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Critical Intellectuals in Postdigital Times

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Critical intellectuals in postdigital times

Abstract

This article starts with a brief analysis of what it means to be an intellectual within the US tradition of critical pedagogy. Pointing towards important socio-technological transformations which took place in the past few decades, the article situates the concept of the intellectual into contemporary postdigital context. The article looks into two main areas of intellectual work which seem to have undergone significant transformations – automation and post-truth. It develops possible responses to recent challenges in these areas and shows that contemporary intellectuals working in the tradition of critical pedagogy need to take technology seriously. Towards conclusion, the article promotes Greta Thunberg as an important example of a postdigital intellectual. Our analyses show that critical pedagogy has an important role in development of contemporary intellectual work. Aiming at constantly transforming challenges, however, old theories require constant reconceptualization in and for our postdigital context. Within this mesh-up of questions and answers old and new, we identify a starting point for this reconceptualization in the notion of critical praxis.

Keywords: intellectual, critical pedagogy, postdigital, automation, post-truth, praxis

Introduction

Critical pedagogy is a theory, a practice, a praxis, an ethical perspective, a (critical utopian) vision of a future society, and much more. In fact, we could say in summary that “critical pedagogy is not a methodology, per se, sequestered in schools of education. It’s not simply or mainly a set of pedagogical procedures or analytical steps as one might typically envision. (...) It is more about problem-posing than solution-giving.” (McLaren, 2019, p. 177) While such a wide definitional arc enables practitioners of critical pedagogy to successfully address a broad range of problems, it also presents us with many unresolved questions: How should I practice critical pedagogy in my daily life? What kind of critical engagement would provide the best fit for this or that problem? – and more deeply – What kind of teacher / person should I become? These are questions that have been raised since the very beginnings of the critical pedagogy movement.

A multitude of scholars from a diverse assemblage of disciples have been answering these questions in various historical moments and under various circumstances (see Giroux, 1988). Yet circumstances change – and answers to these questions cannot remain intact. In the critical pedagogy movement, we all work towards certain social goals such as emancipation and justice – yet the roads to these goals, and even the goals themselves, are constantly moving targets. Should we therefore stop reading Paulo Freire, Antonia Darder, Henry Giroux, or Joe Kincheloe? Not at all – their works have laid some of the most solid foundations of critical pedagogy as we know it. Should we read Freire or early Giroux or early McLaren, and follow everything they said? Not at all – back in the day, their circumstances had been hugely different from those facing teachers and prospective teachers today. Should we try to distil some ‘prescriptions’ for critical educators based on their works? Not in a million years! Critical pedagogy is not about prescriptions, blueprints, or primers. Critical pedagogy has its heroes, but despises followers (see Jandrić, 2018). Critical pedagogy is deeply historical and contextual, and requires constant reinvention of our theories and practices joined in and through the act of critical praxis.

This article starts from a simple truism that one cannot be a critical pedagogue at work and then stop being a critical pedagogue at home, in the street, or on social networks. Critical pedagogy requires our engagement in all walks of life, yet our research and literature often focus to schools and classrooms. Thus our question becomes: how do we, critical pedagogues, prepare ourselves for meeting a variety of challenges posted by our existence in multiple roles – teacher, parent, neighbor, voter, amateur musician, sports supporter? How do we, critical pedagogues, negotiate our various social roles and our convictions? How do we, critical pedagogues, respond to common threats of today such as post-truth, religious fundamentalism, fascism? Answers to these questions have been sought, from Freire until today, in a broad, often over-used concept of the intellectual¹. Building on body of work of the western critical pedagogy tradition since Paulo Freire, this article reconceptualizes the concept of the intellectual in and for year 2020.

Who is an intellectual?

Being an intellectual is a complex idea which defies attempts at definition. Intellectuals are people who use their own reason, often against the grain of the majority opinion, to uphold certain (usually humanistic) values and improve the society through critique. For instance: Peter McLaren's debate with the Nobel prize laureate Vernon Smith published at Chapman University's blog (McLaren and Smith, 2017) provides a social critique aimed at improving communication between theorists of critical pedagogy who support socialism and prominent economists who support capitalism. So far so good... but the right also has its intellectuals! As we write these words, for instance, an article in The Washington Post claims: "Conservative intellectuals are at a turning point: Normalize Trump or resist him?" (Applebaum, 2019). Indeed, normalizing Trump is arguably amongst the biggest nightmares of critical pedagogues, which can probably be outweighed only by even more radical tendencies such as calls for US engagement in new wars over resources. However, it cannot be denied that right-wing intellectuals engage in thinking and expressing opinions about contemporary challenges facing our society at least as much as left-wing intellectuals. While it is easy to dismiss certain people as 'non-intellectuals' because we disagree with their views, we need to accept that being an intellectual can mean different things to different people.

