

Critical Media Literacy in Light of Nuclear Spectacles: Approaches and Problems For the Field

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The term “media culture”...signifying that our culture *is* a media culture, that the media have colonized culture, that they are the primary vehicle for the distribution of culture, that the mass media of communications have supplanted previous modes of culture like the book or spoken word, that we live in a world in which media dominates leisure and culture.

Douglas Kellner, Media Culture (1995: 35)

Although it may have reached unprecedented dimensions in 21st century America, that culture dominates nature (Horkheimer and Adorno, Scully) is hardly a contemporary novelty. In fact, one of the long defining marks of Western civilized sensibility is that the Western worldview identifies with the production of specific forms of technological culture built around representations of “nature” that imply its repression (Mason: 165-72). These representations, which correspond to the onto-theological establishment of “being human,” have been shown to have had the real political effect and intention of denying particular groups “human” status towards characterizing them as “nonhuman” or “inhuman” based upon distinctions of race, class, gender and species (Eisler, Noske). Humanity, then, taken as a concept, must be understood as entailing demands for and self-investments of social power. In this sense, then, human technology and culture unfold historically along the transverse lines of material power formations and hence they can be read as both the tools by which elites entrench oppression (i.e.; as that which divides the socially dominant from the subjugated) and as a political location in which dominated groups may intervene and so gain access to and transform power structures (i.e.; as that which helps to dissolve the dichotomy between ruler and ruled). Again, this holds true of today’s Information Society in much the same way that the innovation of previous technologies, such as print literacy and the cultivation of the Humanities, both empowered some and disempowered many.¹

To this latter end, strategies have been developed, like those by Stuart Hall's working group at the Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies in the 1970s, in which the "high literacies" of the Humanities were deconstructed and put in equal relation to the "popular" literacies of mass culture (thereby valorizing the everyday practices and identities of non-elites). Occurring alongside this project were certain interventions into the high literacy structures of meaning by French post-structural theorists like Roland Barthes. Barthes noted that in a "high" print culture if one wanted to "properly" understand a literary text, it was a normative assumption that one needed to interrogate the author of that text (its creator and thus its ultimate arbiter of meaning). Yet, in works like Mythologies, Barthes unfolds the natural polysemy (i.e. many meanings) at work in texts and exposes the goal of a clear, univocal (i.e. single meaning), and final authoritative definition as being little more than a leftover cultural habit of bourgeois ideology (1983: 158-59).

What is important for Barthes about the new cultural terrain, then, is not the "author" but the "author's death" and the corresponding "birth of the reader" (1997: 148). Drawing from both the British and French insights, the popular culture theorist John Fiske moves to express the extraordinary amount of literacy and "readerliness" at work in newer popular media forms. In his Television Culture (1987: 4-10), for instance, he describes the numerous levels of encoded meaning at work in even the most basic sit-com, delineating the complex ideological dimensions of the negotiations that occur between directors and viewers and the numerous aesthetic factors that are built into the construction of the simplest of T.V. images – e.g. camera work, lighting, editing, music choices, casting, setting and costume, make up.

Thus, the claim often made – in one form or another – by nations, institutions, groups, and singular individuals, that their culture and social norms are "natural," and therefore unquestionably legitimate, is now problematic. For it is now possible to articulate both that the classical divide between "culture" and "nature" in the West is probably more cultural than natural and that the terms themselves ultimately defy singular definition and transparency (Haraway). Instead, to speak of "culture" and "nature" is to chart the

intersections of highly contested terrains in which powerful forces have established dominant interests and practices and in which sub-dominant groups have practiced “other ways of knowing” or attempted the formation of counter cultures that might contest and/or evade such hegemonic legislation (Harding 2003). From within this perspective, then, there is neither “culture” nor “nature;” per se, there is only a complex hybridity between the two, with a multiplicity of voices and interpretations, a sort of endless series of historical markers signifying the ways in which power relations determine unity and difference (Haraway). Yet, in as much as “culture” also delineates a form of enduring imbalance in the power structure, and “nature” is made to connote all that within culture is denied the privileges of power, it might also be said that it is characteristic of a Western civilized pathology that *there is only culture* and that nature can hardly be found except as a sub-dominant voice enclosed *within* culture.

