

Revisiting “old” Latin-American texts from the “present time” of Critical Pedagogies. Key ideas to discuss lines of continuity and rupture¹

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Summary

The reconfiguration of Critical Pedagogy from “criticism” has led us to focus not only on the challenges the field implies in practice, but also on the theoretical roots that conformed this transgressive perspective of the world. Categories linked to multiculturalism, decoloniality, imagination and hope, retake “old” sequences that are reread today in the light of contexts where we act and which we intend to transform. Along these lines, this presentation will search for such categories in texts written by two Argentinian authors from the popular culture field with Latin American projection, namely Rodolfo Kush and Arturo Jauretche, in which

theoretical antecedents and contextual statements can be revisited from the Critical Pedagogies’ standpoint. This journey to the past through these authors makes us travel in time and space, but it also relocates us in the present time along the axes upon which the critical field in education has been built: power, history, language and culture.

Keys words: Critical Pedagogy - Power - Culture - Multiculturalism - Decoloniality - Popular Culture Field.

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I Straining the restricted perspective of schooling to the breaking point

The critical look at the educational field -both seen from a theoretical and a practical stand- has found in Critical Pedagogies transgressive discourses and practices to see the world precisely where politics, power and pedagogy intersect to weave democracy (Steinberg 2008). Henry Giroux follows the spirit of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire in defining pedagogy as a *performative practice* that “[...] takes as one of its goals the opportunity for students to be able to reflectively frame their own relationship to the ongoing project of an unfinished democracy” (Giroux, 2008:17).

Along the same lines, Giroux relates what actually happens in classrooms with external forces of different kinds and proclaims that critical pedagogy attempts to understand “how power works through the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts” (Giroux, 2008:180). In this sense, critical pedagogy seeks to constitute students as *informed subjects and social agents*.

Pedagogy represents commitment to the future and so educators have to guarantee that the future directs towards a world with *more social justice*, a world in which the *discourses of criticism and possibility*, together with the *values of reason, freedom and equality*, are able to modify the world where we live, as part of a wider *democratic project*. (Giroux, 2008)

The establishment of the theoretical field of *critical analysis of education* is deeply rooted in categories coming from Social Reconstructivism, the Frankfurt School, Gramsch, Freire and the contributions of various theoreticians from disciplinary frontiers that provide their perspectives of what is going on in society. Just as social reconstructivism had ethical and social concerns, and articulated relationships between knowledge and power; knowing and doing, commitment and struggle, so do critical theorists break up with a restricted view of schooling -one which is deprived of a democratic vision of citizenry linked to patriotism- thus opening the way to transgressive readings that consider citizens’ education as an ideological process of cultural production intended to deepen and expand the direction of a radicalized and plural democracy. In this revitalization of the concept of *being political*, other discourses from women, racial minorities and subordinated groups of different kinds join to enhance the idea of active citizenship. Giroux’s intention (1998: 226) of “making the pedagogical more political” legitimizes schools as public democratic spheres that, on the basis of a Public philosophy, link the purpose of schooling to the development of forms of moral knowledge, and define citizenry as an “ethical compacting and not as a commercial contract”. This call for a radical cultural policy responding to the new language of criticism obliges us to focus on and search for “identity” in the theoretical roots that have forged this transgressive way of seeing the

world. Johann Baptist Metz (1999) asserts that identity is configured through the awakening of memory⁴. In this presentation, we intend to find conducting threads in categories defined by critical pedagogies and to revisit them on the basis of previous theoretical antecedents and contextual proposals of two Argentine intellectuals from the popular culture field, with Latin American projection, namely, Rodolfo Kusch and Arturo Jauretche. Our intention is to exercise ethical and political consciousness so as to be able to “reinsert criticism into critical pedagogy” (Macedo, 2008: 391) as a way to find identity by tracing back some conceptualizations that preceded the onset of critical pedagogy.

II Revisiting Rodolfo Kusch and Arturo Jauretche from the field of Critical Pedagogy

Any reference to Jauretche (1901-1974) implies placing him within the revolutionary popular nationalism born against liberal trends, and this involves a reinterpretation of history. Particularly significant in Argentina, this form of nationalism represented a rejection of foreign ideas and of intellectuals with an alleged universalistic orientation, equally critical of liberal principles, oligarchy, socialism and communism, on the basis of the fact that *none of these had understood the nation*. It was this popular nationalism embodied in FORJA which Jauretche was faithful to. It proclaimed a national and popular position that sought to reinstate people at the centre

of political events and was determined to interpret history as the development of the *people-oligarchy antithesis*, in which oligarchy serves as an instrument to British imperialism. The system was considered to be a pseudo-democracy, in which the state was the formal sovereign but not the real one due to economic dependence on world power centers. The judiciary and institutional structure which had been created to serve imperialistic interests was referred by Jauretche and the FORJA group as the “legal status of colonialism” (Spanish *coloniaje* not *colonialismo*). This situation located the country in a semi-colonial position which had to be overcome to fulfill the nationalists’ dream of a free Argentina. The source work we are analyzing in the present paper, “The Pedagogic Colonization”, was published in 1957, as part of a major work: “The prophets of Hate”.