And what about intellectuals' education and public reception of their works? Should intellectuals not be educated, well-read, distinguished? Should we perhaps assume that intellectuals – regardless their positioning within the ideological spectrum – are well educated people whose opinions carry a lot of weight in our society? Well, it is easy to agree that intellectuals should have a full grasp of theories and be able to relate those to helping non-intellectuals negotiate, cope with and even transform everyday life. Yet, many intellectuals (historical and contemporary) have not had much formal education, have not possessed degrees, and have not been recognized during their lifetimes. While we can agree that an intellectual should 'know stuff', we don't know what it is exactly that intellectuals should know, and we don't know always how to determine whether someone possesses that knowledge.

What we do know, is that intellectuals should not 'sell' their opinions. The easiest way to disqualify someone from being an intellectual is to show that they advocate certain worldviews and opinions for personal gain. More often than not, we openly pronounce those

¹ Members of the critical pedagogy movement often use the longer phrase 'public intellectual'. While this phrase does emphasize critical pedagogy's social mission, Ford and Jandrić (2019) argue that one cannot be an intellectual and refuse to engage publicly. To avoid tautology, in this chapter we use the word intellectual without the adjective 'public'.

selling their attitudes as profiteers and cowards. In words of Ford and Jandrić, intellectuals are those who “speak truth to power and challenge dominant ways of thinking” (2019, p. 92). Yet, history shows that this definition is also slippery. What happens when people speak truth to power, but get it wrong? For instance, the key European philosopher, Martin Heidegger, made tremendous theoretical contributions which lie in the very basis of critical pedagogy. However, Heidegger is also well known for his public support of Nazism, which brought him a lot of prestige in Germany under Hitler’s regime who bestowed upon him the position of Rector of Freiburg University. Despite Heidegger’s deeply immoral support of the Nazi regime, these days many people (even in the critical pedagogy movement) would nevertheless claim that Heidegger was an intellectual.

As we can see, the notion of the intellectual is indeed very hard to describe. There are some basic shared ideas of what an intellectual might be, but practice is full of borderline cases and surprising twists. Looking for ‘general’ rules, we could proceed to examine history of the concept of the intellectual, we could compare Western and Eastern traditions, we could look closely at the conflict of interest from these (and many more) perspectives... Such an approach might result in a very nice philosophical treatise such as Steve Fuller’s book *The Intellectual: The Positive Power of Negative Thinking* (2005), but it won’t answer our question about what it means to be an intellectual working in the tradition of critical pedagogy. While it is important to acknowledge a wide variety of perspectives and issues, therefore, we turn to the US tradition of critical pedagogy started by Paulo Freire and developed by Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Antonia Darder and others.

We could start building this theoretical grounding at least since Plato. For the sake of brevity, however, we will start with one of the most cited works in the field written at the beginning of 20th century: Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (1992). Writing in his prison cell between 1929 and 1935 (the notebooks were first published only in the 1950s), Gramsci argues: “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (1992, p. 115). Expanding this thought, he concludes:

When one distinguishes between intellectuals and nonintellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals, that is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether toward intellectual elaboration or toward muscular-nervous effort. (Gramsci, 1992, p. 115)

Like a good Marxist, Gramsci sees social relationships primarily through class, and eloquently argues that the left needs its own intellectuals in order to win the class war. He calls these people organic intellectuals. According to one of the newest definitions available, an organic intellectual is “an intellectual member of a social class, as opposed to a member of the traditional intelligentsia that regards itself as a class apart from the rest of society.” (Wikionary, 2019). Gramsci’s key feature of the organic intellectual, class consciousness and class identity, has retained the key feature of an intellectual working in the tradition of critical pedagogy (see Mayo, 1999). Similar thinking can also be found in works of postcolonial theory from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) which heavily influenced Paulo Freire to more recent works such as Edward Said’s *Culture and imperialism* (1993) and elsewhere.

