjective relations. The notion of the individual subject as an embodied subject that is part of the body politic ruptures the modernist notion of the autonomous agent as disembodied, disconnected, and self-initiating. Our bodies remind us of the complex and heterogeneous configuration of our identity that is differentiated, interleaved, and constructed out of multiple discourses and social practices. The putative stability of identity is shattered when it is recognized that individuals are the loci in which various conflictual discourses intersect and compete for dominance. The individual subject is constituted as pluripolar tensions and desires. Our corporeality also reminds us of our civil responsibility to create through intersubjective relations a society where individuals can be secure in the integrity of their own sexual as well as other social practices. It reminds gay students that our society is one premised on sexual apartheid.

### **Sexual Apartheid and Sedimented Perception: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Resistance**

When we examine the plight of the gay student our perceptions are shaped by ideological trajectories created largely by the moral consensus that controls and ritualizes the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves as a community

of citizens. Our perceptions serve as social acts that summon us into existence in a particular way, moral acts in which the one who perceives participates in a selective mode of social collectivity, in a certain form of ethical address, in a particular way of engaging difference such that a voracious center of dominant values works silently and often invisibly to domesticate those constructed as the margins. To understand how we come to perceive and to value, and how objects are brought into existence as "acts" of such valuing, has been one of the goals of critical pedagogy over the last decade. Critical pedagogy is the act of reading the world and the word, as Freire and Macedo (1987) note, by taking the measure of the world's indwelling in us as we are constructed as ethical and political subjects. This is no small feat in an era of multinational capitalism and under circumstances in which time and space have been implacably contracted through new information technologies. In fact, critical pedagogy posits a further challenge to understanding how identities are structured by the cultural logic of late capitalism by asking: In whose interests does the social construction of perception and valuation serve? In whose interests do the social, cultural and institutional practices which shape (and are shaped by) such values operate? These are wide-ranging questions, and critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy have worked jointly to help answer them.

More specifically, critical pedagogy has attempted to situate the process of schooling within the present state of the capitalist formation of society and the reproduction of asymmetrical relations of power and privilege (McLaren, 1989; 1993; forthcoming; Giroux and McLaren 1989; 1993; Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; McLaren and Lankshear, 1994; Giroux, 1993). Despite the fact that the word "homosexual" is no longer quarantined to medical or religious communities, there exists, apart from the important work of James T. Sears (1991; 1992), William G. Tierney (1993), and a few others, only a small number of criticalists who seriously address the plight of gay and lesbian students. Needed are more

critical studies which locate the production of gender, sexuality, and identity within the context of the reproduction of social relations in capitalist society and the deformation of everyday life—what Lefebvre calls “the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption” (1990; Sunker; 1989).

While heterosexual teachers insist on generally ignoring the struggle of gay and lesbian students, they continue to consume images in popular culture that, while still largely condemnatory of homosexuality, are ostensibly more tolerant of gay sexual practices. Yet in the public schools, teachers rarely discuss homosexuality in any serious and informed manner with their students and fail to provide them with a wide range of either critical literature or informed opinions on the subject. Some of the reasons are clear: a fear of dismissal for discussing a morally “taboo” topic; fear of reprisals from parents and religious leaders in the community, etc. Not to mention the teachers’ own homophobic ideological moorings. A central question that I would like to pose is: How can teachers work together in the interests of developing a critical subjectivity among themselves and their students that can begin to rehabilitate the pathological development of homophobic discourses in current school policy and practice? Further, how can teachers and students develop a collective praxis that takes up in a politically charged and pedagogically progressive way the contradiction between the social relations of homosexuality and the social form of “alterity” (one’s relationship to the “other”)?

### **Language, Experience, and Identity**

I want to turn for the moment to a crucial theoretical perspective that undergirds much of the constructionist approach adopted in recent years by proponents of critical pedagogy. This perspective could be useful in promoting a liberatory pedagogy that is profoundly anti-homophobic. Briefly, this perspective holds that language and experience are non-identical. Let me spend some time on this point so that later I will be able to develop a position that links it with gay and lesbian identity.

