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CHAPTER 2

A Utopian Methodology as a Tool
for Cultural and Critical Psychologies:
Toward a Positive Critical Theory

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Introduction

This chapter offers an introduction to a program of research, teaching, and community development that can serve as a model for what we refer to as a *positive critical theory*. *Critical theorizing* has roots in several corners of the humanities and the term means different things across discourse communities. Our use of the term marks our attempt to supersede those forms of criticism that offer no possibility for remedy or redress within the reach of people who don't benefit from reading academic texts.

We reject, for example, the position of the "negative dialectician" Theodore Adorno, who denounced "concrete and positive" suggestions for social change. Adorno's criticism of reform efforts, which he viewed as sad attempts at "administering the unadministratable," was in a word, paralyzing. Adorno thought such reforms would inevitably "call down the monstrous totality of repression upon themselves," and reinforce the status quo (Bronner & Kellner, 1989, p. 275). Adorno's equally bitter rejection of the notion that theory and practice might productively converge is conveyed in his announcement that "no practice can ever be radical enough" (1984, p. 24); practice will never escape its dulling effect on theory.

Our project violates both of these provisos. The term *positive critical theory* is intended to reflect our emphasis on constructing and sustaining alternative arrangements to those decried in critical pedagogy, communication, technology studies, and the communities within which we work. While such efforts may be expected to fail, as Adorno asserts, they provide a crucial means through which we can deepen our understanding of the world, and an empirical basis for