With this in mind, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (2001: 151) have recently described the manner in which the post-structural deconstruction of the human subject of print literacy has combined with a global revolution in science and technology to create a whole new range of social challenges that might be properly called “post-human.” Taking an ethical and post-foundational approach similar to Jurgen Habermas’s notion that “All we can do is reconstruct the Ought that has immigrated into praxis itself” (1997: 145), Kellner has also called for the radical reconstruction of education based on the needs and possibilities inherent in the current moment (2002: 154-69). For if it is indeed a condition of a just and equitable society that it will manifest a culture tolerant and responsive to the entirety of its constituents (and not dominate or repress some sector of them), then such a society must seek to forward the utopian project of a radical democracy in which every voice contributes to the overall social project and has meaning. Modern education, says Kellner, had as its emphasis the “submission to authority, rote memorization, and what Freire called the ‘banking concept’” (155), but in a new post-Humanities, postmodern network society there is now both the possibility that people will become the outright slaves of the global economy of technocapitalist culture and that education will reorganize itself around the multiple literacies required to navigate the new technological

and societal demands so as to intervene on behalf of a democratic model of well informed and mutually informing, ethical citizens.

Remembering that, for Kellner, post-World War II culture has increasingly become a politicized “media culture” in which the very contests of culture play themselves out as any number of media spectacles and sub-cultural interventions, he sees the current cyber-transformations in society as being at once both the greatest cultural delineation of the haves from the have-nots (i.e.; digital divide) and a revolutionary media opening that could allow for robust democratic communications, multicultural exchanges, and meaningful mass-political organizations for social change (155-57). If it is to be more of the latter than the former, he argues, then education must rise to meet the new cultural challenge set before it and integrate curricula that will cultivate the diverse number of literacies required for a radical multicultural democracy. Central to this project should be an expanded notion of critical media literacy that incorporates contemporary computer and multimedia literacies. This form of critical media literacy would foster student attempts at constructive, participatory, and self-actualizing approaches to social engagement, on the one hand, thereby offering students the fluency required in the new technologies to survive being alienated and labeled socially incompetent and, on the other, it would also promote a rigorous socio-political and historical understanding of culture and technology, pointing out the forces at work that serve to gird the manipulation, alienation and subjugation of various social groups (157-60).

Certainly, considering the omnipresent reality of the dominant media forces at work in the present moment, the staggering amount of power invested in national leaders and the Chief Executive Officers of transnational corporations, and the awe-inspiring complexity of modern science and technology proper, a critical media literacy that attempts to intervene via education and call attention to the forces at work, while also attempting to popularly train in the use, hands-on understanding, and transformation of contemporary media tools seems like a profound message and one that is desperately needed. Additionally, that a range of relatively affordable multimedia may now exist that are capable of storing encyclopedic amounts of information, which can then be presented in

rich tapestries of audio and video -- thereby potentially reinvigorating the popular historical imagination while also empowering popular agency -- is reason enough for feeling hopeful about media literacy projects (Hammer and Kellner: 475-89).

Yet, as Kellner (2002: 160) himself notes, media literacy faces numerous challenges, chief of which may simply be its relative infancy as a field, its lack of agreed upon standards, and its inability to generate a sure methodology up until now. This has allowed for a multitude of educational ventures to adopt the name of “media literacy” in both its critical and uncritical forms since the 1970s (Helms and Cho: 1).² But there may be larger problems still for critical media literacy, if it is to be a truly democratic response to the current social deployment of power as imperialist and technocapitalist megamachine and if it is to educate in a fashion that seeks to go beyond the support for establishment cultural values and normative goals towards appropriately allowing for other forms of knowledge, the differing tools which might support those forms, and the liberation of nature generally. Thus, it appears necessary to consider in greater depth the double-binds that may constitute the pedagogical work of critical media educators; and so I will now go on to examine three potential problems for critical media literacy as a counter-hegemonic educational field.