Language is not stable. Similarly, identities are mobile and are structured around overdetermined equivalences. There is no normal language for making sense out of the world in general, or homosexual practices in particular. There is no fixed or neutral language against which one can judge the changing circumstances of utterances or their fluctuating instantiations (Bogue, 1989, Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; Giroux and McLaren, 1993). As Ronald Bogue (1989) points out, the purpose of language is to impose a certain moral order, and it is this practice which supersedes the transmission of information or the function of communication. Describing the position of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Bogue argues that language constitutes the imposition of semiotic coordinates on the world of the child; further, such a language “categorizes the world, and in learning a language one must to some extent accept the codes—codes of privilege, power, domination, exclusion, and so on” (1989, p. 136).

Language transmits the moral order of indirect discourse that has already been put in place by the dominant social collectivities. All language acts are therefore “acts of power” in so far as they are linked to a “social obligation.” Language is not something that is simply embedded in social relations and the concrete practices of individuals. It is decidedly more complex.

Slajov Zizek (1991) remarks that the way language relates to the totality of experience is already overdetermined by language itself, or, in Lacanian terms, language (the symbolic order) cannot be reduced to experience. In effect, the totality of language actually structures the horizon of our experience and the direction of our desiring. There is no passage from language to reality, no direct correspondence, no outside to ideology. The world is always ideological in the sense that we cannot remove ourselves to some transcendental platform outside of language in order to reflect upon our situatedness within language. The void that separates language from experience is what Zizek refers to as the “missing link of

ideology” or the individual “subject.” Hence, we can never find the “truth” of our perceptions, or explain the origins of our experiences; all that we can do is find new contexts in which signifiers may be retroactively rewritten, reordered, or reexperienced. This is, I would argue, a way of explaining a central mission of critical pedagogy.

We need to understand what Žižek means when he says that we always read events “backwards” from the present, using new symbolic languages to give past events new meaning. It means, in effect, that it is impossible to return to an original or authentic experience that is not symbolically mediated or overdetermined by language. For instance, a student’s aversion to homosexuality can never be explained by understanding the psycho-cultural dynamics of his or her experience alone, but must also take into consideration the way those experiences have been revisited or rewritten through particular languages (the language of religious conservatism, political progressivism, ideological fascism, biological sciences, or the particular language of citizenship used by teachers at school, etc.) that are used to mediate such experiences.

The problem, according to Žižek, is that individuals often invent myths which serve as structured fantasies that are retroactively employed to explain their own origins through a fictional narrative that conceals its contingent materiality or the fetish of its origin. What this means is that the external contingent character of certain events must be repressed or transcoded in order to maintain their level of self-reproduction. Žižek uses the example of capitalism to explain this idea. He argues that in order to conceal capitalism’s origins in expropriation, plunder and violence, capitalism has produced the ideological myth of “primitive accumulation” to retroactively explain its own genesis and to justify the “synchronous” functioning of current structures of exploitation: “the myth of the ‘diligent saving worker’ who did not immediately consume his surplus but wisely reinvested it in production and thus gradually became a capitalist, owner

of the means of production, able to give employment to other workers possessing nothing but their ability to work” (1991, p. 107). According to Žižek, this ideological fantasy jumps into its own past in order to appear as its own cause. Thus, the subject fills out the “missing link” of its own genesis through the narrative structure of myth and a circular logic that “presupposes what it purports to explain” (p. 107).