Rodolfo Kusch’s work (1922-1979), the second author of our study, devoted himself to studying “American problems”. His whole work is set in the direction of unraveling a single issue: American peoples’ thought from a wide perspective. Kusch adopts a comprehensive approach to communities living in the city as well as indigenous communities, where he worked so hard to understand what happened in their daily lives. He not only studied religions of the past but also the problems of people today, their challenges and daily struggles for survival and their “development”, i.e., their tomorrow. Kusch’s character might be considered marginal or rather

interstitial in terms of education and intellectual exercise. Is he an essay writer, a philosopher, an anthropologist? He seems to be all these things at the same time, and not entirely any one of them. Perhaps his character can be defined as that of a writer-philosopher, as we might consider that craft in Argentina, one which does not consist in the mere writing of books, but instead, one which involves a curious and daring thinker who reformulates and extends the main thematic vein of his work: “Indianism” as called in the 50’s, or “popular culture” in the 80’s. Kusch deliberately stays wide apart from the world academic canons which in his own words are too “neat”, considering the sense he gives to the term. He throws darts to the social sciences “that make special efforts not to see what is American” and remains mentally outside the framework of university. In this presentation, we shall focus on the second and third volumes of his “Complete Works” published between 1962 and 1978.

Jauretche and Kusch are contemporaneous; their production appears more or less at the same time. Both have a special affect for *Peronism*, a mass movement created by Peron, an important protagonist of Argentine history since the mid 40’s. From the moment it appeared in the national political scene, *Peronism* was claimed by Peron to be a National Movement which included a social sector called “working class”. This label was initially a euphemism which Peron used to identify his “national and popular” conception.

III School, culture, power and identity

“In fact, not even what we call ‘culture’ can give us absolute knowledge”⁵
Kusch, Volume III, pp.21

The link between *school* and *culture* is one of the key issues to be considered by critical pedagogies. The arbitrariness on which the school system is established should be contrasted to the education of active and critical subjects.

Kusch’s text:

Weapon-operated revolutions are a child’s game when compared with cultural revolutions. (Vol III, pp.104)

It is thought that cumulative knowledge transmitted through teaching and materialized in bookshops is an advantage of the century. In fact, we must recognize that it is the snob who does better in these affairs. He lives on what is new that comes from abroad, he responds sensibly to advertising and, naturally, he does not become a specialist. We criticize his superficiality, but he truly does it well; even his euphoria to cultivate not culture but educated people, and the feeling of special relish in knowing Sartre personally rather than knowing his work, is due to a defect of this century. (Vol III: 22)

Maybe it is the same history textbook in book style, with its so many pages and words that has created in us an aversion since early childhood that leads us to those actions. That cannot be history. Something is missing. History cannot be a heap of words about scientifically studied facts that go beyond us and constitute a burden as they constantly confirm our inferiority towards mythical countries given as examples. (Vol.III: 56).

R. K's text

Historical development in Argentina is full of milestones that have been deliberately taken by "pedagogic colonization", which, as the desert sand, persist in obtruding our true way through. (2010: 105).

Our inability to see the world by ourselves has been systematically cultivated in our country [...] If everything depends on the color of the lens, it would be convenient to know exactly which glasses they make us wear, similar to those dark glasses many natives wear and so manage to ignore the green of our fields and the blue of our sky by adapting to the optician's standard dye. It is in this optician's sense that the modeling instruments of the so called Argentine intelligence work (2010: 108).

Our educated men and women subscribe to all foreign problems and, when they intervene in our own, they act as foreigners (2010: 111).

The State School in Argentina is and has always been nationalistic. [It served] as an instrument of nationalization of the immigrants' descendents, as it prevented foreign schools or foreign religious groups from maintaining stratification of the new residents' children in colonies by segregating teaching in national or religious groups (2010: 120).

