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philophobia: from post-critical to neo-critical pedagogy through art critique (and a pinch of hate)

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While post-critical pedagogy urges us to educate out of and toward love for the world, in this article I argue against the privileged status of love in educational discourse. I hold that renewing the world is impossible without critique, indeed without a pinch of hatred. I suggest, therefore, moving from post to neo-critique, to renewing the world by renewing critique. I start with discussing some good reasons for hating the world, and then turn to the concept of critique, which post-critical pedagogy is by no means the first to attack. A look at the thorough analysis of the modern concept of critique offered by German historian Reinhart Koselleck uncovers the deep contradictions inherent to its totalizing, rationalistic presuppositions that see nothing but absolute good and absolute evil. Koselleck's comments on premodern critique point the way to a more complex concept of critique, which transcends such binary divisions. In the last section of this article, I take some steps in this direction, fleshing out the concept of neo-critical pedagogy by thinking of art criticism.

Hatred of Love

I am a philophob. I hate love, but not as much as I fear it. Not in my private life, of course, but as a theoretical concept, especially when it refers not to an individual but to "the world" – when it becomes a moral imperative, a political principle, or the master key for good education. What's wrong with love? What's not to love about it? Isn't love all we need? What educational ideal can outshine it?

My fear of love stems from aesthetic as well as political concerns. Aesthetically, the talk of love for the world (or some favorite section of it, such as a country or nation) quickly becomes formulaic if not trite. Politically, it may blind the world lover to the flaws of her world, resulting in hesitation and passivity even when decisive action is in order – as love often does. To be sure, there are also very good reasons not to give up on love for the world. One of the things the recent pandemic had taught us is how much we love and cherish our fragile world despite its countless flaws. I am a philophob, in fact, because I cannot love the world and at the very same time, I cannot not love it. To borrow the phrase from Facebook: It's complicated.

In post-critical pedagogy, things appear to be simpler. This approach urges us to educate out of and toward love for the world: it justifies its turn away from critical pedagogy by negating the latter's negative approach, which it identifies with "hatred of the world", and calls for replacing it with an affirmative one, emphasizing what is valuable in the world (Hodgson, et al., 2017, 2018). Specifically, post-critical pedagogy argues that the concept of critique on which critical pedagogy is founded is self-contradictory, for while pretending to emancipate the oppressed it in fact reproduces

their oppression. Demanding ceaseless search for wrongs and injustices, critical pedagogy arguably hides from the students all that is good and worthwhile in the world, hampering their ability to lead meaningful lives. Moreover, since the most important thing the students should learn is to recognize the subtle mechanisms that oppress them, they must remain subordinate to the teacher who is a "master of critique", who knows how society "really" works (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 10). Thus, not only the world but also the students are devaluated.

While not denying the wrongs of this world, post-critical pedagogy offers a way out of this conundrum by trusting in the power of love: it holds that the task of education is to present to the young generation all that is worth cherishing, inviting them to take responsibility for the world and care for it. Rather than denouncing the present world and yearning for an imagined, emancipated future, this pedagogy of love attempts to renew the world based on the good it already has (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 15).

In this article, I articulate my philophobia, arguing for complexity and against the privileged status of love in educational discourse. Although post-critical pedagogy is fully aware of the impossibility of utterly renouncing critique – after all, it is critical of critical pedagogy – it wants to move beyond it, to develop an alternative to critique. I argue, however, that renewing the world is impossible without critique, indeed without a pinch of hatred. I suggest, therefore, moving from post to *neo*-critique, to renewing the world by renewing critique.

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Hatred of the World

Education is about new beginnings, about enabling the new generation to start new things in the world. Upon returning from his studies in Paris to his home island of Martinique in 1936, poet and intellectual Aimé Césaire also thought about beginnings, and wrote that it was time to begin: "Begin what? / The only thing in the world worth beginning: / The end of the world of course." (quoted in Lloyd, 2020, para. 2). The backdrop for this political-poetic call for action, which is to be both a beginning and an end, is Césaire's realization that the whole world was infected with racism. Only by uprooting every infected organ – every part of the world – can life begin not only for Black people, but also for everybody. Referring to Césaire in the context of the current Black Lives Matter protest, Thomas Lynch claims that we are not sufficiently *disturbed* by the world: "I want to know why we aren't filled with an overwhelming rage all the time… My question is 'how can you not hate the world?'" (Lynch 2020, para. 19).