We need to make the contingency of myth visible by unmasking its narrative structure by means of which the synchronous system (the present) retroactively organizes its own past. In this current historical juncture, the dominant heterocentric culture retroactively organizes its own past through the ideological myth of heterosexuality (i.e., that heterosexual relations are the only natural, civilized, and appropriate sexual relations). What is repressed in this myth is the idea that both heterosexuality and homosexuality are fictions: that heterosexuality has been retroactively written at the level of the political unconscious as *that which is violated by homosexual relations*. A sacerdotal status is accorded to the mythic origin of heterosexuality: that the only way to construct one’s identity within the logic of civilized behavior is through a logocentric, heterocentric, and white male perspective. This is an important observation and acknowledgement to make. Yet when we choose to resist the myth of the modernist Cartesian ego (whose structuring norm of sexual difference effectively demonizes homosexuality) by confronting it with its mythic origins, its constitutive outside, its relation to otherness, do we not simply recuperate the white male heterocentric voice in another, less obvious register? Do we not reinforce the very voice that nominates the resistance to its own colonizing effects? Perhaps this is inevitable, but at least such a form of resistance draws attention to the mythic and fictional nature of sexuality. Such a recognition can be a necessary (but not sufficient) step in developing a wider politics of liberation.

This idea needs to be addressed in more detail. For the purpose of this essay I merely want to

stress the point that homosexuality and heterosexuality are social fictions constructed through the heterogeneous possibilities of discursive representations. That doesn't mean that the reflexive subject simply disappears and is stripped of all historical agency and personal biography. Rather, it means that there exists neither a transcendental nor biological grounding that incontestably makes heterosexuality more livable and pure when compared to homosexuality. Heterosexuality only has meaning in relation to other identities such as homosexuality. That is, heterosexuality and homosexuality have no "essence" of meaning but rather the terms are continually and culturally negotiated within diverse historical and social arenas and in terms of competing vectors of power. Within late patriarchal capitalism, both identities have been reduced to their binary oppositions through structures of linguistic exchange based on a seriality of antinomies: civilized/deviant; natural/un-natural; legal/illegal, etc. Homosexuality is considered unlivable because it is constructed as the antithesis of what heterosexual communities consider "normal." It is based upon elements of identity expelled and disavowed and projected into the always already subordinate terms: gay, lesbian, or homosexual.

The key imperative for critical pedagogy is to interrogate the disparity between students' everyday experiences and relations and the inherited languages of white supremacist, homophobic, and patriarchal capitalism. How is the dominant culture of schooling able to set the limit on how sexuality is defined and understood and also able to make the boundaries of sexuality co-terminus with those of citizenship? Why is there a lack of vocabularies in our schools for critically making sense of heterosexuality and homosexuality? The answer to these questions should become clearer as the essay progresses.

Jonathan Katz (1990) has argued that the current historical juncture of sexuality politics—or what he calls "the twentieth century heterosexual epoch"—began in the years 1892 to 1900 during which time U.S. doctors tenta-

tively formulated the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality. This period also saw Krafft-Ebing break with the consensual, production-oriented view of heterosexuality as an "absolute procreative standard of normality" and move toward a consumerist view of heterosexuality as "other-sex attraction." Katz maintains that this important perhaps even revolutionary—shift in emphasis provided the basis of understanding heterosexuality as a mode of pleasure.

This perspective was followed by a focus on "different-sex/same-sex eroticisms" and a discursive positioning of heterosexuality as the privileging norm—or "universal sanctifier" (1990, p. 28)—in an institutionalized move to "standardize masculinity and femininity, intelligence, and manufacturing" (1990, p. 16) as well as regularize, naturalize, and police eroticism. Katz claims that from 1900 to 1930, there occurred a distribution of the heterosexual mystique which he characterizes as a time during which "the tentative hetero hypothesis was stabilized, fixed, and widely distributed as the ruling sexual orthodoxy" (p. 16). It wasn't until the mid-1960s that heteroeroticism was distinguished from "a procreant urge linked inexorably with carnal lust" (p. 17). Katz's work questions the very heter/homo division itself.