By 1995 McLaren claimed that "We live at a precarious moment in history. Relations of subjection, suffering dispossession and contempt for human dignity, and the sanctity of life are at the center of social existence", but he went on to say that "Although pain and suffering continue to pollute the atmosphere of social justice in the West, the dream of democracy and the struggle to bring it about has taken on a new intensity...". We live in a "predatory culture" (McLaren, 1995:1), where what is social, cultural and human has been subsumed by capital. Through Jauretche's and Kusch's texts it is possible to see the crystallization of

a *model* through schooling, associated with the big industry of culture -the book-and advertising; which, together with the teaching of history have had an impact on the construction of a political citizenship that is very far from the cultural citizenship we aim at.

The culture he had in his roots -the pre-existing- was, for this "intellectual", a de-culture as it did not coincide with what was new. Jauretche, 2010: 10

Both authors see attention to the accumulation of information, at the expense of depth in the production of knowledge and recognition of difference, as one of the projects on which the idea of the "State as educator" is founded:

Kusch's text:

The fact is that plurality of doctrines makes us feel as if we were labeled and then find out that there are many aspects of ourselves that haven't been considered. [...] We are used to cumulative knowledge which is quantitatively seen, in a world of quantities too (Vol. III: 21). "But there is no more effective work to enforce this search for what is American than to travel and research in the terrain itself" (Vol II: 5). "Knowing what can be seen and seeing what we need becomes the puzzle of our lives as South-American citizens" (Vol II: 283).

Jauretche's text:

The town where I was born in the west of Buenos Aires was an indigenous territory thirty years ago but the school I attended officially ignored *ranquels*⁶. It was thorough Buffalo Bill and the first cowboy films that I got to know American Indians. Those were Indians and not those undignified *ranquels* of normalist education (2010:113).

School taught us technical botany and zoology with cryptogams and flowering plants,

vertebrates and invertebrates, but nothing was told to us about the botany and zoology we had in front of us. We learnt of the platypus at school and knew the baobab through Salgari but knew nothing about *baguales*⁷ or *vacunos guampudos*⁸, and we ignored the *chañar*⁹, that was the first name given to our town before the more educated name Lincoln. It is well known that nothing helps progress more than a *gringo*¹⁰ name [...] (2010: 113).

What was strange, then, about our contemptuous look at storks in local marshes as compared with the very literary European storks that nest in church towers? How to compare the indigenous fox we had just caught with the respectable “Maitre Renard” mentioned at school? It is because of that education that we have come to the White Christmas and Santa for our children and spring in April by our poets. We knew the Yan-Tse-Kiang and the Dane, but school ignored River Salado in Buenos Aires, which originates just there in the lagoons where we looked for nests in reed beds [...]. What can we say about a history of wax-made heroes, so absurd as the model-children in school textbooks, a history that forced us to look for our own heroes with human values in literary fiction or in other countries’ history? (2010: 115).

The bell that called him to class was a daily break between two worlds, and so his intellectual education had to walk two different roads at the same time, as in the hopscotch, with open legs on two squares. School was not a continuation of life, instead, it opened a daily parenthesis in it. The child’s *empiria*, the vital knowledge acquired at home and in his environment, all that was taken as

a negligible contribution. School provided the image of science; experience was not scientific and could not be accepted by it; to learn was not to have better or further knowledge but to distinguish school-provided knowledge from those instances of knowledge coming from the primary world outside the classroom (2010: 117).

In fact, school was the product of “intelligentzia” and was intended to produce “intelligentzia”, as it reproduced Sarmiento’s framework of Civilization or Barbarism. It was the man from San Juan’s preference for the English saddle, disregarding that the Argentine *recado*¹¹ was an empirical creation rooted in local environment and circumstances, just as the English saddle had been in its own environment. The two of them were products of a life-rooted culture- a meaningless concept for someone who considers culture as a branded product acquired by a user (2010: 117).

Great narratives and school practices have systematically reproduced what Henry Giroux calls the process of *ideological amnesia* (1988), where radical memory had no sense, where subjugated knowledge was juxtaposed with the *official history*, where culture and knowledge appeared as an “artifact store”, as “banking education” (Freire, 1973) that managed to make the “language of possibility” vanish by reproducing history rather than constructing it. It is a deeply reactionary history, which can be summarized in the concepts of transmission and imposition. In Giroux’s words, “[...] it is in the distribution, administration, measurement

and legitimization of such knowledge that this type of pedagogy invests its energies” (Giroux, 1988:90).

This is very much like what Kusch calls “labels”, as a claim for the need of a “journey” and “knowledge” to reinvigorate the search for what is American; and also relatable to Jauretche’s reference to “juxtaposition” of unknown contents in everyday contexts of empiria, which could have led, in his view, to rupturing “intelligentzia” for better and further knowledge.

