Afterword

Contesting Culture: Identity and Curriculum Dilemmas in the Age of Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Multiplicity

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In this closing article, Cameron McCarthy, Michael Giardina, Susan Harewood, and Jin-Kyung Park draw on the preceding articles of this Special Issue to develop the argument that educators need to pay special attention to developments associated with human immigration, cultural globalization, and the rapid migration of cultural and economic capital and electronically mediated images. In the plurality of social and cultural sites of practice reflected in these articles, McCarthy et al. find implications for pedagogical practice and the educational preparation of school youth. They specifically address questions concerning the reproduction of culture, identity, and community as they relate to contemporary educational debates. Given this range of cultural practices, how should we address the topic of culture and identity in the organization of school knowledge? McCarthy et al. suggest that pedagogical interventions that privilege popular culture as a site of legitimate critique can open up new avenues of exploration and investigation to a radical, progressive democracy premised on the basic values of love, care, and equality for all humanity.

A single overmastering identity at the core of the academic enterprise, whether that identity be Western, African, or Asian, is a confinement, a deprivation. The world is made up of numerous identities interacting, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes antithetically. (Said, 1991, p. 17)

And no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength. (Césaire, 1983, p. 77)
Contributors to this Special Issue of the *Harvard Educational Review* have collectively raised a very important issue. It concerns the practical and philosophical challenges posed to 21st-century curriculum organization and classroom pedagogy by the intensified proliferation of difference in contemporary popular culture. In what follows, we draw out and build on the significance of this insight. We first discuss the transforming context of culture and identity in late-modern society, a context deeply informed by the logics and processes of globalization that now impose themselves on the educational enterprise inside and outside schools around the globe. Second, we assess the different ideological assumptions and responses of mainstream (and minority) cultural monologists and postcolonial school critics and artists to this proliferation of difference precipitated by globalization. Third, we draw out some preliminary conclusions, pointing toward alternative approaches to the topic of difference vis-à-vis curriculum and pedagogical reform. We will draw from articles in this Special Issue to support our arguments throughout this Afterword.

Globalization and the Transforming Context of Identity

Over a decade ago, Keith Osajima (1992) documented the story of a Chinese American student’s ambivalence toward and discomfort with issues of racial/ethnic identity that she faced in her daily life. She articulated her liminal position this way:

I grew up in a white suburb and my parents are also very Americanized, and spoke mostly English at home, so I don’t speak Chinese. . . . I also grew up trying to identify as much as possible with white people and feeling very inadequate because I would never be like them. . . . I mean, it’s constant conflict with me now. I assume it’s going to be for the rest of my life. . . . You know either being with white Americans and not feeling I’m like them, or going to the Chinese environment, like Chinatown or something, and not feeling like I fit in there. (p. 1)

This brief confession of uncertainty over one’s own belonging — expressed so poignantly and in such heartfelt language — speaks directly to the questions of culture and identity in the late-capitalist moment, and reveals the utter failure of multiculturalism in the United States to effectively come to grips with the ever-changing face of America.¹ On the heels of twelve years of racial antagonism fueled by the assaultive and exploitative assimilationist rhetoric of Reagan/Bush era public policy and cultural representation, this young Chinese American woman, like all students, was facing the coming Clinton years already deeply ensconced in an educational setting that viewed the twinned

¹ By *multiculturalism*, we refer here to the mainstream policy and practice of using cultural pluralism and cultural eclecticism as antidotes to racial antagonism and inequality. Such mainstream multicultural practice seeks to normalize and incorporate the proliferation of difference in modern life, treating “it” as a smorgasbord of cultural styles and meanings that make up the broad cloth of society. Such multiculturalists suggest that “we can all get along” if we learn to appreciate the cultural heritages of individuals and groups that are different from our own.
concepts of “culture” and “race” statically, as unchanging monochromatic structures of identity. However, she was also standing at the frontier of the Clintonian project of multicultural racial equality, which was presented as a keystone concept to realizing fully the promise of the New Democratic (centrist) country President Bill Clinton was envisioning for the direction of the U.S. (see also Klein, 2002).

