Postmodernism and Education

Different voices, different worlds

Robin Usher and Richard Edwards

ROUTLEDGE

POSTMODERNISM AND EDUCATION

In this book, the authors explore and clarify the nature of postmodernism and provide a detailed introduction to key writers in the field such as Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard. They examine the impact of this thinking upon the contemporary theory and practice of education, concentrating particularly upon how postmodernist ideas challenge existing concepts, structures and hierarchies.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a continuing and growing interest in postmodernism as a 'system' of ideas and as a way of understanding contemporary social and cultural trends. There is now a great deal of published work which examines, often critically, postmodern perspectives and concepts and their implications for the study of a wide range of contemporary phenomena. This work is found in areas such as philosophy, feminist studies, cultural studies, literary criticism and to a lesser extent psychology.

Furthermore, the postmodern is not simply a body of thought, a way of theorising, but also a way of practising—there is a postmodern architecture, art, literature, and even a postmodern psychology. Education as an area of study, however, has remained largely immune from this trend and there is little outside the work of critical and feminist pedagogy that relates postmodern ideas to the processes and structures of education or that examines these in the light of postmodern developments in society and culture. Educational practice, on the other hand, does have many features that could properly be called postmodern even though educational practitioners might be reluctant to recognise this. Thus one thing this text tries to do is to ask how educational practices are to be understood, given that they are already located, even if only partially, within the postmodern. One of our hopes is that in doing this a way of looking at education differently will emerge.

However, there are problems here. One is that the postmodern, the term 'postmodernism' notwithstanding, is not really a 'system' of ideas and concepts in any conventional sense. Rather, it is complex and multiform and resists reductive and simplistic explanation and explication. The 'message' (if such a term can be used for something so inchoate) is the need to problematise systems of thought and organisation and to question the very notion of systematic explanation. The task, then, of seeing education in a

postmodern perspective is rendered particularly difficult if the very notion of a postmodern perspective is itself problematic.

Second, the term 'postmodernism' does not refer to a unified *movement*. It is a general term originating as a critique of modernism particularly in the arts and architecture. In some ways, it is easier to discern what it is against than what it is for. Perhaps it is best understood as a state of mind, a critical, self-referential posture and style, a different way of seeing and working, rather than a fixed body of ideas, a clearly worked-out position or a set of critical methods and techniques.

Third, education is, we would argue, particularly resistant to the postmodern 'message'. Educational theory and practice is founded on the discourse of modernity and its self-understandings have been forged by that discourse's basic and implicit assumptions. Historically, education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity's 'grand narratives', the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised. The very rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on modernity's self-motivated, self-directing, rational subject, capable of exercising individual agency. Postmodernism's emphasis on the inscribed subject, the decentred subject constructed by language, discourses, desire and the unconscious, seems to contradict the very purpose of education and the basis of educational activity.

Undoubtedly, then, there are problems confronting those who attempt to relate postmodernism and the postmodern to education. We have chosen therefore to approach the task obliquely. In this text we proceed by examining certain writers who work within the postmodern moment and whose work has made a significant contribution to it. We have chosen Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard. Recognising that any selection is arbitrary, our criterion for selecting these writers rather than others is that for us they have important, varied and interesting things to say about the postmodern. Apart from Lyotard, their work is not specifically about education. However, all in their different ways, contribute to a re-examination of educational theory and practice in the context of a developing postmodern society. Rather than ranging panoramically over the corpus of their work, we have concentrated with each of them on a number of key ideas and positions which, in our view, are central to understanding the implications of their work for education.

In this introduction, it would be appropriate for us to make at least a preliminary attempt to declare our own position. We stress that it is 'preliminary', indeed 'provisional' as well, because although we are writers of this text we recognise that we cannot be fully aware of our own position as its 'authors'. What we stand for can only emerge through an engagement with the text, and readers will quite possibly understand this differently and in a more complex way than we do. Certainly we are not trying to prove a thesis

or substantiate a hypothesis. In our view, this would be inappropriate in a text that talks about the postmodern. Although this is not a postmodern text, we have attempted to communicate our interest in the postmodern and to illuminate some of its meanings and significance. Our own 'situatedness' as educators necessarily influences our selections, emphases and concerns—as indeed do other aspects of our situatedness, for example our gender, ethnicity and autobiographies. In the same way as we have attempted to 'deconstruct' the text of education, readers are invited to deconstruct this text about education. Hopefully, they will find many meanings and problematic moments which have escaped our intentions and thinking.

We take the view that education is itself going through profound change in terms of purposes, content and methods. These changes are part of a process that, generally, questions the role of education as the child of the Enlightenment. Consequently, education is currently the site of conflict and part of the stakes in that conflict. A postmodern perspective can help us to better understand the conflict and to examine the extent to which it is both a symptom of and a contributor to the socio-cultural condition of postmodernity.

One of the things we have concentrated on is how postmodern ideas and approaches challenge existing concepts, structures and hierarchies of knowledge. Education in both structural and processual terms is, in all its various forms, intimately connected with the production, organisation and dissemination of knowledge. In a sense, the postmodern perspective is a confrontation with epistemology and deeply embedded notions of foundations, disciplines and scientificity. We would argue that this confrontation provides the conceptual resources for thinking anew the effects of education at both the personal and structural level.

Our own attitude to the postmodern is itself ambivalent. At one level, we agree with Couzens Hoy (1988) that in order to be consistently postmodern, one should never call oneself a postmodern. There is a self-referential irony about this which we find ludically apt in encapsulating our relationship as 'authors' to this text. Accordingly, we shall not, and do not at any point, call ourselves 'postmodern'. Are we then being consistently postmodern and is this what we seek to convey to readers? Not necessarily, because who, after all, wants to be consistent?

Certainly, as authors we are interested in postmodernism, fascinated by postmodernity, and recognise our own location in the postmodern moment. That this is as much a matter of desire as it is of reason is not something we would be defensive about, although given 'unwritten' constraints and our own perhaps unnecessarily limited pre-understandings, this text follows more the contours of reason than of desire.

At the very least, we can say that we have followed Bauman's (1992) injunction that the postmodern should be theorised according to its own logic. Although we do not believe that there is a single logic, we take the

point that it is all too easy to play the modern versus postmodern game according to the rules of the former. More important, however, we have followed Bauman in another sense by letting the postmodern 'speak' through presenting those writers whose texts exemplify it.

Accordingly, we have tried to show what it means to be located in the postmodern (even if only partially) by concentrating on Lacan's work on subjectivity, knowledge and the cultural-linguistic system, Foucault's on discourses and power-knowledge relations, Derrida's on signification and textuality, and Lyotard's on grand narratives and performativity. We have asked, in each case, what this means in relation to not only understanding anew the work of education but also to the task of reconfiguring educational purposes and practices.

The examination of the work of Lacan, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard will be found in chapters 3–9. However, we have not confined ourselves exclusively to these writers. In chapter 1, an outline is provided of those key aspects of postmodernism and the postmodern moment which bear on an understanding of contemporary educational issues and trends. In particular, the focus is on the challenge of the postmodern to the the project of modernity within which education is located. In chapter 2 the focus is on the discourse and narrative of science and psychology is examined as a case study of the problems which occur when this narrative is applied to an understanding of the 'human'. Psychology, both in its scientific and humanistic variants, was chosen because of its historical connection with educational theory and practice and because it embodies foundationality, disciplinarity and scientificity—all vital features of the project of modernity.

In chapter 10, we focus on experiential learning because of its implication with the cultivation of desire, a key aspect of the postmodern, and because of its related importance on the contemporary educational scene. We attempt therefore to locate experiential learning in the postmodern moment and to the socio-cultural developments that characterise postmodernity. Chapter 11 attempts to bring out the implications of what has gone before for a reconfiguration of the practice of education, its theorisations, structures and processes. In doing this we look again at the project of critical pedagogy, partially located in the postmodern and the nearest thing to a radical theory of schooling. In our view, this, rather than a conclusion in the conventional sense, is the best way of ending a text which, although it poses more questions than it answers and pursues no consistent 'line', is nonetheless haunted throughout by the emancipatory possibilities of education. Part of our 'project' has been to problematise the very notion of emancipation in the project of modernity and to show its oppressive assumptions and consequences, particularly in and through education.

Education is perhaps the most important way we relate to the world, to the way we experience, understand and attempt to change the world and to the ways we in which we understand ourselves and our relations with others.

Questions of emancipation and oppression must therefore lie at its very heart. We have no answers but we do believe that the postmodern, so long as it too does not become yet another project, yet another totalising and oppressive discourse, gives us a fresh and radical way of confronting these questions.

1

POSTMODERNISM, POSTMODERNITY AND THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

Postmodernism: does it exist at all and, if so, what does it mean? Is it a concept or practice, a matter of local style or a whole new period or economic phase? What are its forms, effects, place?

(Foster 1985:ix)

The postmodern moment is an awareness of being within a way of thinking. The speaker (subject) cannot absolutely name the terms of that moment.

(Marshall 1992:3)

There is sense here, but not safe sense. Sense made here is limited, local, provisional and always critical. Self-critical. That is sense within the postmodern moment. That is the postmodern.

(Marshall 1992:2)

LOCATING THE POSTMODERN

Although it is customary to define what one is writing about, in the case of 'postmodernism' this is neither entirely possible nor entirely desirable. As Foster in the quote above makes clear there are many questions arising from and about postmodernism, postmodernity and the postmodern but no one simple answer or definition. The attempt to provide a definitive conceptualisation continues to spawn an extensive literature (e.g. Bauman 1992, Best and Kellner 1991, Boyne and Rattansi 1990, Connor 1989, Crook *et al.* 1992, Featherstone 1991, Foster 1985, Harvey 1991, Lash 1990, Lyotard 1984, Rosenau 1992, Seidman and Wagner 1992, Smart 1992, Wakefield 1990). This is a literature encompassing many areas and covering a variety of academic disciplines and cultural practices; for example, literature, music, art, architecture, the media, advertising, photography and cinema. Given the widespread impact of the postmodern this is appropriate enough, but it is of limited help if the task is seen as one of arriving at a clear definition.

At the same time, however, as Marshall (1992) implies in the quotes above, the postmodern is probably not something that is nameable anyhow–or at least if it is, only partially so. Perhaps, then, all we can say with any degree of safety is what it is *not*. Certainly, it is not a term that designates a systematic theory or comprehensive philosophy. Neither does it refer to a 'system' of ideas or concepts in the conventional sense, nor is it the name denoting a unified social or cultural movement. All that one can say is that it is complex and multiform, resisting reductive and simplistic explanation. As Smart puts it:

> The postmodern problematic has been invoked to distinguish an historical period, an aesthetic style, and a change in the condition of knowledge; to conceptualise difference–a distinctive form beyond the modern–as well as similarity–a variant of the modern or its limit form; and to describe affirmative or reactionary and critical or progressive discourses and movements.
>
> (Smart 1992:164)

What Smart is suggesting, and what we perhaps can say positively, is that the postmodern is, at the very least, a *contested* terrain.

There is a sense, anyhow, in which it is impossible to fully define the postmodern since the very attempt to do so confers upon it a status and identity which it must necessarily oppose. In other words, any attempt at definition must lead to paradox since it is to totalise, to provide a single unified explanation of that which sets its face against totalisation. Marshall's comment implies that there is sense within the postmodern–we can understand it–but any understanding is never 'safe'–it cannot be fully pinned down, universalised or domesticated. As soon as we say 'the postmodern *is*' we give it a fixed and definitive ontology and identity and as Nicholson points out:

> Postmodernism must reject a description of itself as embodying a set of timeless ideals contrary to those of modernism; it must insist on being recognised as a set of viewpoints of a time, justifiable only within its own time.
>
> (Nicholson 1990:11)

To talk about postmodernity, postmodernism or the postmodern is not therefore to designate some fixed and systematic 'thing'. Rather, it is to use a loose umbrella term under whose broad cover can be encompassed at one and the same time a condition, a set of practices, a cultural discourse, an attitude and a mode of analysis. Lovlie (1992:120) advocates using 'postmodernism' as an index term for a position that is 'different' from traditional ones–'a different position which in fact makes difference itself its point of view'.

In what follows we do not intend or pretend to sift through the various strands of the existing literature on postmodernism and the postmodern with

a view to presenting a definitive perspective. Such an enterprise would be inconsistent with an important 'message' of the postmodern, that knowledge cannot be systematised or totalised into a singular, all-encompassing framework. In this chapter we shall attempt to provide a broad overview of certain key strands in the on-going debate about the modern and the postmodern, and from this examine the position of education; this will then form a backdrop for the more elaborated discussions that follow in later chapters.

Featherstone (1991) suggests that instead of trying to construct a single, all-encompassing definition it is more useful to look at the family of terms such as 'postmodernity', 'postmodernisation', 'postmodernism' and 'postmodern'. 'Modernity', a distinct period or epoch of historical development, has its origins in the Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century which, in contrast to the apparent stability of antiquity or the 'premodern', marked the inauguration of the economic and socio-cultural disruptions which founded industrial capitalism and the nation-state. Postmodernity suggests something 'after' modernity, or perhaps something that has replaced it. Featherstone argues that there has occurred 'an epochal shift or break from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organising principles' (1991:3). Here postmodernity refers to a new epoch, a new socio-economic order, associated with the notion of a post-culture, 'post-industrial' society and the changes produced by information technology, particularly in the sphere of global communications and media. It is an epoch of post-Fordism or 'flexible specialisation' (see Harvey 1991 and Murray 1989) where human lives are being reshaped, and in many cases disrupted, by new forces and desires.

'Modernisation' refers more specifically to the impact of economic development on social structures based upon 'industrialisation, the growth of science and technology, the modern state, the capitalist world market, urbanisation and other infrastructural elements' (Featherstone 1991:6). Alongside these developments have come cultural changes such as secularisation, the emphasis on self and personal growth, and the growing importance of electronic media and information technology. Postmodernisation is associated with the growth of service sector employment and 'postindustrial' social formations. The modern centres of production—the factory and large-scale manufacturing enterprise—are replaced in importance by centres of consumption—business and finacial services, shopping malls, entertainment centres and theme parks. Emerging from this development is a breakdown of modern, production-oriented identity as the cultural sphere becomes overloaded with consumption possibilities of which modern sensibilities can no longer make sense.

One aspect which many writers focus on is the question of the continuity between modernisation and postmodernisation, modernity and postmodernity. Featherstone's analysis of 'postmodernity' suggests that there

is a 'break' from modernity to postmodernity, with the latter qualitatively different from the former, and that this break is the condition of a new and distinct 'social totality'. However, the notion that postmodernity represents a break with modernity is itself contentious. Other writers (e.g. Harvey 1991, Jameson 1984) have therefore argued that postmodernity is a continuation of modernity.

Lyotard (1984) has argued that it is possible to distinguish between the modern and the postmodern. However, the distinction is characterised primarily by changes in metaphysical forms, narratives of legitimacy and the organisation of knowledge. Foucault (1986) does not think in terms of epochal or periodic changes but rather sees modernity and postmodernity as oppositional attitudes which can be and indeed always are present in any epoch or period. Couzens Hoy (1988) points out that the very notion of periodisation is modernist. In defining and delineating a period through its characteristics, one has already moved beyond it. The present cannot therefore understand itself as a period other than through a modernist 'metabelief that it is another period. It is characteristically postmodern to challenge this 'by disrupting the modernist assumption that periods are self-contained unities or coherent wholes clearly individuated from one another' (1988:13). Postmodern thought is happy to use the tools of modernity–for example, the prefix 'post' even though this implies an acceptance of periodisation–but does so 'rhetorically to subvert the progressivist assumption that modernity is the unequivocal telos of history' (1988:14).

Progressivism and its consequent teleology are key features of modernity. Smart refers to modernity's faith in rationality and science. This faith is allied to the strong conviction of the spread of rationality in the conduct of human affairs and a progressive growth in scientific knowledge that:

> uncovers the natural order of things, making possible the construction of technologies through which control might be exercised over the development of events… A conception of inexorable progress, from the past through to the present and on into the future, has been a distinctive feature of modern Western civilisation.
>
> (Smart 1992:62)

The faith in rationality and science with its promise of inevitable progress in the task of human betterment is perhaps the feature of modernity which has come under most significant attack. Debates within modernity e.g. that between Marxism and liberalism over the course of science-dictated progress have come under a deeper epistemological and metaphysical questioning. Human progress through the progress of scientific knowledge is one of those 'metanarratives' or 'grand narratives', the higher-order metaphysical forms of legitimation which, according to Lyotard (1984), are marked out as subject to

'incredulity' in postmodernity. Consequently, the notion of inevitable progress has been thrown into doubt, rendered 'incredible', by the continuation of want, disease, famine, destruction and the recognition of the ecological costs of 'development'. Both Lyotard (1992) and Bauman (1992) argue that the humanising and progressive mission of modernity revealed its bankruptcy in the Holocaust. For them the Holocaust, rather than denying, actually represents the triumph of rationality and the application of scientific principles and knowledge to the 'efficient conduct of human affairs'.

In postmodernity, the breakdown of the faith in science and rationality has further ramifications and associations. We witness a questioning of the scientific attitude, a denial of modernist scientificity with its emphasis on the universal efficacy of scientific method and of the stance of objectivity and value-neutrality in the making of knowledge-claims. As Lather (1992:90) puts it: 'foregrounded as an ideological ruse, the claim to value-neutrality is held to delimit our concept of science and obscure and occlude its own particularity and interest'. The epistemological stance which sees scientific method as producing value-free and therefore 'true' knowledge is no longer so readily accepted. There is an increasing recognition that all knowledge-claims are partial, local and specific rather than universal and ahistorical, and that they are always imbued with power and normative interests—indeed that what characterises modernity is precisely the concealing of the partiality and rootedness of knowledge-claims in the cloak of universality and value-neutrality. Thus in postmodernity there is a rejection of universal and transcendental foundations of knowledge and thought, and a heightened awareness of the significance of language, discourse and socio-cultural locatedness in the making of any knowledge-claim.

In effect, in the condition of postmodernity, there is a questioning of the modernist belief in a legitimate and hence legitimating centre upon which beliefs and actions can be grounded. Science and the faith in inevitable progress provided such a centre, an 'authorising' position from which control could be exerted and socio-cultural hierarchies legitimated through a process of 'mastery'. With the questioning of the legitimacy of mastery and the accompanying 'decentring' of knowledge, modernist certainty is undermined with consequent uncertainty pervading thought and action. Postmodernity, then, describes a world where people have to make their way without fixed referents and traditional anchoring points. It is a world of rapid change, of bewildering instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meaning 'floats' without its traditional teleological fixing in foundational knowledge and the belief in inevitable human progress. But the significant thing is that in postmodernity uncertainty, the lack of a centre and the floating of meaning are understood as phenomena to be celebrated rather than regretted. In postmodernity, it is complexity, a myriad of meanings, rather than profundity, the one deep meaning, which is the norm (see Couzens Hoy 1988).