“What is to act in the world but to wander among the ghosts of our own conscience [...]. And what is being practical other than hiding the deep wish of not seeing the ghosts that bother us?”
(Kusch: Tomo III, 85)

Following McLaren, we advocate that “Teaching should never, under any circumstances, be a form of imposition” (McLaren, 2008: 475). We must therefore take schools not only as sites of socio-cultural reproduction but also as environments involved in confrontation and struggle. The task involves finding new discourses and a new way of thinking about the nature, meaning and possibilities of working inside and outside schools. According to Giroux:

Radical pedagogy must be defined here as an entry point in the contradictory nature of schooling, a chance to force it toward creating the conditions for a new public sphere. [...] The task of radical educators should be organized around establishing the ideological and material conditions that would enable men and women from oppressed classes to claim their own voices (2001:116).

Bruner (1996) assumes that the goal of education should go in the direction of helping people find their own way in their culture and understand its complexities and contradictions. But he claims that schooling must not remain apart from other cultural manifestations; it constitutes in fact, in his own view, the first important contact with the culture the child will live in and thus the first place where to open up questions about how culture works and expect honest answers and useful suggestions for understanding it. Bruner explains that teachers help children not only master technical abilities but most importantly become aware of the world around. Along these lines, we can assume that the role of teachers should be that of “creating conscience” about the ways of making meaning of the world.

In Kusch

We are all aware that America’s society, politics and people are suffering transformations. But cultural transformation should not be taken as the putting up of audiences, libraries and theatres. Cultural transmission goes deeper. Above all, whether we want it or not, culture has to become American. But this cannot be completely understood if we take culture as something external. We could as well argue that there are pressure groups that simply by inertia do not want this to happen (Vol III: 104). We belong to a culture that has been strengthened by violence, as it caused the industrial revolution in the last century, and which, for that very reason, makes us believe that all problems are going to be solved on the basis of external inventions of new objects or by moving people as if they were objects. We know nothing about ourselves. We have never been told what we are as cultural entities. We don’t even know what culture consists of (Vol III: 107).

In Jauretche

This is the root of the civilization and barbarism dilemma installed by Sarmiento, which continues to control *intelligentzia*. Civilization was confused with culture, in the same way as in schools they take instruction for education. The idea was not to develop America according to Americans, with the incorporation of elements of modern civilization, enriching the original culture with the assimilated external contribution, as when you prepare the soil for growing a tree. They intended to create Europe in America, transplanting the tree and destroying indigenous people that could be an obstacle for its growth under Europe’s perspective, not according to America (2010:101).

In this way *intelligentzia* facilitated the process of structuring the new countries as dependent countries, disregarding local values that could have contributed to the process of filtering and assimilation, let alone admitting the possibility of an original creation, rooted in coexistence and reciprocal penetration (2010:101)

“*Intelligentzia* sees the present crisis as a decay crisis when in fact it is a crisis of development. *Intelligentzia*’s present fraud involves adopting the terminology and style of the national thinking and in this way disguises itself into neo-liberalism with expressions such as development, expansion, etc. which intend to channel the intellectual movement of the country towards its own dead end along uncertain paths.” (2010:104)

The need to become aware and to recover the voice of what is called “America” against the putting up of cultural artifacts in Robert Kush’s argument, correlates with *intelligentzia*’s fraud, as presented by Jauretche, which constructs its discourse on the basis of the *civilization vs. barbarism* dilemma,

towards destruction and annihilation of the other, through physical and symbolic violence.

“*The mismatch between school and life produces a splitting of the child’s personality*”
(Jauretche 2010:118)

The concept of coloniality of power is a key concept to rethink the modern world and historical capitalism against Eurocentric and Western movements. This dominance pattern, i.e. the power network which articulates in a complex and uneven way a multiplicity of ways of domination and exploitation can be summarized in three axes: labor exploitation by capital, ethno-racial and cultural dominance, and sexual and gender dominance. This pattern must be seen as a worldwide historical process which is born in capitalist modernity and is characterized by the process of capitalist globalization originated in the 16th century in the context of the American Conquest (Lao-Montes, 2005:2). Decolonization is both a process of constant struggle against coloniality of power in all its forms and at the same time a practical articulation of alternative and alternate forms of power.

In R. Kusch

There’s a problem of mental integrity in America, whose solution consists in recovering the old world for a health gain. If that is not done, the old world will continue to be autonomous and will therefore become a source of trauma for our psychic and social lives (Tomo II:4).