### **The Hetrosex Dictatorship**

While admittedly heterosexuality and homosexuality existed before they were discursively defined as such, the privileging modernist ideological construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality has had an undeniably cruel effect on the social existence of gays and lesbians in general and gay and lesbian students in particular, especially in terms of the way 'the gay lifestyle' has been caricatured and demonized and the practices of heterosexuals has been glorified and sanctified, according to "society's particular organization of power and production" (1990, p. 30). According to Katz, heterosexuality must be understood in its historical specificity. He asserts that

women and men make their own sexual histories. But they do not produce their



sex lives just as they please. They make their sexualities within a particular mode of organization given by the past and altered by their changing desire, their present power and activity, and their vision of a better world. That hypothesis suggests a number of good reasons for the immediate inauguration of research on a historically specific heterosexuality. (1990, p. 29)

Identities, both homosexual and heterosexual, are historically and culturally articulated. I would like to stress here that not all gay persons suffer oppression in the same way since individuals are dynamically inserted into specific matrices of domination and subordination according to the axes of race, class, and gender. Other factors, such as geopolitical specificity, age, political affiliations, etc., also play a part. We are not all gay or straight (or bisexual) in comparable ways. Katz warns against falling into the conceptual trap of viewing heterosexuality as monolithic or invariable and urges sexuality to be understood as inextricably linked to race, class, gender, and modes of social organization. He is worth quoting at length on this issue:

The common notion that biology determines the object of sexual desire, or that physiology and society together cause sexual orientation, are determinisms that deny the break existing between our bodies and situation and our desiring. Just as the biology of our hearing organs will never tell us why we take pleasure in Bach or delight in Dixieland, our female or male anatomies, hormones, and genes will never tell us why we yearn for women, men, both, other, or none. That is because desiring is a self-generated project of individuals within particular historical cultures. Heterosexual history can help us see the place of values and judgments in the construction of our own and others' pleasures, and to see how our erotic tastes—our aesthetics of the flesh—

are socially institutionalized through the struggles of individuals and classes. (1990, p. 29)

### **A Radical Materialist Politics of Sexuality**

Conservative approaches to sexuality politics overwhelmingly demonize sexual difference (difference from the heterosexual norm), whereas liberal perspectives stress tolerance for sexual differences in the sense that every identity is thought to possess an "essence" that exists beyond sexual practices. A left-liberal sexuality politics, on the other hand, stresses the importance of recognizing sexual difference in light of the contextual specificity of its production. That is, sexuality is to be understood as a form of signifiatory play within particular communities (Anglo, African-American and Asian communities, for instance). This form of sexuality politics is often approached from the perspective of ludic postmodernist or poststructuralist theory which takes the form of an antitotalizing analytics (Morton, 1993) but which de-emphasizes the constitutive and historical role played by social classes in struggles over meaning.

Donald Morton positions much of the progressive work on "queer theory" in this category, especially the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis, Alan Sinfield, and David Greenberg. Morton's argument, which deserves serious attention, is that many of the exemplary texts of queer theory are "enabled precisely by [their] tendency to endorse and celebrate the dominant academy's narrative of progressive change" (1993, p. 123). Morton contrasts the position of ludic postmodernist approaches to queer theory—whose office of theory is meant to disrupt chains of signification and semiotically unsettle dominant meaning structures—with that of critical cultural studies or what he calls a resistance (post)modernism, a more Marxist-based approach to social transformation which "investigates the way subjectivities are reproduced and maintained in ideology through the operations of language and the political/social/economic structures of late capitalism" (p. 135). From the perspective of a critical cultural

studies or resistance (post)modernist approach, ludic perspectives that shape much of the work on queer theory currently celebrated in the progressive wings of the academy are concerned primarily with the construction of “speaking subjects” and are premised on a post-structuralist infatuation with subverting dominant sign values and regimes of signification. The problem with the ludic perspective, contends Morton, is that it’s concern with experience as the final court of appeal for a politics of sexuality actually displaces the concern for transforming society and the exploitative social relations of late patriarchal capitalism with a bourgeois concern for textually deconstructing the concept of society. Morton is worth quoting on this issue:

while ludic (post)modern theory demands the de-essentialization, denaturalization, and de-centering of signs and representations in the name of personal libidinal liberation, resistance (post)modernism demands collective emancipation by the overthrow of existing exploitative and oppressive structures and a rebuilding of the space of the public sphere along new lines of coherence. In other words, through “knowledge,” not “experience,” even if in the (post)modern moment “knowledge” is only a “knowledge-effect.” (p. 138)