The lack of certainty is closely associated with the 'hyper-commodification' (Crook *et al.,* 1992) that is a characteristic of the social formation in postmodernity. Here, the consumer and consumerism increasingly reign supreme. Meanings that felt comfortable are no longer so. The communication/media 'revolution' means that people are engulfed by 'information' to the extent where the distinction between reality and the word/image which portrays it breaks down into a condition of hyperreality (Baudrillard 1988). Words, images and the information they convey become open to multiple interpretations, mirroring multiperspectival knowledge and the breakdown of 'objectivity', and where, in a condition of semiotic promiscuity (or 'radical semiurgy' as Baudrillard puts it), no single, unified, coherent grid of 'common sense' can be applied. Baudrillard's hyperreality is a world of constantly proliferating signs or 'simulacra' which come to replace reality, creating new forms of experience and hence subjectivity in the process. Featherstone argues that in this situation the subject of postmodernity is best understood as:

> the ideal-type channel-hopping MTV viewer who flips through different images at such speed that she/he is unable to chain the signifiers together into a meaningful narrative, he/she merely enjoys the multiphrenic intensities and sensations of the surface of the images.
>
> (Featherstone 1991:5)

In other words, in postmodernity, sensibilities are attuned to the pleasure of constant and new experiencing, a desire which is its own end, unsubordinated to and therefore unconstrained by a hierarchy of foundational and transcendental reason and values. Experiencing becomes its own justification. In postmodernity the cultivation of desire threatens and to some extent replaces modernity's cultivation of reason. There is an emphasis on:

> the tendencies in consumer culture which favour the aestheticisation of life, the assumption that the aesthetic life is the ethically good life and that there is no human nature or true self, with the goal of life an endless pursuit of new experiences, values and vocabularies.
>
> (Featherstone 1991:126)

We would add that this aestheticisation does not simply refer to elite 'high' culture since postmodernity is characterised, largely through the influence of the media, by a blurring of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' or popular culture. The pursuit of new experience is not confined to the realm of 'good taste' but is part of the constant making and re-making of a 'lifestyle' where transcendental standards of good taste and aesthetic judgement no longer possess the power they held in modernity. The 'tradition' of high culture

itself becomes merely a part of a culture of postmodernism, part of the emporium of styles to be promiscuously dipped into (Crook *et al.* 1992). It becomes yet another experience to be sampled–neither intrinsically better nor worse. The postmodern pursuit of experience has been likened to 'cruising' (Turner 1993), a notion perhaps best epitomised by the comment of Baudrillard (1990:168) that 'the further you travel the more clearly you realise that the journey is all that matters'.

The archetypal person of modernity also experiences a sense of the 'contingency of the present', a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation. However, in modernity there is still an attempt to make sense of the socio-cultural space occupied. Modernity is characterised by a hermeneutic search for an underlying and unifying truth and certainty that can render the world, experiences and events (including the self and its experiences) coherent and meaningful. Postmodernity on the other hand 'is marked by a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order, either in actuality or in potency' (Bauman 1992:35). The parallel and related search for a 'true' or authentic self gives way to an aestheticisation of everyday life in a 'playfulness' where identity is formed by a constantly unfolding desire expressed through choices of lifestyle. Thus in postmodernity, the decentring of knowledge is paralleled by the decentring of the subject. The unified subject of modern humanism as an assumed grounding for identity and action is reconceived as a multiple subjectivity constituted (and reconstituted) through the acquisition of multiple meanings.

We therefore need to recognise that terms like 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernism' are separable and should not be used interchangeably. Hutcheon (1989) argues that confusion has arisen because postmodern*ism*– the cultural expression of postmodernity–has been conflated with postmodern*ity*–a socio-economic 'condition'. For Lovlie (1992:120) 'postmodernism is one voice in the many-faceted discourse of (post)modern times'. 'Postmodernism' according to Featherstone (1991:8) commonly refers to 'fundamental cultural changes as well as the possible expansion of the significance of culture in contemporary Western societies'. He argues that it is a term appropriately applied 'to a wide range of artistic practices and social science and humanities disciplines because it directs our attention to changes taking place in contemporary culture' (1991:11). One important reference, then, is to the state of contemporary cultural trends, the contemporary state of culture in its broadest sense, and to the increasing contemporary emphasis upon the 'cultural' to the extent where it is possible to talk of a complete blurring of the 'culture-society' boundary.

The significant feature of postmodernism is the breaking down of the hierarchical barriers between high and popular culture, art and everyday life leading to 'a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and the mixing of

codes; parody, pastiche and irony; a playfulness and the celebration of the surface depthlessness of culture' (Featherstone 1991:7). The emphasis in postmodernism on promiscuity', 'surface', 'play', 'depthlessness', makes it easy to caricature and dismiss as a trendy fad manufactured by intellectuals and cultural critics fearing for their livelihoods or who, because of boredom, seek something new, playful and transgressive. We do not sympathise with this position. Rather, we would argue that postmodernism should be taken seriously (although perhaps in a playful way!) because it directs our attention to the centrality of culture in the changes taking place at all levels–from the everyday practices and experiences of different social groups to more 'rarefied' artistic, intellectual and academic activities.

Postmodernism therefore signifies the changes that are taking place in the production, circulation and consumption of culture. However, there are significant theoretical differences over the nature and origins of postmodernism. Sociologists and others (e.g. Beck 1993, Crook *et al.* 1992, Giddens 1993, Harvey 1991, Jameson 1984) conduct a fierce debate about how these changes are to be understood–as examples of the most recent development of modernity,'high' modernity or reflexive modernity, as a qualitative, epochal break from modernity to postmodernity or the continuation of modernity to the extremes of its own logic where it ruptures and becomes postmodernity. All these positions exemplify the nature of postmodernism as a contested terrain, marking our uncertainty as to how we should properly characterise the times we live in. Yet, despite this uncertainty, there are still, as Marshall (1992) points out, enough glimpses of the postmodern moment or condition in our everyday lives for it to be something which is not as alien and incomprehensible as those who seek to caricature or dismiss postmodernism would make it out to be.

In postmodernism, cultural practices and media are seen as having an unprecedented impact and a central role in framing sensibilities and identities. We have noted the aestheticisation of everyday life as the cultural spreads throughout the social formation. This centrality signals a new cultural paradigm and in this sense postmodernism does indeed break with the past in representing both a changed culture, a change in the relationship between the cultural and other dimensions of social life and a change in the very way in which the place of the cultural is understood.

Lash (1990) identifies a number of components of the postmodernist cultural paradigm. He argues that postmodernism breaks with modernism in that the latter is a process of cultural differentiation producing clearly defined boundaries of practice and meaning whilst postmodernism on the other hand is a process of 'de-differentiation' where boundaries break down. Consequently different cultural spheres lose their autonomy, as 'the aesthetic realm begins to colonise both theoretical and moral-political spheres' (Lash 1990:11). The breakdown in the distinction between high and popular culture marks a different relationship between consumers/ audience and

producers/artists. The cultural producer is no longer the autonomous 'genius', the legislator of 'good taste', whilst the the consumer now has the opportunity to actively engage, and in a sense therefore 'produce', the cultural event rather than being a merely passive receiver.

Postmodernism is also associated with a de-differentiation in the mode of signification. In modernism, meaning is established through a clear representational relationship between the referent (the 'real' object), and the sign consisting of the signifier (the word/image that 'names' the object) fixed to a signified (the concept associated with the word/image). Postmodernism problematises this relationship by not only questioning the very notion of representation, the relationship between sign and reality, but also by arguing that because the word/image (signifier) is no longer attached to fixed signifieds, the sign becomes the signifier and therefore becomes its own 'reality'. The signifier actually comes to replace an independently existing 'objective' reality such that the referent becomes an effect rather than a source of the sign and where therefore 'everyday life becomes pervaded with a reality−in TV, adverts, video, communication, the Walkman, cassette decks in automobiles, and now, increasingly, CDs, CDV, and DAT−which increasingly comprises representations' (Lash 1990:12). This is what Baudrillard refers to as the 'simulacrum'−the condition where reality is always already reproduced.

It is important to be clear about this. Postmodernism is not simply a critique of realism−that cultural representations do not simply reflect or mirror reality. Late modernism is characterised by a rejection of the notion that the cultural form should realistically represent what it portrays. Then, there is an emphasis in art, literature and music on a 'problem-solving approach' where 'the working out of the possibilities in the aesthetic material is the problem to be solved' (Lash 1990:14). The critique of realism in modernism leads ultimately to a self-referential process where 'Schönberg's music, Joyce's writing, Picasso's art become increasingly impenetrable to even an educated bourgeois audience' (Crook *et al*. 1992:51)−in other words, to forms of cultural elitism. What's at work here is a process of 'hyperrationalisation', the problem-solving approach of modernism taken to its extreme limit where 'aesthetic rationality becomes fragmented, and authoritative tradition mutates into an archive' (1992:75)− in other words, the fragmentation and 'surfaceness' which is the postmodern condition.

Postmodernism goes beyond anti-realism. It questions representation and the underlying belief of a reality that is independent of representation yet capturable by it. However, it also puts forward the notion of a reality constructed by representations and therefore of multiple perspectives where representations *become* reality and where reality is *always,* necessarily, represented. As we have noted earlier, for Baudrillard (1988) this is a condition of 'hyperreality', the condition where meanings become signifiers

which refer to other signifiers in a constant reflexivity of signs and an endless multiplicity of meanings. The 'truth' of cultural activities and objects lies therefore not in how closely they represent reality but rather in their referentiality, their relationship to other signifiers. Hence the result is a reconstruction of 'taste'.

At the same time, postmodernism recognises that representation is not a neutral process, that there is a *politics* of representation where all forms of cultural representation have a 'complicity with power and domination' (Hutcheon 1989:4). As Foster (1985:xv) puts it: 'we are never outside representation—or rather never outside its polities'. Knowing the world is not a matter of faithfully representing it since the very act of representation is itself discursively bound up with values and power. Hutcheon (1989:8) argues that 'the postmodern appears to coincide with a general cultural awareness of the existence and power of systems of representation which do not *reflect* society so much as grant meaning and value within a particular society'. The granting of meaning and value is never a process that operates outside of either language or power. Thus in postmodernism there is a recognition that whilst representation is problematic, it is always inescapably implicated with power and therefore cannot be abolished by avant-gardist acts of will.

The problematising of representation in modernism is succeeded by 'playfulness' in postmodernism. This is the ludic side of the postmodern moment where seriousness is replaced by parody and irony. 'Serious' modern culture aims to give a 'truthful' representation of reality and thus to educate people into viewing the world in particular ways conducive to 'progress'. It provides the grounds and the means for dismissing other cultural experiences as mere 'entertainment', unserious and not 'really' art. Postmodernism questions such distinctions in the very process of being 'playful' or ludic in its practices. Referring to postmodern art, Best and Kellner (1991:11) argue that 'against modernist values of seriousness, purity, and individuality [it] exhibits a new insouciance, a new playfulness, and a new eclecticism'. The ludic practices of postmodernism should not be dismissed as mere frivolity since they function as a means of challenging the power of representation and totalising discourses (discourses that present themselves as the final 'truth', which explain everything) without falling into another and equally oppressive power discourse.

Modernity's equation of progress, emancipation and enlightenment is sustained within a serious intent and purpose, and from the perspective of this equation the ludic aspect of the postmodern simply cannot be comprehended, let alone taken seriously. However, it is precisely the oppositional, critical implications of a ludic postmodernism that need foregrounding. Within the ludic, the constant subversion/transgression of the power of totalising discourses replaces the unrealisable teleology of a reified notion of emancipation and democracy. There is undoubtedly a divergence

between those who argue for a 'pure' and serious postmodernism of resistance and those who would revel in the ludic and ignore resistance. The former, it is claimed, wish 'to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo' (Foster 1985:xi). However, we disagree with Foster when he then goes on to claim that the latter use deconstruction the better to celebrate the status quo. We would argue, on the contrary, that resistant and ludic postmodernism are two sides of the same coin, that each depends for its effects on the other. Thus, unlike many educators who have tended to recognise and deploy only certain allegedly 'resistant' aspects of a postmodern analysis, we do not wish to reject the ludic. On the contrary, we would see it as the very basis of resistance; indeed, we would want to argue for the ludic as a form of resistance and for resistance needing to always deploy the ludic the better to do its work. Without engaging with the ludic we are left with the forms of social analysis which become totalising despite their intent and remain oppositional but ineffective because *as forms* they lack the emotional investment of a *desire* for change.

The postmodern moment, in one sense, can therefore be seen as a celebration and tolerance of pluralism and difference leading to 'a much more ambivalent and less fixed positioning of subjectivity' (Lash 1990:198). The self and subjectivity can no longer be thought of as unified and coherent but 'decentred'. From a postmodern perspective, the 'centred' subject does not exist naturally and pre-formed but is rather a cultural *construct,* inscribed by the meaning system that is language and by discourses, particular and systematic uses of language.

But to talk in terms of the constructive power of language and discourse is immediately to locate oneself in the postmodern. One of the most significant insights offered by such a location is that language and the way language is organised into particular and delimited networks of meaning (discourses) is not 'innocent' because language as a signifying system does more than denote and describe. As the postmodern problematises the logic of naming, representation and language, so the constitutive power of language is foregrounded.

Being located in the postmodern also points to the importance of textuality, of writing, and of reflexivity in the sense of having an elaborated awareness of what is done and what is constructed through text and discourse. Reflexivity is not just a matter of being aware of one's prejudices and standpoints but of recognising that through language, discourse and text, worlds are created and re-created in ways of which we are rarely aware. We cannot always recognise that we are subjects within language and within particular historical, cultural and social frameworks. The key questions then become how we both constitute and are constituted by language, and where lies the power to interpret and control meaning. As Connor (1989:5) points out, we become aware of the 'history and constructed nature of our sense of what experience and knowledge are'–and we would add, our self-knowledge

or self-identity. That our very subjectivity is constructed (although not necessarily determined) implies that although we believe that as 'sovereign' subjects we control meaning, it is nonetheless meaning which, to an important degree, 'confines' and 'defines' us. Here, then, is a challenge to the modernist 'sovereign' subject and an alternative theorisation of identity as *relational,* a matter of subject positioning through discourses or regimes of meaning; an 'active' but not sovereign subject (see Weedon 1987), a subject involved in discursive self-production which yet continually strives for a sense of coherence and continuity (Lather 1991a).

In our discussion so far of the postmodern we have foregrounded socio-economic and cultural meanings. However, the term 'postmodern' has another meaning which is also widely used; the 'postmodern' as an intellectual position, a process of reflecting on the condition of postmodernity or, more specifically, the postmodern as a particular kind of practice or mode of analysis. Marshall (1992:5) argues that the postmodern does not so much refer to a period or a movement but to 'a moment…more a moment in logic than in time…a space where meaning takes place…a moment of rupture, of change'. For Hutcheon (1989:15) the postmodern is not a concept but a problematic, 'a complex of heterogeneous but interrelated questions which will not be silenced by any spuriously *unitary* answer'.

To be incredulous of grand or metanarratives, the master stories of modernity, is to precisely question totalising explanations, foundational logic and the 'spuriously unitary answer'. It is to recognise the need to problematise 'systems' of thought and organisation and, indeed, to question the very notion of 'system' and 'systematic' explanation. The epistemological, metaphysical and humanistic assumptions which have constituted the modern condition and within which debates have raged over the means of achieving knowledge, rationality and emancipation, fragment under the impact of their own failure and the postmodern challenge based on that failure. Here, then, the 'postmodern' refers to something much more inchoate and difficult to pin down than the cognate terms we have discussed so far. The reference is perhaps more to a state of mind, a critical posture and style, a different way of seeing and working, than to a fixed position, however oppositional, or to an unchanging set of critical techniques. In this sense, the postmodern may be more 'a symptom of the present malaise than a cure for modernity and its manifold discontents' (Weeks 1993:186).

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to say something about post-structuralism since many of the thinkers we shall be engaging with in the coming chapters are commonly designated as post-structuralists. Foster (1985:x) claims that 'postmodernism is hard to conceive without continental theory, structuralism and post-structuralism in particular'. Post-structuralism is a term associated and often merged with postmodernism although there are many, rightly in our view, who would want to resist this. It is perhaps best understood as a way of thinking, a theoretical position or mode of

analysis. Marshall (1992) defines it as a paradigm of study rather than an intellectual field in its own right, a way of analysing and asking questions by anyone in *any* field about anything 'textual' both in the narrow conventional sense of written texts and in the much broader sense of any discourses, practices, institutions—in other words, any structure generally which is productive of signification.

Post-structuralism, although in some ways easier to pin down, is still very diverse. Its impact has varied between countries, disciplines and philosophical traditions. It has been most influential in the humanities and social sciences where, like postmodernism, it has been part of a movement of resistance to any form of totalisation and closure. Indeed, it shares much in common with postmodernism, for example in their common emphasis on the constitutive effects of language and discourse and the consequent 'decentring' of the modernist subject. Marshall (1992:8) argues that post-structuralism and postmodernism are not identical, but that 'only within the postmodern moment do the questions raised by post-structuralists have currency…these post-structuralist concerns and questions—about language, texts, interpretation, subjectivity for example—specifically lend themselves to larger historical, cultural questions which inhabit the postmodern moment'.

Part of the problem that readers have in relation to the debates about postmodernism and post-structuralism is that many of their 'exemplary' texts are not easy to master. Some regard them as impenetrable and inaccessible and this is particularly the case with English-speaking readers unused to their heightened intellectualism and theoretical denseness. Continental philosophy, which provides the conceptual resources and an important background intellectual tradition for these texts, is not something to which the English-speaking reader readily relates. This difficulty is not a mere inconvenience or idiosyncrasy which can be 'put right' by a lucid exposition of their meaning. Postmodernist and particularly post-structuralist texts deliberately foreground the importance of language by emphasising their 'textuality', their status as texts. Two significant points can be made about these texts. First, they seek to challenge representationality, the idea that texts simply represent a 'reality' outside their being as texts and that their 'truth' can be found in the fidelity with which they represent the world or the intentions of their authors. In this sense, they problematise the powerful modernist position that truth is a matter of 'correspondence' with an outside 'reality'. Second, and this is why they are not easy to 'master', they are often trying to make a self-exemplifying point about the impossibility of any attempt by the centred, 'sovereign' subject (the author, commentator, reader or 'translator') to master language and present clear and definitive meanings which capture the 'truth'. Post-structuralist texts contain within themselves a running commentary on and critique of the position of *logocentrism,* the possibility of knowing the world in a direct and unmediated way—'as it really is'.

In the chapters that follow we shall present our own reading of a number of key post-structuralist texts. These texts are drawn from the work of Lacan, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard. All these writers can be said to be, and have been described as, 'post-structuralists' even though they themselves have often and explicitly resisted this label–and with some justification, because, as we shall see, they are very different in terms of their areas of concern. Yet at the same time they all have some things in common. If we follow the view that the postmodern moment involves 'the rejection of all essentialist and transcendental conceptions of human nature; the rejection of unity, homogeneity, totality, closure and identity; the rejection of the pursuit of the real and the true' (Squires 1993:2), then each of these writers is at the very least part of, and a powerful contributor to, that moment which is now.

FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNISM: AN UNEASY ALLIANCE

> The crisis in Western representation, its authority (male) and universalising claims was…a crisis that was first announced by those social groups that had been systematically denied historical representation. The feminist challenge to the patriarchal order of things was in this sense epistemological in that it questioned the structure of representations by interrogating the (male) system of legitimation by which they are endorsed or excluded.
>
> (Wakefield 1990:21)

It would be an omission of major significance to attempt to locate the postmodern without a discussion of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism–a relationship which, we argue, can be characterised as one of uneasy alliance. In what follows we shall attempt to outline some of the sources and key features of this alliance.