Alas, in contemporary curriculum and educational policy discourses about diversity, hybridity, and multiculturalism, the last decade-plus — like that of Clinton’s multiculturalist project — has not lived up to expectations. This is most especially true when we consider the intersection of popular forms of culture with the educational experience, both inside and outside the classroom. In fact, the country has seemed to regress under the regime of George W. Bush, whose policy orientation, particularly post 9/11, has been defined by a hostility toward the rampant pluralism that the cultural modernization accompanying globalization has proffered. Cultural difference has been expressed in educational and social institutions in the form of balkanization and the exacerbation of racial and ethnic inequalities. Popular culture — like the formal school curriculum — has become a fertile site of these oppositions, a veritable battle ground of First World/Third World distinctions, as social combatants struggle over the boundary lines of group identity and affiliation, over the very definition of citizenship and trans-national belonging.

This conflict over culture and identity — of one’s place in the world — is not limited to the United States and Great Britain, nor is it adequate to cast it as a phenomenon exclusive to the industrialized world. Given the intensification of diasporic flows of cultural and economic capital — aided most significantly by deepening patterns of aestheticization in popular culture as foregrounded in transnational advertising and new forms of electronic mediation, as articulated by Buckingham, Trend, and Willis in this issue — the new millennial nation-state now comprises an increasingly hybridized population where practices of identity construction are no longer bound by physical borders (see also Giardina, 2003; Silk, 2001). Rather, we see practices favoring “flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes” (Ong, 1999, p. 6) becoming more and more common. Indeed, as Ayse Caglar (1997) argues, an ever-increasing number of people now define themselves “in terms of multiple national attachments . . . that encompass plural and fluid cultural identities” (p. 169). For example, Jennifer Kelly (in press) reveals that Afro-Canadian youth strategically and situationally patch together their identities from an international array of global television, popular music, and technoculture to navigate the constraints of racial hierarchy and experience the benefits of so-called ideal forms of citizenship (see also Ong, 1998). We also encounter similar findings in Great Britain where, according to Gurinder Chadha (1989) in her pioneering documentary I’m British But, Asian youth in South London variously identified themselves as “British,” “Asian,” or “British-Asian,” depending upon the situation.
In this new world of cultural fluidity, it is the affectively charged realm of the popular that drives and is driven by formative encounters with national (and nationalistic) identities and cultural significations. However, and though pivotal to mainstream curriculum and educational discourses and policies such as multiculturalism, we believe that “culture” remains significantly undertheorized. “It” is often treated as a preexistent, unchanging deposit, consisting of a rigidly bounded set of elite or folkloric knowledges, values, experiences, and linguistic practices specific to particular groups (see Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1993; Bennett, 1998). Also, the current cultural studies approach to culture as the production and circulation of meaning in stratified contexts remains inadequate. Instead, we need to think about culture along the lines suggested by Tony Bennett (1995, 1996), whereby culture is understood not as the distinctive forms of “a whole way of life” (Williams, 1961), but rather as a set of dynamic, productive, and generative material (and immaterial) practices that regulate social conduct and behavior, and that emphasize personal self-management (i.e., the modification of habits, tastes, and style), political affiliation, and trans/national identity.

In its own unique way, each article in this Special Issue takes up these important questions of culture and identity in relation to contemporary education and pedagogical practice. In the process, they mark a significant intervention into the field of educational studies and into the very future of our world. Each author recognizes and privileges popular culture as a site of power necessarily tied to the productive relations and formative mechanisms of identity. While offering numerous, provocative, and ground-breaking studies within pedagogical thinking (see also, Giroux, 1991, 2001a, 2001b; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; Grossberg, 1986; McCarthy, 1998), this understanding of popular culture remains looked down upon by some in the academy and is considered a marginal area of inquiry. Although most of the contributors limit their frame of reference to the “place” of the United States and Great Britain, embedded within each article is the idea that transnational flows of cultural and economic capital define how culture and identity are understood.

From the localized site of one inner-city classroom and its students’ interactions with the film Space Jam, Anne Haas Dyson locates an emerging conversation at the intersection of transnational capitalism (AOL Time-Warner, hip-hop music), global sporting celebrities (Michael Jordan), and multicultural education itself. Similarly, Maisha T. Fisher takes us outside the classroom setting and into spoken word/African diasporic communities to come face-to-face with the trans-Atlantic movement of Black people and cultures, what Gilroy (1993) calls the “Black Atlantic.” These spoken word venues, which have become sites of learning, teaching, and community renewal, speak to notions of flexible citizenship (Ong, 1998), stylish hybridity (Giardina, 2003), and multicultural awareness. Indeed, all of the contributors in this Special Issue attempt in some way to link their understandings of the transnational movement of cultural and economic capital and popular meanings to the challenges posed to youth identity
formation and the organization of school knowledge. For example, Cati Marsh Kennerley illustrates how colonial governments (Puerto Rico’s specifically) construct educational institutions that determine how the influx of economic capital is negotiated in relation to the construction of national identity. David Buckingham talks about how transnational electronic media messages influence the “modernist project” of media education in British classrooms and how teachers might negotiate such complex influences in a postmodern world. David Trend discusses the global appeal of violent media and how digital technology helps to translate it across language barriers. Paul Willis talks about waves of modernization, the third of which includes flows of cultural capital, and how the commodification of electronic media shapes working-class culture in a highly multicultural United Kingdom. Lastly, Nadine Dolby refocuses our attention on the nexus between culture and power. In so doing, she underscores the fact that popular culture is a broad site of democratic practice that includes a global community of youth cultures.