Criticizing Critical Media Literacy: Three Problems

The first issue for critical media literacy – even in what I take to be its most rigorous formulation (e.g.; Kellner) -- is that it is tied to a “critical thinking” pedagogical approach that has a problematic history of complicity with mainstream educational and technoscientific practices and is presently a centerpiece of national curricular standards. Critical thinking, as a modern education movement, hails from the work of John Dewey and, in particular, his use of the terms “reflective thinking” and “inquiry” – both of which he based on the instrumental logic of the scientific method that he thought sound (Streib). Now, there can be little question that Dewey himself ultimately promoted a vision of citizenship as strong democracy that would have rejected ideological dependence upon the technological norms of the modern West. Yet, as it stands, Deweyan progressivism is also inextricably linked up with the very deep cultural assumptions that have served to

legitimate and help produce the plethora of cultural and ecological dis-ease (Bowers 2003) that methods such as critical media literacy are looking to challenge and transform.

Thus, while it might prove helpful to draw upon a “critical thinking” tradition in which students inquire and reflect upon the ways in which their media practices are tethered to a larger encapsulating media culture, it must also be remembered that Dewey’s real political effect was to promote the trappings of modern, industrial class structures, thereby de-stabilizing respect for other knowledge systems and for the kind of non-mediated relationship to nature that such systems often desire. The critical thinking rampant during the Progressive Era and beyond has been mostly towards the production of the kind of secular values that can serve a rapidly growing corporate techno-science society, and it has done so especially effectively because it has allowed institutional managerial elites to disguise their agendas and self-interest with the Deweyan language of education as social progress and democracy as collaborative exploration.

At best, therefore, the Deweyan lineage at work in critical media literacy is a contradictory and ironic matter – today’s critical media educators would have to use methods like problem-solving inquiry and team work with students in order to attempt to discover the dubious history behind today’s corporatism that has its conceptual foundation in these Deweyan ideals. Further, as present critical thinking guidelines also obscure the political economy and the real industrial and socio-cultural realities behind the burgeoning technoscientific culture , by talking instead of a post-industrial Information Society in which students “gather, evaluate and use information effectively” (Beyer: 270-76), the critical thinking element involved in critical media literacy could be a real political drawback and amount to exactly the same type of uncritical weakness that pervaded Dewey’s tenure as the socialist dean of American educational letters in the midst of Fordist factory capitalism. To borrow from the language of the radical educator Paulo Freire, it seems that critical media literacy really wants to utilize a “problem-posing” approach to learning, but that it is unfortunately now overly related to a Deweyan “problem-solving” tradition. Again, considering the contradictory history of this latter tradition and its present integration into questionable mainstream education practices,

critical media literacy needs to more adequately raise the critical thinking foundation that is its approach to the level of a thorough-going meta-critique if such media literacy is to purposefully cast itself as a liberation pedagogy.

A more complicated matter for critical media literacy practices, however, is that even in their problem-posing guise they risk undue reliance upon a Western tradition of rational emancipation that can also be complicit with establishment power. To return to the paper's beginning, the connection between the continued growth of human civilization as the evolving divergence of culture from nature, with rulers associated with Reason atop the Great-Chain-of-Being and with those being ruled cast either as irrational animals or mid-range beings prone to conflagrations of emotional hysterics and in need of management, is well documented. This Western worldview, it has been pointed out, represents a long-standing cultural code of elitism and anti-democratic spirit that has arguably become even more pronounced in the modern liberal Enlightenment tradition that has sought to universalize the normative assumptions of what amounts to a privileged class of Eurocentric Caucasian males (Harding 1998). Thus, it is worth considering how contemporary technoscience and technocapitalism are reliant upon such Enlightenment rationality. This would center a critique of media technologies themselves which are the produced objects of the modern admixture of capitalist political economy and scientific rationality.

