An Aural History of Critique in Curriculum: An account of being critical in post-reconceptualist curriculum studies

by

Patrick Phillips

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The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

This thesis is a piece of criticism about criticism in post-reconceptualist curriculum studies: how if functions, what it makes possible, and what or whom it forecloses. I begin with my argumentative parameters, my social and social discursive locations, and their critical implications. I then define criticism as the evaluative gesture of critique, and further define critique as the generative ethos of being critical, grounded in historical-discursive example. Through rhetoric as critique, I take the contexts and documents of post-reconceptualist discourse as the objects of my analysis to demonstrate that curriculum is born of critical rupture and generative critique. Concluding with demonstrations of this aural process, I argue that the field today is and can be made or remade through the choices of scholars to engage (or not) in particular acts of intellection. I end with a call for relevance and accounting of our own critical agency in curriculum.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................................... iii  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... iv  
Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter 2: Contexts and Locations ................................................................................................. 6  
  Social Location and Social Capital of Curriculum ........................................................................... 9  
  Analytical Ground: Discursive Social Location in Curriculum ...................................................... 11  
  The Aural Curriculum: Questioning the Criticality of Curriculum ................................................ 13  
Chapter 3: The Question of Criticism in Curriculum ................................................................. 15  
  What is criticism? ......................................................................................................................... 16  
  Curriculum’s Aural Nexus: Criticism and Critique ....................................................................... 17  
  Critique in Education as “moving and being moved” .................................................................... 21  
  What is Criticism in Curriculum? ................................................................................................. 24  
  Toward a Rhetoric of Curriculum ................................................................................................. 27  
Chapter 4: Methodology: A Rhetoric of Curriculum ................................................................. 28  
  Rhetoric as Critique .................................................................................................................... 29  
  Rhetoric as Criticism .................................................................................................................. 31  
  The Rhetoric of Curriculum ......................................................................................................... 34  
Chapter 5: Curriculum as an Aural Life History ....................................................................... 36  
  Moments and History: Foundations of Curricular Life ............................................................... 37  
  The Empiricism of Critique: A Discursive Ontology .................................................................. 43  
  History left to Ruin: Criticism without Critique ......................................................................... 47  
Chapter 6: Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 49  
  The Transmutation of Hope, the Transmutation of Critique ....................................................... 50  
  The Sublime Curriculum: from Simple Eclecticism to Simple Proliferation and Vacuity ....... 55  
  Coda ........................................................................................................................................... 57  
References ........................................................................................................................................ 62
Chapter 1
Introduction

Will my thesis have any discernible effect on the world of curriculum or the world at large – and is there a difference between these objects? In introduction to my own curriculum as a Master’s student, I was faced with the task not of understanding curriculum studies as a coherent discipline, but as an amorphous field seemingly more about understanding how to understand, with its own world of words; it offered no tethers to a purpose or action in the wider world of teaching and learning, inducing a profound doubting of the relevance of my own reading and writing in curriculum. There is some solace in the knowledge that I am not alone: curriculum studies has in many places – particularly within the “post” of reconceptualist curriculum studies in which I am enculturated- failed to find relevance outside of its own discourse, leaving the full being of curriculum, its lived, social and material consequences largely lost as the territory of instrumentalist curriculum, or the design of curriculum as rational (and often neoliberalized) learning outcomes. In his critical essay Why the Arts Don’t Do Anything (2013), Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández intervenes on this rhetorical hermeticism to articulate a kind of vital ineffectualness in the scholarship and advocacy of mainstream arts education, critically identifying a self-limiting, self-reifying, and self-evidencing discursive language and, consequently, self-naturalizing inertia rooted in the very communication practices of the field and its scholars. This process is not limited to arts education, as described by Gaztambide-Fernández (2014, in press, pp. 6-7): “Indeed, the traces of reconceptualization in national, provincial/state, or local policy are almost null. … Increasingly solipsistic and enamored with its own image, reconceptualization continues to struggle with its self-conscious humanist inheritance.” In this rhetorical existence of being critical, this aural life of responding, appears to be trapped in the surface of its own representation, perpetually “turning attention back to itself and its own solipsistic embroilment with escaping from the existentialist looking glass.”

As a rhetorical intervention into the relevance-making processes (or lack thereof) in curriculum theory, this thesis is essentially a piece of criticism about criticism in post-reconceptualist curriculum studies: how if functions, what it makes possible, and what or whom it forecloses. This intervention requires and allows illustration of two gestures of being critical: an account of being critical, and an accounting – holding to account – the actions of this mode of being and those who perform these actions. I begin by describing the contextual parameters of my argument, the social and discursive locations from which I write, and the critical premises,
limitations and implications these raise. I then define criticism as the evaluative, normative gesture of critique, and further define critique as the generative ethos and material gesture of being critical, grounding these concepts in historical-discursive encounters of post-reconceptualist curriculum. I develop a notion of rhetoric as critique, a methodology distinct from the empiricist mode of data collection and analysis. I apply this framework to a selection of contexts and documents of exemplary moments in post-reconceptualist critical exchange as the objects of my analysis, demonstrating my primary premise that curriculum is born of critical rupture and generative critique. My concluding findings demonstrate the potential decoupling or coupling of the critical gestures I explore throughout my thesis, arguing that, as a field, curriculum studies is and can be made or remade through the choices of scholars to engage – or not engage – in particular critical, material acts of intellection. I end with a call for relevance and reckoning with and accounting of our own critical agency in curriculum.

Following this introductory chapter, I identify the contexts and primary premises of my critique. I situate my focus at the juncture between individual agency, discursive identity and representation, at “the intersection of curriculum studies/curriculum history/curriculum theory through the study of systems of reason that order reflection and action.” (Popkewitz, 2013, p. 301) Arguing that post-reconceptualist curriculum scholars write and teach from and between these registers of critical identity and identification to create and maintain curriculum studies as a field of relations rather than a coherent discipline, I establish three premises for my subsequent analyses: as scholars, we explicitly do not in the present moment of re-conceptualised curriculum uphold a single, universal disciplined dogma that “[distributes knowledge] along a scale, around a norm, [to] hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” what counts as worthy educational inquiry (Foucault, 1975/1977, p. 223); rather, in being, or the continued engagement with one another as members of a critical community, we make present, past, and new perspectives of what curriculum is or should be through rhetorical engagement. In doing so, we may create new universal sets, or collections of all the objects or actors under consideration and held as existent and relevant with regards to any work at hand, constituting the discursive realms theorists navigate. I posit that we choose to either intervene on these realms from our social positions, or virtually separate our individual social locations and discursive social locations in order to engage in more creative critique, abdicating a certain measure of critical responsibility – and rendering curriculum’s sets of logic independent of a real world of curriculum practice. While I realize I am in my thesis engaging in the same processes I
take as the objects of analysis, I introduce a troubling of this subtle limit of critical proximity (of critical subject/presence and object/consequence) as foreshadowing for my eventual critical charge, asking my reader to consider the *aural* dimensions of critique in curriculum, or what sense-making powers may be at play which escape unequivocal documentation.

Drawing on concepts of critique and criticism such as linguistic, performative, historicizing, and vital process, I next synthesize an expanded understanding of critique and criticism grounded in post-reconceptualist curricular example and consequence. I first unpack the words ‘criticism’ and ‘critique,’ connecting common, contemporary, historical, and multi-disciplinary understandings of critique and criticism as affective, performative, normalizing, and generative of knowledge. Integrating the post-reconceptualist discursive moments, the documents and contexts, of critical pedagogy and its contentions via Ellsworth (1989), Lather (1991; 2012), Giroux (1992) and McLaren (2003), I argue and demonstrate that there are at least three critically discernible registers – registers I am able to communicate through text – of critique. I take these critical objects here and throughout my thesis not as post-reconceptualist canon (some are explicitly antithetical) but as the discursive experiences and agential investments of *being* in critique, in which critical rupture is alloyed and put to use with the generative investment of readers and witnesses. Illustrated by my examples – in analysis, delivery and experience – of critique as generative extension and criticism as evaluation, there are also possible instances of criticism lacking critique, as well as critique void of criticism.

To better explore such decouplings and establish critique in curriculum as a vital set of practices which make intelligible and historical, make invisible and divisible, make anew, and make new terrain for or isolate curriculum as abstract research imaginaries, I develop a notion of *rhetoric as critique*, a methodology distinct from the empiricist mode of data collection and analysis. Rather, it is at once object and subjective lens: rhetoric as a methodology of rhetorical analysis and as knowledge-making. I establish the critical dimensions and affordances of critique and criticism as a rhetorical method for examining the same in curriculum. Taking what I identify as Lather’s narrative style (2012) as methodological example of critique-as-method in educational research, I first consider *critique as rhetoric*, developing the discursively performative, generative, and discourse-sustaining dimensions of critical exchange from a history of aural knowledge-making underpinning concepts of rhetoric, extended from basic connotations of persuasion by historian of rhetoric Wendy Olmsted (2008, p. 2) towards the “art of finding subjects and arguments.” I further explore the limitations and limiting functions of
criticism as rhetoric. Reflecting on philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend’s (1975; 1987) work on the limits of unscaled disciplinary intelligibility and rigour, I confront the implication that the understanding of a discipline or field, such as post-reconceptualist curriculum studies, is contingent on a community of performing, interacting agents. I synthesize my own decoupling of critical registers through Bruno Latour’s (2004) call for reclaiming the empirical relevance – the material, political efficacy – of critique in contemporary language, carrying forward a revived meaning of “empirical” as a concern for relevance in the material world to which critique and criticism ostensibly refer.

Having hopefully prompted my reader to consider the ways in which we might generate a collective concept of curriculum through a shared life of words, I use my fifth chapter as an opportunity to glean such a life, a glimpse of curriculum as a life history. By history, I refer to the imbricated where, who, when, or even what we initially cared about when starting our processes of curricular invention; so, by life history I mean less a genealogy of curriculum studies, but an accounting of the critical events, choices, and investments which shape and continue to shape the field. As a Master's student of curriculum studies, I have been schooled to perceive my discipline as a dispersed, often (and never the same) a-temporal chronology of “moments” that, I believe, have achieved enough textual mass to act as objects of theoretical memory. I take the critical mass of Tylerism, the historical rupture of instrumentalist and critical birth of ideological critique in curriculum theory, using its contention as an illustration of the ways in which criticism in curriculum creates historical anchor points between which to travel and rediscover meaning, or polarities to diverge from and define new discursive ground. Further applying the implications of my questioning, of what these forces make possible together or apart, I return to consider what aspects of the rhetorical life and lives of post-reconceptualist curriculum studies, its acts of criticism and critique, prevent an aural existence from materializing in discourse. I take up the ongoing moment of the browning movement (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández, & Murad, 2011; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, in press) as a critical mass of curriculum theory making interventions into the status quo of post-reconceptualism. I question the consequences in this case of the absence of either critical polarity or the generosity of critique – or a discursive response at all.

Between my fifth and last chapter, I transition through my critiques of critical communication practices in curriculum studies theory to my own critique of the present state of criticality in curriculum – my generative offering of meaning and political account of relevance
in the rhetoric of curriculum – through Julie Maudlin’s (Maudlin, et al., 2012; Maudlin, 2014, in press) responses to the critical calls of the browning movement. Taking forward the difficult implications of a rhetorically generated and lived life of curriculum as a confrontation with the present state of critique in post-reconceptualist curriculum, I provoke a more present questioning of how the rhetoric of curriculum may or may not be materializing the curriculum its scholars ostensibly write toward. I gesture towards the post-reconceptualist “next moments” of Eric Malewski (2010a), who names his work an “interventionist” and “activist” scholarship of “immense” importance, but as a site of intervention that does not go beyond its own discourse. I trace this preoccupation with inward proliferation to the emerging, vacuous rhetoric of post-humanist curriculum theory, and finally the rhetorical limitations of my own references and arguments. I attempt to thread back into my established premises, my own conditions and my own critique. I do so to demonstrate a full, aural gesture of critique: I offer that there is always-already hope for relevance in the choice to respond and invest some of ourselves in our discursive lives, while at the same time arguing an explicitly provocative position – in the case of my critique, that post-reconceptualist curriculum has presently abandoned an awareness of its own criticality and critical relevance.
Chapter 2
Contexts and Locations

The questions “What is Curriculum?” and “What should be curriculum?” are arguably, in some form or another, the perennial queries which haunt the theory and practice of curriculum studies. These are critical questions. In the gesture of these prompts, we behold collectively and individually the products of our work and intellection, write them into life through language, and take the same to ethical account. Herbert Spencer’s (1861/1911) provocative nineteenth century essay *What Knowledge is of Most Worth?* can still be invoked as a seminal rupture in procedural compulsion and complacency in taking the state of curriculum and its social effects for granted; regardless of how (un)favourably his morals and hierarchy of knowledge-value are viewed in hindsight, his critical intervention into curriculum remains a discursive catalyst to curriculum today. The introductory words of Spencer’s text by former president of Harvard and contemporaneous education researcher Charles W. Elliot (1911, n.p.) could describe favourably any current inquiry into curriculum: “[i]n proclaiming [the educational doctrine of his day] with ample illustration, ingenious argument, and forcible reiteration, Spencer was a true educational pioneer.” Elliot’s observation, albeit flattering and ideologically biased, illustrates the first gesture of curricular inquiry, as he reads with an eye and pen towards not provocation but amplification and naming of Spencer’s intellectual work, actions which carry the same forward into language.

These practices of generative critique and political rupture through critical investment, held together yet apart, are then more than questions: they are the impulses sustaining the life of curriculum studies. These critical impulses course through specific communities of thought to both create new discrete, intellectually tangible ‘moments’ within curriculum by pushing against and describing new boundaries of criticality, and, at the same time, the same gestures of criticality, such as responding to, reinterpreting, or even denying the critical relevance of a particular moment, allow juncture between the disparate, continually re-binding of curriculum studies – as a field rather than a discipline. I ask how we – individual theorists yet invested in some sense of what curriculum should be – live this life: what does criticism mean and how does it function in curriculum; how do we engage in these practices individually and as a discursive community; and, consequently, how do we sustain ourselves as a coherent, yet disparate, but purposeful field.
My first, and perhaps last, premise is then that we explicitly do not, in the present moment of re-conceptualised curriculum, uphold a universal, disciplined dogma that “[distributes knowledge] along a scale, around a norm, [to] hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” what counts as worthy educational inquiry (Foucault, 1975/1977, p. 223). In being, the field of curriculum studies is both unavoidably vast in people and purposefully vast in lines of inquiry, making the spectre of classification antithetical and the itch of reflexivity constant. As a field, however, I notice that curriculum, as intellectual work, still holds together, arguably retaining what I could relate as, after Bourdieu (1977, p. 165) a gravity of doxa, nearly transparent forces of belief and actions of belief, the actions of ideological investment, as critical relational practices which bind us across time and space in “the universe of possible discourse.” I argue that curriculum studies is held together by such moments and strands of critique, which, along with an inextricable delimiting impulse of criticism, are open to a kind of rhetorical struggle, much like how historian of rhetoric James Herrick (2005, p. 65) describes his view of democracy of pre-Socratic rhetorical life, which “creates truth that is useful for the moment out of doxa, or the opinions of the people, through the process of argument and counterargument” – forming and being formed by critical exchange. Our inquiries are inextricable from our points of reference. They conjure and constitute the field in which we do our fieldwork, and the epistemological cosmology we draw, inhabit, navigate, and explore with our personal critical energies, and which we foreclose when we turn our backs to the voices of others, when we choose not to respond.