Angela Davis, arguably one of the most important US public intellectuals in the second half of 20th century, expands on this thought further. Reminiscing about another great figure of the Frankfurt School for Social Sciences, her teacher, Herbert Marcuse, Davis writes: “He

emphasized the important role of intellectuals within oppositional movements, which, I believe, led more intellectuals to frame their work in relation to these movements than would otherwise have done so.” (Davis, 2005, p. xii) As can be seen from theory and practice of people such as Angela Davis and Herbert Marcuse, intellectuals working in the tradition of critical pedagogy also need to actively engage in oppositional (popular) movements.

These thoughts are echoed in early works of founders of the critical pedagogy movement as we know it today.

Influenced by Fanon and Gramsci, Freire was committed to the idea and practice of legitimizing the experiences and knowledge of his students so that organic intellectuals would emerge. These organic intellectuals would in turn be in the best position to contribute to the solutions of the community's problems since they would know their community, the intricacies of their context, and their problems and solutions better than any expert who had studied the problem merely academically. (Díaz, 2019)

Building on Freire's work, Giroux and McLaren turn the blade inside out – together with speaking of developing students as organic intellectuals, they also examined the theory and practice of developing teachers as public intellectuals. In an early book on the theme, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Giroux (1988: xxiv) describes this work as “a particular form of cultural politics” and provides an opportunity “for exercising as teachers the dialectic of re-reading and re-appropriating elements of a body of work that resonates with contemporary concerns.”

With a preface by Paulo Freire and an afterword by Peter McLaren, *Teachers as Intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988) is an important milestone on our road from Gramsci and Fanon through Marcuse and Freire to early Giroux and McLaren. However, there has been a lot of water under the bridge since this milestone book – and our understanding of intellectuals' work has developed alongside other social developments. In consequence, *Teachers as Intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988) is much more optimistic than Giroux's and McLaren's recent writings. In 2012 Giroux launched a powerful popular attack on deskilling of teachers through various measurements, depoliticization of education, and even deaths of students in bouts of violence which seem to regularly occur in US schools. The article we are referring to, ‘The War Against Teachers as Public Intellectuals in Dark Times’ Giroux (2012), is just one amongst many writings in which Giroux speaks of teachers as intellectuals – often without even mentioning the word intellectual. In a recent article, McLaren invokes the Gramscian class struggle and writes: “The challenge is not to ask vanguard intellectuals with too much ink in their veins to lock arms with motley workers on the picket lines but to understand that the fear of those advocating revolution is proportionate to the fear of those who oppose it.” (McLaren, 2019, p. 328) Critical pedagogy's mission towards emancipation and social justice has remained the same, but the social context in which this mission resides, and available strategies, have significantly changed.

The postdigital challenge of critical intellectuals

Human existence has always been inextricably linked to technologies. The technology of fire has enabled early humans to cook their meals, the technology of building and agriculture has enabled ancient nomads to settle in one geographical location, and the technology of the wheel has enabled ancient peoples to transport large amounts of goods and people from one place to other. All these technologies brought about revolutions in ways we eat, dwell, and travel; and

the latest generation of human technologies, digital technology, is not an exception. During past decades humankind has undergone a deep socio-technological change known under numerous, often bombastic names: the information revolution, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the network society (see Peters, Jandrić, and Means, 2019), and so on. In our recent writings (Jandrić et al., 2018; Jandrić et al., 2019), we call this the postdigital age. While these concepts are fiercely debated in academic literature (see McLaren and Jandrić, 2014), it is fair to say that we now live in a world where human lives cannot be separated from digital technologies (Fawns, 2019; Jandrić and Kuzmanić, 2020). This socio-technological shift carries deep consequences for intellectual work. All social critique consists of three main elements: (1) things we know about society, which helps us develop a critique (available information), (2) ways in which we can express this critique (dissemination of information), and (3) available opportunities for constructive dialogue between the critiques (democracy).