By the late 1980s a number of feminist writers had initiated a dialogue about the then parallel concerns of feminism and postmodernism. This represented a major shift away from the standpoint of liberal humanism and Marxism which had influenced the evolution of feminist concerns in the 1960s and 1970s. In *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir (1972:29) had argued that 'what particularly signalises the situation of women is that she–a free and autonomous being like all human creatures–nevertheless finds herself in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the the other'.

The significance of de Beauvoir's text lies in its uncritical embracing of many of the key elements of modernist thinking rooted in the Enlightenment tradition; that, for example, women are part of a common humanity with selves that were free, autonomous and rational, and who were capable of

determining, from a position of equality, the nature of their identity and aspirations. This emphasis on equality and rights as universals was a key characteristic of much feminist theory in the 1960s and 1970s and provided the theoretical underpinning for the equal opportunities paradigm so prevalent in the educational policies and practices of advanced Western capitalist societies.

However, after two decades of theoretical development and the accompanying fragmentation within the feminist movement itself, feminists began to argue that what they needed was theory that allowed them to think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather unities and universals. They needed to challenge the tradition of Western thought that had constructed a number of hierarchies in which masculine concerns were presented as universal and feminine concerns as specific and partial. The task, therefore, was not only to challenge the dualities around which Western thought had been organised but to develop alternative ways of thinking about gender relations without dualities. By the early 1990s a number of writers (Flax 1990, Hekman 1990, Nicholson 1990) had published critical analyses of the similar yet different concerns of feminist theory and postmodern philosophy. Such accounts recognised that, in replicating the categories underpinning mainstream social science, they were not only defined as marginal within their chosen field of scholarship, but that feminist theory itself had a negligible influence in challenging the 'God's-eye view' standpoint of academic disciplines claiming to transcend the perspectives of any one particular view or group. Part of their project, therefore, was to challenge those claims of objectivity in scholarship which functioned to disguise the value-laden nature of theoretical enquiry. It was at this point that the interests of feminism and postmodernism began to converge more explicitly.

Yet any alliance between feminism and postmodernism is and will continue to remain an uneasy one, first, because there is a plurality of feminist positions (there are 'feminisms' rather than 'feminism') not all of which accept the need to radically challenge modernism and, second, because feminism is itself located in the legacy of the Enlightenment tradition; the latter's emancipatory impulse nurtures the roots both of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century feminism and Marxism. Certainly it was not unattractive for women to believe that, even though they have been defined as incapable of self-emancipation in the past, nevertheless a commitment to the concepts of reason, objective truth and beneficial progress through scientific enquiry would eventually lead to an acceptance of their potential and capacity to be regarded as men's equals. However, it is the very failure of this tradition to 'deliver' on emancipation which has provided part of the impulse for the turn towards postmodernism.

A significant body of feminist theory is prepared to enter into a dialogue with postmodern discourses in order to challenge the homocentrism, the

rationalisms and the dualisms underpinning Enlightenment epistemology. By challenging, among other things, the dichotomies of rational/ irrational, subject/object, culture/nature, feminism has potentially much to gain from adopting a postmodern stance. Meanwhile, feminism crucially adds to that stance the insight that all these dichotomies are gendered. Hekman (1990), for example, argues that the rationalism at the basis of Western thought is specifically masculine. The claim that only rational, abstract, universalistic thought can produce truth embodies a masculine definition of truth. In each of the dichotomies, the male is associated with the privileged element–rational, subject, culture–and the female with the disprivileged element–irrational, object, nature.

As feminists see it, it is in the very dualities of Western thought that women and the concepts and values associated with them are defined and positioned as negative reference points in relation to the privileged positioning of masculinity and men. Masculinity, by its association with rationality, objectivity and universality, assigns femininity to a permanent category of subordination. The feminist critique, therefore, extends the postmodern critique of reason as transcendental and universal by revealing its 'worldly', specifically gendered character.

Given that feminism is not a unified discourse, the implications of a dialogue between it and postmodernism, which is itself not a unified discourse, are extremely complex. Some feminists accept an analysis of the dualisms underpinning Enlightenment thought but refuse to accept the postmodernist argument that a mere reversal of the dichotomies can only lead to further oppression. In their eyes, the privileging of masculinity can be reversed by extolling female nature and characteristics associated with it of caring, intimacy, relatedness, community and aesthetic appreciation. Theorists such as Hekman counter this by pointing to the history of the methodological dispute between the natural and social sciences; they argue that by not attacking the dichotomy that grounds the hierarchy, feminists and anti-positivists merely enhance the power of Enlightenment epistemology to confine both femininity and social research to an inferior position.

A further aspect of postmodern thinking which causes some feminists difficulty is its refusal to accept that the proper application of reason will produce the truth; that such knowledge will say something real and unchanging about our minds and the structure of the natural world. If absolute truth is not a possibility feminism is supposedly undermined in two respects. First, a commitment to political action without a basis in fixed certainties opens up the prospect of shifting relativities in emancipation. Second, some feminists seek to valorise women by arguing for the essential and superior qualities of female 'nature'. This becomes difficult if male absolutes have to be abandoned for, then, so too it seems must the 'essentially feminine'.

These two difficulties reveal both the extent to which many feminists are rooted in modernist assumptions about knowledge and, equally, some of the problems raised by a postmodern stance. In arguing for a feminist epistemology, they would not want to fully accept and apply to *themselves* the postmodern argument that since all knowledge is contextual and historic the absolute/relative opposition is obsolete. In committing themselves to a political programme of changing a society which privileges the masculine they are defending one of the foundations of modernism; the rational, self-directing individual who freely seeks her rights through emancipatory political action. Feminists are, therefore, very sensitive to the criticisms made of postmodernism by theorists such as Habermas who claim that by disrupting the equation of the Enlightenment, modernity and emancipation, the way is opened up for the conservative status quo or, worse still, a nihilistic society in which there are no standards of truth or progress.

Faced with these real difficulties, the feminist response is varied. Hartsock (1990) represents those feminists who believe that postmodernism is more of a hindrance than a help in its view of the subject/object dichotomy. If women seek to escape their inferior positioning, they must reject their marginalised position as the 'other'. In order to do this they must seek to position themselves at the centre rather the periphery of human activity. By rejecting any epistemology that privileges the subject over the object, the postmodern does not allow for the possibility of women constituting themselves at the centre of epistemology. As a consequence, Hartsock views postmodernism as offering an inadequate political direction; for example, she criticises Foucault for offering a theory of power that gives an inadequate account of gender in the sense that his commitment to resisting totalising discourses puts more stress on *resistance to* rather than *transformation of* power relations. Hartsock (1990:173) argues that women need more than resistance: 'we must do our work on an epistemological basis that indicates that knowledge [about ourselves] is possible—not just conversation or a discourse on how it is that power relations work'. In a sense, Hartsock's critique of Foucault is one that is often made of postmodern writing. Essentially, it is a critique of those aspects which stress the ludic rather than the transformative, which stress subversion and disruption through playfulness and irony rather than seriousness and head-on attack.

Flax (1990) shares Hartsock's scepticism of postmodernist narratives of subjectivity. As she sees it, in the postmodern only two alternative stances on subjectivity are allowed; a unified and essentialist self- a false stance—or a self that is historically and textually constituted through and through—a true stance. Nowhere in this narrative is there a consideration of gender. In contrast to Hartsock, Flax is, however, thoroughly committed to exploring the possibilities of a productive relationship between feminism and postmodernism. Her work is significant in showing that within postmodern

discourses generally, and on subjectivity in particular, there is no major attempt to discuss feminist theory or do justice to the specificity of women's experiences. Her analysis (1990:216) of the work of Rorty, Foucault and Derrida led her to comment that 'the absence or disappearance of concrete women and gender relations suggests the possibility that postmodernism is not only or simply opposed to phallocentrism but may be "its latest ruse"'.

She argues that a self which constantly reconstitutes itself through the immediate practices and discourses in which it is culturally located is one that is socially unstable and highly individualistic. It precludes the possibility of enduring attachment or responsibilities to another and is therefore fundamentally out of tune with female experience and feminist views about the self in relation to others. Flax joins those voices that argue for a theory that displaces unitary, essentialist or asocial ideas of the self with understanding about the ways that gender is implicated in the construction of both the self and discourses about it. Throughout her work, Flax argues that postmodern approaches provide a more facilitative framework for the confirmation of feminist thnking than the legacy of Enlightenment dualities. Like many women she attempted to fit her own learning about women's experience and histories into pre-existing theoretical frameworks such as liberalism, Marxism, critical theory and psychoanalysis only to find that the 'add women and stir' approach could not adequately account for gender relations. Neither is she convinced by 'standpoint' epistemologies which cannot abandon completely the notion that rational argument will ultimately prevail and that truth rather than power will adjudicate over claims to valid knowledge.

Flax's contribution is to argue that psychoanalysis, feminism and postmodernism all have much to offer about the relationships between gender, knowledge, power, self and justice; that each is flawed and cannot stand alone as a basis for understanding but together they contribute a number of promising themes and insights. In her discussion of the self she does not seek to develop a feminist viewpoint which is more 'true', but a feminist deconstruction of the self which locates it and its experiences in concrete social relations. Our understanding of a social self emerges as we explore our relations with others, our feelings and fantasies about them alongside experiences of embodiment that make up an 'inner' or 'core' self that is not 'natural'. As she puts it, 'such a self is simultaneously embodied, gendered, social and unique' (1990:232). Given that in most cultures the first intimate relationship is with a woman, Flax argues that repression of these primary relations and the relational aspects of subjectivity is one of the crucial ways in which masculine values dominate in a culture. Such an approach, in her view, exposes a flaw in postmodernist deconstructions which evade, deny or repress the importance of these relationships, and which seem more comfortable with an isolated, decentred self than one pervaded by desire and repression.

The postmodern discussion of power also opens up interesting directions for feminists. In contrast to the modernist conception of absolute truth founded on rationality, postmodernism proposes a plural understanding of truth; that all knowledge is contextual, historical and discursive. By being implicated with power, discourses create subjects and objects, and the mechanisms for positioning subjects. What Flax adds to this is that there is a strand in postmodern thinking which has little to say about how or why totalising discourses should give up their dominance or what would replace them in terms of concrete practices and knowledge. Postmodernists like Rorty stress the importance of pragmatism and pluralism without acknowledging all the difficulties associated with resolving conflict between competing voices, ensuring that people speak for themselves, and arriving at strategies for redistributing unequal resource allocations.

These are critical issues which are often, although not always, absent in postmodern debates. A feminist contribution to Rorty's 'conversations' would seek to expose the relations of domination in whatever guise, however seemingly radical they may appear. The argument would be that all such relations are social and not the result of natural qualities. Many feminists would acknowledge, and this is where certain strands in postmodernist thought would be considered useful, that there can be no refuge in essentialist explanations which privilege a feminist standpoint. Flax's 'no conclusions' constitutes a search for meanings which, at the same time, is not the imposition of reason through the backdoor. For feminists like her, this search presents more scope for resisting male hegemony than clinging uncritically to assumptions derived from Enlightenment thinking.

LOCATING EDUCATION IN THE POSTMODERN

It is at this point that education comes into the picture. Education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice is founded in the modernist tradition. Education is very much the dutiful child of the Enlightenment and, as such, tends to uncritically accept a set of assumptions deriving from Enlightenment thought. Indeed, it is possible to see education as the vehicle by which the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, humanistic individual freedom and benevolent progress are substantiated and realised. As Lyotard argues, the project of modernity is deeply intertwined with education, modernity's belief being that progress in all areas will emancipate 'the whole of humanity from ignorance, poverty, backwardness, despotism…thanks to education in particular, it will also produce enlightened citizens, masters of their own destiny' (Lyotard 1992:97).

The very rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on the humanist idea of a certain kind of subject who has the inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing, a rational

subject capable of exercising individual agency. The task of education has therefore been understood as one of 'bringing out', of helping to realise this potential, so that subjects become fully autonomous and capable of exercising their individual and intentional agency. Thus education is allotted a key role in the forming and shaping of subjectivity and identity, the task of making people into particular kinds of subject.

Insofar as the postmodern is a celebration and tolerance of plurality and difference, it presents 'a much more ambivalent and less fixed positioning of subjectivity' (Lash 1990:198). It is equally clear that the emphasis in postmodernism on the *inscribed* subject, the subject constructed by discourses and signifying systems, 'decentred' through language, society and the unconscious, denies the existence of a 'natural' subject with inherent characteristics and potential and thus seems to contradict the very basis of educational activity. As Lovlie (1992:121) argues, the postmodern critique 'stabs at the very heart of the most cherished ideals of Western culture [particularly that of] personal autonomy as an educational goal'.

As well as its challenge to the conception of the subject who learns, the postmodern moment also constitutes a challenge to existing concepts, structures and hierarchies of knowledge. Education as a socio-cultural structure and process is, in all its various forms, intimately connected with the production and dissemination of foundational knowledge and therefore with the re-creation and reproduction of the differential valuations and hierarchies of knowledge which we touched upon in the earlier discussion of feminism.

Within the postmodern moment, the problematising of epistemological structures and hierarchies provides the conceptual resources for thinking anew the effects of education at both the personal and structural levels. Education is itself going through profound changes in terms of purposes, contents and methods, changes which are themselves an aspect of the uncertainties of the postmodern moment. Debates over the curriculum, pedagogy and the organisation of education resonate with the challenges of the postmodern but often without the reflexive understanding of a postmodern position. Thus postmodernism becomes part of a curriculum, incorporated into the modern practice of education, but without resulting in a reconstruction of the curriculum. By contrast, trends of inter-disciplinarity and experiential approaches to teaching and learning can be seen as changes taking place under the impact of the postmodern and therefore very much part of it. In other words, there is no uniform, unified postmodern discourse of education. However, it is through these changes that the Enlightenment tradition and the place of education within it is increasingly questioned, exposing the certainties and 'warranted' claims of educational theories and practice to a critical examination, a shaking of the foundations. Since a postmodern perspective is itself a questioning one, it does at the very least provide an alternative discourse (a different way of speaking, thinking and

acting) which can be appropriated for a critical examination of the theory and practice of education.

However, as we have already seen, it has been strongly argued that a postmodern perspective is too critical, that in undermining foundations and absolutes it puts everything 'up for grabs' and leaves nothing in its place. Kvale (1992:8) argues that 'the most frequent critique of postmodern thought is [that it is] a rampant relativism, leading to nihilism and social anomie'. Bernstein (1983) describes this critique as being motivated by a 'Cartesian anxiety' where only the two extremes of certainty or chaos are thought to be possible.

Yet it could equally be argued that the postmodern is very much *of* this world precisely because it does not present itself as ahistorical and apolitical. Certainly, it teaches us to be sceptical of foundationalism in all its forms, of totalising and definitive explanations and theories and thus of the dominant taken-for-granted paradigms in education, whether these be liberal, conservative or progressive. We would argue that all of these, in their different ways, share some of the central epistemological, metaphysical and humanistic assumptions of modernity, and all must consequently veil themselves in foundations and absolutes in order to hide their partiality and their implication with the operation of power. As Fox (1993:121) points out, 'what postmodernism and post-structuralism have disclosed is not their own lack of ethical and political allegiances, but the failure of modernism to generate a morality which does not reflect partial, political interests'.

The possibility of a multiplicity of perspectives is perhaps what most characterises a postmodern perspective. On the face of it, this does sound very much like traditional philosophical relativism: the position that all positions are as good as any other. If this is so, and if truth is relative to discursive practices, then there seem to be no grounds for fighting injustice and oppression. That is why, no doubt, it is said that with the postmodern anything and everything goes!

Although it is easy enough to see the postmodern in this way there is another way of looking at this, one which does not 'necessarily' imply irrationality, paralysis of action or an atrophy of moral will. As Lather argues, to accept the postmodern is to also say 'no to nihilism' because relativism must *assume* foundationalism:

> If the focus is on procedures which take us as objects and involve us in systems of categories and procedures of self-construction, relativism becomes a non-issue. If the focus is on how power relations shape knowledge production and legitimation, relativism is a concept from another discourse, a discourse of foundations that posits grounds for certainty outside of context, some neutral, disinterested, stable point of reference.
>
> (Lather 1992:99)

It is clear from our earlier discussion that although there are many strands in feminist thought which are in profound disagreement with postmodernism, there is much to be learnt from the feminist struggle, both at the theoretical and practical level, with 'masterful' and dominant patriarchal discourses which hide their effects under a liberal and humanistic guise. Contemporary feminist thinking argues that, rather than denying truth, there is a need to recognise the multiplicity of local contingent truths and of the criteria for determining truth; that, rather than a single, universal and invariant mode of rationality, there is a need to see rationality as having many forms, validated in many different human practices.

What this implies is that it is possible to acknowledge many and different points of view whilst denying them equal value. This can be done without the need for a clear and unshakeable foundation. We can still act ethically and still fight for some things rather than others but we have to do this within *practices* of everyday life and struggle rather than in terms of an appeal to a transcendent and invariant set of values (see Frazer and Lacey 1993). As Shotter (1992) argues, epistemic relativity is not the same as moral relativity. Indeed, a postmodern perspective, given that it questions notions of a single and unequivocal 'truth', better allows us to foreground questions of justice (see Squires 1993). Thus the recognition that foundations and universals are themselves discursive constructions within certain human practices does not entail that 'anything goes'. Our discourses and our practices are neither monolithic nor univocal. There is always more that can be said and more that can be done. To subvert foundations is not to court irrationality and paralysis but to foreground dialogue, practical engagement and a certain kind of self-referentiality. In the postmodern, the claim is not that there are no norms but that they are not to be found in foundations. They have to be struggled over, and in this struggle, everyone must assume a personal responsibility.

Self-referentiality is perhaps one of the key aspects of a postmodern perspective. Its particular significance lies in providing a constant reminder that all discourses can have power effects. It is, for example, attractive to replace notions of individualistic humanism with those of social empowerment but care is needed to ensure that this does not result in the substitution of one oppressive discourse for another. As Foucault reminds us, discourses of emancipation—despite their emancipatory intent—are still bound up with the 'will to power'. Educators find it hard to accept that their emancipatory intentions, their desire to enlighten, may be implicated with the will to power and may, therefore, have oppressive consequences. A postmodernist perspective reminds us that historically this has been the case and that we as educators, therefore, need always to question *any* discursive practice, no matter how benevolent, for the configurations of emancipation/ oppression within it.

This self-referentiality is not, however, simply a convenient weapon with which to attack other discourses, but has effects on postmodern discourse

itself. Thus, to accept a postmodern perspective must imply a reflexive questioning of the very notion of *a* postmodern perspective. To be located in the postmodern is precisely to question all-encompassing perspectives. Certainly, postmodernism does not provide a set of techniques for 'getting at the truth' since it regards all techniques as having political (in the sense of power-ful) effects and therefore in need of problematisation. Nor does it provide a set of expert prescriptions since expertise is seen as always being imbued with power-knowledge claims. Thus in considering what implications the postmodern moment may have for education, one possible answer that is immediately ruled out is that it provides a new definitive perspective from which a new set of prescriptions and techniques for organising teaching and learning can be generated. Instead, all that we may perhaps reasonably hope for is that it might suggest a way of looking differently at education as a social practice, at educational processes such as learning and teaching, and at bodies of knowledge and the way they are organised and transmitted.