Morton fears (and rightly so) that ludic postmodernism presently has a stranglehold on the progressive discourse of queer theory, a hold that he largely attributes to “the complex historical formation of the social relations of production” (p. 142). He treats contemporary incarnations of queer theory as an ahistorical, post-conceptual and atheoretical move that exalts experience as the primary referent for understanding the construction of gender and sexuality. Experience is not decried by Morton, since as a gay man he understands that oppression is something fundamentally experienced. Yet he chooses to emphasize the importance of using theory to understand, interrogate and transform experience in relation to the social

totality. Morton writes: “I do believe that one *experiences* oppression as a gay person, as a woman, as an African-American, but one cannot *explain* that oppression on the level of experience—such an explanation will have to come from sustained theoretical engagements which are capable of constructing emancipatory knowledges” (p. 142).

### **The Move Away from Binary Oppositions**

One of the theoretical routes out of the binary thinking of the left’s predominately Hegelian tradition is a cautious move towards the thinking of Spinoza. This may seem an odd suggestion, and one that may be met with harsh criticism from many of my neo-Marxist colleagues. It is a move that one could see as early as Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and Althusser’s *Essays in Self-Criticism* (1976). This theoretical direction (which, I need to emphasize, does not demand a dismissal of Hegel or the dialectic) has been evident in a number of contemporary works, including Pierre Macherey’s *Hegel ou Spinoza* (1979), an essay by Etienne Balibar in *Rethinking Marxism* (1989), Antonio Negri’s *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics* (1991), Deleuze’s *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988), and in Norman O. Brown’s *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (1991). This is not the time for a detailed discussion of Spinoza’s thought but merely an attempt to point one possible way out of the binary thinking that has been inherited from the work of Descartes and that undergirds the work of contemporary Hegelians. As Michael Hardt summarizes so eloquently in his book, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (1993), Hegelian ontology seeks an external support for its foundation and finds it in negation. Deleuze draws upon the work of Spinoza to displace negation and affirm the concept of difference.

The materialist ontological position of Deleuze, following Spinoza and Bergson, does not locate being in the movement of oppositions, but rather in a politics of difference. Materiality is at the heart of the Spinozian imagination “in that it provides the possibility of reading the

commonality and conflict in the encounters among bodies" (Hardt, 1993, p. 102). Here, reason is demystified and undermined as a given system of necessary truth. Hardt writes that "In this context, contingency and necessity, imagination and reason are not exclusive and opposing couples, but rather they are plateaus linked together on a productive continuum by the process of constitution" (1993, p. 104). From a Spinozian perspective the body is no longer subsumed within the order of the mind. Practical acts are not determined by theoretical reasons alone. Constitutive practices, in this view, have a relative autonomy. They are contingent, unforeseeable, creative, and nonteleological.

The body and its relationship to power takes on a new force in Spinoza's work and in Deleuze's appropriation of it. From this perspective, society does not exist outside of an immanent field of forces. It is not constituted by some transcendental fiat. The key notion here is that "being is different in itself" (p. 113). It is not defined by its difference from another. A Spinozian view would suggest that homosexuality or heterosexuality need not be defined by their antagonism with each other. They may be conceived simply as different assemblages of being that are not defined by their binary opposite. The politics that emerges from such a position has profound implications for a critical pedagogy that is anti-racist, -sexist, and -homophobic. Because it is a politics of affirming difference, critical pedagogy does not avoid critique but it is able to push critique further—to its very limits—since it does not recuperate the essence of what it attacks by constructing an affirmation out the supercession of the negation (as in dialectical logic). In Deleuze's ontology of ethics, being is conceptualized as "a hybrid structure constituted through joyful practice" (p. 119). From this perspective, democratic society can be made more connected, and less prone to deployments of reactionary power and more connected to joyful social relationships and "powerful subjective assemblages" of being.