These three elements have always been technologically mediated, but the nature of that mediation has radically changed in the last few decades. Most 20th century theories of what it means to be an intellectual working in the tradition of critical pedagogy have been based on analog, one-way communications: books, magazines, radio, and television. However, today's intellectuals work in a very different media environment of two-way media supported by the Internet (see Castells 2001). Furthermore, technological changes reach far beyond communication media as they interact with all aspects of our society. While this is not the place for extensive debates of the postdigital condition, the following quotation outlines its basic features:

The contemporary use of the term 'postdigital' does describe human relationships to technologies that we experience, individually and collectively, in the moment here and now. It shows our raising awareness of blurred and messy relationships between physics and biology, old and new media, humanism and posthumanism, knowledge capitalism and bio-informational capitalism. (Jandrić et al., 2018, p. 896)

The postdigital condition is not about technology; but it insists that technology co-creates our reality. Speaking of education, Tim Fawns hence rejects the traditional distinction between education and technology. "All teaching should take account of digital and non-digital, material and social. Ideas like 'digital education' are useful insofar as they encourage people to look closer at what is happening, but become problematic when used to close down ideas or attribute instrumental or essential properties to technology." (Fawns, 2019, p. 142)

In a recent publication one of us has already theorized the postdigital challenge of intellectuals working in the tradition of critical pedagogy. Taking a broad historical view, and delving into the nature of the postdigital society, the article concludes:

Networks have replaced the detached academic, who if they are to join in the new pedagogy of the public intellectual will do so not as an academic but as a node in an ever-expanding network. It is with this message, that we welcome the birth of the postdigital public intellectual into our world who, it should be clear by now, is always already a collective assemblage whose educational logics run along the lines of collective postdigital study, and not traditional teaching and learning. (Ford and Jandrić, 2019: 105)

Against this theoretical backdrop, we now briefly outline two main areas of intellectual work which seem to have undergone significant transformation and possible responses to this transformation: automation and post-truth.

Automation

The first promise of any human technology is the reduction of labor. A wheel cart helps us to transport more goods than we can carry in our hands; an axe helps us to chop logs that we cannot chop by our hands. During industrial revolutions, however, automation has become more than a tool – it has also become a powerful social force which has significantly impacted employment. Faced with reduction in available workplaces caused by automation, in 1779 the English weaver Ned Ludd destroyed two stocking frames and started a whole movement of workers who destroyed new waving machines called Luddism. These days we won't find many people destroying computers which took away their job, but the primitivist refusal of innovation, Luddism, is still a prominent social force (Jandrić, 2017; Peters, Jandrić, and Means, 2019).

However, the fallacy of Luddism was shown already by Karl Marx. Here, we turn to a brilliant summary of Marx's critique of Luddism offered by Curry Malott:

Marx demonstrates that those same machines used to destroy the working-class under capitalism can liberate workpeople from the need to labor under socialism. Since new value created capitalistically is based on unpaid labor hours, labor saving technology, over time, which reduces the total number of labor hours set in motion, contributes to falling rates of profit. To compensate for this tendency the capitalist class, historically and currently, has found ways to capture ever-larger sums of surplus value. (...)

However, if production is planned and driven by human need, as is the case under socialism, then labor-saving machines can actually reduce the number of labor hours society has to commit to the production of needs such as food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and education. Rather than destroy the instruments of labor they should be sublated and converted into the common property of the broadest masses of workers. (Malott, 2019)

Marx taught us that automation of labor is not a problem – capitalism is the problem. Intellectuals do need to take connections between automation, unemployment, and education seriously (see Peters, Jandrić, and Means, 2019). However,

[t]he idea that more education can resolve the problem of technological unemployment is a political construction which has largely failed to deliver its promise. (...) Instead of attributing responsibility for social change to abstract notions of education, market and technology, a new shared vision is needed where more agency is explicitly attributed to the researchers, teachers, and students who are the genuine human future of work. (Peters, Jandrić, and Hayes, 2019, p. 242)

Obviously, intellectuals working in the tradition of critical pedagogy have an indispensable role in creating this new shared wisdom.

Digital automation of today is very different from analog automation of factory work critiqued by Marx. We now live in a world where ubiquitous devices collect huge amounts of data, and then feed this data into automated systems called algorithms, to assist us in almost

every activity. Phones count our footsteps, self-directed vacuum cleaners send our floorplans to online shops (which then offer us to buy furniture of suitable size while we surf the Internet), and automated systems determine our eligibility for support and healthcare. These systems cause a huge number of issues in areas such as privacy and security (Collier and Ross 2020). And what happens when a system makes a wrong decision? We are now reading an increasing number of testimonies in which people have been wronged by technologies and could not get any help from living human beings (see Eubanks, 2018; Zuboff, 2019).