While cogent arguments have been made about the racist, patriarchal, and colonizing legacies behind such Enlightenment impulses underpinning curriculum (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, in press), I am interested here in understanding how this contentious life is nonetheless lived, to what effects, and a glimpse of what (or whose) ends. What I intend is more akin to applied linguist in education Joan Turner’s (2011) foregrounding of material “encounters” of language in intercultural communication; here, I am interested in inter-discursive communication in curriculum, or the "empirical reality of language, its materiality, its uses in academic performance” (p. 1), and its importance to such encounters. I have begun to use the words “critique” and “criticism” with meaning subtly both particular and similar, and while I will soon explain this significance through necessary linguistic distinction through further linguistic distinction, I believe it also necessary to prompt a questioning of who invests in this field, and for whom it concerns. It is personally and critically treacherous to gaze upon the critical reality of a
post-reconceptualist curricular life: as I intend to take the critical moments of curriculum as the object of my own critical inquiry, I subject myself to the challenge of distinguishing my ostensibly neutral observations of these moments from their immanent reactivity.

If curriculum is sustained by a living history of criticism, a present reading, as much as it is by historicized moments, what does it look like, how does it operate, and what does it make possible or foreclose? Curriculum studies scholar Thomas Popkewitz (2009) examines disciplinary communication in curriculum at a level close to what I am seeking: his concept of “double gestures” of language/representation at “the intersection of curriculum studies/curriculum history/curriculum theory through the study of systems of reason that order reflection and action” (p. 301). The registers I have traced so far suggest something like Popkewitz’s “systems of reason that order reflection and action” (p. 301) at play, however obliquely they may be observed. The observable words and objects of curriculum that appear most easily are the consequences of power, “not merely there in order that educators should ‘grasp’ some reality to act upon. The words are made intelligible and ‘reasonable’ within historically-formed rules and standards that order, classify, and divide what is ‘seen’ and acted on in schooling” (p. 301). While Popkewitz examines curriculum as a causal force in the maintenance of school systems, I propose in this thesis that curriculum is perhaps even an effect of its own system of reason; a kind of continual double gesture of reflexive creation and confrontation.

For the sake of understanding and demonstration, however, it may prove necessary to decouple cause from effect to observe the in-between, how intricately these gestures entangle and form such a “system of reason in curriculum studies [which makes] visible the limits of the present, and, through this critical engagement, makes possible other futures” (Popkewitz, 2009, p. 301). This requires more critical agility than simply and cleanly naming a double gesture of power. The kind of critical power I am pointing to is deep and widely diffused into the aural life of curriculum: its invocation implicates even the subtlest, everyday gestures of kindness or cruelty – every word which punctuates both the theory and lived reality of curriculum; it becomes more and more an ethical and moral objective, more and more an ethical and moral life, stirring into consciousness our individual responsibilities of representation and the actions that sustain or degrade them. Curriculum re/undefined as more an effect of agential, politically valent existence is too vast to chart here. How criticism infuses curriculum and tethers it (us) to one
another can be gleaned, however, in the ways in which we write and read with each other: how, I argue, curriculum is born of critical rupture and generative critique.

Ironically, then, I first excise the second gesture of criticism – the sharp catalyst of evaluation – from the first gesture of critique, what I see as criticism’s mode of engagement and being. I begin with disclosure and a gesture of disjuncture between my social and what I term my social discursive locations, before performing the same artificially splitting of the being of critique and the impulse of criticism. This splitting, I suggest, engenders a mirrored splitting of the universal sets of criticality in curriculum, or the constituent boundaries of object, logic, effect, and responsibility around which arguments are fielded and founded. I close with a splicing of the parallel sets, of critique and criticism and social and social location, by threading through them the implications of beholding curriculum as a critical life in light of my own explicit account of searching for relevance in curriculum theory.

Social Location and Social Capital of Curriculum

It might seem obvious to proclaim curriculum studies as a critical endeavour, and so to summarize such a proposal as a ‘meta’ piece of theory, a ‘criticism of criticism in education.’ Such an undertaking, however, implicates a world of proximity between subject and object rife with critically debilitating, tangled layers of cause and affect, professional bias and personal complicity. Of course, I am right; private allegiances, the thermodynamics of arguments moved by personal tiff – a great wealth of social capital underwrites the ostensibly rational products of curriculum. Who reads you, who cites you, who you know – identities which transect and carry with them the powers of race, class, gender, or even friendship – are vital sources of validation and critical uptake. The very nature (or naturalized culture) of academia perpetuates this: to be a legitimate Master’s student, you must first find someone to support and read your work; there is no obligation for anyone to do so. For the purposes of a humble Master’s thesis, however, relying on such identifying critique is as good as a black-market currency: I cannot necessarily point to any empirical evidence of these exchanges of power. Without having the privilege of being there, one would not even know of the individual fury behind William Pinar’s dissolution and reformation of his Canon Project’s committee following the infamous and fracturus 2008 conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies conference
breakdown.¹ To date, his project’s website (AAACS, 2010) reads perfectly rational, with Schubert’s (2008) less-than-glowing review of Pinar’s canon, the textual manifestation of Pinar’s personal and discursive antagonists, openly and politely cited as supporting literature.

The gravity of being critical, then, is overwhelming; it is nigh impossible for me to rigourously include and account for all registers of critical power. I must quite ironically concede it critically necessary to delimit what this thesis is able to address. Still, as I will be taking the encounters of agential energy of criticality in my field as observable moments, which I argue also constitute curriculum studies itself, I will nonetheless attend to – perhaps cope with – my own process of criticism and critique. While my personal social location within curriculum must remain peripheral in order for me to produce a digestible academic deliverable, this identity, my social location, is inextricably entangled with what I call my discursive social location, and persists as an important dimension of curriculum and criticism that should not be forgotten amidst professionalized exposition.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that this life is necessarily always unjust or unjustly obscured. I am very much interested in how we constructively and in good faith engage in aural acts of meaning-making, and one need not look far to find concrete examples in everyday curriculum. While there is no contractual obligation for any individual engaged in curriculum to care about who they engage with or what they read, we apparently still do – and we choose to do so. I sincerely doubt I am the only one who has invested care and encouragement into the nascent work of a student, offering an aural space of feedback and collaborative creation in which interpretation meets intention, breathing life freely into a new scholarly existence for an idea and a person – freely given because this investment is not necessarily monetized towards calculated gain or contractual obligation. Offering a vital link in knowledge, a piece of keen language, pointing out a promising pattern in another’s thoughts and helping it become realized, are actions just as critical, and critically relevant, as any condemnation. Being critical can be wondrously generative, offering life to ideas, license for new, outside thinkers to ‘live’ in the discursive world of the academy, and, by extension, live more realized hopes and ideas.

I do question, however, how far we go in our critical generosity to find relevance and make ‘good’ what social ills we write against. While I have no doubt that we mean well as individual scholars of curriculum, working towards some sense of a greater ‘good,’ willing

¹ As related in personal communication with Gaztambide-Fernández, 13 November, 2014.
ourselves to push through ‘the system’ so we can effect change, these concessions accrue, tacitly endorsing with compounding force the capitalist shift of the institution, its societal context, and the pyramids of power we supposedly work to make antiquated. The most common critical trace of this performance, in my experience situated in post-reconceptualist thought-space, has often been to couch most critical thought in (or keep them on the couch of) ambiguous claims to poststructuralist indeterminacy, which I believe could never be read clearly or with enough critical force to upset the status quo. This parallels rhetorical appeals to budgetary shortfalls, forgetting that budgets (like curriculum) are not self-evident sentient beings, but constructed by the decisions (for better or worse) of real people. Even in my own paragraph here, by pointing to an abstract threat of neoliberalism and capitalism – rather than bear openly the complicit choices by myself, peers, and mentors – I quickly lose critical traction on the contour of what I am ostensibly struggling against in body and spirit: our very own, mundane and everyday, yet active compliance with neoliberal values. If we embrace (and rationalize) our work as intellectual labour, are we not also implying an intellectual and personal agency in our craft?

Herein, in the moment of this questioning of the agency of criticism, lies my second premise: as I have virtually separated my individual social location (and soon discursive social location), there is the real possibility, academically conditioned tendency, even, to remove ourselves and our complicity from critique, leaving such accountability up to individual choice and privilege. Throughout this thesis, I must continually cope with silenced context while I still, unavoidably invest myself in the same rhetorical life of critique and aural maintenance of curriculum studies. I ask my reader to hold the tacitly understood absence of the vast world of social capital that bears down on or animates the curriculum theory we yet live through in our discursive social lives, and consider how curricular discourse nonetheless stays alive – and in what register of (or perhaps which) reality.

**Analytical Ground: Discursive Social Location in Curriculum**

A century of curriculum studies after Spencer, reconceptualist Kieran Egan (1978; reprinted 2003) defined curriculum as a field rather than a discipline, and offered a criticism of this state of being which could easily apply today: “[m]uch discussion in the professional field of curriculum, at present, focuses on the basic question of what curriculum is, and this suggests severe disorientation” (p. 9). While Egan positioned this disorientation as a lack of clear logical
boundaries between various divergent conceptions of curriculum, such as what the pedagogy of curriculum should be and what should be its content, our present embraces this ambiguity as its own cause: we discursively live a doubting of any singular orientation as an ongoing, great-beyond “post” of curriculum’s crisis of representation. I speak, of course, of my discursive location: post-reconceptualist curriculum theory, defined by Eric Malewski (2010b. p. 536):

Post-reconceptualization rather than being a break or a shift in the terms for curriculum studies scholarship, seems to foreground new sensibilities within the field: (1) flux and change; (2) hybrid spaces; (3) reading differently; (4) divergent perspectives; (5) different contexts; (6) status question; and (7) understudied histories.

For Malewski and other post-reconceptualists, this foregrounding is an onto-ethico-epistemological imperative – but it interpellates a discursive-social idea of an agent of intellection-as-action, not a singular, identified, social individual actively holding or being held to another’s actions or account (intellectual or otherwise). I argue that this discursive-social agent, to which I also lend empirical body through critique, retains however a sense of individuality. The problem I see is that this discourse-identity appears to be detached from the underlying person who writes it into being – it enters and exists, and can remain indefinitely alive in a plane of intelligibility independent of the world in which its writer lives or ostensibly promotes. The examples of such “divergent perspectives” and “hybrid spaces” and ultimately individualized sensibilities I have been exposed to during my own enculturation into curriculum studies teach us, I have argued (2013), to fail in “dilemma” (e.g. Gallagher, 2012) and “get lost” (e.g. Lather, 2009; 2012) as a noble pursuit. Failure is our success, enabling us to produce whole volumes constituted entirely by inward reflections on the value of unresolved dilemma (and often through postmodern metaphors of indeterminacy). Indeterminacy is our rationale for funding: when asked to clarify ethical and/or moral underpinnings and practical implications of an educational research project generously funded by SSHRC and which has birthed entire textbooks – one of which was a pillar of my curriculum – curriculum scholars Stephanie Springgay and Deborah Freedman’s shrugged and deferred (Springgay, 2013a; 2013b). The curricular value of their self-styled curriculum of “mothering” (2011) did not, apparently, require relevance or political meaning in any world beyond its internal references and inventions of language.

While I intend later in this thesis to develop such an argument further as part of my own critical gesture, important here is my third premise of criticality as currently practiced in curriculum: we create worlds of discourse, language, and intelligibility which may not require
identification with a social world beyond its own. This can be both negative and positive: in this way, we can traverse a vast history, population, and present of curriculum, imagining with increasing creative license and generative potential new ways of expressing, and so conceiving of, the world of curriculum and the way we wish it to be. For better or worse, we determine the *universal set* of our critical life. A concept of both mathematical and philosophical logic, a universal set is a collection of all the objects or actors under consideration and held as existent and relevant with regards to any work at hand. Such a set need not encompass all knowledge, metrics, people, or values. Such opportunity for creativity, of course, allows thought and thinkers to escape oppressive regimes of knowing – feminism(s) being a prime example of a break from the universal set of patriarchy and creation of a new horizon of thought (and in many cases) action (Porter, 1954/998). For now, I wish to name this as the creative power of critique and criticism – the creation and maintenance of universal sets of possible understanding.

*The Aural Curriculum: Questioning the Criticality of Curriculum*

I still wonder, however, if critical creativity is presently exploited to avoid rhetorical-material efficacy – re-intervention into a world its discursive agents wish to make better through concepts born of this rhetorical life. Has criticism become largely a form of shadowboxing in certain corners of curriculum, kid-gloved between like-minded colleagues and self-referential literature, with our critical energies directed into language games and our gestural capacities infinitely mirrored? Conversations in hallways, gestures of encouragement, notes of sincere enthusiasm in the margins of essays, cementing intimacies, shared humour and the meeting and birth of new language between students and teachers, researchers and researchers, and other ephemeral moments of critical exchange remain understudied histories, elusively emergent of ethics and culture (of practical curriculum and its academia) that exist outside of curriculum policy, structure, and economy. Such a vast realm of implication, yet again, is far beyond the capacity of one master’s thesis to investigate properly. The existence of these practices of concern – however connected, aware, or detached – alone represent a notable challenge to documentation, never mind theorization. They mobilize real, concrete choices made by political beings in education, across abstract intellectual projects and spaces, particular moments and motivations that are difficult to isolate from the imbricated contexts of curriculum, or even distinct universes
of curriculum. Early progenitor of cultural criticism Walter Benjamin's (1936) theory of an *aura* begins to capture the nature of the grasping I attempt here: Benjamin first used such a metaphor to capture in words what often eludes their descriptive ability, when addressing the very circumstances of an elusive quality being captured.

An aura, like the particular gleam of a portrait's eye or light of a singular sunset, is an intangible quality of a work of art or mundane moment in time and space that is intrinsic and dependent on its singularity. At the turn of the twentieth century, Benjamin believed that photography and other mechanized reproduction allowed such singularities, which bestowed particular markers of validity and social power, to be captured, emancipated, democratized, and shared. Like Benjamin's aural mechanisms, I hope to trace the aura of criticism in education to transform its mystified ritual and power into conscious theory and practice. This is a double gesture in itself, as Benjamin argued that at the same time the capturing of a moment in time democratizes, it simultaneously exacts a price: the singularity of the work of art, the moment of singular experience, is lost in its re-representation; the prospect of describing an auraal object then implies an inevitably imperfect, distancing attempt at representing something not-quite-representable. I suspect the mythical qualities of such an aural state – the personal, private origins of curriculum – are already shrouded in exclusivity; I was not present for much of its life, and this life is contained within the aural knowledge of those who were, and I am already constrained by what I might disclose of my own curricular life. Accounting for the performative, oral, emotional and otherwise relational mechanisms of critique in curriculum as much as is possible will, I hope, grant the recognition of when we are in these moments of invention, so that we may choose better what kind of curriculum we write and who we bring forward with us.
Chapter 3
The Question of Criticism in Curriculum

If criticism pervades and propels curriculum into life and history, through the very language and gestures of sense-making performed by its discursive inhabitants, its aural qualities and effects present significant challenges to their articulation as objects of criticism. In this chapter, I perform my own critical articulation and delimiting of what I mean by ‘criticism’ and “critique,” unpacking these words towards re-synthesizing both as critically tangible objects of analysis.

Drawing on concepts of critique and criticism as linguistic, performative, historicizing, and vital processes, I trace in this chapter a multidimensional understanding of critique and criticism grounded in post-reconceptualist curricular example and consequence. I define and distinguish the words ‘criticism’ and ‘critique,’ connecting common, contemporary, historical, and multi-disciplinary understandings of critique and criticism as affective, performative, normalizing, and generative of knowledge. Integrating the post-reconceptualist discursive moments – the convergent documents and contexts – of critical pedagogy and its contentions via Ellsworth (1989), Lather (1991; 2012), Giroux (1992) and McLaren (2003), I argue and demonstrate that there are at least three critically discernible registers – registers I am able to communicate through text – of critique: there is the experience and agential investment of being in critique, in which critical rupture is alloyed and put to use with the generative investment of readers and witnesses. Implied by my example of studio critique collapsed – in analysis, delivery and experience – as evaluation, there are also possible instances of criticism lacking critique, as well as critique void of criticism.