But if there is indeed no reasonable manner in which to articulate opposing the system from within, then critical media literacy educators should be honest with their students (and themselves) that while such literacy aspires to counter-hegemonic praxis, integrating systemic technological practices necessarily involves the furtherance of a number of hegemonic codes from the outset. My personal conclusion is that critical media literacy cannot escape being a participant in what Jacques Derrida has labeled the "carnophallogocentric" character of Western modes of being (Derrida 112). This makes critical media literacy's aims of radical social reconstruction all the more dubious the more such literacy comes to rely upon Western and Enlightenment models of reason as an emancipator and illuminator. However, it may be that by highlighting a new role for

Reason, and integrating it within a theory that centers an embodied ethics, such as promoted by many feminist theories or Herbert Marcuse with his “life instincts,” that a critical limit to such worldview prejudice could be maintained. This might assist critical media literacy’s aims by serving to distinguish how its appearance as a rational pedagogy differs from more mainstream Enlightenment attitudes.

Yet another problem inherent in the practice of critical media literacy is that, considering the current negative role that the globalization of technoscience plays in the ecocide of both indigenous and oppressed peoples, as well as the planetary environment (at an extinction rate as high for animal species, some experts believe, of 10,000 species a day), it appears that a critical media literacy which un-critically promotes the universal use of high technology like information-communication technologies (ICTs) is caught in a double bind with a Western ideology that is bottom-line quite happy with its modern trappings and isn’t very concerned as to their real costs (Bowers 2000: 190-95). While it is not now entirely rare to find the romanticization of nature and pre-modern communities at work in even the heights of the academic world, if such philosophy meant actually committing to a sort of Thoreauvean literacy project of “living deliberately” and taking up a sort of anarcho-primitivist practice, it is clear that it would involve few professorial takers. In this sense, then, critical media literacy should perhaps take special pains to emphasize the ways in which knowingly using the tools of the technoscientific system can lead to its dissolution and not simply its expansion.

For critical media literacy to work successfully it must achieve a tenuous balance between teaching to use the technologies and media forms that are its objects and critically exposing and transforming them. For such media criticism to have real power -- and not be merely a mode of rhetorical nihilism -- it would require as a necessary condition of operation that whenever information was encountered during the act of critical inquiry such that consciousness dawned upon the inquirer that the culture of science and technology (which pervaded the inquiry) spoke more to the reality of domination than liberation, then at such time the precautionary principle could/would be implemented as a humane limit to the pathologies of a technoscientific capitalist society.

Being able to draw upon the precautionary principle – which dictates that a particular cultural mode should not be acted upon simply because the possibility exists to do so, but only if a real assurance exists that acting in such a manner would not prove to exhibit more general harm than good – would strengthen the ethical ground of the critical aspect of media literacy studies. Again, however, it is unclear whether most (if any) media educators are ready to relinquish the tools of their trade and more deeply radicalize their relationship to mainstream American culture for a principle.

bell hooks, in discussing her role as a critic of film media, speaks to the seduction that films (and by extension – media culture) have on our psyches. hooks feels that images and media tend to make us submit to their will “no matter how sophisticated our strategies of critique and intervention...They have power over us and we have no power over them” (hooks: 3). Whether hooks is correct or not in celebrating the transgressive pleasure of submitting to media’s overt and covert seductions, she is at least honest and perceptive about the real forces at work that serve to problematize approaches to critical media literacy that seek to move beyond consumerism and fandom. For his part, William S. Burroughs often noted the same difficult elements at work in media culture and tended to speak of them as an “addiction” – a state in which the junkie knows that the fix is junk, has moved beyond the idealization of it and knows that it is unhealthy, but takes it anyway, uses it, and makes his life’s commitments based upon it. This, one could argue, is a very subtle form of critical media literacy indeed; but is this sort of anti-Platonism – where one knows the good, and does otherwise as proof of one’s humanity – really the sort of foundation that today’s critical media educators aspire to and wish to utilize? It seems not.