The 2020 intellectual needs to recognize the postdigital nature of these questions. In Marx's analysis, automation was not a problem *per se* because it was confined to the factory – it was capitalism, on top of technology, that was the problem. These days, however, we cannot make a clear distinction between technology and capitalism: today's technology is everywhere, and capitalism is built into today's technology. The 2020 intellectual working in the tradition of critical pedagogy cannot afford the luxury of ignoring technology, nor she can be led to believe that technology is the root of social problems. Whether she likes it or not, the 2020 intellectual needs to take technology seriously.

Post-truth

A good case in the point is the post-truth condition which plagues our political scene, our personal lives, and even our identities. The idea of post-truth has spread rapidly in 2016, when the Oxford dictionary declared it their word of the year (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). In a more recent definition, The Oxford Learner Dictionary (2019) defines post-truth as “relating to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts” and immediately gives an example: “In this era of post-truth politics, it's easy to cherry-pick data and reach any conclusion you like.” Looking at this definition, the post-truth condition does not seem in any way related to technology, as one could argue that some people always relied more on feelings than on facts. Indeed – authors like Jodi Dean (Dean, Medak, and Jandrić, 2019), and Henry Frankfurt (2005), have been writing about similar issues in great depth decades ago. But – and it is a truly big but – the post-truth condition has arrived into prominence with the presidential campaign of Donald Trump and especially his use of Twitter (Oliver, 2020). This sudden bout of popularity did not arrive from thin air – it was based on technological developments that have allowed expansion of post-truth rhetoric to previously unforeseen heights.

Weeks after post-truth was declared the 2016 word of the year, everyone seemed to write about it. Periodically returning to the post-truth condition over the years, Giroux (2019) links it to the development of fascism. Jandrić (2018, p. 119) claims that postdigital critical pedagogues need to develop a “critical pedagogy of trust”. Michael Peters writes: “It takes little imagination to draw some conclusions from this melange of past examples to understand that the notion of “facts” and “evidence” in a post-truth era not only affects politics and science, but also becomes a burning issue for education at all levels.” (2018, p. 148). A recent Special Issue. ‘Lies, Bullshit and Fake News: Should we be worried?’, examines the postdigital nature of post-truth (MacKenzie and Bhatt, 2020b). The first paper in the Special Issue develops a nuanced view of the relationships between post-truth and its infrastructure:

Although Twitter has made post-truth political rhetoric easier, I suggest it may yet be possible to find ways either to resist enthrallment by learning to play this game better or even by engaging with the fundamental logic that favours these specific forms in the first place. Rather than feeling limited to either opting out or remaining silent, it may

instead be possible to change the debate through, for example, coopting the software layer by marshalling bots in more effective ways, developing laws that protect groups from violence and aggression (on any platform, not just Twitter), or simply by turning the sceptical gaze back onto the political moves made to discredit expertise. (Oliver 2020, p.35)

Subsequent papers look into various aspects of the post-truth problem such as critical media literacy; many of them make direct reference to Paulo Freire and the critical pedagogy movement. Thus, Carr, Cuervo Sanchez, and Daros (2020: 53) write: “In an era where truth is played like a bluffing game, the first and most important principle in facing misinformation is to encourage and cultivate critical thinking and engagement in and through education”. While this is not the space for a detailed elaboration of all insights developed in the Special Issue, the final paper nicely summarizes its main message: “As our information ecosystem becomes increasingly complex, unpredictable, and balkanised educators have a vital role in helping an informed public navigate what it encounters online.” (MacKenzie and Bhatt, 2020a, p. 217)

Post-truth is amongst the clearest contemporary examples of complexities facing contemporary intellectuals working in the tradition of critical pedagogy. Our information ecosystems are not confined to the workplace, and we need to combat truth in each and every interaction we make. Technology shapes post-truth discourse, and simultaneously offers new affordances for developing counter-discourses; while technology is not all there is, it does need to be taken very seriously. Traditional critical pedagogy can offer us plenty of theoretical guidance, but this guidance is at a high theoretical plane; practical strategies for combatting post-truth need to be developed pretty much from scratch. “The postdigital is both a rupture in our existing theories and their continuation” (Jandrić et al., 2018, p. 895), and intellectuals working in the tradition of critical pedagogy, in our postdigital age, need to accept uncertainties and complexities which arrive from that position.