For all of the positive contributions that this Special Issue makes, however, there is more work to be done. By way of this Afterword, we want to link the work of education and pedagogy to the politics of popular culture in a way that makes clear the transformative, emancipatory power of popular cultural forms. Moreover, we want to suggest that we must think outside the regulative strictures of contemporary pedagogical practice and discourse in order to advance and work toward the promise of radical progressive democracy. In short, we take up the question of how popular culture can help us create a critical race and gender consciousness for the 21st century (Denzin, 2002).

Our focus on popular culture is guided most especially by the work of the cultural Marxist C. L. R. James, who maintains that understanding popular culture is crucial to unraveling the interplay of power in modern life. As James (1993) critically insists, one can get a better insight into the tensions and contradictions of contemporary society by observing and interpreting popular culture than by analyzing canonical texts:

It is in the serious study of, above all, Charles Chaplin, Dick Tracy, Gasoline Alley, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Rita Hayworth, Humphrey Bogart, genuinely popular novels like those of Frank Yerby (Foxes of Arrow, The Golden Hawk, The Vixen, Pride’s Castle) . . . that you find the clearest ideological expression of the sentiments and deepest feelings of the American people and a great window into the future of America and the modern world. This insight is not to be found in the works of T. S. Eliot, of Hemingway, of Joyce, of famous directors like John Ford or Rene Clair. (p. 119)

James is pointing to the fact that the popular arena is perhaps the clearest window into the contextual specificities of American life; a context that reflects the crises and tensions of cultural integration and reproduction in our time (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000).

To understand the relation of popular culture to education, it is imperative that we address the concepts of “culture” and “identity” — concepts integral to
curricular projects such as multiculturalism — in the organization of school knowledge. In the following sections, we problematize the way in which educators have addressed the topics of cultural identity, cultural difference, and cultural community in these times of rapid, globalizing change. We will read such mainstream approaches to education and culture against the open possibilities of knowledge production and ethical affiliation that are foregrounded in postcolonial theory, postcolonial literature, art, and popular culture. We firmly believe that addressing these critical issues of cultural identity and the organization of knowledge in schooling is pivotal in a time in which there are deepening patterns of cultural balkanization and disciplinary insulation in educational institutions. We conclude with a call for a new direction toward theory and practice of curriculum organization in this era, dominated as it is by multiplicity and difference.

Globalizing Pedagogies

Recent large-scale developments are wholly transforming social and cultural life outside and inside schools around the globe, yet curriculum thinkers and practitioners have tended to dismiss or ignore them. These developments have enormous implications for pedagogical practice and the educational preparation of school youth. These developments might be grouped under the term *multiplicity*, as they are brought about by globalization and rapid advances in electronic media, changing conceptions of self and other, and new explanatory discourses. These developments can be summarized as follows.

First, there is that broad set of processes that has come to be known as “globalization,” understood here as the intensified and accelerated movement of people, images, ideas, technologies, and economic and cultural capital across national boundaries. From former President Bill Clinton’s relentless pursuit of “building a bridge to the 21st century” and the passage of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the activist protestors at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, Washington, and the ever-expanding reach of the U.S. war and culture industries, the word *globalization* has become fully ensconced in our everyday vernacular. Whether in the form of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, which has the potential to reach one billion people via its various cable and satellite television providers, or the fast-growing worldwide reach of the Internet, it goes without saying that we are living in a time of unparalleled interconnectivity. Driven forward by the engines of modern capital reorganization and the correspondingly changed interests, needs, and desires of ordinary people everywhere, globalizing processes are sweeping all corners of the contemporary world and, as a result, rapidly shrinking the distance between hitherto far-flung parts of the world (Castells, 2001; Giddens, 1994). While in the last century popular media had already expanded the range of information, images, and identities available to people, contemporary globalizing processes have exploded the pace of these rapid ex-
pansionary mechanisms and opened the door for new and empowering developments. At the same time, they remind us of the gross inequalities that remain unchanged in the contemporary world.