The postmodern reminds us that we construct our world through discourse and practice and that therefore, with a different discourse and a different set of practices, things could be otherwise. However, because the world so constructed then 'turns around' and constructs us–and here education plays a crucial role–making things otherwise is no easy, once-and-for-all task–although, ironically perhaps, education can have a crucial role to play here too. The fact that reality is constructed through social and discursive representations does not make 'reality' any the less real. But it does mean that 'reality' can be seen differently and difference can be seen in 'reality'. This is a task which can only be carried out through changing our social practices, including the practice of education–a practice which itself plays a significant part in bringing about change.

The grand narratives of science, truth and progress are themselves discourses, 'realities' which we have created by and for ourselves, stories we tell ourselves about the real or, more likely, stories told by 'powerful' others on our behalf. However, the problem is that in order to see reality differently, in order to see the grand narratives of modernity differently and tell different stories, we have to rely on the 'reality' we have created. We cannot, through an act of analytical will, free ourselves with one bound. This is where the postmodern scepticism of emancipation through knowledge that uncovers 'truth' comes into play. We are always complicit in that which we struggle against. This is one of the most valuable resonances which postmodern thinking can 'tell' education. Thus whilst the postmodern may suggest that everything is up for grabs, it also reminds us that there is always the 'always already' which places limits on what we can do. Within the postmodern there are no new Archimedean standpoints and no Promethean soaring free from history, context and language.

It is because postmodernism presents no foundational standpoint and no new *theory* that it teaches us to be sceptical of all systematic theorisations. This may appear to be already recognised in certain progressive educational stances. For example, in the present educational juncture a great deal of emphasis is placed on experiential learning and learner-centred approaches to education. In one sense, there is no apparent theorisation involved here and on the face of it learner-centred approaches seem to celebrate diversity and difference. Yet there is still a real danger of reification. These approaches are easily transformed into the kind of instrumentalism which underpins the increasingly dominant training and enterprise culture. However, an often unacknowledged side of this is that learners can be more readily manipulated under the guise of democratic participation and personal empowerment. This humanistic discourse perpetuates the unconscious reproduction of the existing social order and encourages the idea that social change is purely and simply a consequence of individual 'self-fulfilment'.

Of course, one could argue that the Enlightenment story of a sovereign (autonomous and agentic) subject is not only a goal but a necessary feature of any educational practice, given that the latter aims to bring about certain kinds of desired change through certain kinds of desirable interventions. Humanistic discourse, with its emphasis on person-centredness, resonates with educators who feel the need for a legitimation of their practice, particularly where the decentring of people through technologism and mass culture seems to pose significant threats. The fear is that if there is no agency then there is no subject, and if there is no 'free-standing' subject then educational intervention, so the argument goes, either becomes futile or a subtle form of indoctrination.

Yet to cling to the autonomous subject of humanistic discourse, to accept the constructed subject of this discourse as 'natural' rather than constructed, to refuse to question it by rejecting any alternative which suggests that the subject may be constructed from sources outside itself is to remain trapped within an agency/determination dualism and the futile choice between the two. If nothing else, postmodern thinking suggests that this dualism, and the endless see-sawing between the poles, is in need of problematisation. The dominance of either/or ways of thinking is precisely the grounds for the differentiation within modernity discussed earlier. Thus both the subject of humanistic discourse and the 'determined' subject of structural discourse remain hopelessly trapped in the extremes of dualism. The de-differentiation of postmodernist thinking creates a critical space in which this and other related dualisms, eg nature/culture, masculine/feminine, rational/irrational, can be deconstructed and reconstructed. It is in this sense, therefore, that the postmodern provides a useful critique of that Enlightenment project which education has traditionally sought to fulfil and which is expressed through the dualist logic that it has traditionally sustained.

In their search for a grounding or foundation, for finding certainty in the either/or, the discourses of the Enlightenment share, despite their differences, a desire for closure. Grounding is considered necessary since otherwise certainty would be removed and everything, including knowledge and learning, would, it is feared, get out of control. In one sense, we seek closure because by enclosing the world we feel better able to deal with it (see Lawson 1985). But useful and perhaps necessary as this may be, it also provides a means of mastery and control (a powerful gendered metaphor!), hence the fear that without closure things would get 'out of control' and 'we' (or perhaps more accurately, patriarchy) would no longer be masterful.

However, to counter this it could be argued that there is also a sense in which, for example, experience and subjectivity are always out of control and therefore to impose a closure is to deny the openness of the meaning of experience and the continual formation and re-formation of subjectivity. Here education has historically stood on ambiguous ground for it both seeks and rejects closure. Education has been both open and closed–an issue which we will discuss further in later chapters.

The question then is why we should feel the need to impose closure simply for the sake of being masterful and in control. But any answer is complex and we shall not pursue that complexity here. What we can say at this point is that although all our explanations and actions will always be subject to temporary closure, a temporary fixing of meaning, a single definitive closure seeks more than this. Here perhaps Gadamer's point (1975) that experience is not a reduction to sameness but an openness to difference is helpful. Openness involves an understanding which does not merely seek the closure of certainty but an openness to new experience with new and multiple meanings. The aim then becomes to accept the possibility of uncertainty and unpredictability whilst recognising difference and otherness. Here, also, is what education in the postmodern might emphasise.

Indeed, for educators, this has important consequences. As Giroux has pointed out, the Enlightenment's humanistic project has sought, through education, to create both a certain kind of autonomous, rational individual and to institutionalise 'the socialising processes and legitimating codes by which the grand narratives of progress and human development can be passed onto future generations' (Giroux 1988a:65). The interlinking grand narratives of material progress, cumulatively coming to know everything through science and becoming free, legitimate the social order and 'compel' consensus, defining the place of a certain kind of subject. All this embodies what Walkerdine (1988) has called 'Reason's Dream', the desire for a rational control, for mastery of meaning by masterful subjects that provides certainty and ultimately power over self, others and things.

The questions raised by the Enlightenment project are well known and by no means limited to postmodern thinkers. Whose reason and whose control? Progress for whom? Who becomes free? Who is cast as the Other, to be dominated and excluded? Increasingly, as a consequence of incredulity, we question where the dream of rational control and total knowledge through science has led. We question whether pursuing the goal of empowerment has not led to its opposite; on the one hand, an increasing destruction of the planet in the name of progress and on the other, an increasing surveillance and regulation in the name of efficiency and accountability. These are questions which, in our view, it is impossible for education to avoid, given that it is so heavily influenced by humanistic discourse and the values of the Enlightenment. More and more, it seems that the grand narratives which sustain and embody these values benefit the few with the cost being paid most obviously by the environment, by women, by black and poor people. Many would argue that modern education in all its forms, liberal, progressive and conservative, has been disabling rather than enabling.

The consequences, then, are clear but the answers are unclear. Educators cannot simply, through an act of will, rid themselves of humanistic discourses, either of the individualist or critical variety. We need only remind ourselves of the power of terms such as 'progress', 'development', 'empowerment', 'emancipation' and 'enlightenment'. For educators they are part of an everyday, taken-for-granted discourse that saturates thought and action within practice and self-understandings. They are part of the tradition, the interpretive culture, which educational practitioners share, even though many would seriously question it.

The implication is that it is precisely by adopting a postmodern approach that we can open ourselves, through critical dialogue with others and with texts, to all varieties of educational tradition. We can then recognise what they have of value whilst understanding that whatever emancipatory message they may contain can have oppressive consequences when 'emancipation' becomes a search for certainty and control through definitive knowledge, totalising explanations and the elimination of difference.

Yet this is itself no panacea, let alone a new method or technique which can be applied to educational practice. To think in a postmodern way is to actually question the appropriateness of 'application' in the relationship of theory, thought and analysis to practice. The value of being located in the postmodern is the greater possibility for disruption of the 'given'; and in education there are far too many givens in need of disruption. The emphasis on methods and techniques is itself a product of education's humanistic discourse. More than ever, then, education needs a critical scepticism and a suitable degree of uncertainty whilst close attention must be paid to the need for a careful deconstruction of the theorisations and discourses within which educational practice is located. Central to the theorisation of modern

educational practice is the 'subject' of psychology and its construction within a scientific discourse. It is to a critical discussion of the constitutive effects of that discourse, its centrality to modernity and its implications for education, that we now turn.

SPEAKING 'TRUTHFULLY'

Science, psychology and subjectivity

Central to the theorisations of modern educational practice is the subject (in a disciplinary sense) of psychology, its construction as a scientific discourse, and the subject which is constructed through that discourse. It is to an analysis of that discourse, to its key place in modernity, and its consequences for the theory and practice of education that we now turn. Psychology's predominant self-understanding is that it is a science and, moreover, a science of the human, which seeks to discover the 'laws' of the human. We shall examine the way in which different varieties of psychology project their own particular constructions of the human subject, constructions which lie at the heart of the modernist project and hence of education, and which are the target of the postmodern challenge. We shall also try to show that 'mainstream' psychology through its implication with science, through its capture by the 'scientific attitude' and through its consequent failure of reflexivity, constructs subjects in ways which better enables their regulation and control.

THE MODERNIST PROJECT OF SCIENCE

The postmodern and, in particular, the post-structuralist critique of science is centred on science's refusal to accept that it is itself a human, social practice rather than a transcendental activity 'beyond history, culture, values, subjectivity and power' (Heelan 1991:214). This refusal, an aspect of the power of scientism, has significant consequences for knowledge-seeking, theory-building practices such as psychology. The argument is that since science takes place within a historical and world cultural context, the 'context of human co-existence' (Maturana 1991:30), it must therefore be a social practice and what it says and does must be located and understood within that context. However, the dominant discourse of science sees things quite

differently. It places science firmly outside of any context of social locatedness arguing that its knowledge is warranted precisely because it is *outside*. Knowledge is understood as a matter of standing outside or apart from that which is to be known and from the activity of knowing. Hence there is apparently no problem of reflexivity. Everything can be properly and truly known through an unshakeable structure erected on an assumed Archimedean point transcending human social practices.

Now in one sense there is something obviously strange about this. Why is knowledge only possible through this process of standing outside? Does one not get to know something best by being within it? Does not the very activity of knowing mark out a world to be known? This strangeness alerts us to the possibility that there is something questionable about the notion of Archimedean points as the condition of *all* legitimate knowledge. Are we really standing 'outside' or are we very much 'inside'? And is this a stance which makes possible a shaping without being shaped, power with no corresponding accountability or responsibility?

What is at issue here is the discursive construction of science as a transcendental project and the consequent projection of a scientificity modelled on the universal validity of the natural sciences. To critique this is to point to Gadamer's 'truth' that science does not know everything that in truth there is, and that there is more to truth than scientific method (Gadamer 1975). This alerts us to the need to problematise the imperialism of scientific method and scientistic restrictions upon what counts as knowledge. It also confirms the appropriateness of the natural sciences within their own objectified realm but reminds us that this is conditional upon their staying strictly within that realm. This has important implications for other realms, in particular those of the human and social sciences. Further, this critique brings to our attention that the name 'science', with its consequent legitimacy and respect, is conferred very grudgingly by the discourse of science on other knowledge-producing activities, and if it is done at all it is still in terms of the criteria assumed to be characteristic of the natural sciences. The way science understands itself, the way it projects itself and the way it is seen as a model and standard for other knowledge-generating activities, can only be understood as part of a modernist philosophical discourse about the nature of knowledge, truth and reality.

Gadamer is very critical of scientism, the notion that the natural sciences are 'a supra-historic, neutral enterprise and the sole mode of acquiring true knowledge' (Bleicher 1982:3), the universally applicable model of methodical rationality. He argues that the natural sciences do not have the measure of the human sciences and thus he challenges the totalising, universalistic discourse which science 'speaks' and scientism conveys. Gadamer (1977:xvii) targets for particular criticism scientism's imperialistic claims on behalf of the natural sciences, 'the inflated claims made on behalf of methodological self-control'. There is a major problem with the scientistic model of rationality

and truth. In positing a universal abstract rationality there is a suppression of the *conventionality* of reason, of how it is forged historically in cultural practices, how the model of rationality is itself caught in cultural traditions and how these are a condition of rationality rather than rationality being the overcoming of tradition. Gadamer argues that it is impossible to explain the directionality of scientific practice without recognising the place of pre-understandings or what modernist discourse would refer to as 'prejudices'. Any methodical enquiry must have as its starting point the pre-understandings which subjects have of possible 'objects' of investigation. The existence and necessity of such pre-understandings highlights the historical situatedness of scientific communities and the historicity (its partiality and social locatedness) of scientific knowledge.

Gadamer's target is method, and in particular the notion that anything which cannot be objectified through method has to be dismissed as 'subjective' and therefore an 'untruth'. The most significant characteristic of that which calls itself 'science' is its speaking through a discourse of methodical certainty and universality; of how the world is known with certainty and precision through truths which are universal. It is through method that science can 'prove to itself that it is without limits and never wanting for self-justification' (Gadamer 1977:93). For the human sciences it is not enough to say that the method of natural science is inappropriate or that they must have a different method, it is the very notion of method as the guarantor of truth which is problematic.

Gadamer's critique of method also has implications for the notion of the modern 'sovereign' subject—the subject that is implicitly assumed in the discourse of science. On the face of it, subjectivity seems to have no part to play in the discourse of science—indeed, the condition of being scientific is to have eliminated subjectivity, the source of 'prejudice', and it is one of the main tasks of scientific method to ensure this (for an account of the historical locatedness of science's banishment of subjectivity see Bordo 1987). Yet this does not mean that the discourse of science does not possess a certain conception of the subject nor that this conception has effects which can be ignored. On the contrary, within the discourse of science, the subject is conceived in terms of an essentially philosophical construction which earlier we have described in postmodernist terms as the 'centred' subject.

The 'I' that designates the sovereign self, the self-transparent, self-identical subject of consciousness is an 'I have been' and an 'I will be'. What it can know and how it knows is always influenced by its temporality and its participation in a community of meanings—in other words, by its history and culture. It can thus be neither an origin nor a destination but is always 'under way'. This *situatedness* of the subject is prior to a consciousness of objects or of self-consciousness, its consciousness of itself as an object. Its own self-understanding is constituted by its temporality, the interrelationship of its

past, present and future. The subject's understanding is through a history which it has not made for itself. Although it is its 'own' history, it is a history which is yet other to it in the sense that it cannot be self-consciously known and methodically controlled.

This also implies that epistemological foundations cannot be located in the originary consciousness and intentionality of the autonomous, rational self. Consciousness is always 'prejudiced' in the sense that it always comes with 'ready-made' pre-understandings. It cannot transcend its 'thrown projection'. Thus it cannot eliminate its situatedness merely through an act of methodological self-control as the discourse of science requires. There is no presuppositionless knowing and no definitive terminus of knowledge–the 'perfect knowledge' which grasps the truth of its object. This is what the natural sciences understand themselves to be doing but Gadamer wants to emphasise that, although they may indeed know the truth of what they know and may ever seek to increase the domain of their objectified knowledge, they cannot encompass all that is true. Even the most rigorous methodological self-control cannot eliminate 'the shadow of being', the need to implicitly accept something before one can know anything–in other words, that there are no Archimedean points from which to know. Since truth is itself situated, it is something that keeps 'happening' and which therefore eludes all attempts at totalisation.

Science's self-understanding is that if something cannot be objectified through method, then there can be no science of that something. Equally, since its self-understanding recognises no limit to objectification then science can understand itself as having a potentially limitless reach. Thus anything that seems to undermine method and objectivity is excluded because, as Gadamer points out, a science *is* its method. The consequence is that although the very project of science is historically and culturally conditioned, science's self-understanding must rigorously exclude this knowledge. If it were to accept this then it would have to subject method in general, not just particular methods, to critical scrutiny and in so doing recognise its limits as an exclusive and definitive way to knowledge and truth. As Weinsheimer (1985:32) points out, 'wherever we attempt to examine the ground we are standing on, there we are engaged in hermeneutical reflection–not natural science'.

The ascendancy of scientific method as the means of establishing secure knowledge has resulted in a consistent failure to examine science as a social practice and as a historical and cultural product. Science has instead been seen as transcendent and decontextualised. Knowledge, as well as the knowing subject, therefore becomes context-free. Rationality is cast as universal and transcendental, operating across all historical and social contexts and practices but independent of all of them. The result is an individualistic epistemology where the solitary individual confronts an independent reality of objects.

Kuhn (1970) redirects our gaze from the disembodied subject of reason as the source of knowledge to a source in paradigms, traditions and knowledge-producing communities. Rather than the pre-formed subject with its abstracted powers of reasoning and unmediated access to experience, Kuhn points to the scientist, the subject of science, who is formed and acts through an unconscious acceptance of traditional, community-based authority, an authority which provides a way of theorising or understanding, working on and changing the world.

By emphasising the social, Kuhn reveals the formative role of 'otherness' in science. His foregrounding of the power of authority, tradition and the community reconfigures science as a struggle against the perception of an ever-present irrational. Indeed, we can see science as being constructed *in terms of* an irrational 'other' which opens the door to relativism, to the primacy of desire and the undermining of true representations—an irrational other which cannot be assimilated to rationality but which is yet an ever-present danger. As Bernstein argues, foundations as 'a permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework' (1983:8) were a response to the Cartesian anxiety and ultimately to a fear of 'the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos' (1983:18). It is for this reason that a disembodied subject which embodies rationality and can therefore counter the influence of otherness is needed to secure science. To transcend history and culture is to transcend relativistic limitations. To know the world independently of history and culture is to have a common measure or standard whereby difference and heterogeneity become sameness and homogeneity. Knowledge therefore becomes a mastery, the elimination of difference. Relativism is feared precisely because in claiming that there is no uniquely privileged position from which to know but a number of different positions each with their own standards, the very possibility of an authorising centre is apparently destroyed. It implies that difference and heterogeneity cannot be eliminated and knowledge and truth cannot be possessed and mastered. Thus Kuhn helps to decentre science by decentring the subject of science.

The emphasis on reason therefore conceals a desire which is deeply suppressed. Le Doeuff (1977) argues that in philosophy the place of desire is marked by the implicit recognition of lack, that there is always something which yet remains to be known. This incompleteness energises philosophy and makes it a never-ending quest. Yet philosophy also recognises itself as being without lack in that it thinks it knows with certainty and completeness. It has therefore sought mastery of knowledge whilst at the same time believing that it is its master. Extending Le Doeuff's argument, we can say that science too is characterised by being both lacking and without lack, masterful yet always seeking mastery. This ambivalent situation is intrinsic to the very structure of the scientific enterprise. Lack in the sense of incompleteness, uncertainty, is another form of otherness; a failure to master

is always present and without it the aim of completeness, certainty and mastery would be impossible. Thus lacking and completeness are mutually necessary.

Science is driven by the desire for mastery, the desire to attain full and complete knowledge, to be not-lacking or complete through the elimination of otherness. But it is a desire which must always remain unfulfilled since if lack could be overcome, if the state of completeness or mastery could be attained, then science would come to an end. The desire for mastery is a desire for shaping the world whilst standing above it. It is a desire which seeks to construct knowledge whilst refusing reflexivity and thus denying that what is known is the product of practices of knowing. To recognise reflexivity would be to accept lack—an acceptance which would in turn mean accepting the existence of an unknowable otherness and therefore a recognition that the desire for mastery is doomed never to be fulfilled. It would be to accept that there are limits to what can be known by rationality and method and that there is a different, non-rational, incommensurable knowledge which science cannot know.

It is, for example, in the context of a science that seeks to deny the social construction of knowledge that feminists have questioned whether there can be a feminist science as compared with a feminist critique of science. By passing itself off as objective, dispassionate, disinterested and universal in its applications, science has disguised how partial and distorted its construction of knowledge is. Through being associated with 'nature', women are part of the otherness which science both seeks to master and thinks it has mastered.