From this point of view, expressions of love for the world cannot but appear to be a failure to acknowledge the various kinds of systematic oppression and everyday suffering of so many people. Indeed, one does not have to be Black, or even focus on anti-Black racism, to be filled with rage. Not only are there countless different mechanisms of oppression and domination – neoliberal

capitalism, antisemitism and islamophobia, misogyny and LGBTQphobia, to name but a few – they are rooted so deep into our world that they affect everything we say and do. Hatred and calling for the end of the world may sound radical, but so is the oppression that has our world by the neck. If human suffering concerns us, if we believe oppression should be fought against, hatred is not only understandable, it is imperative.

It should come as no surprise, then, that love has been appropriated by people and organizations intent precisely on spreading racism and xenophobia. Sara Ahmed (2014, pp. 122-143) showed how hate groups of neo-Nazis and white supremacists often present themselves as motivated by love: love for those who look like them, of course, for a particular exclusive culture or tradition that is experienced as or that pretends to be threatened – but still, love. Hatred is attributed to others, to aliens coming from elsewhere (Suissa, 2020). As we have seen, these claims are not entirely wrong: the oppressed have very good reasons for hating the world (and the oppressors who rule it). Nevertheless, love still enjoys much better public relations.

Yet a closer reading of Césaire reveals not only hatred of the world. Just as beginning and end are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually presuppositive, so is hatred of the world interwoven with acknowledging the good in it. After quoting Césaire, Vincent Lloyd (2020) writes that:

The world is never fully captured by domination. There is always a remainder. Because domination has infected our language and our perception, we cannot point to that remainder and name it. But in song, poetry, dance, protest, and prayer we can conjure it now, and we can project it into the future, visioning a world without domination, after the world's end. (Lloyd, 2020, para. 7)

Love for the world can only be expressed indirectly, aesthetically, but we must not give it up. A new world can only be built on foundations originating in the old, and if we fail to love and cherish them, the end of the world is bound to cause just as much suffering. Not love but indifference is the opposite of hate; love and hate feed off each other.

Rather than fear hate and reject it as post-critical pedagogy asks us to do, we had better bring it together with love, or rather move beyond the love-hate binary. Renouncing critique based on its affinity with hate amounts to renouncing love as well. Can critique go beyond love and hate? A reading of Reinhart Koselleck's history of critique suggests that if this concept is to be of any use, we must leave such binaries behind.

Hatred of Critique

More than five decades before post-critical pedagogy – in fact, before critical pedagogy itself – Koselleck mounted a fierce attack against the concept of critique, as part of his comprehensive challenge to the period most associated with critique: the Enlightenment (1988). The Enlightenment, he argued, transformed the premodern critical practice from a multifaceted engagement with texts, persons, and events, into a unidimensional process of rational assessment, which condemned and combatted whatever it deemed irrational. For the 17th century humanists, argued Koselleck, critique was the art of meticulous evaluation, which combined careful judgment with broad-minded, comprehensive analysis (Koselleck, 1988, p. 105). Such critique was practiced under the exclusive auspices of the Church, recognizing its authority and drawing on its rich tradition.

The 18th century Enlightenment, on the other hand, dissociated critique from tradition and

revelation, attempting to ground it in reason alone. Even before Kant, critique and pure reason had become synonymous. This transformation, evident already in Pierre Bayle and later in Voltaire and the *Encyclopédistes*, marked a decisive moment in the history of critique. As the reason-revelation binary was made into critique's condition of possibility, dichotomies became its sole mode of operation, resulting in paradoxes and self-contradictions.

This mode of operation is evident on various levels. First, as critique attempts to purge itself of all irrational residues, it takes on a totalizing, uncompromising nature, thereby losing the ability to account for complex matrices of power and compromising on its raison d'être. Its verdicts are narrowed down to the binary opposition between ultimate good and radical evil (Koselleck, 1988, p. 108). We may even say that rational critique either approves or disapproves, either loves or hates, ignoring the interdependence of the two poles.

Second, critique's area of applicability is also affected by its dualistic nature. In order to ground its moral authority on reason alone, it has to separate itself not only from the church but also from the political sphere altogether. Rational critique and politics become two opposing poles, as reason's objectivity depends on its independence from the actual world. To be sure, independence is bought at the price of ineffectiveness: while political law is believed to be inherently immoral, moral law becomes politically impotent. Critique is confined to the republic of letters and the arts, as in Friedrich Schiller's plays where a tribunal is staged in which opposing powers are presented, judged, and convicted (Koselleck, 1988, pp. 99–100).