Second, these developments have the potential to stimulate the imaginative work of the broad masses of the people. People now express their sense of past, present, and future in terms of new “mediascapes,” to borrow from Arjun Appadurai (1996). These new mentalities and self-imaginings are driven forward by an ever-expanding sense of possibility — as well as terror and constraint — as modern humanity cultivates new interests, needs, desires, and fears in the landscape of the new media. These are the “dangerous crossroads” of media culture writ large that George Lipsitz (1994) reminds us of, replete with profound possibilities as well as dangers (see also Buckingham and Willis in this issue).

Finally, new critical discourses and interdisciplinary frameworks have been generated, largely outside the field of education, to address the challenges of this new age. In the academic realm, these discourses include cultural studies, postmodernism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism. Each of these discourses is represented in this Special Issue, the latter being the framework that integrates the disparate elements and threads of this Afterword. But in the realm of the popular, these interpretive frameworks are often formulated in the language of moral panic and its obverse, the language of panaceas and quick fixes. Here we are referring to the panic/panaceas offered by psychic networks, extreme sports, stock options, e-trading, “reality” television, and the like that now dominate commercial advertising and the calculations of both private citizenry and transnational capitalist enterprise. All of these developments, both critical and panicked, represent the triumph of multiplicity and the lack of clear answers now overtaking our daily lives. For example, as Trend argues in this issue, we live in a time when “pseudo-events” fomented in media-driven representations have usurped any relic of reality beyond what is staged or performed. These representations drive deep and perhaps permanent wedges of difference between the world of the suburban dweller and his or her inner-city counterpart. Daniel Boorstin (1975) writes, “We have used our wealth, our literacy, our technology, and our progress, to create a thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life” (p. 3). These Durkheimian “facts of life” — notions of what, for example, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans are like — are invented and reinvented in the media, in popular magazines, in the newspaper, in television, music, and popular film. These developments also incite new challenges for the reproduction of increasingly unstable social orders generally and the practices of classroom pedagogy more specifically (see Willis in this issue). Indeed, we are being compelled at every point to reconsider what pedagogy and curriculum practices mean in these circumstances.

Against the tide of these currents of change, however, mainstream educational thinkers in the United States such as Lynne Cheney, Dianne Ravitch,
Chester Finn, Jr., E. D. Hirsch, and William Bennett have tended to draw a clear distinction between the established school curriculum and the teeming world of multiplicity that flourishes in the everyday lives of youth beyond the school proper. These educators still insist on a project of homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the socially functional citizen. This is true even of contemporary and progressive approaches to curriculum reform that have sought to bring the problems of multiplicity and difference into a framework of institutional intelligibility and manageability. Thus, proponents of the modern curriculum tend to speak a “technicist discourse,” a discourse of experts, professional competence, and boundary maintenance. In these instances, potentially powerful tropes such as multiculturalism have become reconfigured “through a proliferation of images and practices into a normalized, non-politically charged discourse that [assumes] that ethnic minority communities [are] homogenous and somehow representative of an authentic and unified culture” (Giardina & Metz, 2001, p. 210). While purporting to be emancipatory practices that subvert the status quo, the majority of these popular iterations commonly efface the harsh realities witnessed at the ground level of everyday interactions between and among diverse populations generally and in the school setting specifically. As a result, while an unthreatening form of multiculturalism has been integrated into the curriculum, more critical discourses such as Marxism, pragmatism, Frankfurt School critical theory, cultural studies, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism have been left aside.

In rejecting such monologic projects, we confront the heart of Friedrich Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the modern condition, which speaks adroitly to contemporary educational and social dilemmas and more generally to the antinomy of center-periphery relations. Nietzsche (1967) insisted that a new ethical framework had come into being in the industrial age, which informed all patterns of human exchange in the bureaucratic arrangements of social institutions. He called this moral framework resentment, or the practice in which one defines one’s identity through the negation of the other. This is a process governed by the strategic alienation of the other in forms of knowledge-building, genres of representation, and the deployment of moral, emotional, and affective evaluation and investments. One sees this in operation in the whole contemporary stance in educational institutions toward the topics of difference, multiplicity, and heterogeneity. This thinking is revealed most especially in the fratricidal wars taking place on college campuses across the country over the question of the canon versus multiculturalism and the traditional disciplines versus alternative forms of knowledge, such as cultural studies and postcolonial theory. Thus, the struggle over the proliferation of  