In the face of such challenges, science must define and legitimate itself against this different knowledge, unknowable yet fearful, an undefined and excluded object which can only be described metaphorically (Brennan 1989). Science can only sedulously guard itself against it by erecting the defences of method and maintaining them well. But in defining and legitimating itself against this knowledge science shows how much it is constitutive of its very being. That which is cast as outside is already inside, the excluded that is already included.

THE PROJECT OF SCIENTIFIC PSYCHOLOGY

As the natural sciences have become subject to the critique of being conditional upon non-scientific practices which they have to deny, so the situation for the human sciences has become more complex. Thus it is a feature of psychology that descriptions and explanations within its field of study, and hence the security of its claims to 'truth', have been problematic and contentious even within psychology itself. If at any one time competing paradigms coexist, if an apparent confusion of paradigms reigns, what sense then does it make to regard psychology as a science?

The standard response to this criticism of psychology's apparently un-scientific status is that it may indeed exhibit a confusion of competing voices but there is nonetheless a 'mainstream' which is scientific. As a discipline, psychology, it is claimed, is still in its scientific adolescence and is therefore still refining and elaborating its concepts, procedures and knowledge base. With time, having grown to maturity, there will be a convergence to a single accepted paradigm which will legitimate the claim to scientific status and remove finally all doubts about the security of its claims to truth. There has, however, always existed a strong counter-argument that it is the very assumption that psychology is, even if only potentially, a science with (potentially) a single unified paradigm which is actually the root of the problem that psychology faces, both within itself as a discipline and in terms of its relationship to human life which it seeks to scientifically investigate.

There is indeed a 'mainstream' in psychology the boundaries of which show a certain amount of flexibility over time. If there is a confusion it has been a confusion of competing theories and models rather than competing paradigms. Psychology's paradigm is *scientistic* and conditions its self-understanding to regard the natural sciences as the model and standard of scientific endeavour. Mainstream psychology is therefore located in the discourse of science, a discourse which talks of the discovery of general laws through the use of scientific method, an objective stance, and a set of universal rules for attaining true knowledge of the human world. This has enabled a certain kind of knowledge to be generated and, perhaps more important, its acceptance as a discipline with a claim to scientific respectability. Salmon nicely summarises the position:

> Psychology as a discipline has seen itself as distinctive insofar as it entails the application of scientific methodology to questions of human conduct and human experience. This methodology is set up for the investigation of universal laws. It presupposes generality; cause-effect relationships which apply regardless of particular contexts. It is tailored to quantification and measurement.
>
> (Salmon 1980:39–40)

Thus it could be argued that psychology contains within itself a powerful tendency that uncritically supports the modernist grand narrative of progress through science and, indeed, it is in this way that psychology readily becomes a powerful regulatory discourse. Psychology's dominant paradigm is positivistic and embodied in a powerful discourse which shapes consciousness, perceptions, attitudes, as well as institutional structures at all levels. An independent 'real' world is assumed whose laws can be known by scientific method. The human, social world is assimilated to the natural world and is posited as an unchanging 'given' whose secrets can be

'unlocked'. However, it would be a mistake to see psychology's knowledge as 'ivory-tower' knowledge. Psychology may believe that it generates knowledge by standing outside the world but this knowledge is very much part of the world.

Psychology has been criticised for its narrowness. It is this narrowness which leads other critics such as Frosh (1987) to describe psychology as seeking explanations at the level of systemic processes and functions rather than at the level of subjectivity. The former kinds of explanation emphasise the 'how' as against the 'why' questions, an emphasis which Frosh attributes to a fear of moving away from that which is observable, model-able and quantifiable, of moving away from that which can only be known by the application of scientific method. Thus although it is subjectivity which needs explaining, in the main 'scientific' psychology fails to do this.

For example, behaviourism tends to be thought of as the exemplar of scientific psychology, yet it could be argued that in its embeddedness in scientism it exemplifies all that is problematic in psychology as science. Behaviourism brackets anything to do with subjectivity on the grounds of its unimportance for scientific purposes. This bracketing provides the conceptual resources for an empiricist and positivistic psychology, an observational, experiential and experimental 'science' modelled on the natural sciences and based exclusively on the study of behaviour. However, the consequence of this is that subjectivity is stripped of its meaningful 'lived' sense.

Psychological theorising such as behaviourism works through representing the social world but ignoring the subject of that world, psychology's 'object' of investigation which also 'theorises' and represents its world. In this sense, subjects are quite different from the objects of the natural sciences. Since they represent their world rather than merely *exemplifying* the scientist's representation of it, the influence of meanings and ultimately of language cannot be ignored as it is in the natural sciences. This opens up the question not simply of how language is learned by a pre-given subjectivity but of its role as a signifying system in constructing subjectivity, its role not merely as a vehicle for conveying pre-constructed representations but in actually constructing these representations.

By focusing exclusively on immediate empirical reality, scientific psychology posits this reality as real. The imaginary, the realm of images, fantasies and identifications, which is a feature of any subjectivity, is excluded, as is the realm of language or culture within which subjectivity is formed. Behaviourism for example, in concentrating only on the 'reality' of behaviour, cannot go beyond the confines of the observable and the immediate. Reality is constructed as 'that which is there as fact', hence there is no means by which this given, pre-existent and autonomous reality can be problematised. Since the possibility of critique is foreclosed, the focus switches to efficiency and instrumentalism. In accepting 'reality as it is'

unproblematically, behaviourism concentrates instead on improving the efficiency of environmental reinforcers. The same too is the case with cognitivism, the emphasis here being on improving the efficiency of the information processing machine. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that psychology so easily lends itself to instrumentalism.

Instrumentalism is implicated within the desire for efficiency and rationality. Behaviourism's roots can be clearly traced to this and the use of behaviouristic techniques by US corporate capitalism was significant in the acceptance outside academe of behaviourism as more than just an esoteric doctrine. The instrumentalisation of psychology and its implication in fields outside psychology is now a commonplace. Furthermore, and more significantly, psychological knowledge, through its instrumentality, becomes an instrument of state regulation. Walkerdine (1990:5) argues that scientific psychology is 'implicated in the production of our modern form of government—the democratic government of reason'. Psychology, as an institutionalised practice becomes in Foucault's terms a power-knowledge formation. Psychological knowledge as a scientific discourse purporting to discover the 'truth' about human beings is enmeshed in and serves as a justification for the power to regulate people and determine their life chances. Through the state and other institutional forms such as education, psychology thus can be said to regulate in the name of science, rationality and efficiency. Linked as it is to the grand narrative of 'progress', psychology becomes a powerful regulatory mechanism through its promise of an improvement of the human condition.

As we have seen, science, because of the way it structures itself, cannot reflect on its own ground without ceasing to be science (see Gadamer 1975). Through its scientistic paradigm, its construction through a discourse of science which valorises method and universality, psychology becomes abstracted objectivity and thus effectively debars itself from examining its own ground; it is not itself what it studies and thus is necessarily limited and incomplete. Objectivity is purchased at the price of a failure of reflexivity, of being itself what it studies. Psychology's failure to reflect on its own ground and examine the effects of the particular ground on which it stands has two inter-related consequences. The first is that in studying its object naturalistically, as if it were akin to the objects of the natural sciences, psychology ends up with theorisations which are grossly impoverished and limited. This is probably what Frosh has in mind when he says:

> The purpose of a psychological description is to offer in terms which are as objective as possible an account of the mental or interpersonal processes which are operating in a person at the level of those processes rather than at the level of the subjective intent of the person concerned.
>
> (Frosh 1989:5)

Behaviourism demonstrates this very clearly in its exclusive emphasis on behaviour. Frosh goes on to point out that, as a consequence, there is 'an avoidance of "subjectivity" and of how each human being becomes, and is organised as, such an experiencing subject' (1989:5). Furthermore, psychologists, whilst treating subjects as objects, exclude themselves from this objectification. Yet psychology's paradigm, by defining objectivity in terms of the abstraction of subjects from objects, fails to recognise the self-referential consequence. In other words, psychologists don't explain their own lives in terms of their discipline. Most would probably admit, if pressed, that it had no relevance. However, they are happy to explain the lives of others in this way. As Hollway (1989:122) reminds us: 'on the other side of the experiment, the psychologist is engaged in just the sort of activities that would be associated with mind…accounts of events or experience, questioning, giving answers, argumentations—in a phrase, making sense'.

In taking this direction behaviourism, and scientific psychology generally, exhibit a scientistic arrogance, a denial of subjectivity and agency in those it studies, linked to an unquestioned assumption of these in itself. Psychology's scientific project, therefore, intertwining a desire for certain knowledge with a desire for scientific respectability results in the neglect of key questions concerning the nature of human subjects and their subjectivity and of the desires underpinning their own work. In this way, it is implicated in modern science with the pitfalls and exclusions which that entails. The pursuit of science and the emphasis on scientificity veils this neglect and psychology's own failure of reflexivity. Psychology, therefore, whilst it may believe that it has achieved its aim of being a science, has simultaneously and consequentially failed as a *human* science.

THE HUMANISTIC ALTERNATIVE—OR MORE OF THE SAME?

But what does it mean to be a human science? The dissatisfaction with scientific psychology on the grounds of its failure as a human science and as a grounding for educational practice has been around for a long time. Humanistic psychology understands itself as an alternative to scientific psychology by attempting to be such a science. It seeks to introduce 'the feeling subject into the domain of sober scientific enquiry' (Richards 1989:95) as a means of preserving science whilst countering the impoverishment of the subject which lies at the heart of behaviourism. Carl Rogers, for example, attempts to reconcile subjective experiencing with objective knowledge by linking scientific discovery to self-discovery. He conceives of science as a neutral activity, the search for objective truth, which when pursued by those who have discovered their authentic selves must inevitably have benevolent consequences—good science done by good people!

Humanistic psychology, then, seeks to 'humanise' science, having that which is truly human as its legitimate field of study whilst afffirming its scientific credentials.

Humanistic psychology seems to offer a way out of the prison constructed by behaviourism, reinstating subjectivity through its emphasis on the agency of the authentic, organismic self. Consequent to this is the claim that since psychology's objects are not equivalent to objects in the natural sciences but are subjects in their own right, they should be recognised as such. We see this clearly in Rogers' commitment (1967) to a phenomenological approach, where the subject is seen as the source of data rather than an object of experimental investigation—thus, for example, allowing subjects to give their own accounts rather than having them jump through experimental hoops. Yet the separation of subjects and objects is maintained because the aim is still to acquire 'scientific' knowledge through scientific method. The phenomenological approach is therefore undermined by the continued commitment to scientific method and an empiricist epistemology as conventionally understood by scientific psychology.

In the end, scientific and humanistic psychology, despite a certain uneasiness on the part of both, nonetheless find it possible to accommodate one another (Kvale 1992). The task of accommodation has not proved arduous. Humanistic psychology does not set itself up as a critique of science *per se* but of a certain way of doing science. Wishing to be seen as scientific, it seeks to 'infuse science with the vitality of the human spirit' and it is in this sense that Rogers' project is both paradigmatic and symptomatic. Scientific psychology, for its part, can live with this 'human' infusion since what it considers to be its scientific integrity, its commitment to objective knowledge through scientific method, is not compromised. Despite their seeming differences both scientific and humanistic psychology share a scientistic paradigm. Humanistic psychology accepts that the methods of natural science are the only sure path to scientific knowledge, that scientific activity is neutral and that the fruits of scientific knowledge are inherently benevolent.

Those who adopt a humanistic or an interpretivist position therefore implicitly accept a dualism of natural scientific knowledge on the one hand and the knowledge of the human and social sciences on the other. By doing so, they accept both the self-understandings and the claim to epistemological priority of the natural sciences. The defenders of the human sciences argue their case on the grounds that its knowledge is different but not inferior. The difference, however, is one which continually has to be defended as a special case, a deviation from the paradigmatic. Deviations are difficult to defend continually, particularly when most of the 'defenders' are either equivocal or harbour sympathies for the other side. Interpretivist and humanistic discourses are inevitably always on the defensive in a situation where a

dominant positivistic discourse shapes cultural values beyond the narrow confines of esoteric disputes between scientists.

The problem lies in the dualism since, as we have seen, every dualism implies a hierarchy as its inevitable consequence. Humanistic psychology attempts to redefine the dualism by arguing for the special character of the human sciences. This is often linked to the claim that the dualism can be reconciled; for example, that the objectivity of the natural sciences can be linked to the subjectivity of the human and social sciences in a kind of 'subjective objectivity' or 'objective subjectivity' appropriate to both. Ultimately, in Rogers, all these efforts break down and the hierarchy is reasserted. Redefinition and reconciliation always seem to end with the reassertion of the superiority of natural scientific knowledge.

Their common location in a scientistic paradigm means that humanistic and scientific psychology both lack critical force. As we have seen, scientific psychology constructs an unproblematic and pre-given subject and an unproblematic and pre-given reality. As Ricoeur puts it, scientific psychology 'does not question the difference between the real and the imaginary inasmuch as its theoretical entities all refer to observable facts, and ultimately to real movements in space and time' (1981:251).

Ultimately, humanistic psychology works with the same conceptions of the subject and of reality. It too, like scientific psychology, becomes a mechanism of regulatory power. In its applied human relations form it has become an influential tool in, for example, business practices, itself a powerful regulatory form. As Hollway (1989:95) points out: 'Human relations has become enormously influential…and this comes about because of its successes in regulating behaviour where behaviourism and measurement were either only partly successful or counter-productive.' By emphasising autonomy and the 'whole person', humanistic psychology becomes enmeshed in practices which, at one level, appear to counter the arid impersonality, the lack of feeling and human contact of scientific psychology. Yet the roots of its success as a regulatory form are the same; the scientific credentials, the emphasis on the 'real' of a given reality, the individualism; everything that lends itself to instrumentalisation and the deployment of humanistic psychology's 'scientific' knowledge of the 'deep springs' of subjectivity, in the service of an efficiency and rationality of a more 'human' kind. Furthermore, humanistic psychology lends itself more readily to this enterprise since, unlike scientific psychology, it is more effectively harnessed to that other grand narrative, the maximisation of happiness and spiritual well-being.

Humanistic psychology is therefore a 'technology of the self', a means by which people can 'effect by their own means or with the help of others a number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being, so as to transform themselves' (Foucault 1988:14). Its 'knowledge' becomes the means with which people can construct a self *in order* to master it, a mastery which then becomes the means of their

regulation. Rose (1990:115) calls this 'living one's life according to a norm of autonomy'. In the educational field the person-centred or student-centred curriculum, although apparently centred on the intrinsic characteristics of the learner and the rightness of students making decisions about their own learning, actually works to increase the efficiency of the 'learning system'. In other words, despite the stated rationale of students taking control of their own learning, the emphasis is on cost-efficiency, 'value for money' and more efficient regulation through engaging students directly in a supposedly democratic process of participation—a process, however, which is empty of 'empowering' content and centred on adaptation.

Another feature which scientific and humanistic psychology share is the emphasis on an individual/society dualism. The former understands itself as the study of psychological processes which are both individual and systematic and which operate at the level of the organic, the behavioural or the cognitive. The individual is assumed to be pre-given, a natural category and the social pre-formed and external to the individual. Explanations of the individual are, therefore, not seen as requiring explanations at the level of the social.

Behaviourism thus reduces the social to environmental reinforcers and cognitivism sees it as a kind of environmental 'noise' which interferes with the efficiency of information processing. The best that psychology can do in terms of incorporating the social is socialisation theory. Here the social is theorised as an externality to which the assumed pre-given individual 'learns' to adapt. The individual is theorised as adaptive, as learning to function effectively and efficiently in relation to this external, pre-formed 'reality', modified but not constituted by it. Insofar as there is any theorisation of social change it is in terms of change at the level of individual processes, a theorisation which enshrines an extreme form of voluntarism and reifies the individual/society dualism.

The dualism and its inevitable hierarchy is also revealed in humanistic psychology where change is theorised as entirely a matter of individual responsibility. Rogers, for example, constructs the social as social relationships which exercise an oppressive authority preventing individuals from fully realising themselves, from being true to their authentic organismic selves. He argues that if individuals can get in touch with their deepest feelings and become authentic then change will follow at all levels. A good society is the product of good individuals.

Rogers' psychology, therefore, is in the end conformist. Individuals who are true to their authentic selves are constructed as pre-socialised and hence need experience no problems in conforming to the prevailing social order. Although Rogers targets social relationships as the source of distortions, oppression and inauthenticity, he has no quarrel with the given social order. Thus he fails to recognise the extent to which that order is implicated, both for good and bad, in the very being of the subject, the source of a tension

which shapes the mutually interactive relationship between the subject and sociality, the constitutive social form.

In failing to recognise this relationship, both scientific and humanistic psychology remain trapped in a privileging of the individual side of the dualism. Both scientific and humanistic psychology see the individual as the agent of everything social and fail to recognise the co-implication of the individual and the social (see Walkerdine 1989). Humanistic psychology challenges scientific psychology on the grounds that the latter presents an impoverished portrait of the individual. Scientific psychology's rational individual is replaced by the notion of the 'whole person'. However, the centrality and privileging of the *individual* is not challenged. Humanistic psychology is in the end unable to mount, as it purportedly claims to do, a sustained and in-depth critique of scientific psychology because it cannot challenge the latter's scientific pretensions and their consequences. Its failure, however, is ultimately a failure of reflexivity since, because of its scientific pretensions, it too is unable to question the ground upon which it stands.

Both scientific and humanistic psychology fail then to be appropriately human sciences. Scientific psychology removes itself from 'life' in order to be scientific. Humanistic psychology attempts to re-instate 'life' but ultimately fails. Its critique of the positivistic discourse of scientific psychology, its critique of dehumanising scientism implies an alternative psychology freed from scientism and speaking a 'human' discourse. Yet humanistic psychology fails to escape the clutches of scientism; its paradigm is ultimately the same as scientific psychology's.

EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND DISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The nature and place of disciplines and disciplinary knowledge in education has been a contentious issue for some time. In his classical formulation, Hirst (1974) drew a distinction between naturally occurring 'forms' of knowledge, equatable to disciplines, and 'fields' of knowledge which are constructed as integrated composites drawn from the forms. Education was cast as such a field, drawing from disciplines in a way appropriate to its nature as a practical activity. In broad terms, the argument is that disciplines tell us 'the way the world is' and education as a practical activity concerned with acting in rather than knowing the world, must base itself on disciplinary knowledge.

Disciplines, in telling the truth about the world, occupy a foundational place in this scenario. There is an implicit model at work here of the relationship between the natural sciences as foundations of applied fields such as engineering and medicine. By extension therefore, education is seen as founded on the human and social sciences, particularly the disciplinary knowledge of psychology. This is a powerful model because, on the face of it,

to have disciplines as foundations has the ring of common sense about it. Disciplines, being 'scientific', claim to provide a true picture of the world which then forms the basis for the action required by applied fields such as medicine, engineering and education. Educational practitioners, so the argument goes, are therefore no different from the engineer building a bridge or the doctor treating a patient.

Yet as always what appears to be 'common sense' is actually highly problematic. The attempt to make education into a Hirstian field is conceptually and practically flawed (Usher 1989b). Disciplinary knowledge cannot simply be 'mapped' onto or applied to a field of practice such as education. As Schon (1983) forcefully argues, the attempt to do so results in the enshrinement of a technical-rationality model, an instrumental means-ends rationality of thought and action which, if it were to be applied, would seriously distort practice.