Norman O. Brown has recently remarked:

Spinoza is the philosopher of the future because right at the beginning of modernity he saw that the Cartesian metaphysic would not work, and by systematic exposure of its internal self-contradictions he was able, in a supreme effort of intellectual abstraction, to arrive at the alternative. (1991, p. 123)

Spinoza undercuts the Cartesian notion of the self-contained, self-explanatory, self-subsistent, and self-determined individual which Brown describes as "Individualism, pluralism, and lofty idealism on the subjective side; monism and materialism on the objective side: an irrevocable commitment to material development, opening up the infinite world of interacting energy in the physical universe and the infinite world of expanding desire in the human universe" (1991, pp. 123-124). It is an utterly bourgeois Cartesian position, notes Brown, to couple individualism and idealism on the subjective side with the commitment to materialism on the objective side.

Spinoza's perspective is radically monist in that it suggests "the unity of the mind and the body in every individual and the unity of individuals with each other as parts of the whole" (p. 125). Spinoza's monism, if interpreted politically, "can be seen as setting the historical agenda for us today; to rectify the flaw in modernity; to arrive at one world; to reorganize the gigantic material processes of intercommunication released by modernity into a coherent unity; call it Love's Body" (p. 128).

When Spinoza talks about the social body it is important to remember, as Brown notes, that the conception of unification at work here is not one that formulates members as functionally or organically differentiated or complimentary but is more akin to Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles, (p. 133). His idea of being is pre-Socratic whereas his philosophy of organism is post-Aristotelian, something we have no space to explore here. Suffice it to say that Spinoza's conception of intersubjectivity and

community works against the logocentric conception of the body politic as based upon an “us” against “them” ideology—an ideology that is at the root of modern understandings of difference and which perpetuates the idea of homosexuality as being a “disease” that must be hacked away from the healthy tissues of civilized communities. A turn to Spinoza (and equally important, to Marx) could help us to liberate our conceptions of homosexuality from dualistic thinking that posits artificial boundaries between self and other.

### **Gay and Lesbian Identity and Praxis: An Oppositional Pedagogy**

In this section I will summarize in programmatic terms some of the positions presented in this paper. The purpose of this summary is to outline a series of initiatives in the construction of a critical pedagogy that is inclusive of gay and lesbian contributions to society and which, as part of its liberatory project, also examines the structured silences surrounding the oppression of gays and lesbians. Of serious concern here is developing a critical pedagogical approach that involves students in interrogating critically their own construction of sexual identity and in attempting to account for ways in which alternatives to their own identity are constructed through a politics of difference. The fundamental referent that guides such a curriculum is the struggle for social justice and the construction of a more radical democracy.

1. A central characteristic of the critical classroom is to develop a language of analysis and discussion that attempts to break down the intractable binarisms of homosexuality and heterosexuality which operate as part of the discourse of the oppressor. These binarisms are found not only in heterosexual identity politics but in gay politics as well. For instance, in her recent article, “Making it Perfectly Queer,” Lisa Duggan (1992) notes that the tendency of gay theorists to essentialize sexual identity as biological or psychological is fundamentally an Anglocentric and Eurocentric perspective. She writes that “Anygay poli-

tics based on the primacy of sexual identity defined as unitary and ‘essential’ residing clearly, intelligibly and unalterably in the body or psyche, and fixing desire in a gendered direction, ultimately represents the view from the subject position of the ‘20th-century Western white gay male’” (1992, p. 18). Duggan also remarks that there should be an attempt to avoid the naturalization of the term “bi-sexual” by not casting it into terms that rigidly gender it.