I take forward into my following chapter a question of methodology: I wish to take the critical communication practices of post-reconceptualist curriculum to account, but I do not mean to devalue the generative potential of critique and criticism, in any state in which it may have been or may be in presently. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to introduce and describe the ways in which we, as curriculum scholars, might tacitly understand or misunderstand the power of critique and criticism, generating the collective concept of curriculum through a life of words – make intelligible and historical, reveal or erase, invent or disable possible research imaginaries. Following this, I then take up the practices I examine –
critique and criticism – as my methodology, a methodology not of empirical data collection but immanent understanding of curriculum as an aurally-generated, rhetorical life.

**What is criticism?**

Criticism as the context, object, and method of education, as well as the object of this project, is best understood by unpacking a title word of this thesis: an enigmatic word, 'criticism' and its cognates refer loosely to an historically traceable practice and “honor of thinking” that flows as object and verb (Gasché, 2007). Arguably, the connotations of critique have followed the arc of Romantic worldviews to the postmodern present of Derridean deconstruction (Gasché, 2007). Now enjoying new life as Lyotard's (2009) “enthusiasm” of “unscripted events” that enact the power of potentially emancipatory change, notions of criticism and critique have turned to the ontological and corporeal, where Bruno Latour (2004) argues for a re-purposed notion of criticism as desire for judgment and truth transformed in a time of doubt into a “matter of concern” – a kind of active, social, biopolitical praxis situated in real people.

On a more basic, rhetorical level, the word, criticism connotes common understandings and actions of assessment (usually by authority), judgment, displeasure or dissatisfaction with an object of analysis – forceful words and inflection intended to pry open fault. In the English language, the ontological, affective experience of the word sounds sharply pointed or many-barbed; it describes impolite thought in many circumstances, even in moments of particularly critical texts such as an introduction to the browning of curriculum movement by Gaztambide-Fernández in which he states, after commenting on how his colleagues extend unexplored directions not mentioned by the authors of the SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction, that his words are not meant as “a criticism.” (2009, p. 237) This simple gesture momentarily saves face (for all involved) against a base meaning of incision and potentially emotionally volatile, less-than rational (in the Enlightenment sense, I wonder) affect behind the thrust of the author or speaker’s words; I have found myself uttering the same phrase, as a self-professed student interested in practices of criticism, in my graduate seminars – while, of course, I am also expected to be thinking and writing critically, and absorbing criticism as feedback from instructors contained in the margins of my essay – at least in private.
Curriculum’s Aural Nexus: Criticism and Critique

Unfortunately, I would argue, the best relatable example of contemporary public criticism in a curricular context is rather difficult to define: that of critique in “the arts.” Before I describe this practice in more detail, I want to point out that I have chosen to put marks of provisional definition around another piece of language here, as uttering “the arts” often both homogenizes and marginalizes certain kinds of knowledge and knowledge production in opposition to the rigour of the scientific academe, including sociology and education theory. In particular, higher-order categories of “events” and “analyses” or “texts” and “objects” (such as a history book versus an historically situated sculpture) require a constraining of signification: there are the experiences we have with material things and people in the world, and then there are our intellectually, academically valuable thoughtful analyses and reflections. While the mind/body divide is by now a tired cliché, I believe there is still a subtle yet pernicious conception of what counts as critical work in education. When we present our thoughts as polite scholarship pruned of its critical thorns, foregone is the opportunity to experience events and the contexts encompassing our knowledge – relations, relationships, and objects – as texts, and lost is the opportunity to consider the texts of our discipline as locations in which, in the case of curriculum, we live out our scholarly lives. Criticism in its form of critique, I believe, is neither private nor public, yet implicit rules of education delimit and disassociate this affordance. Even I must argue for criticism to be conceived as an object to afford analysis of its concepts and life, and so concede that criticism in any context involves the ordering tendency of language, science, historicization, and even personal circumstance. From now on, I will refer to the generative capacity as critique, and attempt to conceptually separate it from the political, normative, subversive aspect as that of criticism.

Through my professional work in post-secondary visual art education (Phillips 2012/13), I have defined the critique as a performative, oral, and relational practice of arts-based criticism and oral-textual genre. As events of formative assessment, these are exchanges of ideas between students and instructors that encompass all aspects of a work (in this case a work of art), including: conceptual approaches, material processes as well as the practical considerations of a work. Critique can happen in formal situations amongst groups of peers and instructors and one-on-one between faculty and students. In a broader sense, however, critique as a register of
communication can happen informally between peers in a studio, and in the conversations shared between all members and collective contexts intersecting the discussions had around a piece of cultural production. Formally, such conversations can function as a method of assessment, but in all cases critique becomes the primary source of constructive feedback in the studio and promotes a complex set of skills and, importantly for a questioning of criticism in education, *aural responsibilities*, including: communicating in written, oral, and gestural modes; proposing; reinventing; corresponding; presenting; reacting; commenting; challenging; making; suggesting; naming, and listening – contributing to the wrestling, negotiation, and creation of knowledge at hand.

Critique then suffuses a studio education as a means of reflecting on, and engaging with, works critically. My nascent hypothesis of this practice as the basis of a *critical community* implicates real people experiencing critique as palpable events of sharing power, and begs future investigation. Most relevant here is that critique is often cut out of teeming, lived contexts of *being* in criticism that are then captured as static, singular “critiques” – much like the discursive detachments of curriculum discussed earlier – that elide the social investments and conditions which led to their creation. Although the most current and developed scholarship into critique practices is limited to basic structuralist concepts of formative and summative assessment, even instrumentalist researchers (cf. Blair 2006; Barrett 2000; de la Harpe, et al. 2009; Dannels and Martin 2000; Rust 2002; Rust et al. 2003) have noted a strong affective dimension of critique that bears down on students and fully-fledged artists alike; performatively and orally presenting work is charged with emotional, embodied stress that can often make it difficult for all students to engage, even to the point that the fidelity of memory around critique events is often severely reduced, and students, having bared their hearts to public *criticism*, so to speak, simply prefer to forget such events ever happened. Similar to the questions of criticism in curriculum studies, to what extent these practices allow for the abuse, maintenance, mystification or subversion of power and privilege in studio education remains to be investigated; like concepts of criticism in education, critique is practiced without being explicitly taught or checked for ideological dimension or even pedagogical efficacy (Phillips 2012/13). This indeterminacy, I believe, seeps across discussions of practice, theory, policy, and ethics.

I argue, then, that there are at least three critically discernible registers – registers I am able to communicate through text – of critique: there is the experience and agential investment of *being* in critique, in which critical rupture is alloyed and put to use with the generative
investment of readers and witnesses. Implied by my example of studio critique collapsed – in analysis, delivery and experience – as evaluation, there are also possible instances of criticism lacking critique, as well as critique void of criticism.

Looking further back in Western history, “[c]riticism as an instinctive reaction” to the delivery of a rhetorical composition – “any public act of praise or blame” upon a literary work is “as old as song.” (Kennedy, 1993, qtd. in Ford, 2002, p. 2) Before written texts, oral performances of poetry and song were highly nuanced, contextually heterogeneous processes of criticism, involving aural discussion between poets, critics, and their audience. In his tracing of the origins of Western criticism through the literary culture of classical Greece, literary historian Andrew Ford (2002) advises that “it is necessary to think of ‘performances’ rather than ‘texts’ as the objects of criticism” (p. 4), because criticism was not a “private affair” (practiced autonomously at desks and in writing) until late in the fifth century. Even once this transition began through written texts, it was only accessible to society’s most privileged. Furthermore, there was no “conceptual unification” of what counted as a song (i.e. a text of valuable knowledge) until they were eventually codified in written texts, and early ‘publications,’ as I would call them, were collaborative public events between author, audience, and critic; the very concept of criticism delineated into authoritative fields such as “literary criticism” is an anachronism. This, Ford suggests, means “we should consider the [early Greek] critic, no less than the poet, a performer before a social group” (p. 3). The documentation of criticism in curriculum I suspect, like that of what was considered intelligible literature, however, began before the written word became its signifier; Ford notes that the aural socialization of criticism likely still contributed to the formation of normative genres, however more open to engagement such text-free texts might seem in contrast. Important here is that criticism (in flesh or ink) is then sometimes inherently material, performative, affective, tacitly foregrounded in shared actions but not fully captured in its representation. Now, what is the mechanism of this criticism we might admonish in everyday language?

It would seem at least that critical practices, from an historical perspective, “may have no discernible beginning, but [they do] have a history.” (Ford, 2002, p. 2) Ford’s phrase here captures what criticism might mean to curriculum studies, and what history might mean to criticism in education. Are there antecedent relationships – events, affective registers, struggles – integral or lost to what we conceive as the history of curriculum? The complete array of arguments, infighting, personal allegiances, betrayals, love and camaraderie that infused the
critical life of Ford’s ancient Greeks left barely any direct textual fossils of their happening. Once more, this suggests an ontological depth and breadth of relationality that is beyond the capacity of a master’s thesis: friendships, romances, trysts, bad blood and the ingranual everyday of collegial sympatico. These songs, our discursive texts, however, nonetheless moved forward as values and historical vessels of value. This also suggests that there are hopes, dreams, and desires for whatever epistemological milieu criticism is enacted in, and so an echo of what the ‘good’ of such a collective project might have imagined, and left behind, in its texts. Curriculum might very well have its textual traces that capture – or occlude, and absence is not without meaning – critical registers of its creation, maintenance, and contention that lack clear origins (recalling possibly obscured social locations) but may nonetheless prove visible as the impetus behind our discursive life: that there are historically and politically charged choices made in the construction of our theories.

Criticism is then, at least, an act of contention, by a thinking and feeling individual in the being of responding to another, that often involves a kind of critical antagonism. What it means to be critical is thus expanded to include challenging territorial boundaries, subordinating power structures, ethical metrics, morality, the social contract writ large – and even historical record. The most discursively active historical records of post-reconceptualism, I argue, are those that reflect critical encounters between theories and theorists. The texts of these moments are layered traces of contexts: ideological struggle, personal politics, discursive rupture, and the materiality of the criticism enacted and captured in these texts belie convergences, divergences, and perhaps even generation of new discursive habitats – worlds of intelligibility born of critically normalized and reinvented modes and choices of engagement in language.

Below, I introduce this perspective to the discursive currents of post-reconceptualist theory to offer a first glimpse of critique and criticism active – theorists making critical choices through language – in shaping discursive realms. I include the layers of critical engagement within the texts themselves, as well as the broader cross-textual contexts surrounding and tethering, or severing, each from each other. I do so to grasp a sense of what critique might historically and presently mean to curriculum.

\[2\] “Antagonism”, taken in the political-philosophical sense, is a condition of invigorated public contention as a process necessary for democratic progress; here, it implicates a vast political dimension of the word and action. See Fossen’s work (2008) in political philosophy for more.
Critique in Education as “moving and being moved”

On the border of the moments of curriculum studies which I might demarcate as those of reconceptualism and representational crisis, captured by the destabilization of critical pedagogy as a coherent critical project, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) realized that a decontextualized concept of the emancipatory teacher-oppressed student was a significant factor in the failing of the project of critical pedagogy. “[Working] through” this historical concept-role within the context of critical exchange in a classroom, such as it may be, was necessary to move forward as a critical, self-aware scholar and educator. For Ellsworth, the foundations of emancipatory practices of the time were allied to a problematic return to the values of Western rationalist academic debate: oppressions revealed and students empowered, all parties would then have successful, intellectually elevated, and equally represented deliberations of root causes to mutual problems. For Ellsworth, this conception of critical pedagogy lacked fundamental criticality – it did not address the reality, the material conditions maintaining oppression, but rather assumed oppression, its foundations and cures. In the real experience of marginalized students, words and actions were of “survival,” necessarily not rational in relation to the structures they spoke within, and it was logically impossible, Ellsworth realized, to be in an enlightened position to identify a neutral environment for debate. In order to work through this dilemma alongside her students, Ellsworth rejected the problematic practice of bracketing dialogue-underneath-the-ostensibly-radical in favour of a “pedagogy of the unknowable,” a practice of gestural “movements” between particularized and partial alternative structures of critical communication that relied on commitment to students talking to and for each other, rather than rational emancipation and valorization of the enlightened pedagogue (pp. 318-324).

In order to express this anti-rationalist pedagogy, Ellsworth revisited her literary roots (see Alvermann & Hrubry, 2003), drawing on the expressly radical, feminist prose of writers such as Audre Lorde. Through an infusion of new language, Ellsworth offered a new discourse of indeterminacy as a writerly and curricular cause. Audre Lorde's hope (quoted by Ellsworth, 1989, p. 319) for difference to be “not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” became the call and cause for kindred curriculum theorists. This rhetorical project extended into the ways in which adherents conducted, documented, and validated research (cf. Lather 1988; 1989). Now-famous scholars like Patti Lather adopted Derridean (postmodern) language of "the ordeal of the undecidable,"
advocating a "moral and political responsibility [that] can only occur in the not knowing, the not being sure." This radical position of critical agency, in language, was set in direct opposition to "the masculinist voice of abstraction, universalisation" – the rhetorical position of "the one who knows" (Lather, 2001, qtd. in McLaren, 2010, p. 54).

As individuals in a wider world of political contention, feminist writers like Ellsworth and Lather were reacting, through this new rhetoric, to what they felt was an intractable patriarchy of the academy. Questions of race, gender, and disability could then become more central to like-minded writers in education. The new postmodernists championed these categories not because they had been hitherto ignored, but because these signs had been "defined as attributes of persons whose core was defined often in socio-economic (in fundamentalist analysis) or in social class terms (within the critical tradition)" removed from actual identities. The language, it would seem necessarily, changed; postmodernist and poststructuralist analysis "influenced both the language and the substance of educational thought" (Lynch, 2002; p. 90; cf. Mac an Ghaill, 1996).

Now seen as the opposite pole of the “Ellsworth-Giroux” debate, neo-Marxists such as Henry Giroux (1992) and Peter McLaren emerged as rhetorical antagonist to the postmodern turn – or turning away, as some would argue – enacted by the likes of Ellsworth and Lather (cf. Ellsworth, 1989; Lather, 1991). Their language was and is still of disparate intelligibility to that of the postmodernists they critique (Lynch, 2002). Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur (2003) still rally a critical project away from some of the same failings Ellsworth notes, but towards a “revolutionary critical pedagogy.” Drawing on Marxist educational theorist Glenn Rikoswki's (2001) notion of "class struggle" to even criticize the language of postmodern educational theory, McLaren and Farahmandpur trace a link between the power of teaching and theory, and the language used to proliferate it. Here, "class struggle" denotes "a social relation between labour and capital that is integral to the existence of" – constitutive of – the world (and so its defining struggle); Riskowski argues that educators and theories increasingly, "literally abandon" the relationships of knowledge and the labour of its production, and the labour of teaching and the potential power of pedagogy and its "personhoods" to subvert the education of capitalism. According to these authors, writers such as Ellsworth, using Patti Lather (2001) as a specific example, materialize this complicity in "compromised" language, whose "nomenclature and systems of intelligibility [remain] tributary to anti-capitalist struggle," or worse, "unwittingly advocates a move toward a centrist politics that etherealizes class struggle into questions of anti-
essentializing epistemology," ultimately "evacuating historicity" through the guise of postmodern language (McLaren and Farahmandpur 2003, p. 63-70).

The criticality of critical pedagogy and its antecedents now brought to the level of a debate over language itself, it becomes critically interesting to note that despite her embrace of indeterminacy, Ellsworth’s work, and similar discourses in the present, retain a common-sense of critical communication; to address the remaining need to communicate in a classroom community, Ellsworth affirmed the formation of “affinity groups” of like-minded students in her course. The “required levels of trust and personal commitment” for her anti-rationalist pedagogy was arguably dialogic, in both a more bodied and idealized sense, built through conversations in informal one-to-one meetings, potlucks and other gatherings (1989, pp. 315-16). Charges of complicity aside, Lather and Ellsworth use a performed criticism of language to propel a new critique – generation – of space in language, and so future criticism and critique, in which to operate. The critical merits of McLaren and Farahmandpur put aside, the authors of this example put aside the potential, critical merits of Lather and post-structuralist company in advance of a distinct critical project.