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2 These are projects that thrive on the idea that the curriculum must be organized around a core set of knowledges centered on Europe, Africa, or Asia, as Edward Said points out in the first epigram to this essay. Such a monologic core might be complemented, but never displaced, by “additions” of subject content relevant to other groups; this is the underlying curricular truce of multiculturalism.
difference in schooling is a struggle over content as well as the methodology of knowledge production. This links concerns over multiculturalism to concerns over interdisciplinarity. But these debates do not stop at the hallowed gates of the university, the preparatory classrooms of the high school, or the playgrounds of the elementary school. We also see this antipathy to difference in popular culture and public policy in the United States, a country in which the professional middle-class dwellers of the suburbs have appropriated the radical space of difference onto themselves, occupying the space of social injury, the space of social victim and plaintiff. In so doing, this suburban professional class denies avenues of complaint to its other: the inner-city poor. It projects its suburban worldview out into the social world as the barometer of public policy, replacing issues of inequality and poverty with demands for balanced budgets, tax cuts, and greater investments in surveillance and security. All of this is accompanied by a deep-bodied nostalgic investment in Anglo-American cultural form and its European connections.

Of course, this framework of oppositions can be mapped a thousand-fold onto the relations between industrializing and industrialized countries and contexts. Ironically, these developments are taking place at a time when, all over the world, the processes of migration, electronic mediation, and the work of the imagination of the masses have affected the separation of culture from place (Appadurai, 1996). Difference has become an abstract value that can be di rected from specific groups and settings and combined and recombined in ways that allow, for example, clothing designer magnates like Tommy Hilfiger to appropriate elements of hip-hop culture and sell these elements back into the inner city itself. Further, the movement of peoples from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to the United States has had the effect of reworking U.S. culture and its very demographic character from within. In schools throughout California, Texas, and New York it is now not unusual to encounter classrooms in which the minority child is Anglo-American and where English has been supplanted by Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Korean, or Ebonics (Mirón & Inda, 2000; Ruiz, 2003). These vastly transformed circumstances consequent upon the movement and collision of people impose new imperatives on curriculum and pedagogy in schooling. But in our era we seem evermore to lack the qualities of empathy, the desire for collaboration, cooperation, and negotiation, or the magnanimity of spirit to engage with the other as a member of our community or even our species.

The Dominant Paradigm

The dominant and hegemonic approach to the contemporary challenges of multiplicity and difference in schooling is to think of “culture” and “identity” within the crisis language of imaginary unity, singular origins, singular ancestry, bounded nationality, and so forth. Culture is thus defined as a tightly bounded set of linguistic, aesthetic, and folkloric practices specific to a partic-
ular group. Group identity is seen as the true self within the collective association and as the fulfillment of a linear connection to an unsoiled past and ancestry (Cheney, 2003). The overriding slogans resonate a discourse of “These are our people”; “We are different from all other groups”; and “These are our cultural forms and meaning of style.” For example, in the United States, hegemonic Anglo-centric school critics such as Arthur Schlesinger, George Will, and William Bennett maintain that U.S. school curriculum should have a unitary and homogenizing focus around Western Eurocentric culture. Will (1989) makes the point in very direct language:

Our country is a branch of European civilization. . . . “Eurocentricity” is right, in American curricula and consciousness, because it accords with the facts of history, and we, and Europe, are fortunate for that. The political and the moral legacy of Europe has made the most happy and admirable of nations. Saying that may be indelicate, but it has the merit of being true and the truth should be the core of any curriculum. (p. 3)

On the other hand, minority school critics such as Afrocentrist scholar Molefi Asante (1993) argue for placing African culture at the heart of the curriculum, maintaining that the curriculum for African Americans should be organized around “solid identities” with Africa. Asante’s Afrocentrism is by no means dominant in the curriculum. Yet, he ironically mimics performatively by his insistence on African cultural primacy and homogeneity the curricular model he opposes — Eurocentrism! Cultural monologic discourses, both Eurocentric and Afrocentric, rely on the simulation of a pastoral sense of the past in which Europe and Africa are thrown back to the Stone Age and made available to U.S. racial combatants without the noise of their modern tensions, contradictions, and conflicts. In this issue, Marsh Kennerley offers a similar analysis of state-sponsored community education in Puerto Rico. The dreaded line of difference is drawn around glittering objects of heritage and secured with the knot of ideological closure. The modern American school has become a playground of this war of simulation, revealing at every turn contending paradigms of knowledge that have become embattled as combatants release the levers of atavism, holding their faces in their hands as the latest volley of absolutism circles in the air.