Of course, having said this it is important to recognise that education both in its practice and self-understandings is traversed by a powerful discourse of and about disciplinary knowledge. Disciplines provide conceptual resources that 'in-form' thought and action. It is difficult, for example, to stop believing that disciplines such as psychology do not provide the kind of knowledge which education as a practice must base itself on. This is not to say that practitioners do not often feel uneasy about 'applying' disciplinary knowledge to practice. In the case of psychology, for example, it is very often difficult for educational practitioners to see its usefulness. Teachers have struggled without success to apply learning theory in the classroom. Psychology appears inaccessible and remote, removed from the concerns of everyday life.

At the same time, whilst this may well be the case with 'scientific' psychology, it is much less so with humanistic psychology which does seem more accessible, less remote and therefore more useful for the kind of problems and situations faced by educational practitioners. Humanistic psychology's discourse, with its foregrounding of person-centredness, self-directedness, empowerment, and its less obvious cultivation of scientificity makes it much more attractive. In adult and continuing education cognitive psychology is becoming much more important. Its attraction lies partly in its optimistic message that all adults possess the capacity to learn regardless of age, and partly in its emphasis on 'information processing' and cognitive adaptation to life environments.

In general, however, the disquiet about psychology's remoteness and inaccessibility is not something that easily translates into sustained critique of the discourse of disciplines. Disciplines do exert a formative power. It is precisely psychology's claim to know the world 'scientifically' and 'as it really is' which makes it powerful. Practitioners cannot easily get out of regarding disciplines as foundational because their understanding is enfolded in an implicit conception of disciplines as neutral, scientifically validated bodies of knowledge whose only effects are enlightening and

empowering and which thus enable effective action (see Usher 1993b). Essentially, this is but an aspect of the power of discourses to project themselves as neutral and disconnected from power. Disciplines such as psychology are understood purely as knowledge discourses, both power-less and empowering.

Psychology's claim to possess scientifically valid knowledge makes it powerful in the sense that it provides both the justification and the means for a variety of normalising and regulatory practices, particularly schooling but increasingly other fields of educational practice. Psychology does not, as it claims, discover the learner, child or adult, with ready-made 'natural' characteristics. Instead it is psychology's knowledge working with and through certain educational practices that constitute the 'learner' as a particular kind of subject. Educational sites are regulated through discursive practices and education provides sites, such as schooling and increasingly adult continuing education, where regulation through these practices takes place. It is important to stress that what is involved here is neither a matter of overt imposition nor of psychology functioning as a mystifying 'ideology'. The postmodern position would be rather that psychology as a discourse 'recognises' the learner and by so doing makes educational sites into fit objects of the disciplinary gaze.

Recognition and intervention are therefore intertwined but the nature of the intervention changes. In the case of adult continuing education, intervention was seen as a matter of providing greater opportunities for access to provision. Now, however, the education of adults is equated with training involving the acquisition of attitudes, skills and competences perceived as functional to the needs of the socio-economic order. This is justified by theorisations ('knowledge') of socio-economic change which foreground the impact of new technology, the changing nature of employment and the need for competitiveness. These are presented as inexorable facts entailing the necessity of constant change and adaptation. Cognitive psychology provides the means of reconstituting and recognising adults as having precisely the 'natural' cognitive capacities for the lifelong change and adaptation required by the socio-economic order.

There is, then, a coming together of an apparent knowledge discourse (humanistic or cognitive psychology) with certain kinds of social and educational practices. There is a dynamic of mutual implication of a power-knowledge discourse with educational practices whose effect is to 'normalise' the adult as a certain kind of learner or subject. Thus a discipline such as psychology is not powerful simply because it represses–in a sense it does not because the subjects it constitutes are 'active' rather than passive subjects. Rather, psychology is powerful because it can 'name' and normalise. By 'naming' the adult in terms of 'scientifically' validated capacities and ways of behaving, a norm of the adaptive learner is created. Educational practices work in terms of this norm. They are not simply its consequence but make

the norm concrete and substantial. They provide 'evidence' which further reinforces psychology's 'truth' and make constituted subjects 'real'. Psychology's 'truth' is therefore continually being produced and reproduced through educational practices.

Deploying post-structuralist ideas, Walkerdine (1985) argues that this is precisely what schools do. They provide the 'objective' basis for legitimising certain kinds of pedagogic practices, for example, discovery learning, whilst at the same time, these practices define the content of student behaviour. This behaviour provides 'evidence' upon which teachers base their judgements and conduct their practice. Yet it is the practice that has constructed the behaviour and the evidence is therefore relative to that practice. Ultimately, it is relative to the psychological 'truths' about the 'nature' of the child; 'truths' which are themselves not objective descriptions of 'reality' or discoveries about what exists 'naturally' but constructs relative to psychology as a power-knowledge discourse and schooling as a regulatory practice.

Within postmodern positions therefore, disciplines, because they are discourses that combine power and knowledge, cannot be separated from educational practices. Indeed they are always present in such practices. This means that the traditional separation of theory (knowledge) and practice based on their location in separate domains cannot be sustained. Education cannot 'draw from' disciplines in a Hirstian sense because it is already 'in' disciplines—disciplines are already *implicated* in education. Psychology in all its variations is both implied by and implicated in educational knowledge and practice. The question is therefore not whether disciplines have or should have a place in education because that question has already been answered. We are left therefore with a paradox—that disciplines both are and are not foundational. In a conventional epistemological sense they are not but as power-knowledge discourses they clearly are. As far as education is concerned, the disciplinary knowledge of psychology is 'everywhere' (Walkerdine 1985). The real question therefore is not about the status of psychology but about its *effects*.

We referred earlier to the problem that many practitioners have in seeing the relevance of psychology to their field of practice. In a sense, it is easy to be critical about psychology and this contributes to a consistent underestimation of its power. We highlighted some of these criticisms earlier in discussing psychology's refusal to widen the scope of its study. Yet these criticisms miss the point. Psychology does not exist in a vacuum; from its very birth as a 'scientific' discipline it has been intertwined with various practices of social regulation. Its claim to scientific status is therefore not merely a misguided attempt to attain respectability but is vital to the very production of psychology. It has needed to be seen as scientific since otherwise it would have had no warrant in a modernist scientific-technological culture.

In general, psychology appears extremely narrow and unproductive. Yet it is precisely this narrowness which gives psychology, in common with any other scientistic body of knowledge, the power which makes it productive in its *effects*. Psychology, in embracing scientific method, pays a price in terms of narrowness. But scientific method is taken to be the guarantee that what is known is 'untouched by human hand' and therefore known 'as it really is'−hence there is a warrant to do things in the name of that knowledge. So the price is worth paying and, what is more, most practitioners in psychology, given that they cannot see the ground upon which they stand, do not recognise that they are paying a price. As far as they are concerned, they are simply being scientific and no further justification is required.

However, there is now a growing body of literature by psychologists in the area, significantly, of social psychology which is critical of psychology's scientistic self-understandings and practice and which foregrounds its regulatory effects (Frosh 1989, Henriques *et al.* 1984, Hollway 1989, Kvale 1992, Parker 1989, Parker and Shotter 1990, Steier 1991, Walkerdine 1990). What these critiques have in common is an emphasis not on the weakness or otherwise of psychology's scientificity but on the *politics* of that scientificity. They argue that psychology does not exist in some neutral, transcendental realm of 'science' but is very much part of the day-to-day practices of governmentality and social control.

Significantly, this critique does not exempt humanistic psychology, indeed, on the contrary, humanistic psychology is seen as central to contemporary governmentality (see Rose 1990). Increasingly, people are not simply 'externally' regulated by 'objectifying' power-knowledge discourses such as behavioural psychology but rather regulate themselves through 'subjectifying' discourses which emphasise the need to talk and know the 'truth' about oneself as a means of empowerment The autonomous self becomes the normative centre of attention and activity. Humanistic psychology is perhaps the most influential contemporary example of such a discourse.

In education, humanistic psychology is a discursive practice which constitutes the learner as an active meaning-giving subject with knowledge about self. From this follows a pedagogical emphasis on learner-centredness, negotiated curricula and activity-centred methods, all of which are seen as encouraging autonomy and empowerment. Now our first reaction to this would be to see it as a vast improvement on traditional didactic knowledge-centred methods and in that sense we would readily agree that it is empowering. This reaction would not be wrong since learner-centredness is empowering−that's what Foucault means when he refers to discourses as creating 'active' knowing subjects. However, it is a reaction which fails to recognise that regulation works through empowerment. The technologies of the self are designed precisely to empower through *self-control*. In a sense, we

position and regulate ourselves more effectively through a 'Subjectifying' discourse such as humanistic psychology.

Seeing education as inherently emancipatory and empowering, in principle if not always in practice, is an aspect of our modernist way of seeing the world. As a consequence, we fail to see that a 'knowledgeable' discourse such as humanistic psychology brings out more and more dimensions of the learner and in so doing expands the space for educational intervention and the exercise of power. Here we must emphasise the significance of Rogers' humanistic recuperation of pedagogy in *Freedom to Learn for the '80s* (Rogers 1983). Its influence in both the self-understandings and the practices of education should not be underestimated. His critique of schooling and in particular of didactic pedagogy was positioned in a discourse which appeared to be both 'human', accessible and relevant. It had none of scientific psychology's remoteness, abstraction and impersonality. But as we have noted earlier, it appeared also to be none the less 'scientific' for that. Given this combination of the 'human' and the 'scientific', it functioned very effectively as a discourse which constituted learners both as active knowing subjects and as objects to be acted upon.

'Looking into yourself' and 'finding your true self' is what humanistic psychology enables people to do and what emerges is a form of self-knowledge which involves self-monitoring and self-assessing, a continual self-measurement against norms apparently of one's own making. In effect, people place themselves under their own surveillance, they control themselves not through 'external' discipline but by applying disciplinary techniques of confession and self-examination to themselves. In confession, people understand themselves through practices such as, for example, counselling and therapy which constitute confession as truth. They are therefore already inscribed in power, their 'needs' articulated through confessional techniques.

Schools and increasingly other educational sites act as a field of surveillance and regulation. What we are beginning to see now is significant changes in their forms. Schools have always been the site of discipline articulated through objectifying discourses within which, as we have noted earlier, scientific psychology has been strongly implicated. Now, however, it is subjectifying discourses, within which humanistic psychology is strongly implicated, that are if anything more powerful. Discipline is now more likely to be articulated through technologies of the self, confessional techniques which speak the language of empowerment and learner-centredness. As Metcalfe (1991) points out, report cards are not something handed out by teachers but students through self-assessment must 'confess' the 'truths' proclaimed about them in the report cards. Discipline is not something externally imposed by teachers since students now discipline themselves.

The effect of this is that students take responsibility for themselves. Again, our first reaction to this would be to applaud it as a mark of

progress. But again this is to see only one side of the picture. Through confessional techniques students come to believe that what they are is entirely of their own making and that their success or otherwise educationally reflects the 'truth' about themselves. Clearly, then, attitudes are being formed, and very individualistic ones at that—in effect, that students have only themselves to blame. It is another way of rejecting the social which actually works to mould subjectivities with the characteristics identified as valuable and necessary by psychological discourses and ultimately by the needs of governmentality. In the meantime, the 'truth' of the socio-economic order remains unquestioned. Yet confessional techniques do not work through oppression; people actively and almost joyously accept the 'truth' about themselves. We will return more fully to the place of confession in educational practices in a later chapter.

Rose argues, rightly in our view, that government is not just a matter of applying power from outside. There is also the government of oneself, something which requires education in the skills and attitudes appropriate to self-regulation. Once this is achieved external regulation can be dispensed with except for those who refuse to confess, monitor and regulate themselves. He also points out in support of Foucault that confessional technologies can only work on active subjects:

> If psychology has played a key role in the technologies of the self that produce the modern subject, this has not been through its individualistic…and behaviourist branches. For in contemporary rationalities and technologies of government, the citizen is construed and addressed as a subject actively engaged in thinking, wanting, feeling and doing…. It is upon these social and dynamic relations that government seeks to act. In the family, the factory, and the expanding systems of counselling and therapy, the vocabularies of mental hygiene, group relations and psychodynamics are translated into techniques of self-inspection and self-rectification.
>
> (Rose 1990:114)

This points to a significant fact about psychology and its place in contemporary life, *viz.* that in all its various 'scientific' manifestations it plays a crucial role in 'shaping' the way people understand themselves. This shaping is sometimes obvious but in other cases much less so. It could be argued that behaviourism, for example, deliberately and consciously sets out to 'shape' and as a consequence is obviously oppressive in its practice, if not in its self-understandings. Humanistic psychology, on the other hand, understands itself as liberatory and empowering and its practice is not apparently oppressive. Its power lies in its offer of empowerment backed up by a 'human' science. Its appeal lies in its insistence on the reality of the

'sovereign' subject and the consequent freedom which this implies. But as Richer (1992) points out our responsibility increases the more freedom we ascribe ourselves, and the more responsibilty we take on the more this is bound to fail in a situation where our autonomy is necessarily circumscribed and limited. Humanistic psychology refuses to recognise this failure and by so doing provides both the justification and the means for intervention and 'shaping' in the name of governing the self:

> In the end, the prying interpretations of humanistic and psychodynamic approaches are far more efficient at normalising than are either the anti-psychotic drugs of the medical approach or the shaping techniques of behaviourism. Psychology—all of it— is a branch of the police; psychodynamic and humanistic psychologies are the secret police.
>
> (Richer 1992:118)

PSYCHOLOGY IN THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

It is important to stress that the postmodern critique of psychology we have outlined is not simply a highlighting of mainstream psychology's wilful failure to reflect on its grounds and its effects but also an attempt, on the basis of the critique, to reconfigure psychology. This is no easy task given psychology's central place in modernity and its intimate implications with governmentality and the operation of power. Equally, psychology finds itself increasingly at odds with postmodernity. Gergen (1992:23) points out that in modernity 'psychologists could confidently proclaim that there was a subject matter available for interrogation…in the light of postmodern arguments, it is no longer easy to occupy such a position'. The problem is that if psychology is not simply a representation of the world but a discourse which constitutes the world in a particular way, then there can be no subject matter as such—or at least, the only 'subject matter' apparently left is the study of psychological discourse—which is precisely what the critique we have been discussing so far does. Yet a moment's reflection shows that necessary though this critique may be, it is essentially a parasitic activity, i.e. there must be something to critique. It is this which has led some, for example Kvale (1992:45) to suggest that 'modern psychology, whether in the naturalist or the humanist version, has become an intellectual secondhand store' and that perhaps the 'postmodern death of the subject may be tantamount to the death of psychology—the modern science of the subject' (1992:52).

However, this is only part of the story. For some, like Gergen, the problem is not so much that psychology is a 'technology' but that it has been an unreflexive technology. The answer then is not to abandon psychology but to ensure that as a technology it is 'placed more directly and openly in the service of values' (1992:28)—in other words, that psychology recognise

reflexivity and by so doing recognises the need to make deliberate choices about values rather than hiding behind 'objectivity' and Valueneutrality'. Through recognising reflexivity and the constructed quality of psychological knowledge, its location in discursive paradigms which create 'worlds' to be researched and 'discovered' is admitted and put to work. As a consequence, psychology can be reconstructed within the postmodern moment and be better placed to engage in cultural criticism and also to play a role in cultural change—as Gergen puts it 'rather than "telling it like it is" the challenge for the postmodern psychologist is to "tell it as it may become"' (1992:27).

There is a trend in psychological research which well exemplifies this attempt to reconfigure psychology and its subject matter in a more positive way. One aspect of this is the focusing of research on what Foucault called 'subjugated knowledges' or local and unelaborated knowledge and experience traditionally ignored or downgraded because it was considered as having failed to pass the test of universality and scientificity. What this indicates is that psychology may be beginning to rethink its commitment to the natural science model of scientificity. The trend therefore may be illustrative of what Kvale (1992:53) refers to as an alternative psychology that 'moves out of the archaeology of the psyche and into the cultural landscape of the present world'—a reconfiguration of psychology from 'science' to practice, from the modern abstracted, rationalistic, pre-social and asocial individual to postmodern social subjects forged in history and by culture acting in the lifeworld of the everyday.

One example of a 'subjugated knowledge', which is particularly relevant to education is practitioner knowledge (see Schon 1983, Usher 1989b, Usher and Bryant 1989). This is knowledge that is subjugated because traditionally it has been judged by psychology as anecdotal, situationally specific (and therefore ungeneralisable), lacking in scientificity and thus not worth bothering about. In other words, it is judged, and excluded, from a disciplinary standpoint. Any emphasis on practitioner knowledge as a realm of study in its own right is a recognition that these 'defects' actually tell us something very significant about scientific psychology. Furthermore, it is an emphasis which leads to an immediate questioning of the technical-rationality model of practice and the notion, embedded in scientific psychology, that first, 'rigour' in practice is all that matters and second, that this 'rigour' always requires the application of scientifically validated knowledge ('theory').

What we have here therefore, is actually a questioning of psychology's traditional self-understanding of being a body of disciplinary knowledge that 'explains' the world yet is somehow detached from it. Rather, the focus on practitioner knowledge brings psychology out into a postmodern world characterised by complexity, uncertainty and situational particularity; a world where knowledge (the knowledge in and of practice) is itself socially

constructed, fragmentary, foundationless and validated by its usefulness rather than its scientific rigour (see Polkinghorne 1992).

This approach offers a number of possibilities. First, it forces psychology to examine its own ground, to reflexively recognise that it is itself a knowledge-generating practice in a postmodern world—in other words, that it is itself what it studies. In this way it may start to rid itself of its 'scientific' pretensions and its capture by scientism. Second, it offers the possibility that psychology ceases to have the 'sovereign' individualistic subject as its founding assumption and object of study and instead studies the practices of everyday life and the 'knowledge' generated in those practices. This would involve recognising that subjects are both particular, i.e. have a unique identity, but are at the same time embodied and embedded, social subjects of language and culture. If psychology were to develop these self-understandings and the modes of practices associated with them it would most likely be a 'discipline' which could play an important part in reconfiguring educational practices away from their current dominant mode.

3

KNOWING ONESELF
Subjectivity and mastery

THE DREAM OF PRESENCE AND SELF-PRESENCE

The scientism of psychology is motivated by a fear that the world cannot be mastered, i.e. known directly and certainly, without scientific method. What is manifested here is a desire for 'presence' where the world can be known in an unmediated way. This unmediated and therefore certain knowledge is considered possible in principle but, equally, the possibility of presence is thought of as always under threat; a threat whose source ultimately lies in mediation in its various forms.

The fear that presence will be subverted is ultimately a fear of the effects of language and sociality. Language, for example, with its tendency to elude mastery is seen as the source of a bias which threatens presence. Although language is cast as merely the vehicle for transmitting thought and/or feelings (where by implication language has been mastered), it is nonetheless considered an untrustworthy vehicle because of its everpresent 'slipperiness'. One example is the power of language to persuade—its rhetorical power which can present fiction or 'untruth' as truth. This is one of the reasons why psychology, whatever its form, has a tendency to make subjects into objects without language. Language's rhetorical power, it is believed, undermines rationality and truth. Scientific method therefore becomes the means whereby knowledge of the world, either of the objective world or of subjective action and experiencing, can be naturalistically generated—a knowledge from which the possibility of otherness, i.e. that which cannot be made 'same', fully known or mastered, has been removed and where presence can therefore be guaranteed.