While I intend to take up the possibility of such a vacuous history in my fifth and sixth chapters, important here is that, regardless of which rhetorical direction Lather or McLaren propagate, all agents named so far are themselves engaged in a rhetorical life – in criticism and critique. Composition theorist K. Hyoejin Yoon (2005) argues that Ellsworth, Giroux, Lather, and McLaren all make rhetorical appeals. Each of these discourses “achieves its cultural currency, not solely through its reliance on rationalism, but also through an unacknowledged reliance on pathos,” amongst other classic appeals – somewhat ironically in the case of Giroux and McLaren’s “revolutionary” discourse, which has historically been criticized for its underlying rationalism (p. 1-3). Yoon states that the scholarship surrounding critical pedagogy has yet to fully account for the power of its own language, leaving her to wonder, “In what ways do [these discourses] establish their power?” Below, I write toward asking a similar question, first situating my established premises of critique and criticism in a shared practice of representing curriculum rhetorically.
What is Criticism in Curriculum?

In many ways, attempting to encapsulate the – or rather a – history of curriculum studies is similar to materializing a convincing representation of the field in an authoritative handbook or other canonical text. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) has investigated this dilemma in which “the act of representing [inquiry into curriculum] in a bound text is constrained by the underlying conception of the field that informs the inquiry” (p. 237). Critically, this constraint is more paradigmatic than choices of which “moments” or particular authors are given space in the text. Through what could arguably be described as a cultural analysis of the SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction (Connelly, et al., 2008), Gaztambide-Fernández establishes a meta-awareness of the power of naming, dating, and structuring a history and consciousness of curriculum, noting that the Handbook’s editors force a conception of curriculum studies that determines “a priori which particular dimensions of the field” are visible and so count as important documents of curricular inquiry (p. 238).

By “dimensions,” Gaztambide-Fernández includes not only particular disciplinary subfields that may face marginalization or erasure, such as the phenomenological, psychoanalytical, and theological, but also what may be vital “in-between” epist-o-ontological activity that the Handbook’s authors actually undermine, despite claims of valuing the same activity; in the Handbook’s case, with an emphasis on a kind of practical “continuity and coherence” – that in fact avoids the diversity of theoretical conflict and debate which constitutes a sustaining practice: a theoretical practice which, as Gaztambide-Fernández phrases it, “animates” the curriculum field itself. In thesis, I attempt to trace this animating force as criticism in curriculum. At this moment in my own attempt at coherence, however, I must first amplify this articulation of theoretical interaction as a viable object of analysis, before forcing a wedge between such understood critical objects – “moments” of curriculum – wider to encompass – critically encounter – such inter-structural “animating devices” within the project of curricular inquiry writ large (or at least wider). These patterns of intelligibility appear to be represented – and so constrained by – atomizing metaphors, such as particularities, particles, divergent trajectories (cf. Connelly, et al., 2008; Malewski, 2010a). I have encountered these larger-order concepts of curriculum as space-time objects in the same aforementioned genre of handbooks, my methodological schooling, collegial discussions, and the mundane structure of my core curriculum studies syllabi; curriculum, according to my curriculum, is divisible into a
coherent series of historical objects such as Tylerism and Reconceptualism, and thematic factions such as “Race and Globalization.” I must inevitably reconcile them in this very thesis as the basis for my own ordering and rationalization of curriculum as a critical object. Amidst his reflections on the SAGE Handbook’s representational valence, Gaztambide-Fernández himself readily accepts this conceptualization of curriculum as an observable host of critical bodies suspended in a vast universe of abstract diversity through echoing its editors: “[t]here is no doubt,” Gaztambide-Fernandez concedes, “that each chapter provides a window from which to observe the intellectual energy at work in our curriculum cosmos” (p. 237).

I wonder, however, if this cosmological metaphor belies a kind of pernicious rhetorical determinism: that curriculum as a field is self-evident. The people who occupy the current moments of curriculum as practice, as and in reality, I argue, experience and put into action systems of criticism: educators read students and their work, listen to students and their concerns; some of these educators reply in kind, offering concern and investment of themselves as active readers and listeners into students and the knowledge formed between these actors – and, crucially, some do not. In parallel, the people who inhabit the discursive spaces of curriculum, in reality, choose to respond, and how they respond to discursive existence and calls of others is the agency of critique and criticism in curriculum.

Rather than determined by cosmic laws of correspondence, researchers who choose to read in such a critical manner actively blur and extend the objects of their criticism with the forces used to analyze them. These practices of concern, I believe, encompass and mobilize real, concrete choices made by political beings in curriculum and, in turn, encompass, mobilize, and sustain curriculum – perhaps even the social project of education itself, as it is caught in a corporatized, neoliberal “moment.” These choices are made outside of, and brought into, the contractual obligations of teaching or freedom of academic research; teachers and professors are not required to care about the work of their students – or, in other words, to read with their students; curricular scholars are not compelled to respond to each other, to travel the distance of such a vast field (and risk entry into the mutual gravity wells of criticism). In reality, Ellsworth and Lather decided to pursue a new rhetorical life fashioned of tools not found in the master’s house, however discursively alienating. McLaren and Giroux made a choice to flatten Lather and company into dupes of language. Curriculum is performed and enacted, and finds rationale from a living criticism made through aural gestures of comprehension: witnessing, challenging, responding, rejecting, enjoying, disturbing, and sharing confidence and invention with more than
ourselves as independent, enlightened masters of knowledge held to account by an infallible logic or cosmic self-evidence.

Knowledge, truth, and validity as constructed through contested acts of thinking and making sense of the world, as the social engine of intelligibility has, of course, been turned in on itself by philosophers of science, including various feminist epistemologies. Drawing on such ostensibly postmodern, self-reflexive perspectives – or rather their language – is now commonplace in qualitative approaches to educational research and induction into curriculum studies (Bleakley, 2006). Educational, cultural, and qualitative research theorists such as Wanda Pillow (2000) and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2000) characterize postmodernized education theory, its teaching and dissemination as less about understanding education – its history, effects, social significance, power, or practicality – and more about “a shift in attitude” towards “learning to hear and ‘understand’ a statement made within a different structure of intelligibility” – perhaps, in other words, a field about learning to understand itself understanding (Beakley, 2006; St. Pierre, qtd. in Bleakley, 2006, n.p.). Philosopher of education Patrick Slattery (1995) further contends that this rhetorical preoccupation is inevitable if one wishes to engage in contemporary educational scholarship: “Refusing to engage in the postmodern debate” equates to putting one’s ideas onto the wrong side of history, to vainly “silence a cosmology that has already emerged” (p. 3, emphasis mine).

Despite this continuing renaissance of post-ological “proliferation” (Malewski, 2010a), much embraced by my post-reconceptualist contemporaries, curriculum as a critical metanarrative (Lyotard 1979), discursive domain or ordering science embroiled in ideological struggles in the world at large, and curriculum as a coherent, yet heterogeneous, self-aware critical field (which is at once able to be represented by such a word) appear, in my experience, to be entertained quite separately – or not at all. In the case of the post-critical pedagogy moment just described, and which still continues today in states of rhetorical fallout or splintered lines of thought, criticism is wielded to distance critical positions rather than maintain critical correspondence. The voices aligned with Lather and those with Giroux diverge in rhetorical language and, arguably, in present moments of post-reconceptualist curriculum scholarship, the generative gesture of critique and the normative, motivating challenge of criticism become decoupled and inverted: in Eric Malewski’s “comprehensive” handbook of contemporary post-reconceptualist curriculum scholarship (2010a), criticality becomes a celebratory rhetoric of critique without criticism. In this rhetorical aesthetic, the individual writer “embraces the
indeterminacy” of a post-post curriculum studies through the metaphor of a “robust”, “protean and expansive” progress as both its ends and means, amidst which we are to “celebrate the growth of its theories and stories – and to be seized by its vigor and intensity – and to assert our human inventiveness so as to personalize our theorizing regardless”, while this same self-evident discourse “must be held to account”... presumably through (neoliberal?) individuals focused primarily on the nurturing of their own seed (p. 24-25; 4). I will revisit this, my own critical charge, after exploring these practices of criticality more methodically, and in which I must also engage in the being of my own writing.

Toward a Rhetoric of Curriculum

I hope I have at least prompted my reader to consider what we mean as ‘criticism’ in education, and how we may be actively participating by stating, leaving out, or disqualifying these thoughts: I suggest that not articulating a contextualized critical stance, gesturing away, saying politely, or prefacing that our words are “not meant as criticism” forecloses any critical power our words may engender – for better or worse – and devalues the vital work we do as agents in curriculum and its contested articulation, theorization and documentation. The question I ask in my next chapter is ostensibly one of methodology, and does not, however, devalue the generative potential of critique, contextualizations of curriculum as a life history of critique and criticism as sine qua non of curriculum to synthesize a reflexive perspective through which to glean the power of the same. So far, I have described very much the way we generate the collective concept of curriculum through the life of words – make intelligible and historical, make invisible and divisible, make anew, make new terrain for or isolate curriculum as abstract research imaginaries. Next, I will establish a way for understanding this quality of curriculum as a rhetorical life.
Chapter 4
Methodology: A Rhetoric of Curriculum

In this chapter, I build reflexively on my opening of the meaning and being of ‘critique’ and ‘criticism’ to develop a notion of methodology distinct from the empiricist mode of data collection and analysis. Rather, mine is both object and subjective lens: rhetoric as a methodology of rhetorical analysis and as knowledge-making. I establish this framework for understanding critique and criticism as rhetorical objects as well as critical-gestural practices for examining the same processes in curriculum through consideration of the rhetorical, sense-making affordances of critique and criticism, such as the performative, generative, normative, historical, and political.

Taking what I see as Patti Lather’s (2012) narrative style as methodological example of critique-as-method in educational research, I first consider critique as rhetoric, describing the discursively performative, generative, and discourse-sustaining dimensions of critical exchange from a history of aural knowledge-making underpinning concepts of rhetoric, extended from basic understandings of persuasion by historian of rhetoric Wendy Olmsted (2008, p. 2) towards the “art of finding subjects and arguments.” I further explore the limitations and limiting functions of criticism as rhetoric. Applying philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend’s (1975; 1987) work on the limits of unscaled disciplinary intelligibility, I confront the implication that the understanding of a discipline or field, such as post-reconceptualist curriculum studies, is contingent on a community of performing, interacting agents.

I conclude by synthesizing my own analytical decoupling of the critical registers (of critique and criticism) through Bruno Latour’s (2004) call for reclaiming the empirical relevance—the material, political efficacy—of critique in contemporary language, to ground my following chapters’ rhetorical analysis in an argument for a shared sense of “empirical,” critical “reality.” Retrieving my introductory thoughts on the concept of universal sets in light of Latour’s reclaiming of empiricism, I cast my following chapters as necessarily engaged within or intervening on commonly established, through practices of critique and criticism, rhetorical sets of what is collectively understood as the “field” of conversation, including what is intelligible as its historical anchors, vocabularies, and purposes; from then on, I carry on a revived meaning of “empirical” as a concern for relevance in the discursive and material worlds to which critique and criticism ostensibly refer.
**Rhetoric as Critique**

Criticism as intrinsically, reflexively critical and generative, and curriculum studies as a critical field of relations continually revisiting the past with new perspectives, can be described for methodological purposes as a rhetorical endeavour. A thesis such as this one offers consequently, as rhetorician and historian Wendy Olmsted (2006) describes her own inquiry into the discursive domain of rhetoric, “[itself] simultaneously as [a] concrete [work] of persuasion and as thoughtful considerations of how rhetoric works” (p. 1). As I introduced the question of criticism in education, Olmsted notes that contemporary connotations of the word ‘rhetoric’ suggest a contamination of writing with deception, flattery, misdirection or otherwise abuse of manipulative language. For contemporary rhetoricians, however, acts of rhetoric and inquiry into rhetoric as an activity are – or should be – far more significant. Rather than removing themselves from “historical contingencies”, Olmsted sees a ‘good’ rhetoric found when writers engage with the “discursive communities” of their time, modifying “the cultural norms and common beliefs that define its limits and possibilities” as they are at the same time constrained by them (p. 2). This perspective suggests a third register of political activity in acts of intellection, such as those constituting and sustaining curriculum studies, that resists the binary of theory/practice: rhetorical writing as invention and reinvention.

This “art of finding subjects and arguments” parallels closely what I have so far been saying about criticism, critique, and curriculum. Parallel to Olmsted, I argue that the work of curriculum produces reinventions of logical and ethical maxims, extending the “plurality of styles available” (p. 2) to its given discursive community. These discursive formations enrich a collective of thinkers’ shared affordances of thinking (and thinking together) through critical text, even to heal historical errors, and permits, if used in such a way, the search for a better space within its shared contingencies. Because speakers and writers – of curriculum in this case – “seek arguments in historically and culturally specific situations, rhetorical texts cannot tell them what to say” (p. 2). Instead, like Olmstead’s rhetoricians, I suggest curriculum scholars revisit history in an a-historical, or perhaps pseudo-historical manner, respecting historical contexts in order for them to be grasped critically, while also sometimes re-imagining and re-delimiting these histories to find renewed implications in the present. Olmstead sees these types of discursive-historical locations as essentially Greek topoi (Latin: loci), or intellectual territories “where materials and arguments can be found” (p. 2). Sometimes, it has seemed so far, the
material found is more akin to antimatter, so charged by its readers as to spark a new thought, however acrimonious the scene: Ellsworth and Lather’s rhetorical break from the likes of Giroux continues to propagate new cognates of curriculum through inventive critique, while Giroux and McLaren move forward – from the same crisis of critical pedagogy – in other new “moments” of neo-Marxist criticism; each of these critical masses also represent different histories, curricula lived differently. The spaces created by curriculum studies can be glimpsed then as rhetorical contexts born of contention, in which new ways of knowing are created. Like Olmsted, I hope to articulate curriculum “as an activity of invention and discovery by providing concrete experience” (p. 1) in and of its inquiry.

Methodologically, I see this already happening within a kind of “post-qualitative” narration of methodology within education, and a subsequent uptake by education research of its inventions. Self-described narrator of methodology Patti Lather (2009; 2012) presents methodological exemplars of qualitative research becoming its own self-sustaining object, sustained by critical invention and articulations of new language and possibility from what unfolds historically and contemporaneously in her surrounding cosmos of research imaginaries: that is, criticism as critique, as a knowledge creating endeavour. Arguably, Lather’s implicit proposal – the narrative, speculative gesture of her writing – is in essence a biographic mirroring of curriculum studies. Her methodological premise reflects the lived struggle and hope of the qualitative researcher, caught between bodies and discourse, politics and persons, intractable histories and clouded futures. In her methodological account of “getting lost,” Lather (2009) performs the liaison between two incommensurable voices as the spirit of a generative methodology that “survives disappointment” between seemingly mutually exclusive understanding and commitments to two onto-epistemological anchor points – the progressive, antifoundationalist postmodern and the necessary vigilance and historicization of embodied difference. Cast in this light, as in her speculative mapping of “getting lost” as a methodological practice, she writes as a way of “accepting loss [that] becomes the very force of learning and the promise of thinking and doing otherwise, within and against” troubled, shifted, and lost categories of both lived identity and methodological criticality (p. 224, emphasis mine).