2. Students need to see gender in a critical relation to desire. It is important, therefore, that gender and desire be understood as social and cultural constructions—as sites of historical specificity and struggle. This means introducing students to constructionist theories of sexual identity. According to Duggan,

Constructionist theories . . . recognize the (constrained) mobility of desire and support a critical relation to gender. They stake out a new stance of opposition, which many theorists now call “queer.” This stance is constituted through its dissent from the hegemonic, structured relations and meanings of sexuality and gender, but its actual historical forms and positions are open, constantly subject to negotiation and renegotiation. (1992, p. 23)

3. Teachers need to reset the parameters of knowledge so that the perspectives of lesbian and gay students are given legitimacy in educational institutions, neighborhood communities, and at the level of state and federal bureaucracies. In a provocative and important essay, “Academic Knowledge and the Parameters of Knowledge,” William G. Tierney (1993) develops an insightful case study of a university setting in which gay and lesbian professors and students are shown to question the meaning of academic freedom within a repressive

academic context in which “individuals are not able even to conceive of studying certain ideas such as lesbian and gay studies, which in turn makes academic freedom a concept that demands reanalysis and conceptual clarity from a postmodern perspective” (1993, p. 149). If this is the case on most university campuses, and as a cultural worker in the university system I can attest that for the most part, it is, then one can wonder what kinds of policies and practices prevail in most elementary, middle, and high school settings.

4. Teachers and students need to work collaboratively to identify the social and cultural processes that both shape and reproduce sexual identity formations in the school, community, and larger society.
5. Teachers and students should engage in a careful analysis of how institutional, organizational, and bureaucratic structures function to constrain and enable the process of sexual identity formation.
6. Teachers need to explore the ways in which sexual identity is informed both by social structures and human agency, and to consider how agency and structure constitute the dialectical weave of all identity. In this light, teachers need to pose and explore the following problem with their students: How is sexual identity inscribed and coded in lifeworld transactions (speech acts, communicative rituals, and routines) at the level of everyday school and classroom life?
7. Teachers and students need to establish a forum for dialogue whereby they can identify the strategies used to justify and arguments used to legitimize ethical, moral, and political positions on sexual identity? Tierney puts the issue as follows:
 

To come to terms with academic freedom, one must investigate the climate and culture in which a specific topic resides and ask a series of questions: How is knowledge conceived? Whose interests have been advanced by these forms of knowledge? How has what we defined as knowledge changed over time? How does the organization’s culture promote or silence some individuals? How are some topics marginalized and others promoted? (1993, p. 158)
8. Teachers and students need to evaluate their own access and that of other school and community members to counter-hegemonic discourses of sexual identity—those that do not depend on falling within the boundaries of an existing background consensus of taken-for-granted beliefs and normative discourses of authority.
9. Teachers need to raise the following question: What are the discourses of possibility and hope that exist in the school, community, and wider society that can be tapped in order to give students a better sense of how individual and collective struggle can and often does make a difference in the fight for social justice? As Tierney notes, “social constructionist interpretations far too often have the tendency to point out that change does not occur, but . . . it does” (p. 159). Further, how can students cauterize themselves against the degradation and violence of homophobic prejudice in order to carry forth a project of self and social transformation that is profoundly antiracist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic?
10. Since sexual identity cannot, for the most part, remain tied to the tenure of theory, teachers need to explore how students can forge active alliances with progressive social movements and make a link between classroom practice and the public interest. Consequently, teachers and students need to explain ways in which coalitions can emerge that work across barriers of race, class, and gender.

I do not have the space to expand on these issues in relation to developing a curriculum

and pedagogy of sexual identity. My purpose has therefore been more suggestive than explanatory. It constitutes a more modest goal of charting out in a very broad sweep some of what I feel to be the more significant theoretical insights and political issues that need to be raised, debated, and struggled over if schools are to participate in the construction of a more egalitarian social order with respect to a politics of sexual identity. Surely the question of sexual identity is a crucial area for schools to address critically in renewing their social contract with the public. Otherwise they simply become complicitous with the larger society in continuing the shameful legacy of constructing gay and lesbian identity as the anti-thesis of a democratic society. This can only lead to acts of "sexual cleansing" and sexual apartheid no less ominous than those which we continue to witness as part of our collective history. In fact, such acts already surround us and we could see them more clearly if our moral conscience were not so terribly out of focus.

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