Proponents of a Eurocentric canon maintain a monological interpretation of culture and, as such, advocate a curricular approach that is deeply informed by several ideological assumptions. First, curricular monologists conceptualize culture and identity as consisting of a clearly demarcated set of lived and commodified cultural forms and practices specific to particular groups. These practices are defined as forms of property and are seen as constituting the totality of group capacity and definition. Second, mainstream theorists motivated by the manipulation of this model of culture and identity propose that curriculum reform should take the form of content addition to the dominant Eurocentric core curriculum, adding selectively from the stock of knowledge and experiences associated with minority groups. Third, mono-
logists suggest that only the members of a given minority group are fully competent to understand the knowledge and the experiences pertinent to that particular group (see also, McCarthy, 1997). This often leads to a dangerous tendency to construct as “other” those who are not part of the monologist’s preferred group or who do not share his real or imagined ancestry. The other in this context is then targeted for exclusion, and consequently the history, knowledge, and culture of such others are also perceived as illegitimate and often suppressed.

The Postcolonial Response

In contemporary sociological and commonsense understandings of the dynamics of modern life, postcolonial theory and imagination have assumed a great urgency in the light of events of 9/11 and their global dimensions. These developments have forced U.S. critical scholars to awake from our methodological slumber regarding the perils of amnesia or disinterest in the facts of U.S. relations with the outside world and to its particular imperialist and possessive investment in the Third World. In this sense, the work of postcolonial literature, painting, music, and other arts has been prophetic, anticipatory, and instructive (Attali, 1992). But what do we mean by postcolonial theory, and what status does such theory have in interrogating the productive relations of popular culture forms?

By postcolonial theory, we are referring to the practice(s) of systematic reflection on dominate/subordinate relations produced in colonial and neo-colonial relations and encounters between metropolitan industrial and industrializing countries. These relations are properly but not exhaustively understood as center-periphery relations because they continue to be asymmetrical in their organization and character. Postcolonial critics such as Hommi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Michael Dash, and Edouard Glissant argue that these relations are overdetermined and often reciprocal, since agency flows both ways along the center/periphery divide and in many directions. In this view, the cultural forms of the Third World are not simply bastardized texts of the first. Instead, postcolonial critics refuse both the top-down models of structural integration based on neo-Marxist theories of cultural imperialism and the cultural diffusion and modernization models de-

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3 The “post” in postcolonial is not to be understood as a temporal register but as a sign and cultural marker of a spatial challenge and contestation with the occupying powers of the West in the ethical, political, and aesthetic forms of the marginalized. Uneven development between the metropole and periphery plays itself out in aesthetic form, in ways that problematize colonial/postcolonial networks of power relations, as well as the Cartesian stability of subjecthood fabricated in and through these relations. The postcolonial imagination in material form — represented by the work of novelists, playwrights, painters, scholars, and musicians — is a product of colonial histories of disruption, forced migration, false imprisonment, and pacification. This “post,” as we conceive it, ultimately specifies a co-articulation of colonial and postcolonial histories, not a self-serving separatism and isolationism.
rived from ethnographic anthropology and mainstream sociology and political science.

Postcolonial artists, writers, and painters such as Nicolas Guillén, Toni Morrison, Michael Ondaatje, Jean Michel Basquiat, Arnaldo Roche-Rabell, and Gordon Bennett have been both precursors to and participants in postcolonial theorizing. These critically minded cultural producers scour the historical ruins left by colonial relations, reworking and reordering them to foreground the complex human condition produced in the wake of colonization and its subsequent struggles of resistance against colonial and neocolonial domination. They point toward themes that underscore a deep sense of community, interdependence, and cultural translation across the minefield of difference. Postcolonial cultural workers have always been ahead of postcolonial critics, pointing to the fitful, incomplete, reciprocal relations between the colonizer and the colonized. This extraordinary insight about modernity’s interment in pre/anti-modernity is foregrounded in postcolonial aesthetics (see also Harris, 1967), as Marsh Kennerley clearly illustrates in this issue.