Lather’s lived identity and so the font of her methodological, rhetorical power does indeed get lost; she generates a discursive world, with a world history, of new rhetorical power with herself as the narrator, leaving the social and material plane of her own professional existence behind. Narrating a hopeful and expansive 'afterward' of methodology in her
Methodology-21 (2012) talk at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Lather carefully traces a structural basis for this state of continual discursive renewal from within: the “post-qualitative ... 'becoming' in the Deleuzian sense” of the “thousand tiny paradigms” that now offers opportunities within the “ruins of [positivist] empire.” She narrates the “methodology-to-come,” through which “we begin to do things differently ... wherever we are in our projects.” (n.p.) Her fleshing-out of this post-qualitative frontier “begins to make sense” by referencing her layers of qualitative schema, the unproblematized “1.0” through to the utopian “3.0” that offers openings through postmodern theory into questioning validity, rigour, data, authenticity, voice, and empathy, yet still defends and normalizes the epistemological structures of qualitative methodology, and finally to “4.0” that is now “post-qualitative” in that it cannot be fixed in a handbook, or, it would seem, fixed to an identifiable agent in the world. Lather’s pursuit of a “radical methodology across worlds that cannot know each other”, an “incompleteness as a positive norm” implicates the emergence of a genre of methodology, subtly distinct (yet quite removed from) a methodology of practice, and leaves the problem of history somewhat romanticized and ambiguous. I believe it necessary to add to the narrations of disciplinary invention like Olmsted and Lather a sense of political deliberation and enhanced reflexivity that calls out what and who curriculuralists want to not simply proliferate – a verb of biological or genetic indifference – but envision and activate politically.

Rhetoric as Criticism

Despite a neutralizing emphasis on the creative potential of rhetoric, Olmsted (2008) still touches on the politics of discursive life: “[t]he capacities of the good rhetorician – to invent subjects and arguments, to organize discourse, and to make good judgments – cannot”, according to Olmsted, “be learned from rhetorical theory. These capacities must be actively exercised by beginners and advanced scholars alike.” (p. 1) I argue that this deliberate register of criticality is a self-aware political intellection – perhaps a discipline’s disciplinary force or the magnetism of a field, or what even Lather herself (2012) wants to retain as traction against a seemingly nihilistic and relativistic cycle of methodological creation and destruction and its promise of infinite particles re-combining. I would like to return to the rhetorical character of a cosmic curriculum through the methodological perspective of Paul Feyerabend’s which sees discursive enterprise as a kind
of “astrosociobiology and social glue in one” (Feyerabend 1987, pp. 152-53; 167) to approach the onto-epi-political nature of being critical.

Philosopher of science and author of the influential Against Method (1975), Feyerabend explores the outer limits of unscaled disciplinary intelligibility, and confronts the implication that the understanding of a discipline or field is contingent on a community of performing, interacting agents. In Farewell to Reason (1987), a collection of thoughts on the limits of methodological pluralism (or relativity) and diversity, he notes a growing trend towards aural knowledges becoming more popular in scientific disciplines. This is a trend, Feyerabend argues, against a foundational paradigmatic gap between what is considered 'creative' and 'scientific', which has been widening since Presocratic thought homogenized worldviews, eroding earlier, complex entanglements of concrete and abstract understandings of knowledge. This rhetorical erosion, a “transition from complex and concrete to simple and abstract concepts” affected behavioural concepts such as the concept of looking, social concepts such as the concept of honour and 'epistemological' concepts such as what can be considered knowledge. (135) Originally, all of these concepts included details of attitude, facial expression, mood, situation and other concrete circumstances. For example, there existed an expression of understanding that contained the fear felt by the person looking as an inseparable element, and a concept of knowledge that incorporated “the behaviour accompanying and propelling the acquisition of knowledge.” Creativity has thus become a necessary “irrational” event, a miracle in a scientific world that bridges the forgotten concrete terrain of complex, ontologically-grounded knowledge formations. Despite modern understandings, creativity does not belong to the lone genius artist, but is found in the “free creations of the human mind” – particles of the human spirit, unconscious, biological, material, conditional “first structures.” Any language and conversation, then, has the power to change “space, time, [and] reality.” A vast number of these particles are non-verbal, yet tied to the “minor occurrences” – tacit, aural, unpublished concrete-knowing exchanges – that form the understanding of the discourse to which they belong. Although Feyerabend's larger arguments are now familiar to discussions of the philosophy of science – that knowledge is contextually and historically dependent – he defines the epistemological stakes on a level that any methodology or logically coherent method of inquiry, including that of curriculum, can meet the discussion: our existence, biologically and conceptually, depends on knowledge that can reach across to another individual. “Our lives would fall apart if we could not read people's faces,
understand their gestures, [and] react correctly to their moods” (p. 106). The survival of a discursive community such as curriculum may bear the same dependency of ‘tacit’ understanding.

What does this mean for criticism in curriculum, and the methodological task of illuminating the rhetorical life of curriculum with deliberation? Taking the narrative critique of Lather back to the invention of rhetoric, through the implications of ‘living’ discourses in need of a conscious intellectual and political project of agency, method begs for a bit of a ‘reality check’. The separation of social position and social discursive position which I myself have entertained, for the purposes critical, rational cleanliness (see Chapter 2 of this thesis), seem complicit in a delimiting of what is possible to engage with critically – to the point, as Lather demonstrates, of creating protagonists to populate, witness, or simply accessorize newly fashioned virtual worlds of rhetorical possibility. Rather than repeating endless epistemological proliferation, as if our thoughts were bacteria scattered across a primordial cosmos, curriculum scholars might want to consider what and who they are actually concerned with – and how they enact this care through the creation of (seemingly) given discursive worlds.

Here, I mean to address the problematic implication of a hermetic genre of writing (of methodology), and consequently a self-evident universal, rhetorical set that engenders an ‘anything goes’ motto of creation and differentiation over a methodology and a curriculum of practical efficacy (including deliberate intellection), which yet leaves the problem of history – and by this I mean where, who, when, or even what we initially cared about when starting our processes of curricular invention – somewhat romanticized and ambiguous. Fayerabend’s (1987, p. 141) deeper point was that “[w]e do need arguments – but we also need an attitude, a religion, a philosophy, or whatever you want to call such an agency, with corresponding sciences and political institutions, that views humans as inseparable parts of nature and society, not as their independent architects.” From Fayerabend, I take forward the notion of a responsible and response-able diversity of perspectives of being coupled through relational affordances, a pragmatic yet ethical solvent between any pairings of critical opposition: aesthetically-maintained discursive communication (rhetoric, in the case of this thesis), the drama of life, and even “marvelous objects” (here: our discursive texts and encounters) are part of our maintenance, innovation, struggle, and creation of knowledge, and this knowledge is made valid, maintained, and enacted by living people with agency; theory is deliberate. Crucial for an analysis into the life of curriculum, Feyerabend believes that the knowledges of expert
disciplines are becoming increasingly incommensurable—meaning that they rely on the performance of their theories:

Large parts of modern mathematicians, physics, molecular biology, geology rest on an oral culture that contains unpublished results, methods, and conjectures [that give] meaning … . Workshops, conferences, seminar meetings in leading research centres do not merely add information to the context of textbooks and research papers, they explain this content and make it clear that it cannot stand on its own feet. (p. 111).

Disciplines have become “living” discourses which would “collapse without a community of thinkers” concretely engaged in historical and personal contact—through critique and criticism (p. 111).

The Rhetoric of Curriculum

What are the stakes involved in how we write curriculum, its material consequences and possibilities? Why care about what sort of critical communities we might be creating?

Describing the current state and efficacy of Western notions of critique writ large, philosopher of science Bruno Latour (2004) argues that “a certain form of critical spirit has sent us down the wrong [epistemological] path,” leaving us to mistake the “definition of [our] main target” (p. 1), and purpose, of critique. Rather than distance critique from empirical grounding, Latour calls for a renewal of empiricism, for “the critical mind” to reclaim itself and “be relevant again” (p. 1). This "new empiricism" or "empiricism of matters of concern" encapsulates Latour’s larger project of reversing the reductive separation of "fact" and "value" or, in other words, quantitative and qualitative; the assignment of a either category already assumes "the settlement of a controversy" – that there is pure value and pure fact. This radical embracement of non-positivist empiricism attempts to account for ways in which "relations are exactly as real as things related; for radical empiricism, reality itself is concatenated." (McGee, 2014, p. 20) Latour’s is an alternative realism: reality is of course produced and fabricated, but is made and not made up, despite its “fragility and uncertainty." This makes the current moment in post-capitalist history "in great need of care and caution." We must actively, according to Latour, attend to how we register "facticity," taking an active role in solidifying a world, however tenuous, in what we believe to be our best interests. I argue we do this in the case of the words of curriculum studies, or at least have the capacity do so, through a rhetorical investment in critique.
Latour’s (McGee, 2014) anti-reductionist project, directly linked to the ways in which critique is enacted, brings the intellectual work of curriculum studies into the context of a larger ideological struggle in critique, as McGee (2014) summarizes the key issue underlying Latour’s (2004) questioning of contemporary practices of criticism and critique: “[w]ell-grounded propositions, that is, those for which the supporting inscriptions and documents are in alignment, may indeed appear not to depend on other entities for their existence” (p. 21). Looking behind the “scenography” of their manufacture, the empirical conditions of concern, criticality is revealed to be "highly contingent" on "theatrical machinery placed just out of view of the public audience." An empiricism of concern means "insisting that everything matters–the whim of princes (and think tanks), the 'material conditions' of production, the 'social context,' the minute details of performance cannot be separated from the matter of fact, which causes Latour to coin a more appropriate phrase, ‘matters of concern'" (McGee, 2014, p. 21). While such a concept implies a daunting array of possible critical relevance, my point is that there exist many sources and forces of relevance in the intellectual lives we live out through critique. Recalling my preceding premise that curriculum finds intelligibility and tangibility as a field through aural, universal sets of critical interaction, I next demonstrate this and other registers of critique and criticism through rhetorical intervention – rhetorical analysis and reinvention – into key moments of or associated and defining of post-reconceptualist curriculum. As I have foreshadowed in preceding chapters, I believe the community of post-reconceptualist curriculum theory has a kind of virtual life of its own, lived within rhetorical sets, its theoretical activity divorced from and irrelevant to the life of education to which it ostensibly appeals; I will return to this concern in the conclusion of this thesis. From here on, I carry forward a revived meaning of “empirical” as a concern for relevance in the discursive and material worlds to which critique and criticism ostensibly refer.
Chapter 5
Curriculum as an Aural Life History

Having hopefully prompted my reader to consider the ways in which we might generate a collective concept of curriculum through a shared life of words, I use my fifth chapter as an opportunity to glean such a life, a glimpse of curriculum as a life history. By history, I refer to the imbricated where, who, when, or even what we initially cared about when starting our processes of curricular invention; so, by life history I mean less a genealogy of curriculum studies, but an accounting of the critical events, choices, and investments which shape and continue to shape the field.

As a Master's student of curriculum studies, I have been schooled to perceive my discipline as a dispersed, often (and never the same) atemporal chronology of “moments” that, I believe, have achieved enough textual mass to act as objects of theoretical memory. In kind, I take the critical mass of Tylerism, or the historical rupture of instrumentalism away from curriculum theory and consequential critical birth of ideological critique, using its contention as an illustration of the ways in which criticism in curriculum creates historical anchor points between which to travel and rediscover meaning, or polarities to diverge from and define new discursive ground. Further applying the implications of my questioning, of what these forces make possible together or apart, I return to consider what aspects of the rhetorical life and lives of post-reconceptualist curriculum studies, its acts of criticism and critique, prevent an aural existence from materializing in discourse. I take up the ongoing moment of the browning movement (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández, & Murad, 2011; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, in press) as a critical mass of curriculum theory making interventions into the status quo of post-reconceptualism. I question the consequences in this case of the absence of either critical polarity or the generosity of critique – or a discursive response at all.

Continuing and concluding my emergent critique in my next, final chapter, I transition through my critiques of critical communication practices in curriculum studies theory to my own critique of the present state of criticality in curriculum – my generative offering of meaning and political account of relevance in the rhetoric of curriculum – through Julie Maudlin’s (Maudlin, et al., 2012; Maudlin, 2014, in press) responses to the critical calls of the browning movement. Taking forward the difficult critical implications of a rhetorically generated and lived life of curriculum forward as a confrontation with the present state of critique in post-reconceptualist curriculum, I provoke a more present questioning of how the rhetoric of curriculum may or may
not be materializing the curriculum its scholars ostensibly write toward. I gesture towards the post-reconceptualist “next moment” of Eric Malewsk (2010a), who names his work an “interventionist” and “activist” scholarship of “immense” importance, but as a site of intervention that does not go beyond its own discourse. I trace this preoccupation with inward proliferation to the emerging, vacuous rhetoric of post-humanist curriculum theory, and finally the rhetorical limitations of my own references and arguments. I attempt to thread back into my established premises, my own conditions and my own critique. I do so to demonstrate a full, aural gesture of critique: I offer that there is always-already hope for relevance in the choice to respond and invest some of ourselves in our discursive lives, while at the same time arguing an explicitly provocative position – in the case of my critique, that post-reconceptualist curriculum has presently abandoned an awareness of its own criticality and critical relevance.

**Moments and History: Foundations of Curricular Life**

The first reading in my *Foundations of Curriculum* graduate seminar at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, established a chronological emergence of curriculum studies as a tenuous discipline. Ralph Tyler’s *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) and his fellow “historical antecedents” were to be read first, constraining, in a broad sense, the intelligibility of curriculum studies as a rather amorphous field that (somehow still) progressed from a specifiable point in time. Here, I point to both the structural placement of Tyler in my curriculum as an authoritative historical point of origin, as well as its content and ways in which this content was consequently engaged with as readers of curriculum: when read, such discursive anchor points suggest elided historical context and, further, a kind of movement powered by an undocumented critical force.

Tyler is indeed, generally speaking, an historical anchor when articulating the beginning of curriculum as a purposeful, if not always intelligible field, a point from which to diverge in time and conceptual space: it requires little critical analysis to recognize that “Tyler” represents a kind of origin at a critical register. Spoken aloud or cited in writing, this single word represents the individual, his namesake rationale, and an idea of an historically-bounded moment in time. I say “historically-bounded” here to critically raise, when trying to define viable objects of analysis in curriculum, the epistemological constraints of any reader of curriculum when making sense of it as a field. Today, Tyler signifies a kind of antiquated person, a worldview, and a basis
for drawing an arc of change and progress. It-his-when is unavoidably relived as stilted, assigned to be read in its original wording, testimony of time and people who can be captured in syllabi, theory, and even conversation as a discrete mass that can take the action of criticism. This is, of course, useful: some argue (Pacheco, 2013) that the field is too vast to study comprehensively; the history of education is long, and breaking up its development into a timeline, either through a curriculum of curriculum or handbook of its canon, that can be taken in by the eye all at once as if from a high vantage point, makes it possible for any actor in the life of curriculum to grasp observable temporal and theoretical constructs. It affords curriculum the status of a subject that can be learned and taught; it makes it possible for students of curriculum to gain a foothold on the base of its ivory tower; and it sustains the ascent and gravity-defying suspension of those who reign (benevolently?) over its knowledge through ever-advancing and proliferating research, theses, papers, books, and conferences. It confers intelligibility to something that even defies only a coherent definition, and which appears to somehow thrive (according to Malewski and other “posties”) despite this ambiguity.