Thus at the root of the modern scientific attitude is a dream of presence, a desire to know the world through a language which represents the world transparently and thus truly, where meaning is present to thought undistorted by language's 'fictions', where the world 'speaks' itself truly. As Boyne (1990:91) puts it, 'the world represented by the language, unobscured by it,

would be perfectly *present* to the observing subject, who could then *speak* of what was seen' (emphasis added).

Presence means perfect representation, where language is simply a transparent representational medium for describing the nature of the world, making it present, without interposing itself between the observing subject and the world. Presence is where the subject 'sees' clearly and systematically and where speech is merely the means of accurately communicating thoughts from one rational subject to another. With presence, the possibility of bias in any form has been removed since there is no place for deception to gain purchase–language merely represents that which is. With presence, the subject stands apart, an autonomous being who simply 'sees' with both an internal and externally directed gaze untouched by the social form.

As with presence in knowing the world, so too with self-presence in knowing the self. In Descartes' foundational story of presence the deceiving demon causes him to doubt even his own existence (see *A Discourse on Method*, 1986). But in doubting, Descartes thinks and thereby confirms the certainty of his existence, thus vanquishing the deceiver. Descartes thought therefore that he had found presence, a certainty based on the essential rationality of himself as a knowing conscious subject, with an innate rationality, immune to deception. The knowing subject not only knows but knows it knows; consciousness implies self-consciousness. Ultimately, the fact of self-consciousness, of being master of oneself, is the guarantee of knowledge. Like the world, self-consciousness is transparent; the self can be known through unmediated reflection i.e. the subject can be present to itself.

However, Descartes' foundational discourse repressed certain crucial questions which have come back to haunt science, psychology and the modernist project generally. For example, what if the subject is not centred on rationality? What if the subject cannot experience reality in an unmediated way? What if 'reality' is not itself an independently existing given? What if certainty is an achievement, an end-point, rather than a starting-point? What if the subject is not transparently self-conscious, what if it does not know that it knows? All these questions are centred on and raised by a questioning of the notion of consciousness. Freud's introduction of the notion of the unconscious and his reformulation of the Cogito as 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think' raised most acutely the issue of the decentred subject, where the subject of consciousness, the reasoning, thinking transparent subject, is displaced by the opaque subject of the unconscious.

We have encountered earlier the possibility of an unconscious dimension in discussing Gadamer's critique of consciousness. Gadamer argued that self-transparent consciousness thinks itself the centre of being, fully in control of itself, immune to influences outside of or inside itself. Against this, Gadamer argued that being is always prior to consciousness and, indeed, because

subjects are 'prejudiced', prejudiced being is the condition of consciousness. Without prejudices, which are unconscious, subjects could not even begin thinking, they would have nothing to think with. Prejudices or pre-understandings are located in interpretive traditions, the network of beliefs, presuppositions, values and above all language which pre-constitute the world for consciousness to know. The subject is thus always more than the consciousness it takes itself to be. Consciousness cannot even think of itself as consciousness without an 'unconscious' in the sense of a pre-understood world.

The argument is, therefore, that consciousness cannot be transparent to itself nor, since prejudices are historically situated in traditions which are continually changing, can consciousness be identical with itself. Rather, it is always 'in process' and always partly opaque to itself, If consciousness is not self-transparent and self-identical then there can be no subject of self-certainty. In other words, modernist dreams of presence and self-presence remain *dreams*. If there is always something beyond consciousness which consciousness must accept without an awareness of its acceptance then the subject cannot have a complete knowledge of itself or of the 'external' world. There is no independently existing 'external' world in a positivist/empiricist sense since to know a world is already to be in it. The world must be pre-understood before it can be investigated rationally and methodically. This also implies that however much consciousness may come to know, there is always something that remains unknown because the subject, since it changes with what it comes to know, never remains itself, present to itself, the same, self-identical.

Here we are not referring to science's ritualistic incantations of the 'incompleteness' of knowledge because this is not a *necessary* incompleteness but one which always can, in principle, become complete through more research and the progress of science generally. Rather, what we are referring to and what informs the postmodern moment is an incompleteness which can *never* become completed. The horizon is always shifting; as soon as it is reached it has already moved and so on *ad infinitum;* the subject is always in the middle of this movement, caught in a dialectical and changing relationship between itself and that which it knows.

Science's desire for mastery requires a subject that knows and can control itself. This is what the Cartesian Cogito is all about. Yet it could be argued that the Cogito, rather than pointing to a firm substantive ground of consciousness, shows the subject of certainty as a fading point which always *lacks* self-knowledge. Where there is lack there is desire and desire always implicates knowledge. Rather than certainty, the Cogito testifies to a lack of certainty and thus to the desire for certainty through knowledge precisely because of this lack. We have touched upon this in the previous chapter when discussing the desire for mastery, founded on lack, of philosophy and science. As Ragland-Sullivan (1986:84–5) puts it: 'The desidero

circumscribes the cogito. All efforts to give meaning to one's life manifest Desire.' Descartes' extreme desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false testifies to this. As Ricoeur (1981) points out, the truth the Cogito seeks is a certainty about itself in the context of a *deceptive* consciousness. Thus the Cogito is not master of itself, it can only seek to *construct* a certain self rather than possess or master itself fully.

Desire as constituted by loss or lack is both within and other to the subject. The desire to know is the attempt to fulfil the lack (an absence) with a presence, the presence of unmediated knowledge of self and world. The mastery of desire enables, as Walkerdine (1988) points out, both a control over objects and the world in general and a self-control which merge in certainty. But mastery is not the same as extinction or fulfilment of desire. The subject thinks it has attained mastery through presence but continues to be traversed by a desire which is interminable and whose result is that presence is interminably postponed.

FREUD–PRESENCE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

It is to Freud more than anyone else that we owe our understanding of the possibility of a consciousness which thinks it can master itself, thereby denying (repressing) the unconscious and thus falling into self-deception (untruth). Consciousness seeks to repress a dynamic unconscious whose effects it finds itself unable to cope with, but falls into self-deception in the very act of repression. In effect, Freud argues that subjects are not reducible to consciousness and that human actions can only be explained through uncovering their underlying causes in the unconscious. For Freud, all actions have meaning but meaning may be obscured, ambiguous and difficult to find. Freud's approach is hermeneutic in the sense that it emphasises interpretation and meaning. Psychoanalysis is about the search for meanings where the obvious or surface meaning does not terminate the search, where meaning is not exhausted by the subject's stated intention or conscious reflection. The search can only approach a terminus when a 'final' meaning located in the subject's unconscious is found. It is this meaning, a meaning related to the subject's history which is causal *vis-à-vis* actions.

At one level, Freud's 'final' meanings, when they are found, look distinctly biological. It is drives, particularly sexual drives, which govern intentionality and human actions; the meaning of what we do and who we are is ultimately explainable in terms of the history of our sexual drives. Of course, drives should not be confused with instincts, a term Freud never actually used in this context. Instincts were described by Freud as 'mythical', at any rate primarily biological, whereas with drives the biological is always mediated through psychic 'representatives' in its effects on the mental. This implies that drives are actually psychological and that biological 'reality' is not a bed-rock

which the psychological merely reflects. The biological would seem therefore to be a precondition but not a determining cause. Instincts refer to the purely organic drives, to motivational or directional energy, and belong to the biological whereas 'drive' is a human concept which incorporates the biological given that the latter is an aspect, although not the totality, of the human.

Freud himself was always ambivalent about the status of the biological in psychological explanations, a position which was itself a reflection of his ambivalence about the scientificity of psychoanalysis. In the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' Freud speaks through a positivistic discourse of science with a reductionist emphasis when he refers to his intention 'to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science' (quoted in Smith and Kerrigan 1983:75). Freud's desire in the face of powerful opposition that psychoanalysis be recognised as a biologically-related science echoes the contemporary debate about the scientificity of psychoanalysis. Yet his conception of psychoanalysis, despite the reductionism to biological first causes as in the 'Project' and the emphasis on scientific method, at the same time consistently incorporated a hermeneutic dimension in its emphasis on explaining human actions in terms of their meaning. Freud's science, although it aspired to be an empiricist science, can aptly be termed a hermeneutic 'science', a form of 'relational' meaning-constructing work in its practice (see Flax 1990, Stevens 1983).

Freud's problem is that his desire for scientific rigour opened up the danger inherent in any reduction of the psychological to the biological—that the unconscious becomes either animal-like or a place of the 'divinities of the night'. Freud believed that everything psychological could be explained ultimately with reference to a bed-rock, and the unconscious which underlies consciousness became such a bed-rock. But as Harland (1987:33) points out, the danger here is the smuggling in of a hidden assumption that 'whatever is underlying and basic can only be underlying and basic in the way biology is underlying and basic'. Thus if the unconscious is basic then it must be biological or animal-like. Freud did not consider the unconscious to be animal-like, the repository of a seething mass of 'natural' instincts. But the problem was to formulate a theorisation which preserved a 'human' rather than an animal unconscious but which, at the same time, did not repress its dynamic energy nor render its subversive effect innocuous.

Freud's quasi-biologism points to the need in any theorisation of human subjectivity for something beyond the abstracted or organismic rationality offered by scientific and humanistic psychology. Here again the problem revolves around the question of consciousness. As we have seen earlier, the dominant discourse of scientific psychology is to see subjectivity as coterminous with consciousness, either a purely cognitive consciousness or as with humanistic psychology, a consciousness that also encompasses the affective. Insofar as Freud's message constitutes a critique of the notion of a

unified, rational, self-transparent consciousness as the essence of being, it can only do so through disrupting the identity of being and consciousness. It is here, therefore, that Freud's quasi-biological dimension can play its part. Freud's critique of consciousness argued for an unconscious counterposed to consciousness which continually subverted it, and desire as drives which are ambiguously both social and biological. The latter is perhaps best understood as a metaphor of force, energy or motivating power. Desire presses, pushes, seeks, in an unsatisfiable restlessness; of all this, rational consciousness 'knows' nothing.

LACAN AND THE SUBJECT

We now turn to a more explicitly post-structuralist perspective on subjectivity by considering the work of Jacques Lacan, work which has been very influential in the unfolding of a postmodern stance. Lacan's critique of consciousness is the basis of a theorisation which avoids biological reductionism and an individualistic subject. Lacan agrees with Freud that subjectivity is not constituted by consciousness. He emphasises the importance of the unconscious and of desire as the motor of human actions. Desire remains a force or pressure but is not reduced, even ambiguously, to the purely biological. Lacan (1977:52) points to the need to disentangle 'the deciphering of the unconscious from the theory of the instincts–to say nothing of the theory of the drives'. For biology he substitutes signification and by doing so situates himself within the postmodern moment. For him, desire is particularly human and cannot be theorised naturalistically, i.e. reduced to drives. The energy implied in the Freudian discourse of quasi-biological drives becomes in Lacan a dynamic of want conditioned by lack and mediated by language and intersubjectivity. As Forrester points out, biological need (instinct) is transformed into human desire:

> Lacan continues his criticisms of those versions of psychoanalytic theory which equate Freud's concept of drives with biologically determined need, arguing instead that the true realm of psychoanalytic action is the world of desire which is created by language transforming need into desire.
>
> (Forrester 1990:110)

Desire is human rather than animal-like because it seeks what is human in others–their desire. Lacan expresses this as the subject's desire always being the desire of, for and from the other. Without desiring the desire of the other, consciousness cannot also be self-consciousness. As an 'energy' motivating action, desire is always social and intersubjective, directed beyond the self to others, since what we desire for self, what constitutes us as a self, is the recognition of others. Desire therefore operates in the field of intersubjectivity

rather than biology and the subject is not 'free-standing', pre-social and asocial, but is rather a relational self (Frazer and Lacey 1993).

At the same time, desire is not simply a matter of conscious intentionality. What we desire is different to what we need in a naturalistic sense and what we demand or what we may consciously think we desire, because desire is in the domain of the unconscious. Now if desire is both unconscious, although articulated in speech, and a motivator then correspondingly Lacan's subject is radically different to the subject of scientific and humanistic psychology. It is neither an organismic subject nor a subject of rationality. It is neither pre-given nor transparent. Subjectivity instead is structured according to the laws of the Imaginary (the order of identifications and images) and the Symbolic (the order of language and culture). The subject is structured but since its structuring remains opaque to it, it is a subject of the unconscious.

As a subject of the unconscious, consciousness does not exhaust its identity—thus it is neither self-transparent nor unitary. It is for this reason that Lacan's subject is no longer 'a unified collection of thoughts and feelings, but is "decentred", marked by an essential split' (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986:18). In Lacan the subject is split between an ego (or *'moi'*), i.e. the subject as posited by science and psychology, the 'self' as conventionally understood, and a speaking subject (an I or *'je'*). Both the ego and the I are traversed by conscious and unconscious dimensions which oppose and complement one another. The ego is located in the Imaginary order, the domain of images, projections and visual identifications. These constitute the subject as a self with a sense of wholeness, a 'focus of unity', which determines 'on a certain level the "structuration" of the subject' (Smith and Kerrigan 1983:57). Without the ego, the subject would be merely a speaking subject, or more precisely a *spoken* subject—the subject that not so much speaks as a matter of conscious intentionality but is spoken by language. The I, on the other hand, is linguistically and culturally determined but this determination is modulated by the ego which therefore prevents the subject from simply being a machine programmed by the Symbolic order of language and culture.

However, the I, because of its location in the Symbolic order gives the ego a stability which it would otherwise not have if it were located in the Imaginary order. The I designates a subject that not only speaks but is named, at the most basic level with a proper name which positions her/him in the domain of social relations. It is through the use in speech of the designatory signifier made possible by the socio-linguistic Symbolic order, that the subject becomes articulated as a *person* with identity and continuity. This provides the stability which the ego lacks because as the term *'moi'* implies, the ego works by constituting itself as an object to itself through identifications and fusions with others. As a reflection of the other, it sees itself as others see it Subjectivity is therefore a 'conferred imputation' (Smith

and Kerrigan 1983:10). If the self is always constructed through the ways others see it (through 'conferred imputations') then it cannot be autonomous (self-originating and self-directing) and coherent (possessing a fixed identity). However, the ego does understand itself as unified, coherent and autonomous but Lacan argues this is merely a narcissistic and unstable self-image; the ego therefore always falls into self-deception. It understands itself from outside itself; in other words, from a position of otherness.

As a narcissistic object to itself, any sense of selfhood is therefore continually shifting, subject always to an oscillation between certainty and uncertainty. The ego says with certainty–'This is me'–but then immediately has to ask, 'Am I so sure?' because this 'me' is not a fixed identity. The ego is both certain of its 'wholeness' because of its imagined unity and self-identity, yet uncertain because of its constitution in otherness, what Lacan calls its lacking or 'want-to-be'.

In consciousness, the ego presents itself in terms of its appearances or persona, its externally presented roles and its other-determined self-conceptions, in particular of autonomy and self-determination, of developing naturally, essentially unified and owing nothing to anything outside itself. Lacan, however, presents this as a process of fundamental misrecognition. Its fixity or sense of stability and unity, its centredness on itself, are constituted in an otherness which originates at an early stage of life in the mirror phase where the young child conceives itself in an image of illusory wholeness which it mistakes for itself. This image of wholeness, of a reassuring stability and identity, is pleasurable and satisfies the desire for mastery as it counters the inherent feelings of helplessness, disunity and fragmentation (lack of mastery) experienced by the young child. This process continues throughout life, causing the ego to misunderstand its own stability and unity. The ego's sense of its wholeness and identity is an imaginary identification with an ideal ego that 'situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction' (Lacan 1977:2). The ego recognises itself in others as an ideal ego. Through its origins, the ego becomes dependent 'on a failure to discriminate between self and other, apparently whole but in fact brought about through alienation' (Frosh 1987:134). Thus for Lacan the ego does not provide the subject with a sense of authentic self-identity because the subject is located in the relational intersubjective exchange of ego and alter ego. There is always a misrecognition since the ego 'recognises itself at the moment it loses itself in/as the other…identity is based on a (false) recognition of an other as the same' (Grosz 1990:41).

Thus the ego is neither stable nor unified nor can it have a transparent knowledge of itself, divided as it is between self and other. Since the subject is not founded on a natural core of stable identity, claims to certain knowledge of itself and the world, based as they are on an illusion of autonomy, self-origination and self-mastery, cannot provide the epistemological foundations in the subject of certainty that can truly know itself and 'reality'. Lacan

argues that, on the contrary, the ego takes the illusory to be real and what it knows about the real is the knowledge of an illusory reality.

The I or speaking subject is the subject of language. Where the ego provides the subject with its sense of individuality, albeit an unstable and illusory individuality, naming and positioning in a network of social relations gives the subject a sense of continuity. But this continuity, rather than constituting an identity, is actually a means by which the subject is inscribed in an oppressive *identification,* i.e. is identified as such and such and located in the social order. At the same time, the use of 'I' to identify self is the representing of self in language and to represent something necessarily means that the something is absent. As Clement points out, identity and identification are not identical:

> The subject will never be truly 'himself'. He will be the son of, the brother of, the sister of, the cousin of, the lover of, the friend of. He will become stuck in the affections of others in which he will not be himself but another…
>
> (Clement 1983:91)

When 'I' represents self, I am identified but my identity, that which is represented, must disappear. That is how language works. It is both performative and referential. Performatively, the designation 'I' constitutes me as that I. Referentially, 'I' represents me but what is represented disappears. As Lacan puts it, the world of words replaces the world of things—words make things present but since words 'replace' (stand in or represent) things, things are at the same time rendered absent. The Symbolic order of language and culture is an order of relationships where, because of the mediating function of language, positioning, and hence distance between the components of a relationship, is made possible. It is through this positioning and distancing that every subject becomes a distinct subject. Naming, or the ascription of a signifier X or I, thus allows subjects to be distinguished from objects and from other subjects—they assume an identity. X can be distinguished from self, it is an other, a not-self and equally self is not-X. The signifier 'I' allows the subject to be distinguished from everything that is not-I. This is just another way of saying that language works through difference and negativity.

Given this, the Symbolic order as language (which Lacan refers to as the Other) makes social relationships possible. It is through immersion in the Symbolic order that subjects 'learn' social relationships and thereby become 'different' or distinct subjects (one learns who one is by learning who one is not). This is achieved unconsciously and the Oedipal drama is a metaphor for this learning of difference and negativity. For Lacan, it is what makes the subject a 'human' (although also a gendered) subject. But designation by the signifier 'I' not only differentiates but also distances the subject—not only

from others but also from its own subjectivity. 'I' is the signifier of self but it is not subjectivity itself, the signified or meaning of subjectivity. The signifier does not operate in a one-to-one relationship with signifieds but through a structural relationship of pure difference and negativity *vis-à-vis* other signifiers. Thus in being named, in acquiring a signifier, the subject assumes a 'unique' signifier which differentiates it from other signifiers, other subjects. This signifier however has no meaning in itself, its meaning emerges only through a differential relationship with other signifiers. In becoming subject to the workings of the signifier in the structure of language the assumption of uniqueness through distinction is at the same time an assumption of difference, negativity and hence distance, both from other subjectivities and from one's own, which vanishes in being represented and acquiring an identity. For Lacan then, the entry into language and culture makes subjects 'human' but also installs in them an interminable desire.