Specific to discussions of culture, identity, and curriculum, these aforementioned postcolonial cultural workers point to the limitations of monological and homogenizing approaches. They argue that culture and identity are the products of human encounters and the inventories of cross-cultural appropriation and hybridity. Within this framework, culture and identity are the moving inventories and registers of association across narrowly drawn boundaries of group distinction. To illustrate this point about cultural hybridity, Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier (1985) tells the story of encountering an illiterate Afro-Latin griot who was regarded as the keeper of communal history in the remote forest community of Turiamo, Venezuela. The villagers introduced Carpentier to “the Poet,” through whom he came face to face with the multi-accented, polyphonic voice of these anthropologically defined “natives.” At a late-night communal gathering, “the Poet” recited for his forest dwellers extensive passages of eighth-century French epic verse in an indigenous Venezuelan language. Carpentier reflects on the story:

That day I understood perhaps for the first time in our America, wrongly named Latin, where an illiterate black descendant of Yorubas could recreate the Song of Roland — in a language richer than Spanish, full of distinctive inflections, accents, expressions and syntax — where wonderful Nahuatl poetry existed long before Alfonso the Wise and San Isidoro’s Etymologies, in our America, there were a culture and a theatrical disposition which gave poetry an importance long lost in many countries in Europe. (p. 160)

Carpentier’s vignette points to the complex flow of humanity across presumptive borders. By presenting the radical encounters of Western and indigenous cultures in the postcolonial setting, Carpentier highlights the unanticipated trestles of affiliation that link up disparate populations and the futility of atavistic attempts to maintain group purity. Further, and like so many other postcolonial artists, Carpentier challenges the ways the colonial imagination
has sought to constrain “colonized” subjects through reductive and simplistic discourses of racial and national origin (McCarthy, 1998). These simplistic discourses are consolidated in curricular projects in the West (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000). However, these postcolonial artists allow no such easy closure. Instead, they challenge us to look to new and less prefigured representational practices.

The work of the postcolonial imagination points toward a larger inventory of associations in the conceptualization of culture and identity than one finds in the educational thought of the cultural monologists. Postcolonial cultural workers are often engaged in the radical practice of double-coding, in which they mobilize two or more plains or fields of idiomatic reference in any given work, what Harris (1989) calls “the wedding of opposites.” Postcolonial artists may therefore quote or combine the vernacular and the classical, the traditional and the modern, the cultural reservoir of images of the East and the West, the First World and the Third, the colonial master and the slave. Postcolonial writers like Said (1993, 2000) suggest that a complex and dynamically relational treatment of culture and identity should deeply inform curriculum change. The framework suggested by postcolonial theorists operates on the following assumptions. First, the opposition between the Western canon and postcolonial cultural form is illegitimate and not empirically based. Instead, there is a vigorous critique of and dialogue with the West taking place in the literature, music, and paintings of Third World artists. Second, curricular knowledge should be an interdisciplinary product of heterogeneous sources, and pedagogy should be organized around the thesis of the constructed nature of all knowledge. Postcolonial theorists further assert that the accumulation of the latter is not a linear or singular process but one that is best facilitated by an open practice of knowledge production rooted in a plurality of methodologies and strategies of inquiry. Third, the contemporary context of all school knowledge and experiences is profoundly shaped by globalization and the ever-expanding pattern of integration of local realities into more global dynamics and vice versa. Given the increasing interdependence of the world, contemporary students must be prepared for the changing reality sparked by globalization.

The lines that separate the approaches of cultural monologists and postcolonial theorists to curriculum formulation are therefore firmly drawn. Monologists see the curriculum as the servant of the core cultural values, knowledges, and experiences of particular groups. They believe that the integrity of these groups is best preserved by curricular recognition of group distinctiveness and specificity. On the other hand, postcolonial theorists argue

4 Here we differentiate this strategy from the type of double coding that postmodernist critics such as Charles Jencks (1996) talk about when defining postmodernism. Instead of foregrounding the collapse of master narratives of individualistic or maverick imagination, we point to the collective purposes, the collective history, the visualization of community memory that constitute the central issues at stake within the postcolonial artistic project.
for the interminable process of cultural integration and co-articulation of majority and minority cultures in the modern world. In this issue, David Buckingham makes a similar distinction between modern and postmodern approaches to media education. Contemporary reality is defined by globalization and the blurring of the cultural and economic distinctions between the inhabitants of industrialized countries in the West and those of industrializing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These developments provide extraordinary challenges and great opportunities for curriculum reform in contemporary U.S. education.