Captured as particular anchor points in the history of curricular thought, Tyler is put into motion the same critical energies which sustain curriculum studies today. A possible causal relationship – the cause of curriculum’s being, so to speak – can be inferred from earlier literature that began to re-examine Tyler’s theories as “disturbingly” out of date. In a 1970 critique of Tylerism, with “Tyler” now evolved into a rhetorical force, Herbert Kliebard began laying the rhetorical groundwork for his Deweyan, historical model of curriculum theory by anchoring his ideas to, but against, “Tyler”:

One of the disturbing characteristics of the curriculum field is its lack of historical perspective. New breakthroughs are solemnly proclaimed when in fact they represent minor modifications of early proposals, and, conversely, an-achronistic dogmas and doctrines maintain a currency and uncritical acceptance far beyond their present merit. The most persistent theoretical formulation in the field of curriculum has been Ralph Tyler’s syllabus for Education 360 at the University of Chicago, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, or, as it is widely known, the Tyler rationale. Tyler’s claims for his rationale are modest, but, over time, his proposal for rationally developing a curriculum has been raised almost to the status of revealed doctrine. (Kliebard, 1970, p. 56)

Kliebard goes on to critique and criticize the rationale of Tyler’s rationale, coining the rhetorical phrase “simple eclecticism” to critically encapsulate Tyler’s entire program. This phrase is at once an invention of language that better articulates the concepts Kliebard wants to engage with, and manifestation of a sharp critical force working to define a new “moment” in contrast. Tyler,
in this light, is seen to be “simple” against Dewey, who “creatively reformulate[s]” the problem of evaluation, while Tyler picks and chooses without historical rationale between different philosophical groundings. Tyler becomes implicitly populist; Kliebard states that the prevalence of “Tyler” is due to his eclectic acceptance of disparate (or perhaps “diverse,” in present post-reconceptualist par lance) sets of curriculum doctrines and histories: Tyler’s criteria of evaluation “proceeded from different theoretical assumptions, and each of them had its own spokesmen, its own adherents, and its own rhetoric” (p. 57). Of course, despite Kliebard’s wishful use of the past tense to describe these conceptions of curriculum, “Tyler” is, in Kliebard’s own words, “imperishable” in its resiliently commonsense, seemingly a-historical rationale; ironically, in the present moment of this thesis’ writing, “eclecticism” is rather embraced by my contemporaries (see Malewski 2010a), and Kliebard’s new (circa 1970) “epoch” has been shelved for its own rationality.

The same critical energies deployed by Kliebard to flay the concept of Tyler, feeding the growth of competing rhetoric, may also flesh him out, granting the possibility of giving Tyler the collegial benefit of the doubt. By such a gesture, Tyler was not intending to invent his infamous “Tyler rationale” as a fiefdom to rule, discursively inhabiting “Tyler” as an historical location of critical, professional innovation and stability. Here I wish to make an important point which should not be lost in the midst of reading into the life of curriculum: that the ongoing mode of being of criticism and critique, however fractious, is not simply binary – sparked only by reactionary divergences and polarizing ruptures – but rather generative. Reversing the polarities of critical perspective as a reader of curriculum, instead of pitting disparate voices against one another, reveals this sense of possibility. Tyler, as an historical grounding and genealogical origin is still frequently visited, as a person is still revered, and as a disciplinary anchor point still respected and visited as if a site of pilgrimage; Tyler can be read in more favourable ways in even the criticism of historical opponents. As Kliebard himself acknowledges, Tyler’s (as a person) Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction was originally intended as a course textbook for Tyler’s own teaching practice and students (Pinar, et al. 1995). There was arguably a need to manifest an intelligible body of knowledge behind and embedded in the historical moment it represents, before or after its historicization. Such motivations were not and do not necessarily remain hidden; Tyler (1949) himself can almost be seen to be in the midst of bootstrapping his own discipline into pragmatic stability in his words:
A good deal of controversy goes on between essentialists and progressives, between subject specialists and child psychologists, between this group and that school group over the question of the basic source from which objectives can be derived. The progressive emphasizes the importance of studying the child to find out what kinds of interests he has, what problems he encounters, what purposes he has in mind. The progressive sees this information as providing the basic source for selecting objectives. The essentialist, on the other hand, is impressed by the large body of knowledge obtained over many thousands of years, the so-called cultural heritage, and emphasizes this as the primary source for deriving objectives…. Many sociologists and others concerned with the pressing problems of contemporary society see in an analysis of contemporary society the basic information from which objectives can be derived…. On the other hand, the educational philosophers recognize that there are basic values in life, largely transmitted from one generation to another by means of education. They see the school as aiming essentially at the transmission of the basic values…. The point of view taken in this course is that no single source of information is adequate to provide a basis for wise and comprehensive decisions about the objectives of the school. (pp. 4-5)

Tyler even acknowledges an awareness of the ideological power of education, and explicitly states a moral dilemma not alien, I would think, to “present moment” scholars:

    Education is a process of changing the behavior patterns of people. This is using behavior in the broad sense to include thinking and feeling as well as overt action. When education is perceived in this way, it is clear that educational objectives, then, represent the kinds of changes in behavior patterns of the students which the educational institution should seek to produce. (5)

In *Understanding Curriculum*, Pinar and colleagues (1995) acknowledge the historically serendipitous and largely unintentional (on a personal level) emergence of Tyler (on the part of Tyler himself) as a hegemonic framework. While the authors concede Tyler could not have predicted its elevation into North American education dogma before they flatten Tyler into a conflated representation and object of criticism and anchor for reconceptualist theoretical genesis, they do not address or quite represent the contextual forces behind the formation of the “Tyler” semiosis.

    “Tyler” is read in a very different way, in an article roughly contemporaneous with Kliebard’s, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), a for-profit curriculum development resource publisher. Illustrative of the generative rhetorical gesture of critique, Tyler is here taken up as a wise grandfather speaking wisdom to a troubled present. Listening to his retelling of the rise of the “Tylerian” model as a personal *conversation*, Jeri Ridings Nowakowski (1983) interviews Tyler for the ASCD’s *Education Leadership*, a magazine marketed to curriculum developers that is still in publication as of 2014. Tyler reminisces about his involvement with the “famous” (or infamous) Eight Year Study, a
nationwide assessment of the United States’ secondary and post-secondary school systems, which led to present-day, dominant, instrumentalist concepts of curriculum as learning objectives. Importantly, he places himself and his now-treasured thoughts and influence as originating in the context of the Great Depression. Tyler, in his own words, found himself bootstrapping a college syllabus into a national definition of curriculum, or what should be taught widely in American schools and how it should be standardized towards re-stabilizing a system widely irrelevant to a contemporary post-war society. In response to the question of what motivated Tyler to write his Basic Principles on-the-ground of this time, Tyler relates to Nowakowski that the lack of employment opportunities had left school as the only option for many youth, who had historically forgone either secondary or post-secondary education in favour of earlier entry into America’s workforce. Enrolments doubled, creating a need for redesigning the way schools went about teaching – for a new context of students. According to Tyler, his position, historically very influential, was not one in which any of his contemporaries would want to find themselves. Tyler was faced with a prevailing philosophy of curriculum that stressed testing and its results, now apparently a bad fit for a population of students who were not all academically enculturated (and, implicitly, not of a privileged class). His objective was, from his perspective, practical and based in a kind of good faith that would arguably be amenable to the most radical post-positivist curriculum scholar today: contextualizing socially knowledge and teaching.

This entire critical encounter is captured in the intimacy of an interview framed by Tyler himself, prefaced by a photograph of Tyler in a dignified thinking pose. I could no doubt go on to perform an ideological analysis of this particular representation of published Tylerian thought. Importantly, again, I do not wish to cast a reconceptualist perspective against an instrumentalist view. The subtle difference is not about the value of either, but the ways in which both living moments move and remain discursively alive through reading and rhetorical innovation and generation (critique) and as well as critical rupture (criticism). Pinar and colleagues 1995) do a standard criticism of science with Tyler as its object, but do not, ironically, quite give nuanced, living critique to the ‘interiority’ of Tyler; perhaps those who look back on Tyler as an inspirational moment in curriculum history invest in this blind spot, and bring Tyler alive as much as the likes of Pinar do their own chosen moments, illustrating a rhetorical gesture of critique.
Even today, the question, “What Would Tyler Do? (WWTD)” is asked in earnest sincerity, in the contemporary, proliferating life of the field of curriculum development and evaluation, curriculum studies’ estranged instrumentalist sibling. Curriculum developer and blogger Steven Weber (2010, n.p.) fondly reminiscences around Tyler’s work, appealing to all curriculum developers as a community facing similar, practical problems: “Whether you are a beginning educator or a veteran curriculum coordinator, this timeless classic will provide direction for supporting your work and the work of curriculum development teams.” In this rhetorical universe, Tyler as discursive life coach guides curricularists away from ambiguity and reflexive crisis to sense of relevance. “The answers to Tyler’s questions,” Weber assures, “will provide your team with purpose and direction.” In rhetorical antagonism conceive more broadly, in reconceptualization away from Tyler or any other historical-discursive anchor, we push against critical objects to find relevance, at least discursively speaking – to push us forward in a rhetorical life and maintain the aural suspension of this life. Rhetorical force remains motive, alive, and animating discourse through moments of critique.

Even if, in the case of reconceptualism and post-reconceptualism, the life of the Tyler rationale is transformed through historicized perspective as the polarizing charge that he was hopelessly naïve, such reading suggests a process in which we extend ourselves into curricular history through a critical impetus, an impetus born of choices, that flows below the many discursive performances of rationality, and which is taken as given. Tyler’s successors, on either pole, were actively doing something in the moments these texts represent. It may seem like a simple and obvious point at first, but they were engaged in the very making of their fields. I argue that the provocation, the criticism itself, the mustering of impassioned, politically valent energy propelled forward a sense of curriculum, and in discord with Tyler, drew new constellations of curriculum that we still recognize as definitive, critically massed bodies of history – and, in a sense, we connect their dots anew each time we read them or bring them into the “conversation” that is the idealized, but lasting life of our writing and reading as scholarship: curriculum, again, is born of critical rupture and generative critique. These practices are very much political acts and commitments to some sense of a ‘good life’ of curriculum: we make choices as intellectual agents; we proliferate curriculum. What happens if we lack this correspondence?
The Empiricism of Critique: A Discursive Ontology

In 1988, William Pinar wrote to give a (supposedly) magnanimously level-headed overview of a discipline that to this day resists definition. Curriculum studies had ostensibly progressed away from a-critical, a-historical functionalism (represented by Tyler) to understanding all intellectual endeavour as inherently political and in need of critical awareness. But, alas, curricularists were not all approaching such implications in the same way, and so they needed to get along instead of wasting valuable words on arguing for which way was best. Of course, inasmuch as he wrote to conceptualize the reconceptualization of curriculum as a collegial project, he arguably also staked claim to its re-territorialization. Although Pinar would state that the reconceptualization of curriculum was “fundamentally an intellectual phenomenon, not an interpersonal-affiliative one,” today, if curriculum studies is anything coherent, it is a web of such affiliations. Today there are two exemplary “moments” or “strands” of curriculum theory in which the practices of critique and criticism, practiced in either synthesis or exclusivity, can be discerned: Pinar’s canon project and associated proliferation of post-reconceptualist “activist scholarship” espoused by Malewski (2010a), and an interventionist (intervening into the former) “browning community” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad 2011). I do not wish to devolve into a critique of a curricular genealogy, but the ways in which such histories are formed – and their revitalizing contention – is important here: where does this practice happen or, in contrast, not occur? Below, I turn Gaztambide-Fernández’s keen argument (2009) that handbooks and our rhetorical vocabularies can (and do) become hegemonic devices on its head to glean Gaztambide-Fernández’s own attempt to establish a new, anchored moment in curriculum studies – an attempt foiled by his own critical community and their failure to respond to his new moment. Critical masses of such responses, by implication, also show most clearly the generative and discipline-sustaining critical power of critique, through observing the rhetorical absence of critical uptake, as far as might be possible despite textual fossilization.

At first glance, the brief browning manifesto (Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad, 2011) – the reading of which I was assigned in my own curriculum – does indeed read, if one is not familiar with the social and discursive social contexts involved, to be mostly a reaction to the dogmatism that is arguably inherent to Pinar’s Canon Project, a kind of discursive ark of what Pinar and adherents believe should be held as the core of curricular thought, and, as Pinar’s critics argue, an attempt to establish a new faction within curriculum through delimiting
historical-discursive passage through such a covenant. In taking “browning” as a moment bound from discursive-social interaction, however, the scene begins to read less like a turf war and more like the first breaths of a critical location seeking critical sustenance from its intellectual world.

The “browning” of curriculum studies was arguably seen to be “out of line” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad, 2011) for its active criticality, and so became estranged by its own critical community. Gaztambide-Fernández and like-minded colleagues’ browning faction began as caucus sheltered within the established institutionality of the Curriculum and Pedagogy group, a professional and academic association devoted to promoting social change in education. In Gaztambide-Fernández and Murad’s manifesto, the critically polarizing spectre of Pinar’s (in)famous canon project is, to be fair to my professors, first invoked to ground the ‘Browning Project’ in curriculum history, and as the authors’ point of critical departure into a new moment of curriculum. The authors demonstrate this in a focused, yet rhetorically divergent paragraph:

The genealogies of White supremacy have been particularly evident through the recent undertaking of the Canon Project by the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies. It is also manifest in the everyday lives of curriculum workers who endeavor within a field that emerged from and continues to be constrained by histories of oppression, violence, and displacement. (pp. 14)

Across these two sentences, criticism and critique are performed: the authors critically define Browning against the Canon Project in an openly, politically charged statement, while also naming a new site for curricular work and thought – the “everyday,” endeavouring “lives of curriculum workers.” While this second gesture opens for the reader a generative welcome into this political movement, the goal of the browning community to “raise questions and invite dialogue about the historical and contemporary pervasiveness of colonial heteropatriarchal White supremacy in curriculum studies” is quite literally predicated on the preceding political call – specifically, the choice to return this call with a critically active answer.

On an onto-epistemological register, then, Pinarian perspectives are only part of a larger rhetorical topography still constituting a kind of diluting delta of critical focus away from recognizing deeper injustices in curriculum theory: the call for “browning” the curriculum intervenes on any (virtually all, arguably) curricular discourse that has yet to address higher order and deeply ingrained structures of status quo privilege. Salient here, I argue, is that this kind of intervention causes an ontological register to brush up uncomfortably against any alliance or individual who continues to marginalize any voice which does not align with a
discipline’s (or amorphous field of association) status maintenance, however progressive the academic sphere. Activities of rhetorical representation, revelation, and replication, not just discrete theories, constrain what discursive locations and social positions may be conceived. Opening up such a context as the “moment” of “browning” within curriculum demonstrates that this is also an ontological, political project that transects academic text, performance, allegiance, and identification.

What is at stake in the case of the browning movement is not simply the injection of more melanin into the academe, but the reality that “building an intellectual space that might yield political strength needs to start from a sense of solidarity that takes as its core not similarity but difference” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006, p. 63). Difference as explicitly political and a sense of solidarity as the core of discourse implicates that criticism, and so our discipline, should be concerned with more than words on pages or intellectual reactions to abstract problems; lest I give the impression again that Pinar or other paradigmatic, genealogical identities are the main adversaries of browning or my own rhetorical intervention, browning emerges out of deliberate criticism, against Pinar or any other established, privileged discursive voice that currently constrain disciplinary formation, and its continued viability, it would seem, relies on critical engagement beyond a single group of scholars. In an essay intimately grounded in his experience as an agent of curriculum studies discourse and member of the then-hopeful browning community, Gaztambide-Fernández (2006) hopes that his words “will spawn further dialogue and foment a ‘community of dissensus’ that will strengthen our commitment to a publicly engaged curriculum work.” (p. 64) Gaztambide-Fernández explicitly invites critical extension by other agents of curriculum studies, noting that he has “glossed over” (p. 64) much in his own writing, but that any of his blind spots or otherwise unattended history are open and welcome to the critique of a generative community. This critical rallying is a call for critique from other members of curriculum studies, as a purposeful discursive community, to respond and correspond, to sustain and proliferate the critical valence of browning (its criticism) and relate its ideas through new language and encounters with other discursive identities and locations.