Practicing Critical Media Literacy: The Chicken Comes Home to Roost?

My own educational forays into critical media literacy have afforded me “front line” experiences to see both the benefits and difficulties facing today’s critical media educators. Ubiquitously, contemporary media technology tends to be presented with great optimism and a rhetoric of critical empowerment and professional ease clothes the classroom. Missing, however, in my experiences, have been any equally scathing attacks

upon the media culture at large or on the genocidal implications of such culture described previously in this paper. In one telling case, I attended a presentation made by the Los Angeles-based Center for Media Literacy, in which the presenter made a witty, critical and persuasive Microsoft PowerPoint presentation as an example of critical media literacy *about* critical media literacy. But while the presenter knowledgeably and passionately pointed out many media myths, traps, and issues, a self-critical meta-analysis was never achieved and the presentation importantly failed to include and comment upon the meanings inherent in the presenter's own ironic status as a pawn in the larger media game. Bill Gates, counted as the world's richest individual during the tech boom of the late 1990s was never invoked once, though his presence pervaded the very technological form of the room's centerpiece media experience and it is for reasons such as this that there is real reason to fear that even the most well-meaning critical media educators might have about them something of the booster for the corporate status-quo.

Other presentations I have attended have also confirmed my suspicions that critical media literacy needs to make clear what its commitments are *vis a vis* the anti-democratic semiotic codes of media professionalism. One would expect critical media literacy educators to side with what theorist Dick Hebdige has spoken of as a subversive punk aesthetic in valorizing counter-subcultures as forms of "noise" capable of jamming dominant media transmissions (Hebdige 90-92); and thus would they promote critical media literacy as a core-subversion of the hierarchical and hegemonic semiotic codes of a high-status professional media literacy. Yet, many critical media literacy presenters have seemed unconcerned (or oblivious) to the problems in developing a professional approach to the media technologies at hand. Rather they have related to the mainstream media codes which constitute professional literacy much the way Eric Schlosser's fast food consumers relate to mainstream fast food: they consumed it, allowed it to enter and become one with their bodies, "without giving it much thought, unaware of the subtle and not so subtle ramifications of their purchases" (Schlosser: 10).

One presentation I attended involved a UCLA undergraduate student who was utilizing the university's advanced media equipment and computer editing facilities to create his own

broadcast episodes for UCLA's cable television network. Regardless of the overall worth of his material – which I found to be rather juvenile and decadent -- the student's commitment to making his own media projects was admirable, I thought; he obviously had spent a great deal of time in learning the literacies involved in being a director and video producer and he had learned to make a variety of decisions about both the form and content of his various media pieces. Unfortunately, this latter assumption of mine was soon proven mistaken when the student presenting candidly offered the following film editing advice as if delivering a scriptural commandment -- “Never allow your video shot to last more than two to three seconds without moving or cutting away from it.” In fact, the truth is that this demand for the constant “jump cut” (as it is called) is not scripture – though it is questionable whether the young director knew this or if he had simply watched so many Hollywood films and MTV that for him it might as well have been. Thus, this presentation's advice (passed off as critical media literacy) amounted to a clear complicity with a rather jarring and ubiquitous media industry aesthetic of the moment – one designed to desensitize, hypnotize, and befuddle viewers. It was hardly surprising, then, to find that the student director who made the presentation later confessed that all his hard work was a form of training and portfolio-building for a future directing opportunity with one of the major corporate studios in town. So this is critical media literacy?

As part of my graduate studies, I have engaged in some media projects of my own. In one such project I produced a 27-minute video entitled *Seeing the World Through Nuclear Spectacles*.³ The title was both a reference to a sort of Barthesian position that the media are the optics through which we come to see the world, and a reference to the Situationist leader and media radical, Guy Debord, who theorized the contemporary formation of an “integrated spectacle” characterized by (Bracken: 198):

- 1) incessant technological innovation;
- 2) fusion of state and economy;
- 3) unanswerable lies;
- 4) the perpetual present; and
- 5) generalized secrecy.