Yet the rational autonomy which critique presumes also means that nothing is exempt from its judgment, including current politics. Koselleck argues that the paradoxical nature of critique is rooted in this "hypocritical" attempt to be independent of political power and simultaneously submit it to its moral judgment:

The moral stage provides an exalted view of a world divided into beauty and fear in order to subject politics to its criticism… At the point at which the dualistically segregated dominant politics are subjected to a moral verdict, that verdict is transformed into a political factor; into political criticism. (Koselleck, 1988, p. 101)

Critique seeks to be detached from politics and yet plays an active part in it, drawing its unique political power from the façade of an external observer. By claiming to an exclusive and objective expression of reason, critical intellectuals pretend to hold a neutral position in relation to the controversies they evaluate. As in Schiller's plays, they combine the roles of prosecutor, defender, and judge (Koselleck, 1988, p. 109), while in actual politics the rational-critical stance is but one in a complex array of power relations: "the critics stood above the parties by virtue of their criticism, but as critics of the State they became partisan" (Koselleck, 1988, p. 114).

The inner contradictions resulting from critique's dualistic nature become more harmful still when they affect the critics' relations with the world and with themselves. The paradoxical mix of absolute sovereignty and political impotence opens an unbridgeable gap between the utopian moral goal and the inability to achieve it. The "infinite process of renewal" (Koselleck, 1988, p. 109) characteristic of critique's restless urge to ask new questions takes the form of unceasing progress which despises the present and values only an ever-elusive future: "criticism transformed the future into a maelstrom that sucked the present from under the feet of the critic" (Koselleck, 1988, p. 109). The critic, then, hovers above the real world, applying impossible rational standards thereto.

Acknowledging no other verdict but love or hate, critique loves itself, and feels nothing but hatred for the rest of the world.

Finally, the dichotomous foundation on which critique rests is also translated, as is evident in Diderot's essay on critique in the *Encyclopédie*, into a split between the critic as writer and as real individual (Koselleck, 1988, p. 115): if the former is to express pure rationality, then the latter is utterly irrelevant. Even "enlightened monarch" Friedrich the Great urged his readers to "distinguish between the philosopher in me and the prince, the decent man and the politician" (quoted in Koselleck, 1988, p. 117), as if they were two unrelated personae. Thus, critique depersonalizes the critic, turning him into a "functionary of critique": "his writings alienate the individual, who can no longer find himself in them" (Koselleck, 1988, p. 115).

We can see that Koselleck's critique of the concept of critique overlaps with the two post-critical claims presented above. First, the critic's alienation from the world, expressed in the distant judgmental gaze presuming to subordinate everything to its verdict while taking part in nothing, is a clear expression of what post-critical pedagogy calls "hatred of the world" (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017). Second, the critic's self-alienation, his devaluation of the present and the compensation he seeks in some utopian future echo the post-critical claim that critical pedagogy in fact subordinates the student to a "master of critique" in the name of a hoped-for emancipation that is always around the corner.

Yet Koselleck's analysis not only anticipates post-critical pedagogy, but also sheds light on the reasons for critique's inner contradictions. The alienation, devaluation and hatred of the world are explained by critique's association with rationality, or rather a specific kind of rationality, which demands absolute sovereignty and purity, hating and negating whoever and whatever refuse its uncompromising demands – in fact, the whole world. Rational critique works against itself because the irrational complexities it pretends to bracket away insistently infiltrate its fortified borders, undermining its strict dualist structure.

Koselleck however – for whom renewal is an essential aspect of critique – also allows us to conceive of another kind of critique, one that is not founded on pure reason attempting to quarantine itself from the world and observe it through bipolar spectacles. The problem, for Koselleck, does not lie in critique per se but in its modern, enlightened version. His brief discussion of pre-Enlightenment critical practice suggests a model of critical engagement that collaborates with the church, bringing together reason and religion to examine the world from various perspectives and offer rich, multidimensional evaluations. Such critique is neither hateful nor lovely. It combines love and hate, suspicion and acceptance, into a complex relation with the existing world, which is sensitive to its evils and able to apply its good aspects to combat them. In fact, we are familiar with alternative models of critique not only from the premodern past, but also from various modern critical practices that do not comply with the Enlightenment rational-dualistic structure. I will now elaborate on one of them, art criticism, which I believe to be especially apt for renewing critical pedagogy.

Love of Critique

The criticism of art in the wide sense of the word, including fine art, literature, cinema, etc., is a matter of aesthetic evaluation. While the systematic study of aesthetics is a fruit of the Enlightenment, even Kant acknowledged that it is not a matter of pure reason but rather an engagement with an object that also involves sensibility and imagination. Yet while Kant

(1790/2000, §22) argued that aesthetic evaluation requires universal consent as if it were asserting objective knowledge, thereby bringing the totalizing moment back in, art criticism also branches in other directions. While I cannot follow any of these directions here, I will place some road signs pointing to the path I find most promising for reviving critical education.