This requires however, for better or worse, the agency of those discursive citizens to do so. This action bears asking what sorts of challenges, whose challenges, of intellection are actually taken up by scholars of curriculum, and by which scholars. Reflecting on his personal, ontological experience of attending a Curriculum and Pedagogy conference, Gaztambide-
Fernández notes that, in reality, it does matter a great deal who sits with whom, and, I would add, ultimately who is privileged with being heard and acknowledged by a response:

And yet, even in this space, an unsurprising dynamic was evident. Brown-skinned participants (including faculty as well as doctoral students) were sitting toward the back of the room while the large mass of participants sitting toward the front looked more like the typical crowds attending curriculum conferences; lighter-skinned, fair-haired, blue-eyed. [...] [T]he arrangement of the physical space betrayed a sense of division along racial lines. (p. 63)

The agency we have in reality, including (I wonder) our choices of association in our discursive lives, would then seem to be of critical importance – of criticism itself. While physical and discursive reality is difficult to account for in its entire casual spectrum, there are power plays going on even in the most diversity-friendly spaces – which include the textual spaces of discourse – and that however open or expansive we may believe our discipline to be, we cannot always see those perspectives and real, empirically-existent people who we occlude with our own presence. To engage in discursive criticism, in curriculum, means risking an explicit political challenge or shift in intellection. “This way of engaging”, according to Gaztambide-Fernández, “requires that we make personal commitments to creative ways of being in solidarity with one another toward the personal, political, and intellectual ‘browning’ of our field” (p. 64).

Despite also historically anchoring their moment in curriculum discourse through citing Herbert Spencer’s *What knowledge is of most worth?* in a critical juxtaposition (manifesting this anchor at the discursive site of Spencer’s patriarchal legacy), the critical life of browning was still dependent on the critical agency of a larger curriculum studies community. The members of this community chose to either confront their own complicity in the historically (and presently) “imperialist,” “racist,” “sexist” and economically exploitative underpinnings of curriculum studies, or otherwise accept its status quo genealogy. This risk of being browed by critical “fire,” from within a “structural, personal, and spiritual” as well as intellectual “reckoning,” requires some doing – on all sides. To the browning community’s ostensibly receptive host
association, however, this call was not answered – in the discursive as well as personal sense.

While “browning” was cast for me in my graduate seminars as a faction within a feudal battle for curriculum studies’ intellectual territory, its critical implication was largely left unanswered by its own supposed community, leaving it with no community at all.

**History left to Ruin: Criticism without Critique**

From what I am able to piece together from textual records, it appears that the ostensibly supportive Curriculum and Pedagogy Group (C&P), which once offered physical and intellectual space to the thoughts behind the “browning” of curriculum, did not offer the thoughts of the browning movement the benefit of rhetorical life, along with much of curriculum studies writ large. In the words of browning’s C&P colleagues, they chose to remain unencumbered by its critical uptake, and “conscious of [their own] space”: observable, if somewhat obliquely, is the waning life support from C&P to the browning “caucus.” In C&P meeting minutes freely available on the organization’s website (2011, n.p.), Gaztambide-Fernández brings up the apparently complacent segregation of the browning caucus within C&P itself, and is denied meaningful critique:

[Committee member Walter] Rejoins with Rubén, arguing through a prompting critique that “browning” is "part of our work", and that it needs a more explicit "strand" of reference threaded through the very structure of C&P.

[Committee member Polly] challenges Rubén, stating that the explicit, "stressful" work of 'browning' should not be demanded of others, and appeals to a sense of (as I read it) neoliberal choice to "continue the conversation".

[Committee member Appelbaum] asks if C&P is "bearing the burden [of browning] for an entire field."

[Committee member and Browning caucus member Zahra] responds critically: "Why is it that people of colour have always [carried] this forward?"
These meeting notes conclude with the trace of such a call quieted. "After substantial exchange and discussion," C&P member Miryam Dulanto-Espinosa reminds the group to "take care of the C&P space" – a gesture of neutralization of a burgeoning moment of browning’s “foment.” This gesture is strangely present yet absent, responding in language to a real, empirical moment of “foment” but deferring a meaningful, empirically relevant response. Offering a performative representation of curriculum studies inquiry and activity in general, C&P committee members abdicate to the indifference of arbitrary time, space, and what is worth discussing: the meeting has gone over schedule, and the individuals of C&P, implicitly constitutive of a rhetorical set different than the one from which the browning caucus’s calls originated, have better things to do.

The scene captured fleetingly by the C&P’s meeting minutes begins to illustrate the ontological power of giving and receiving active critique, of being read, and the actual “privilege to make noise” (Reilly, 2011, p. xxxv), prompting the sheer existentialism of asking if noise is even possible if no one is listening. In my own personal conversations with Gaztambide-Fernández, I have suggested and confirmed the plausibility that the lack of critical uptake of browning by and into the C&P project has had an ultimately diminishing effect on the rhetorical life of the arguments of and by members of the browning movement – to the point that, arguably, some theorists who might be called ‘members’ of a ‘browning project’, if one were to be named and canonized, are discursively dispersed into rhetorical worlds, universal sets, which have drifted apart (cf. Au, 2009; Brown & Au, 2014; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, in press). In my following, concluding chapter, I retrace my own critical journey to these ruins and fragments to confront the reality and hope still evident in critique – for while our rhetorical existences may depend on universes detached from our empirical selves, our theories feeding on encounters with others, we still retain the will and agency to engage in critique.
Chapter 6
Conclusion

Throughout this particular thesis, I have argued for and through the following rhetorical worldview: curriculum scholars occupy and perform social discursive positions in some proximity to our social positions as individual agents; we do so through our deliberate engagement in or estrangement from particular rhetorical representations; we collectively, in solidarity or polarization, make possible what we might perceive as the field of relations that is curriculum studies; and we consequently bring into being or exclude from history the origins and current existence of curriculum as we know it and want it to become.

This being is a rhetorical, critical life. The aesthetics of our vocabularies, those who are included in our words, whose words we choose to read, respond to or decline critical correspondence, and what we mean to contribute in these relationships sustains a critical community, such as it might be. Members exercise power of critique and criticism: critique being the social investment of traversing discursive history, finding and reinventing new ways of understanding and rhetorically expressing such understanding, and criticism as the provocative act of evaluating these investments – which can both sever ties, foreclosing whole worlds of possible understanding, yet catalyze radical new life pathways for imaging better futures.

In my own logic of rhetoric, however, I have had to somewhat ironically separate these two gestures of being critical, and, as I forewarned in my introductory chapters, attenuated my own personal and discursive selves. I do not mean to suggest that the more generously inventive critique becomes the less it can be critical, or that the keenest incision of criticism cannot be inventive. Critique, rather, is fully both generously inventive and antagonistic; our very intellectual presence as critical agents enacts a witnessing, a kind of validating, of the voices of others and grounding of the imaginations of our theoretical kin. Rather, those of us engaged in the being of critique possess both qualities and energies. Our choices of how we invest these words in our lives as scholars of curriculum more than simply represent the state of curriculum today: these choices are curriculum, its power, heart, quality, and border. Taken further, this means that what critique and criticism are ultimately defined as is also not self-evident, but under our control – as much as we are willing to acknowledge or afford. In reality, we have authority, as authors, advisors, readers, and writers.

The separation then of social position, ourselves as flesh-and-blood individuals with private lives and personal agendas, and social discursive position, ourselves as justified agents of
intellectual scholarship, is then, once again, rather arbitrary. This limit of distance, the warning and aura of proximity from which I began my own writing here, is where I will now return. To do so, I take up the present moment in which I am personally and discursively immersed: the vaguely postmodern post-reconceptualist as defined-yet-undefined by Eric Malewski (2010a), which encompasses, in my curriculum, the still-unfolding (or fading) moments of browning and critical pedagogy. As a conclusion to my thesis, I describe this current being as both an object of my rhetorical analysis and subject of my own critique, briefly describing its rhetorical content and artifice, naming its intellectual maneuvers, gaps, and potentialities. In contrast and affinity, I first engage with Julie Maudlin’s attempted echo of browning, *the Abandonment of Hope* (2014, in press), to trace a deeper abandonment of critical proximity and real responsibility as it explicitly responds to the critical charges of Eve Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2013) incursions into the humanist rhetoric of curriculum studies. In doing so, I attempt to thread back into my established premises my own conditions and my own critique, to demonstrate that there is always-already hope in the choice to respond and invest some of ourselves in discursive lives, while at the same time arguing an explicitly provocative position: in my case, that post-reconceptualist curriculum has presently abandoned its own critical relevance.

*The Transmutation of Hope, the Transmutation of Critique*

Recalling her actual, reality-bound and reality-invested presence at the breakdown of communication between C&P and its ostensibly-welcomed browning caucus, its own (and her own) harbouring hopes of inclusion, C&P member Julie Maudlin has recently written (2014, in press) a more promising response to calls for browning – ironically, for it in its rhetorical modes as *the Abandonment of Hope*, it, I argue, rejects progress in naming and facing the critical solidity of empirical reality and so forecloses the solidarity critical to browning’s fundamental goals. Maudlin’s response begins with a memory of attending a special session of the 2011 Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference in Akron, Ohio, arranged after a “heated debate ... prickled at [her] conscience for some time”, but eventually, like the organizational efforts to deliberately engage the project of browning, this critical prickling faded into the margins as she “turned away from the intensity of that critique and resumed [her] work in cultural curriculum studies” (p. 3). Maudlin then abruptly cites Gaztambide-Fernández and Eve Tuck’s recounting
and reflections on the same session two years later (2013) as the sharper spur which catalyzed her most recent revisiting of the same moment, which she once denied. This moment, a two-year gap of documented reflexivity and a rhetorical leap of criticality in-text, offers a place for me to both begin and conclude on present accounting of curriculum’s life, from my social and social discursive positions in direct tension.

Quite literally in-text, Maudlin (2014) chooses to keep these turned-away years between the original moment in 2011 Ohio and Eve Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández’s publication undescribed. Apparently lacking in 2011 an undefined fearlessness or bravery of “collective action and connection,” Maudlin retrieves a new sense of scholarly reflexivity from browning’s discursive imprint, jumping ahead to Eve Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2013) published assertion that C&P curriculum scholars failed in 2011 to engage the implications of browning without thinking of the preservation of their own discursive privilege:

Then, in 2013, [Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández] published an article in Journal of Curriculum Theorizing entitled “Curriculum, Replacement, and Settler Futurity,” which not only recounted the events of the 2011 session as a “confessional,” in which “white participants dominated the conversation with expressions of guilt, helplessness, innocence, and dismay” …, but also brought renewed heat to the earlier assertions that curriculum must be understood as “central to the colonial project of heteropatriarchal White supremacy” (p. 4).

These criticisms, registered in the realm and time-dilation of published discourse, compelled Maudlin to revisit the questions she inwardly asked herself but could not answer – how she might ‘fit’ into a browning project, be a responsible ‘good’ white scholar, and consequently how problematic such a hope, a hope to be ‘fixed’ and bettered and carry on as an enlightened white scholar, is to the actual point of browning: to challenge the intrinsic racism of Enlightenment humanism as the basis of curriculum studies writ large. Key, here, are the implicit, empirical logics of post-reconceptualist and, in a higher-order scholarly affinity, even browning’s rhetorical life (or lack thereof). The two year gap I have highlighted is, in print, the mere beat of a discursive heart, while the powers of critique Maudlin exercises allows her to reinvent, to a discursive extent, a significant sense of history. This discursive social mode of being critical indeed allows Maudlin to respond anew, finding, feeling out, and offering new language and reinvention of discursive position in response and generative gesture towards those of browning. However, Maudlin then makes the choice, I argue below, to limit herself, her location of responsibility, to this creative impulse of critique, excluding an empirically active identity and its tether to the larger set of institutional privilege’s material consequences, the relevance of her
own existence to her ostensible critical objects (systemically oppressed lives in education or educational research), and so the relevance of her words beyond her own rhetorical musing.

*Within* the world of words of her colleagues, her free-floating social-discursive identity nevertheless remains alive, successfully responding within the *rhetorical* set of an emerging critique and consequent language of re-inventing ways of thinking within curriculum as a legacy of Enlightenment epistemological settlement. This requires rhetorical leaps across Maudlin’s own history of understanding curriculum, omitting an account of what she was hoping (in scholarly or teaching activity) for between Ohio and reading Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández’s criticism, performing seemingly a double, rhetorical gesture of personal investment (critique) and critical alignment (criticism), but which arguably only functions within the virtual realm distancing of her social position and social discursive position – as the entire performance loses intelligibility in increasing proximity to the former.

Before and between 2011 and 2013, Maudlin in fact wrote explicitly about hope – in direct rhetorical appeal of hope (cf. Maudlin, et al, 2010; Maudlin, 2013). Despite all of these appeals to hope, Maudlin, in the breathless space between a few paragraphs after reading Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, decides to *appears* to abandon this line of rhetorical invention, suggesting that:

> An ideology of hope, even [“educated” and “radical”] conceptualizations, might be problematic, especially when practiced by white scholars because it operates to reinscribe white privilege and perpetuate the assumption that whites can transcend the critique of whiteness . . . The call for an abandonment of hope not only relinquishes the possibility for white moral innocence but also challenges traditional notions of moral responsibility (p. 5).

Importantly, I argue, Maudlin has not in fact abandoned the *rhetoric* of hope, but has instead refashioned it through the creative impulse of critique as her hopeful, free-floating *discursive* self. “Hope” in the empirical sense, it seems, becomes something she is privileged to abandon; she is able to confess while still writing about how her confessions are meaningless, or at least not quite helpful; she is further able to retain an aesthetic of individual address while distancing *herself*, her social identity, from the discussion.

Maudlin further cites the likes of Giroux as critical polarity (rather than her own historical appeals to hope), and constrains her audience of relevant agents (her community) as “we whites.” Further distancing herself from her own critical responsibility, she only momentarily offers a *criticism* of the browning authors’ critical gestures her own distancing, asking, “If hope is conceived as the expectation that we can achieve something we desire, then
certainly that optimistic attitude of mind is critical to change, and where would the world be without change?” Maudlin sheaths this criticism away in favour of a strangely distanced critique, abandoning her own criticism in a selfless act of discounting (or erasing) her own powerful social identity:

Without some assumption of feasibility, some expectation of achievement, there would be no accomplishment to speak of, and the world would, ostensibly, remain unchanged. Yet, [browning’s Murad] observes, “While the concept of hope carries deep personal, spiritual, and emotional meaning for people, there remains an aspect of hope that is defined socially, through discourse and narrative” … By situating hope this way, as historical, as discursive, as performative, we can examine how its meaning is shaped by public discourse and power (p. 6).

Between the first and second sentence of the above quoted passage, the implication and possibility of addressing personal, material agency is jettisoned in favour of collegial, discursive star-gazing – Maudlin rhetorically flattens browning into a discursive game of deconstruction, downplaying “deep,” personal “aspects” of hope in preference to “public” – or discursive – displays of power independent of naming socially any individual’s responsibility or hope, obscuring her own examination’s “assumption of feasibility” – how she is able to write hopefully, confidently, despite ostensibly abandoning her claim to such power.