Work on this project involved locating and gathering stock footage of United States DOE and DOD films about atomic weaponry from 1940s through the 1970s, downloading choice files, translating these files to a workable digital format and importing them into the software Final Cut Pro. Additionally, I translated and imported scenes of some Hollywood representations of nuclear war – Wargames, Planet of the Apes, and The Day After – as well as a brief clip of a Japanese Godzilla classic in which Godzilla, a monster born of nuclear holocaust, represents Japanese tradition against the creature Gigan, who is clearly symbolic of American atomic aggression. While the project was not about didactically delivering a fixed meaning and sermon about nuclear weapons, over the course of the work I did develop certain criteria that moved me in the direction of the *auteur* and away from the free play of representations placed entirely by chance that had been my original idea.

The nuclear bomb and the network society, it is my contention, are both godheads of Debord's society of the integrated spectacle and, as such, attempts to capture their meaning and represent them accurately (and critically) prove especially difficult. For instance, the network society often represents itself as the efficiency and freedom of the autonomous computer user, but the real meaning of this image may in fact be delayed by decades and may ultimately take place in another cultural environment – one of harmful development and modernization -- thousands of miles away. In this, the Internet spectacle reveals its deep kinship with the nuclear spectacle, which has, from the first, been constructed by media representations that attempt to construct a reality for it that is wholly in line with dominant social aims. In the case of the nuclear spectacle, the icon of an eerily beautiful mushroom cloud over an expanse of desert became fixed and iconic. But, just as the growth of the science and technology society itself is masked by iconic images of Internet liberation, representations of nuclear spectacle have tended to downplay or disregard the real social meaning of nuclear weapons – which would be better represented by images of the effects of the invisible radiation that such weapons contain and which threatens life on earth itself.

Trying to find a way to articulate a response to this problem through the critical manipulation of the media technologies I used proved an especially troublesome and ironic predicament. This was compounded by my conclusion that attempts to strike a parodic note

concerning the obvious absurdity of the propaganda that was my direct material would be a reactionary response that spoke more to my discomfort with the reality of the material than the greater meaning indexed by the footage itself. However, in the end, though the technology at my disposal often failed and posed its own plethora of difficulties and challenges, I did ultimately achieve a finished piece of personalized critical media. This was then placed on the Internet for free viewing, and to be fair, I must confess to feeling a sense of empowerment that developed along with the process as a whole – as Nietzsche put it: that which did not kill me, made me stronger (Nietzsche: 467).

My Background: Another Critical Media Literacy Educator is Born

Somewhere between totalizing critique and programmatic involvement with media as educational tools, I should underline my own relationship to critical media literacy. I consider myself a critical media educator and a theorist of critical media literacy. Born in New York in 1969, I was raised on a steady diet of media and counted myself a part of the slacker Generation X that made a particular statement about its relationship to media culture and its aspirations for life as a result of it. All through my youth, while always possessing a deep kinship for nature and the physicality of outdoor experience, I was also saturated with an evolving moray of video games and then computers. I can still remember talking my father into purchasing our first Apple IIc in 1982, learning to program in Basic and issue simple commands in the machine language that really made the whole thing run. By 1985, along with a friend, I developed a range of simple computer simulations: one that involved the user in a random phone conversation, another that simulated a strategic match between one's favorite World Wrestling Federation stars like Andre the Giant and Sergeant Slaughter, and my masterpiece – a 60-page long series of code that allowed one to input a variety of statistics for a given baseball player, which were then analyzed, normalized to a relative value, and used to construct a highly accurate card that could be used in a simulation baseball board game we created (which was later stolen by Milton Bradley).