The assemblage of the Argentine nationality, just as the others in Latin America, must have been done on the fear that everything is fake below the surface” (Tomo III:11).

Bourgeoisie creates museums, concert halls and talks about eternity and universality simply to ratify that art is to be consumed not to be created. That is our cultural crisis. It seems as if bourgeoisie suspected of culture as something not still. Is it perhaps that it notices its revolutionary sense? (Tomo III:101).

The criticism of an established culture represents the first step to recover the submerged values of the pre-existent colonized culture. The word culture loses its neutral meaning to transform itself into a cultural politics which is in opposition to the cultural politics we are presented as culture. It is an essential belligerence to obtain the synthesis against the imposition of a culture deprived of self-elaboration (2010:99).

Thus, in Argentina, the establishment of a true culture necessarily leads to a struggle against the imposed culture of colonial dependence (2010:99).

The struggle against the established superstructure opens new ways of inquiry, gives creative meaning to intellectual work, offers unknown horizons to spiritual concerns, and enriches culture, even in its aseptic meaning, by providing another point of view with peculiar national features (2010:99).

On behalf of such struggle we shall avoid further introduction of relative values corresponding to just one moment in history or geographical location under the disguise of universal values (2010:99).

To consider a de-colonial turn in knowledge and education implies to take seriously those contributions and implications of local histories and denied, marginalized, subordinate epistemologies, and the dialogic connections between them. But perhaps:

It is even more important to pay political and ethical attention to our own practices and discourses about these histories and epistemologies, to the interventions we may deploy to construe and generate political conscience, de-colonial methodologies and

critical pedagogies. In order to break with the hegemony and coloniality/colonialism of Western thought it is also necessary to face, and make our own subjectivities and practices visible, our pedagogic practices included (Walsh, 2007:33).

In this vein, the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (2003) asserts there is no such thing as a neutral, uncommitted and apolitical educational practice. In fact, he claims that education can hide domination and alienation or else denounce their existence, thus becoming an emancipating tool.

Conclusions and implications

In this article, we have tried to show how, by tracing back the production of two Argentine authors from the mid-twentieth-century national and popular culture field, who do not pertain to the specific field of Pedagogy, it is possible to find out categorial clues which were recovered and further developed by educational critics of the 80's. Our purpose has not been that of constructing a genealogy of the field, but rather to follow connecting threads that take us to present-day problems and discussions that reinterpret theory and "praxis" in pursuit of a return to criticism in critical pedagogy -a criticism that not only allows construal of critical pedagogical practices but also recognizes the existence of de-colonial pedagogies (Walsh, 2007). These pedagogies make visible what multiculturalism tries to hide but slips away:

The operation of the masters of power, a power that is at the same time modern and colonial, racialized, patriarchalized, heterosexualized;

the geo-politics of knowledge and the topology of being (Maldonado 2006); and the economic, social, cultural, environmentalist and nature-oriented practices and politics, that continue to push the neoliberal project and its multiculturalist logics. Those pedagogies which integrate questioning and critical analysis, transformative socio-political action, in-opposition awareness but also intervention with an impact on the fields of power, knowledge, being, life with interculturalism as a political, ethical and epistemic compromise project; pedagogies which intend to construe allied decolonial forces directed towards the construction and mobilizing of powers, beings, knowledge, societies and very distinct worlds. (Walsh 2007:34).

In Jauretche’s words:

“Primary schooling has not been oriented towards the formation of human beings but towards citizenship. The intention has not been to form men for the home country but citizens for the institutions –the ultimate goal of the country- as Argentina is not a continuity in a historical process but a motionless reference point for institutions, where the seminal ideas on which it was created remain unchanged” (2010: 122).

We need a creative search for resistance that -in the process of dismantling domination- could produce liberating ways of authority and community. We refer to a participatory democracy and a radical democracy and in that way we assume the creation of fully democratic forms of citizenship and community, enforced by the principles of substantive equality, reciprocity and collective deliberation (Lao-Montes 2005). The authors we have analyzed in this article have paved the way to start thinking about it.

Notes

¹ The original work has been submitted both in English and in Spanish by the authors. The quotes from the sources in Spanish have been translated by the authors into English.

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⁴ Our translation.

⁵ The English version of Kusch's quotations throughout the present article are our own translations of the original sources.

⁶ Local indigenous people inhabiting this territory.

⁷ wild horses

⁸ horned cattle

⁹ Tree species grown in this territory.

¹⁰ Popular word for *foreign*.

¹¹ Spanish word to refer to the set of objects used in rural areas to mount a horse.

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