Conclusion

As we and others have argued in this Special Issue, the great task confronting educators as we move into the 21st century is to address the radical reconfiguration and cultural rearticulation now taking place in educational and social life. These developments are foregrounded and driven by the logics of globalization, the intensification of migration, the heightened effects of electronic media, the proliferation of images, and the everyday work of the imagination. All these developments have shifted the commonly taken-for-granted stabilities of social constructs such as “culture,” “identity,” “race,” “nation,” “state,” and so forth. The dominant response to this proliferation of difference and multiplicity is to suppress the implications for rethinking the ethical, political, and epistemological basis of education by imposing a program of homogeneity. This hegemonic approach constitutes a top-down project that attempts to hold the Eurocentric core of the curriculum in place, inoculating it by simply adding on selective, nonconflictual items from the culture and experiences of minority and subaltern groups. This monological approach to culture is also found in the curricular formulations of some minority school critics. They maintain that the cultural knowledges and experiences of their specifically embattled minority group should be foregrounded in a manner that would effectively replace the Eurocentric core of the curriculum with a specific minority program of cultural affirmation.

Ultimately, these monological approaches to curriculum reform, hegemonic or minority, merely lead us down the path of a cultural illiteracy of the other — an illiteracy that we cannot afford in a world context of deepening globalization and interdependence. As postcolonial theorists suggest, a fundamentally new direction is needed in the approach to culture and identity as we enter the new millennium. This approach must begin with an effort to reject the simplistic economy dominant in contemporary curriculum, which places the Western canon in implacable opposition to the cultural forms, knowledges, and experiences of U.S. minorities and Third World peoples around the globe. It must involve a radical rethinking of the linkages of knowledge, culture, and association among people.
As Dolby and others in this Special Issue suggest, pedagogical interventions that privilege popular culture as a site of legitimate critique can open up new avenues of exploration and investigation to a radical, progressive democracy premised on the basic values of love, care, and equality for all humanity. One of the overarching themes running throughout this issue has been the centrality of popular culture in the formation of youth identity (see especially Willis’ article in this issue). Both within the confines of the classroom and in the informal organization of school knowledge, contemporary youth are deeply immersed in popular culture from an early age (see also Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997), as Dyson illustrates in this issue. However, rather than turning away from and/or condemning the reach of popular culture vis-à-vis youth, the contributors to this Special Issue warn us against the marginalization of popular culture (see especially Buckingham and Trend). Instead, they urge us to reconceptualize “the popular” as a significant political, social, and cultural territory that influences the constitution of educational experiences of school youth (see Dolby). In this regard, as Willis argues, we can never lose sight of the capacity for change embodied within young people and their own cultural practice. Popular culture must not be seen simply as a site of cultural expression or oppressive domination. Instead, we must view it as the crucial terrain of political and social contestation, negotiation, and resistance that makes up the ever-shifting boundaries and alliances of youth identity formation. This understanding becomes all the more important when education is added to the interrelated nexus of youth and popular culture. But fundamentally, as Buckingham, Fisher, and Trend have pointed out, popular culture is a site for the construction of an informal curriculum. It is a point at which a concatenation of fragmentary ideas and experiences about the local and the global, the “here” and “there,” are produced (Hall, 1996). It is the fundamental contemporary paradigm through which students across race, class, and gender now obtain knowledge of the Third World and periphery of the First. It is here, then, that a genuine heterogeneous and postcolonial approach to curriculum reform can be built — one that seeks to connect the informal and the formal. The now suppressed and subjugated knowledges of the popular must be meaningfully allowed to interrogate the dominant assumptions of what Buckingham calls the modernist curriculum.

Thinking in postcolonial terms about the topic of difference and multiplicity in education means thinking relationally and contextually. It means bringing back into educational discourses the tensions and contradictions that we tend to suppress as we process experience and history into curricular knowledge. It means abandoning the aural status of concepts such as “culture” and “identity” and recognizing the vital porosity that exists between and among human groups in the modern world. As the authors in this Special Issue maintain, it means foregrounding the intellectual autonomy of students by incorporating the open-mindedness and inquiry that come from letting
traditions debate with each other. It means, ultimately, thinking across disciplinary boundaries and insular knowledge — linking the aesthetic, ethical, political, and the pedagogical in the way we do our work. The contributors to this Special Issue have offered useful insights concerning the proliferation of difference, which we see as pivotal to the project of curricular change in the time of postcolonialism and globalization — a time of the mass movement of people, images, and economic and cultural capital across borders. They have begun a tentative and difficult but necessary process of pointing the curriculum field in the direction of dynamic alternatives.

References