While this trail has been trodden before, it is losing credence in the contemporary intellectual climate, and is in need of clearing and blazing before it can be put to use in the educational context. As is only fit, the trail is now covered by vegetation growing from its two opposing sides. The first is the journalistic critical practice, common in modern capitalist society, whose verdicts amount to unequivocal recommendations for or against the work in question. Just like in Koselleck, such critique distances itself from the work, attempting to simplify and grade it for the consumers' convenience. The second is contemporary academic critique, which has become the scholarly work of experts producing professional knowledge. Such critique attempts to get closer to the work, but often distances itself from the non-academic world, becoming completely irrelevant to society (North, 2017, p. 11).

Yet not all critics (and theorists of critique) take either of these sides. Here, again, alternatives that are more complex are available. In writing about the concept of critique in German romanticism, Walter Benjamin suggests thinking of it as a creative activity that complements the artwork, breathing meaning and life into it (1920/2002). Such critique is not parasitic on the "original" (Benjamin, 1920/2002), nor serves an external economic or academic goal, but rather joins it to produce a rich, dynamic whole, without which the work remains mute. By offering interpretation, it adds a layer to the artwork, without presuming to say the last word. Unlike the totalizing rational critique criticized above, it welcomes further perspectives and interpretations. Hence, it does not have to decide between love and hate. In a most concrete sense, it is in need of both: on the one hand, it stems from love, care, and even devotion to the field; on the other, it is far from singing the work's praise, and its evaluative engagement with art necessarily involves asking questions and revealing flaws. The art critic's relation to the art world, in short, is complicated.

Unlike the academic scholar, the critic does not have to apply any previous knowledge or theory, and unlike the journalist, the scope of her writing is not predetermined by editorial considerations. Critique is an open, creative activity, which meets the demands of the specific case. While it is in a sense "amateurish" (North, 2017, p. 11), it is by no means an easy task: critical aesthetic evaluation involves meticulous scrutiny. At the same time, such scrutiny does not isolate the artwork from the world of which it is part. Benjamin writes that critique should reveal the work's "absoluteness", namely its essential relations to culture, history, and religion (1920/2002, p. 129), and Perry Anderson similarly remarks that critique "tends to transgress the frontiers of the text towards the associated life beyond it" (quoted in North, 2017, p. 10).

Moreover, according to this line of thought, critique is a practical no less than it is a theoretical endeavor. Through its engagement with the artwork, critique takes a stand in relation to the genre to which the work belongs, to the world of art, and to the audience. In fact, good critique always encompasses the world. To be sure, this practical engagement does not pretend to come from nowhere. Rather than voicing the detached perspective of pure reason, it draws on concrete sources and traditions, bringing them to bear on the artwork. It thereby combines aesthetic evaluation with explicit political, ethical, and educational activity (North, 2017, p. 3).

Importantly, the concrete standpoint from which critique is articulated means also that the critic

herself does not remain outside of the picture. Unlike the rational critic, who is the depersonalized voice of reason, she is a real person whose unique perspective is inseparable from the critique she writes. Hence, the transformative, educative impetus of critique is aimed not only outwards, at the readers, but also inwards, at the critic. Art criticism, in other words, is always also a practice of self-critique and self-formation. Through her critical engagement with the world the critic comes to reposition herself in relation to it, and rearrange the categories through which she thinks about it. Not least, she also constantly criticizes the very way she practices critique.

I believe this way of practicing art criticism can remedy the ills of critical pedagogy anticipated by Koselleck and articulated by post-critical pedagogy. The contemporary, 'hateful' critique, which alienates the student and subordinates her to critical knowledge, can be revitalized by inviting her to act like an art critic: to examine the subject matter carefully and interpret it from her own perspective by asking difficult, but loving questions that promote renewal and transformation. Like the premodern critique described by Koselleck, this new kind of critical pedagogy accepts the authority of the institution – in this case, not the church but the school – as long as it welcomes critique.

Although it certainly loves the world, this type of critique, which I call *neo-critique*, is not blinded by love. Rather, it realizes that love, unlike indifference, also involves hate, and therefore contains a desire for the end of the world it loves – for an entirely different world. As in the poetic lines of Césaire, it demands the end of the world – the end of the world, as we know it – and attempts to begin this end, which is also a beginning.

Precisely owing to its insistence on complexity and rejection of simplistic dichotomies, this critique does not depend on prior knowledge generously shared by some master of critique. One can start criticizing right here, right now, and no starting point is better than criticizing critique itself – not in order to do away with it, but to breathe new life into it. This move from post- to neo-critique is therefore much more than semantic. It means that to renew the world critique must renew itself, and search its own rich history for models more suitable for education than current critical pedagogy. Renewing critique requires going beyond the dichotomy between the aesthetic and the political, as well as that between love and hate. Critique itself, however, must be loved and cherished. If philophobia is fear of hateless love, than it is nothing other than criticophilia.

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