In 1990, I became involved in investigating the early public internet domain and logged on to a variety of underground B.B.S.s (Bulletin Board Systems) where users traded simple information, communicated, and downloaded pictures at a rate of 600 baud (current DSL

subscribers can pull about 250,000 baud by comparison). In 1995, I began investigation of the emerging World Wide Web, learned HTML programming, and made my first simple multimedia website – where one could download songs by my band The Degenerates. By 1997, I was actively chatting on AOL and using it as a sort of personal dating service – through which I met my wife, causing me to move cross-country. In the years following, up until now, I have honed by my skills as a web developer/researcher and the computer (in its many functions) now seems to dominate my days and determine the very course of my livelihood. Yet, despite my apparent trajectory, my theoretical orientation has always remained philosophical and questioning: Why this direction? At what cost? Who chose? This perspective has led to my recent work in “blogs” – Internet weblogs – where I have created a noted blog (read daily by a thousand people in over 20 countries) devoted to proliferating and commenting upon media issues regarding ecological consciousness, animal rights, and environmental degradation.⁴

While there are no doubt many involved in media education whose skills with technology (and their sociological understanding of the same) dwarf my own, my standpoint is not so humble as to deny that I must represent a sort of vanguard in the young field. Thus, my nearly three decades of close literacy with the new media technologies which I have spoken of here, when combined with my decade of training in philosophical criticism and educational practice, invokes for me a certain responsibility of leadership – irrespective of my own desires or professional stature. It is the real commitment to the responsibilities that comes with this leadership that I take very seriously, and so while I might better serve my own career in critical media literacy by taking a more optimistic tone and sounding more enthused about the possibilities inherent in the new technologies or the social revolution that they afford, I believe that this would be a misguided strategy at this time.⁵ For leadership means being invested with the power to articulate courses of action, and ethical leadership also involves charting a course of action that will bring voice to the voiceless and choice to those without choice.

In this respect, in considering the contemporary attempt being made by the dominant monoculture to re-colonize most of the globe through the cultural exportation of information

communication technologies, despite the precautionary principle and the well-established evidence that such globalization only serves to increase the desperate plight of the world's 3 billion-plus poor and catalyze an unprecedented mass environmental extinction, leaders in the field of critical media literacy must speak out. Of course, to be put in the position of articulating how I might act as a double-agent and work to better the system from within (even as those I love are extinguished around me, in part, through my own behavior) is a complex and potentially impossible task. Therefore, I am led to think in a similar direction as the philosopher, who in reflecting about the ethical constraints in logical utterance once remarked, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein).

We, then, who are born of the new media technology – let us use our technologies the best we know how, attempting always to hack and jam the social network, turn it away from its present course of development, and so make way for a better world. But let us strive not to be boosters for the network in the process – perhaps the truly effective mark of today's critical media educator is the degree to which he/she goes about his/her business quietly and unnoticed. Working positively with the tools at hand, but with an unembarrassed pessimism fueled by the enormity of present-day horrors and their relationship to the historicity of new media generally, critical media literacy could function as a sort of underground pedagogical method – passed by word of mouth, operative to operative. As I live among the bourgeois splendors of epically cinematic Los Angeles, writing these very words on Bill Gates's Microsoft Word, and attend a University of California system which is directly responsible for the creation and management of the ongoing nuclear holocaust, it may be that for me my emphasis upon the importance of the cautionary tone is all that is left me in the form of a great refusal.

NOTES

¹ "Humanities" here should not be taken as that which today represents the group of disciplines that are separated off from the natural sciences, but rather as that which is designated classically as the liberal arts and is denoted by the Latin term *humanitas*.

² Interestingly, this is a distinction that is also unfortunately shared by its "natural" counterpart -- Environmental Education.

³ This 27 minute video is online for viewing at: <rtsp://media.gseis.ucla.edu/kellner/kahnnukefilm.mov> .

⁴ See: Vegan Blog: The (Eco) Logical Weblog at <http://getvegan.com/blog/blogger.php>.

⁵ Though I have discussed the radical uses of new media and the Internet also, from a dialectical perspective, see Kahn 2003, 2004.

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