Problematically but illustratively, my arguments here may be difficult to comprehend for anyone reading in the mode of discursive selves, because these arguments require a difficult proximity, if not reconciliation between, our social and social discursive identities as readers and writers. I am saying here that the aural investments of Maudlin and others are not fully visible or discernable in text, because all possible sets I have so far engaged in, between my second and last chapter, do not include provisions for empirical relevance beyond these sets of critical life. The aural existences of and so my referencing of these registers becomes threatening to the maintenance of its aural logic – attempting to point at the out-of-scene (Latour, 2014) and socially, empirically grounded (that is, born of actions of real people) performance. These ideas and pledges then exist without the responsibility of relevance outside this discursive realm, or even the responsibility of simple, clear definition or example:

To inhabit the critique, to enact the living with or non-transcendence of the untenable, requires what Fenwick (2006) calls “an attitude of mindful engagement,” which necessitates a shift “from recovering and projecting a pre-given world to enacting the immediate” ... As Fenwick (2006) explains, “Ultimately what matters is how we reach out to participate in this moment with people, ideas and situations in front of our noses. Our ethical action is a function not of noble principles, but of immediate responses to the
beings with which we are immersed everyday” … Attending to the present … situates both past and future within this moment through an acceptance of the now not as we wish it to be but as it is, in all of its difficulty. (p. 19)

Maudlin retains intelligibility, I argue, because she writes into a community that will read and respond to her writing as curriculum; this is the sustaining power, the hope, Maudlin does not in fact abandon. Indeed, Maudlin writes hope as “inextricable” from the project of curriculum, but does not account for this rhetorical lifeblood – even as she appears to immediately address a state of “everyday” immersion of “beings”, concepts, and “situations in front of our noses”: who exactly, and in efficacy, she refers to in this inhabitation remains romantically vague; conversely, who she did not give the benefit of an “attitude of mindful engagement” is not specified or addressed – no doubt a vast population of peers, students, or research subjects, given the rhetorical scale of her gestures. Exactly how one is to engage in a meaningful inhabitation of critique, implicitly involving “people, ideas and situations” in immediate, material, empirical proximity is not explained. Any past or present material consequences are, consequently, not defined or evidenced beyond the discursive realm.

Maudlin does, to her credit, exercise critique by reinventing a position for her and other white scholars to write from responsibly, or at least attempt new ways of endeavouring to do so. However abstractly, she does in discursive performance respond to a critical, political prompt. This gesture, yet again, is directed inward and transmuted into a foil to the same implications she is ostensibly offering allegiance. Indeed, Maudlin’s essay, readily published, will no doubt be a feasible reference for naming similar discursive solutions to challenges of browning, or any challenge which might impinge on the material status quo behind post-reconceptualist curriculum studies. I mean this as a criticism and critique: Maudlin comes very close to reckoning with the implicit rhetorical life which sustains her lot in curriculum, an aural life which in turn maintains the aural state of curriculum through language and other empirical underpinnings behind the scene of the text; below, I argue that Maudlin has brushed a rhetorical finger on the pulse of a power that, despite my criticism, she nonetheless demonstrates is within more active reach.
The Sublime Curriculum: from Simple Eclecticism to Simple Proliferation and Vacuity

If Kliebard’s now-historical criticism of Tyler could be summarized as a charge of “simple eclecticism” (1970, p. 57) over rationale, today’s post-reconceptualist curriculum embraces such irrationality as its very – very vast – project. How and through what means Maudlin herself ultimately yields hope to simultaneously abandon it in discourse remains unaddressed, yet curiously named in and as discourse across this expanse of “proliferation.” This perennial blind spot is palpable indirectly in language, in the gravity-defying inscriptions of post-reconceptualist Eric Malewski. In the introduction to his Curriculum Studies Handbook: The Next Moment (2010a, p. 1), Malewski frames an implicitly authoritative body of curriculum literature with a pair of epigraphs which both immediately implicate and erase the individual curriculum scholar’s responsibility from the form, function, or otherwise ongoing nature of the field:

For Lyotard, the aim of philosophy is not to resolve differends but rather to detect (a cognitive task) and bear witness to them (an ethical obligation) this is precisely what the millennial generation of curriculum works may do. (Sears & Marshall, 2000 p. 210)

An interpretation does what it says. It may pretend to simply state, show, and inform, but it actually produces. It is already performative in a way... The political vigilance that this calls for on our part obviously consists in organizing a critical examination of all the mechanisms that hold out the appearance of saying the event when they are in fact making it, interpreting and producing it. (Derrida, quoted in Mitchell & Davidson, 2007, p. 229)

Lyotard’s problematization of language as unavoidably constraining allows, through rhetorical invention, very much a double gesture as the framework of understanding for his volume’s introduction: Malewski’s post-logic explicitly raises the position that “discourse must be taken to account,” while it also embraces the indeterminacy of a post-post curriculum studies through the rhetorical inventions of a “robust,” “protean and expansive” progress as both its ends and means, amidst which we are to “celebrate the growth of its theories and stories – and to be seized by its vigor and intensity – and to assert our human inventiveness so as to personalize our theorizing regardless” (pp. 4, 24-25). It claims comprehensiveness while at the same time shrugs at this impossibility; it claims comprehension without needing to comprehend. It is neither historical nor linear in its conception of time, breaking the “chastity of history” through “doubled readings” that are to be read as neither wholly political – activist – nor as “brittle” excretions of academe’s troglodytes; it is a constant striving in and for a state in-between discursive virtuality
(or relativity) and the complications of empirical reality, in which curriculum scholars can “focus on creating a more just and equitable world by way of offering alternative language and readings” as action (p. 4). For Malewski, through these postmodern modes of being, freely proliferating ideas from a vectored, potential identity that is ultimately only intelligible in and as discourse, reading critically appears to be an ethical, vital obligation – but not necessarily tethered to a material identity and responsibility to respond.

I believe this ethos is important in the context of understanding and being relatively content with post-reconceptualist curriculum studies as a field for Malewski, as the “postconditions” of a chaotic mass of “through lines” that is constantly re-imagining the limits of “its own intelligibility” – and so a field that is content with itself, a field of content relativism, made up of and made up by an audience of scholars content with themselves and their own critical generation within a specific rhetorical universe, and not meaningful change beyond its own field lines – a life of critique without criticism.

Malewski continues with a similar gesture to my reference and observation of Tyler, and the theoretical genesis made possible by subjecting Tyler to criticism. Sidestepping charges of flawed theory from a misguided past, Malewski cites Huebner as a spiritual model for a kind of intellectual interventionism. This quality, regardless of the exhausted debate over curriculum’s morbidity, is what, if I read with Malewski, is the fruit of the contention against developmentalism. Such a theoretical adaptation reinvigorated curriculum, and whatever a scholar’s views on Huebner’s (1976) projections is an historical anchor point that is simultaneously and not necessarily fixed in the past. “The questions held by curriculum scholars,” Malewski observes positioned with Huebner and his own time, “across generations, one might say, harmonize. That is, together they constitute an interwoven network; they are the threads that bind us across time and space” (p. 7). Finding critical kinship, an anchor of intelligibility, yet also license to explore his own internal (inward) expansion, Malewski summarizes his tome’s encapsulation of curriculum as presently post-reconceptualist, and post-reconceptualism as an intellectual “intervention,” “within curriculum itself,” into the “object so as to change it.”

Although Malewski names this an interventionist scholarship, the site of intervention does not go beyond its own discourse. Malewski’s gesture of critique is incomplete – it does not engage in contention with any immediate context or being under his nose; it is and lives, simply, for its own proliferation – illustrating a post-reconceptualism representing the aura of critique
without actual, material, critical engagement beyond itself. I am left, much as I was in the beginning of my curriculum of curriculum, left to simply experience post-reconceptualist curriculum studies as a kind of sublime, unfolding beauty.

Coda

The most recent mutation in this bacterial bloom of rhetorical life in curriculum is a burgeoning discourse which explicitly embraces this aesthetic: anti-humanist and posthumanist theory in curriculum (Snaza, et al., 2014). Similar to my criticism of Maudlin’s double gesture in which she names an empirical reality of curriculum while erasing her own presence, Gaztambide-Fernández (2014, in press) describes a consequence of the erasure of the empirical human in this self-propagating rhetoric:

Some have proposed an anti-humanist position or a posthumanist sensibility. Such projects, however, seem more interested in recasting the white male subject as an antidote to white man himself. The desperate move to erase the human while at the same time reinscribing white man does little to decolonize, as it leaves untouched the privilege of the already constituted white male, now repeated as a farcical caricature of his previous self – as zombie, as superhero. Such post-humanist futures promise little to those who have never been human enough and on whose broken backs the supremacy of the white male subject stands. (p. 17)

I would extend this thought to include the argument that any rhetoric of curriculum has the potential to enact futures or erase hope of attaining subjectivity. While I charge post-reconceptualist theorists aligned with Malewski as critically irresponsible and those with posthumanism as further void of any semblance of such concept, I nonetheless, in my own citing and naming of their maneuvers, acknowledge a kind of worth in their thoughts: there is generative potential in Malewski’s writing, which I take up, put into kinship with my own thoughts, and offer rhetorical identity in my own words; critically, I still hold onto hope that the authors of curriculum’s posthumanist manifesto mean well in the fraternity they obscure.

Similarly, Maudlin’s treatment of hope as something she is privileged to abandon suggests, through even brief rhetorical reading and response, that hope is yet existent in the ongoing exchange between the embers of browning and those writers of C&P who still respond to its calls; it is conceivable, in the reader’s mind, to imagine privately some kind of vaguely ethical, everyday “mindful engagement” with the immediate beings Maudlin lives, works with,
or teaches, and of whose lives she ostensibly writes to make better. Promisingly, this ongoing communication facilitates and is facilitated by a mutual recognition of humanism as the critical fulcrum of a collegial debate, a spiniform object of rhetorical, historical destination and reinvention through experimentation in language and critical repose: a more-or-less common ground, language, and rhetorical atmosphere of criticality in active, aware tensions and materializing contention of intelligibility.

Such a critical encounter comes close to acknowledging and actualizing, as I hope for, a full critical presence and alignment of the gestures of criticism in education towards meaningful ends of this critical life-force. Gaztambide-Fernández’s critical incision into the genre of curriculum handbooks (2009) and my extension into curricular rhetoric more generally, here so far used as a lens on the mythic origins of curriculum, gleans the real charge that we all encourage: however aware we are whilst constrained by language and hegemonic structure, we commit a determinist fallacy. Gaztambide-Fernández, Maudlin, and the SAGE Handbook’s metaphors, along with Malewski’s call for proliferation of new moments in a forever-churning cosmos imply a hopeful energy and vitality of curriculum. Rhetorical analysis of these examples also suggests, however, that this is somehow a sublime, natural, self-evident process not directly shaped and propelled by us, by our desires, grudges, hopes and gestures of political contention, our willful reading presently with and for each other and not dispersing across a vast field of cosmological indifference – the ethics and morals, the good life of curriculum we want to proliferate.

Turning Gaztambide-Fernández’s perspective onto his own response (2014, in press) to posthumanist curriculum vacuity, a perspective which I have so far preferred, criticism can be made and critique offered in extension rather than foreclosure, as a double gesture and so a full act of critique. After once more laying bare the same intrinsic racist underpinning of humanism and so a kind of essential foundation of curriculum studies, Gaztambide-Fernández offers a critical, but hopeful challenge. Doing the work of browning “requires a commitment to anti-racist and decolonizing pedagogies premised on relationality, collectivist understandings of learning, and to an ethic of solidarity. Such an ethic understands solidarity as a relational project that strategically engages processes of identification” (p. 16). An explicit critical leveling at the register of ethical, material action, “[t]his requires an active and creative engagement with both the material and the symbolic content of specific struggles in specific contexts” (p. 16). However, like Maudlin, Gaztambide-Fernández leaves a tangible, material description or
disclosure of complicity or proximity to these actions up to the reader’s imagination or exclusive knowledge – perhaps, in form, validating and making the indeterminate responses of the likes of Maudlin or Malewski possible to be read as critical engagement, as “critique.” That is, what this work and ethic of solidarity entails, located in material specificity, is left deferred; Gaztambide-Fernández’s “bind of having to work in and against institutions can create locations of anxiety … involving imaginative acts of remembrance and creation through the exclamation of active presences” remains primarily intangible (p. 17, emphasis original). On a rhetorical level, Gaztambide-Fernández’s departure from white supremacist humanism is virtually indistinguishable from Maudlin’s, or Maudlin’s from that of the posthumanist theory Gaztambide-Fernández critiques, in regard to what stakes or whose stakes are ultimately, empirically involved – in an ultimately ongoing discursive quest for “emancipation and freedom.” As an ironic example, the rhetorical expression Maudlin draws from is at its source explicitly hopeful in a posthuman “audacity” of “ecological relations” (see Fenwick, 2006). The universal set of curriculum’s logos is not sullied, no incursion of the material world of curriculum is made; no presence is named or directly challenged, human, post-human, or otherwise.

In reflexive consequence, I now compel myself to name the gaps in my own referential supports, and my own criticality: the uncomfortable intersection of my social identity and discursive social identity, and what may be my offer of a resolution to be written forward or challenged by curriculum as a community of agents – people who may choose to respond.

Gaztambide-Fernández (2014, in press) again comes closest to describing the state of post-reconceptualist curriculum, and what I believe to be the crux, the unaddressed theory-material breaking point, through which I see critique in curriculum is evidently emptying:

[T]he work of curriculum theorizing shifted in some academic spaces to a profound existentialism, from a concern with curricular content and organization to an examination of the subject and the phenomenology of educational experience. In part as a reaction to the increasing technicalization of education in which curriculum continues to be understood as design, the “reconceptualization” turned toward self-excaavation and ideological critique. Despite the continued richness of its theoretical and conceptual venturing, the reconceptualization – now “post” reconceptualization – of curriculum work has largely failed in several ways. First, after almost four decades of scholarly work, reconceptualist curriculum work has left largely untouched the mainstream focus on content and design. Indeed, the traces of reconceptualization in national, provincial/state, or local policy are almost null. … Increasingly solipsistic and enamored with its own image, reconceptualization continues to struggle with its self-conscious humanist inheritance, quibbling that any and all suggestions of continued white
supremacy are manifestations of “identity politics.” As a parental silencing device, the severe dismissal forestalls and shelters curriculum work, turning attention back to itself and its own solipsistic embroilment with escaping from the existentialist looking glass. (pp. 6-7).

Breaking this solipsistic surface of reflexivity, the skin of post-reconceptualist curriculum, has yet to happen – even through what I believe to be the most promising, hopeful exemplars by Gaztambide-Fernández. If an evasion of identity is at the heart of any and all deferrals of responsibility, including those of racist, historical injustice, then perhaps a reckoning with curricular, critical identity – a re-binding of social position and social discursive position – is what I call for. That is, turning the naming, normalizing, historicizing, as well as generative, translocative, and life-supportive energies of critique towards the empirical reality of curriculum, binding the activism of our intellection with our social, material, empirical lives, and what we all want and critically write and enact it to become.

While Eric Malewski (2010a, p. 6-7) uses curriculum studies’ “reading practices as [points] of departure,” I want to extend this thought and consider all curricular readings as profoundly ontological, epistemological, political, critical events “that bind us [as social and discursive, empirical beings] across time and space.” Malewski's rhetoric of “proliferation” arguably works to foreclose such moments. I mean this as a criticism, but not one without hope for the ultimately choice-driven power of rhetoric to still find meaning beyond itself. Like the appeals to present-day contexts and constraints by Tyler, despite his perennial historical transmutations, the literary play and opening up of language continued in earnest by readers and citers of Ellsworth or Lather is not in fact incommensurable with the neo-Marxist realism of McLaren and Giroux; to begin with, the former could consider and make explicit who might benefit from their language games and how, and the latter consider how new language might be practically aligned with an anti-neoliberal/anti-capitalist project. Finally, my own critical grievances may be overcome by re-staking agential presence in “activist scholarship,” moving from a perpetual gesturing beyond Maudlin’s (after Fenwick) “inhabitation” of critique, from an a-temporal present moment of reading with curriculum (discursive agents adrift our own malleability) to presently reading with and writing curriculum – curriculum studies with relevance, generative and critical of, empirical registers of curriculum.

We must expand our sets of intelligibility and concern into wider contention, conversation, and community. We should name ourselves, our material hopes and fears, our mundane critical existences as critically relevant. My first critical volley is thus: the writers of
post-reconceptualist curriculum engender and maintain their own empirical irrelevance in the larger set of the curricular world through the very ways in which they engage – or do not engage – in critique.
References


Blair, B. (2006). At the end of a huge crit in the summer, it was ‘crap’ – I'd worked really hard but all she said was ‘fine’ and I was gutted. *Art, Design & Communication In Higher Education*, 5(2), 83-95.