Who remembers Greta Thunberg?

As we wrote the first version of this text in late 2019, 16-year old Swedish child Greta Thunberg has just started a heated debate about environmental consequences of capitalism. Blaming older generations for stealing the future of our planet’s children, Thunberg has gained significant media attention and inspired a worldwide wave of environmental protests. While her actions are extremely important and remarkable, Thunberg did not say anything new about dangers of global warming. The content of her claims has been known for decades, and has been continuously present in the critical pedagogy movement (e.g. Kahn, 2010). So what makes Thunberg’s actions so powerful? Why did she manage to get her message across the whole world? More importantly, why did we not manage to get the same message across the world in all these years before Thunberg?

One aspect of Thunberg’s success is technology. Another aspect of her success is the structure of contemporary media. Another aspect of her success is her youth. Another aspect of her success is her parents’ and teachers’ support. And yet another aspect, that we would hate to see neglected, is Thunberg’s brilliance – she, amongst millions of children, has managed to do something that no one else did. While this may seem like a stretch, we believe that Greta Thunberg is a true postdigital public intellectual and critical pedagogue. She speaks truth to power. She challenges theoretical assumptions of contemporary capitalism. She organizes, networks, acts. She develops our sense of collectivity and enables collective action. While she could not be further from traditional educational systems, Thunberg teaches the world some

important lessons; she also makes many of us want to learn more about arguments in environmental debates. We cannot all become like Greta Thunberg, but studying her example has the potential to improve our theories and practices.

We submitted the first version of this article days before the outbreak of Covid-19, and we are now making our revisions approximately six months into the pandemic. In the meantime, we pointed towards the need to study effects of the pandemic as they unfold (Jandrić 2020), we explored the concept of viral modernity (Peters, Jandrić and McLaren, 2020) and expanded it towards a viral theory of post-truth (Peters, McLaren, and Jandrić, 2020), we explored religious responses to the pandemic (McLaren, 2020), and so on. And we are not the only people who suddenly refocused their work – in fields from medicine, through education, to logistics, and many others, most researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners have joined their efforts in the ‘war’ against the immediate threat of Covid-19 (Wagener 2020). Few days ago, while we discussed revisions in this article, one of us asked: Who remembers Greta Thunberg? While we can find an occasional article about themes such as non-human animal trauma (O’Sullivan, 2020) and biopolitical management of human populations (Lewis, 2020), environmental questions have definitely slipped out of humanity’s collective focus during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our experience of sudden pandemic outbreak may be out of the ordinary, but it does point towards a larger principle. In order to make a difference, public intellectuals should combine ephemeral nature of their public appearances with engagement in longer-lasting measures such as policy development. With time, Greta Thunberg’s viral *j’accuse* speeches will cease to attract so many clicks and eyeballs, yet policies she managed to influence will continue to shape lives of millions. Certainly, this does not imply that postdigital intellectuals should somehow stop being ‘public’ or that they should transform into politicians and lobbyists. However, this does send a clear message that a postdigital public intellectual and critical pedagogue should simultaneously work on many fronts, combining public appearances with political organizing and policy work.

Conclusion

This article started with a brief analysis of what it means to be an intellectual. We examined main theoretical insights from the US tradition of critical pedagogy and situated them into contemporary postdigital context. We looked into two main areas of intellectual work which seem to have undergone significant transformation – automation and post-truth – and examined possible ways that contemporary critical intellectuals might respond to these challenges. We promoted Greta Thunberg as an important example of a postdigital intellectual who has the power to inspire, encourage, teach and learn from those, to paraphrase Freire (1998), who dare to be critical intellectuals in our postdigital times. Finally, we concluded that postdigital public intellectuals should wear many hats, including but not limited to those of public personae, policy-makers, lobbyists, and others.

The concept of intellectual has always defied definition, and it is impossible to provide firm primers or guidelines about what it means to be an intellectual working in the tradition of critical pedagogy. The tradition of critical pedagogy provides indispensable theoretical background for contemporary intellectuals, yet our strategies and practices are in a need for constant reconceptualization in and for postdigital times we live in. Continuous reimagination and reinvention of our theories and practices, and their joining together in the concept of critical praxis, is a true critical pedagogue’s starting point for responding to challenges of today and tomorrow.

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