Desire is interminable because as it assumes its distinctiveness, the subject is 'taken over' by the signifier. In becoming a subject it is submerged by the signifier 'I' and all the other signifiers to which this signifier is necessarily linked in the chain of language. Lacan argues that the insertion into language ensures that the subject, by becoming a speaking subject, thereby becomes an object of language. Through the use of the signifier of self that distinguishes self from other, the subject is at the same time alienated from its subjectivity, from itself, because the signifier of self operates within the structure of language. Subjectivity is therefore 'lost' because the signifier 'I' never points directly and unequivocally to the signified, the meaning of one's self. 'I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object' (Lacan 1977:86).

To understand this fully we need to consider Lacan's theorisation of the relationship between the signifier and meaning:

> It is in the chain of the signifier that meaning 'insists' but none of its elements 'consists' in the signification of which it is at the moment capable. We are forced, then, to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier.
>
> (Lacan 1977:153)

Lacan is suggesting that meaning is not a function of an individual signifier attached to a signified but is rather a function of the connection or relationship between signifiers—a position we have identified as consistent with the postmodern moment. Each signifier ('element') is only capable of a signification through being attached to a signified, what the signifier 'consists', but this attachment is temporary and unstable since meaning continually unfolds itself in the chain of signifiers: 'no signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification' (Lacan 1977:150). Each signifier points beyond itself to another signifier, meaning is always

anticipated but never fully realised. Every signified is itself a signifier. Thus meaning is never exhausted by the signification of the moment but it is only in the unfolding of the chain that meaning 'insists', a chain which potentially encompasses the whole of language. This does not mean, as some critics of Lacan would claim, that there is no meaning but rather that meaning is always in process, to be completed and where the completion always remains a potential. There is always, as it were, a 'beyond' constituted by the seamless tapestry of the infinite continuity and tropic combinations of language.

Of course, in practical terms there always is closure in the sense that meaning is fixed temporarily. Without this, social intercourse would be impossible. In effect, because most meanings are socially fixed and given to us, we are meaning-takers. We understand our temporary meanings as fixed and definitive; we believe, given our ego's desire for mastery, that we can in effect halt the slide of meaning and by so doing master language. Taking meaning to be 'fixable' and assuming that language can be mastered in this way is an effect of the totalising and imaginary identifications of the ego; this is yet another of its illusions in misrecognising itself as a subject of certainty.

The existence of the speaking subject who is named an 'I' inevitably poses the question 'Who am I'? The answer is not a signified, the meaning of who I am, but merely more signifiers. It is in this sense that Lacan argues that the signifier 'I' does not simply represent the subject as a signified, in terms of an essential pre-given meaning which is conventionally what we take the function of the I to be, but rather the signifier represents (or stands in for) the subject for another signifier:

> The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other [i.e. language and culture] makes manifest the subjects of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject.
>
> (Lacan 1979:207)

The subject is therefore manifested, made concrete, through the signifier–'I exist, I speak, fishing in language for my words, and I stop my words so that they will make sense… I therefore exist only after the fact…after I shall have spoken' (Clement 1983:178). But the signifier is in the field of the Other, the signifying system of language, which is external or other to the subject and which the subject has unconsciously accepted in becoming part of society and culture. So in speaking the subject becomes a signifier, is called into existence and 'petrified'. But in this process of interpellation and fixing the meaning of itself is lost, continually sliding. It is this loss which marks the subject as the subject of the unconscious and also creates the lack which is the source of interminable desire.

This has certain consequences. The first is that for Lacan there is no true, essential or 'natural' self. This marks an obvious difference with humanistic psychology and in a less obvious way with scientific psychology since it too, as Frosh (1987:130) points out, assumes 'a pre-existent subject which learns to express itself in the words made available to it by language'. The Lacanian subject has no such pre-existence, nor does it possess a core of pre-social, organismic selfhood as does the humanistic subject. It is in effect an 'absence', a no-thing which becomes a some-thing through being 'called' or identified by and through language or, more precisely, the signifiers of language. The subject is therefore a construction, a 'solidification' brought about by signifiers rather than an expression of a true self. Equally, however, there is no false self—there is a subject always in process who believes it is a self but who is never certain and there is an unconscious which speaks the 'truth' of the subject but is not recognised as so doing.

The second consequence implies a critique of intentionality, in particular the notion found in both modern scientific and humanistic psychology that language represents intentions, that the subject is the source of meaning and that language is merely a vehicle for expressing the meanings encapsulated in intentions. This takes us back once again to the question of mastery, of the subject as the master of its intentions and thus of meaning and language. If it is not a question of the subject using signifiers to represent intentions (meanings) but rather of signifiers representing the subject for other signifiers then a subject can no longer be considered in possession of an agentic mastery over speech, language or indeed itself.

A third consequence is to do with the signified of the subject, the essential meaning that would answer the question 'Who am I'? The relationship of signifiers to signifieds within the structure and chain of language means that there is no transcendental signified or ultimate, bed-rock meaning—in other words, there is no self-presence. Thus the question must remain forever unanswered. This perhaps accounts for the difficulty we experience when we try to understand our subjectivity by conscious reflection or through a 'scientifically validated' body of knowledge and why so many, including 'scientific' psychologists such as Rogers, have ultimately sought the answer in mystical transcendence. When we try to answer the question of 'Who am I' we seem to become lost in language, in words, in signifiers which somehow always fail to capture our being. This is no coincidence. In conscious thought we can only know our being through signifiers, which in effect means we can never know it finally and definitively. There is always something 'beyond' consciousness.

As Tavor Banet (1989) points out, language provides the terms in which we can understand ourselves, our desires and our experiences and thus enables us to bring these things to awareness, to 'name' and recognise them, to in a sense make them 'our own' and to have them recognised as our own by others. However, since the terms through which we do this are pre-

provided by language and since language is a presence made of absence', of difference and negativity, there is equally a sense in which they are not our own desires and experiences, that the self of language is not the self of being (Tavor Banet 1989:20). Subjects are constituted by the signifiers of language rather than by their psychological processes as scientific and humanistic psychology would have us believe. As Lacan puts it:

> The displacement [i.e. sliding of the signifier along the signifying chain] of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindness, in their end and in their fate, their innate gifts and social acquisitions notwithstanding, without regard for character and sex…everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology…will follow the path of the signifier.
> (from *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan—Book II,* quoted in Smith and
> Kerrigan 1983:60)

Yet as subjects we refuse to accept this limitation and go on searching for that transcendental signified, go on wanting to know. For Lacan, we are born into language, which forms and structures our being, and language, given its symbolic nature, functions through lack or absence. We are formed and structured by absence or 'castration'. 'Castration' for Lacan does not mean the same as it did for Freud. It refers to the subject as a subject of language, inducted into the Symbolic order as a condition of its humanity yet whose essential characteristic is to be cast in otherness, an otherness which cannot be mastered and thus enshrines a feeling of impotence in the subject. Language gives meaning, it makes 'powerful' subjects and castrates them, deprives them of their being. At the same time, however, because of the unconscious desire for recognition and mastery, subjects are impelled into continually searching for it. The inevitable failure of the search, our inability to answer the question 'Who am I'? points to a fundamental alterity—as Lacan would put it, we are founded in the Other, the signifying system of language, a founding which makes us unconscious and opaque to ourselves.

What Lacan points to is the essentially paradoxical and ambivalent position which subjects find themselves in as human beings. Language has an alienating power but it also provides access to and a position in culture and society. For Lacan (1988) it is the entry into this Symbolic order which makes us truly human. Here we see a profound difference between Lacan and humanistic psychology. For Lacan, sociality may be alienating but it is also humanising. Throwing off the shackles of internalised and oppressive social norms is not, as humanistic psychologists argue, the road to freedom and human-ness but rather a road that leads nowhere. Our structuration in language is not something we can reject or change at will though we do try to do so and imagine that we can. We may be alienated by language and the

Symbolic order generally but it is only through sociality and its concomitant alienation that human existence, intersubjectivity, and communication and exchange is possible. Without it, we would remain forever in the closed, narcissistic dualities of the Imaginary order. Thus the postmodern turn to language can be seen in Lacan as not a rejection of sociality but a recognition of the embeddedness of subjectivity.

TRUTH AND INTENTIONALITY

Lacan's argument, then, is that the subject should not be equated with the ego. Scientific and humanistic psychology do however assume this and, as Richards (1989) points out, the ego is the psychic form assumed by an abstract, unproblematic rationality. Lacan's use of the term *'moi'* suggests the ego's object-like quality. As we have noted, the self as ego is always an intersubjective self. For Lacan, intersubjectivity is rooted in an ambivalent dialectic of recognition and misrecognition. The subject located in both the Imaginary and Symbolic orders seeks its identity through others and directs its speech towards others because it desires their desire, their recognition. The subject's desire is to have its own desire confirmed through the recognition of others and the Other.

Lacan links speech and intersubjectivity and by so doing he throws a different light on the subject that knows itself. The latter notion is based on the assumption that there are pre-linguistic intentions to which meanings are attached and that intentions can consequently be known through the meanings by which they are expressed–by saying what you mean you express what you intend. Equally, by meaning what you say there is an assumption that the expressed intention carries a guarantee of truth. The implication here, then, is that communication is always about the transmission of truth and meaning.

Lacan, however, shows that the assumptions linking intention, meaning and truth are questionable, and challenges the modernist position that meanings and intentions can have an existence separate from language and intersubjectivity. He argues, first, that truth is in the field of speech–you *tell* the truth. Second, because it is situated in the field of speech, telling the truth is always intersubjective–it is always directed to the other (another subject) and most importantly, to the Other, 'the locus of the linguistic code, the guarantor of meaning, the third party in any dual relationship…. The subject's speech is vouched for by this Other' (Forrester 1990:109). Third, because it is so directed, the intention of any *one* speaker is not the only factor that governs meaning and truth. The addressee's response also plays a part and that response will depend on how the utterance of the speaker is interpreted. In effect, it is the addressee whose response confirms or disconfirms the speaker's utterance. Fourth, therefore, truth is not simply a matter of the intention conveyed in the speaker's meaning acting as a

guarantee of truth. The meaning of the speaker's utterance and hence its veracity depends on the total inter-subjective transaction–the speaker's utterance, the response of the other and the dialectical relationship between utterance and response.

Lacan's argument is that language does not merely represent preexisting intentions, naming and conveying what is inside one's head, but has an important role to play in constructing and of course concealing intentions. Without language truth could not be disclosed: 'it is with the appearance of language that the dimension of truth emerges' (1977:172). Equally, however, if language allows truth to emerge it also opens up the means for deception to emerge. Forrester puts it this way:

> There is nothing beyond speech which grounds it; but nonetheless it is as if it were grounded on a pact. Every act of speech brings with it the possibility of the pact being broken, of the other intending to mislead me, even through telling the truth.
>
> (Forrester 1990:156)

The implication of the first feature is that in communicative acts the addressee's interpretation of what is meant and hence their construal of whether what is being said is true does not necessarily correspond with the addressor's intent. Utterances are not tokens passed from one mind to another with their meanings indelibly stamped upon them. An utterance is always addressed to another, its meaning does not lie in itself, in the intentions which underlie the meaning, but in the interpretation and response of the other, thus making communication between people inherently unstable.

The implication of the second feature is that speech, in order to deceive, must first affirm itself as true. For a speaker, deception must require from the beginning the support of the truth, because in order for deception to be possible truth must be concealed. The implicit pact of speech, the guarantor of meaning, Lacan's Other, is a pact of truth which necessarily involves the possibility of deception. Lacan characterises the Other as 'the guarantor of the Good Faith necessarily invoked even by the Deceiver as soon as what is at issue …is the pact of speech' (Forrester 1990:157). Even Descartes' deceiving demon must rely on the Other since otherwise it could not carry out its task of deceiving. Since there must be truth ('good faith') in order for there to be deception, equally truth could well only be deception.

Lacan shows, therefore, that meaning and truth are not individual but intersubjective matters. Meaning is not just an unproblematic 'read-out' of intentions nor intentions of meanings. Because meanings are located in the intersubjective field of speech and unfold in the whole chain of language they are not simply stuck on to intentions like labels. As Dews (1987:73) points out, for Lacan, there is no such thing as an 'intuitive grasping of meaning'; the subject is not 'the intentional bestower of meaning upon the empty shell

of the signified (1987:92). Psychology, with its individualistic and decontextualised subject can make no sense of this, so the best it can do is talk in terms of a 'breakdown of communication'. However, this notion arises from two questionable assumptions. First, that it is the individual subject who bestows meaning and second, that language is 'a transparent vehicle for the articulation of rational consciousness' (Frosh 1989:132). What is articulated and how it is interpreted, the determinants of a meaning which always has indeterminate elements, do not reside in the 'rational consciousness' but beyond it in the place of the Other (the unconscious).

The context of intersubjectivity means, therefore, that every transaction is not simply a question of communicating information or intended meanings. Every communicative act is also a plea for recognition of the subject by the other, a plea which is routed through the Other (the unconscious). Speech itself can be seen as the means by which recognition is implicitly asked for, although not necessarily given, and according to Lacan never can be fully given. Even the most apparently straightforward act of communicating 'facts' has within it this implied plea and an implied positioning of the other in relation to the subject. The other's confirmation of or failure to confirm the ascribed position then 'returns to' and determines the subject's position and hence whether the plea for recognition has been heard and responded to.

Acts of communication, Lacan argues, are therefore performative in nature:

> If I call the person to whom I am speaking by whatever name I choose to give him *[sic]* I intimate to him the subjective function that he will take on again in order to reply to me, even if it is to repudiate this function.
>
> (Lacan 1977:86–7)

It is the *action* itself of communicating which is of significance, just as much as the content conveyed in the communicating. It is a mistake to see the act of communicating as being exclusively oriented toward the conveying of information or the making of a statement: 'the function of language is not to inform but to evoke. What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question' (Lacan 1977:86). Thus because the goal of communication involves recognition, when we communicate with others we are not only conveying information but evoking our and their selfhood or subjectivity.

Earlier, when discussing Lacan's theorisation of desire, we mentioned that for him desire is always the other's desire and that self-consciousness is only possible through the other's desire. This desire is, in effect, a desire for the other's recognition. We have seen that desire, like the signifier, is never a meaning in itself but always finds its meaning in pointing beyond itself– Lacan calls desire a 'metonymy' since it is always displaced from one signifier

to another. The recognition which desire seeks is also a quest to understand selfhood. It is this self-understanding or self-consciousness which the ego seeks—the prize being the certain knowledge that 'This is me'. Yet the ego, because it is formed and operates in the field of intersubjectivity, finds the prize continually slipping away. That this really is me can only be confirmed by the recognition of others and the Other. But others are unable to do this for they too are egos desiring recognition. The Other, for its part, is mute to conscious-ness. The result is a continual process of shifting interpretations and negotia- tions precipitated by the dialectical play of egos seeking mutual recognition and futile attempts to get beyond the 'wall' of language, to find the end of the endless chain of signifiers. Hence each subject in the act of communication can never be sure that it has secured the other's recognition. The plea for recognition always receives an ambiguous response. This may well be me but can I be sure?

SCIENCE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

We have noted earlier Freud's ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* biology and the natural sciences in general. As Bowie (1991:5) points out, an important aspect of biology's significance was that it provided 'a lesson in strictness and a persuasive model of scientific rationality for those who sought to bring mental states, acts and dispositions within the purview of science'. In other words, for Freud biology presents a model of *scientificity* which prevents psychoanalysis from being simply a form of superstition or magic. More important, perhaps, it also enables psychoanalysis to be more than therapy—a matter which is also of concern to humanistic psychology.

Lacan has similar concerns. Because he too sees psychoanalysis as more than superstition or therapy he is wary of the notion that psychoanalysis is a 'human' science. But he is immune to the seductions of biology and resistant to accepting the natural science model of scientificity. The one thing which Lacan's many commentators and critics have noted as characteristic of his work is his rejection of natural categories as necessary for explanations of human subjectivity and action. For Lacan, the human is found in the field of culture and intersubjectivity. Hence the conceptual resources needed to study the human are not to be found in biology but in the human sciences in the widest sense, including literature as well as the sciences of the social.

Lacan is therefore not attracted by the term 'human' sciences preferring instead the term 'conjectural' sciences. Lacan continually argues that psychoanalysis is not a humanism nor humanistic because the subject cannot be conceived as unified, autonomous or transparent. Here lies his contribution to the postmodern 'death' of Man. However, for the same reason, psychoanalysis does not belong to the natural or 'exact' sciences either. The latter are defined 'by the fact that they remain in their methods and results totally unaffected by unconscious symptoms' (Leupin 1991:4).

This 'fact' leads Lacan to argue that psychoanalysis, if it is 'scientific' in any sense, cannot be scientific in an empiricist sense.

An empiricist science can only operate at the level of experiential phenomena, the observable, the given of experience. It cannot be concerned with the unobservable, that which does not present itself as a given to consciousness. Empiricist science cannot make the unconscious its object of study because it cannot conceive the unconscious in itself. By privileging observation and experiential phenomena science locates itself in the Imaginary order, the order of projections and spectral identifications, of imagined totalisations and illusory wholeness.

This relates to science's obsession with the quest for presence. Hence the emphasis on verification which guarantees presence by removing all possibility of error—a certainty of knowledge attained by the termination of uncertainty. But for Lacan any attempt to attain such a state merely places deception at the very heart of things. The striving for certainty is a form of self-deception, an alliance with the ego's imaginary identifications of wholeness and unity which vainly tries to master and end the restless movement of desire. Lacan argues, therefore, that although the 'exact' sciences understand themselves as being centred on truth they are actually located in the Imaginary. Hence truth passes them by and they are left only with 'exactitude'. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, has to be centred on truth—the truth of the unconscious—because it is concerned with foregrounding the self-deception of mastery and wholeness and showing the subject the truth of itself. It thus cannot itself be a masterful discourse since it must recognise the self-deception present in consciousness. Hence psychoanalysis can be neither a 'human' in the sense of a humanistic science nor an 'exact' science. It has a scientificity uniquely appropriate to its own being.

Forrester (1990:132) argues that the 'exact' sciences have 'rendered nature mute and measurable' but 'rules are required…to interpret the measurable world'. The question then is—who does the interpreting? Scientific and humanistic psychology basically give one answer—the 'centred' subject, the natural subject of consciousness. Psychoanalysis, particularly in its Lacanian form, gives another—the 'decentred' subject, the cultural subject of the unconscious. The nature of the subject who does the interpreting makes a vital difference in terms of the way science is understood.

A decentred subject means a decentred science. Lacan's subject is split, decentred, because it both speaks the truth and deceives; traversed by an unconscious which it cannot know in the sense of mastering and yet having to live through consciousness it cannot help but deceive itself. At the same time it continually strives to know its truth. Science is, in a sense, a symptom of this split. It attempts to speak the truth through a masterful knowledge but never quite succeeds. There is always something lacking in its mastery, an uncertainty in its knowing. The truth can never be fully and finally spoken.

Science deceives not because its outcomes are false but because it cannot

'come clean' about itself and, because it cannot do this, its way of speaking becomes oppressive. As Leupin (1991:19) points out, science raises two crucial questions: 'what is this passion of knowledge in modern man and where does science lead?' Science chooses not to answer these questions because if it did its project of mastery through a totalising knowledge would be openly revealed. Hence the questions are repressed. Science, therefore, has its own unconscious, a desire which lies at the heart of its being but which it can never bring out into the open.

Lacan presents a picture of the subject who strives for mastery and who always experiences any particular mastery as incomplete, thus necessitating further attempts at mastery. Science is a vital part of this striving. This implies that science is always going to be with us. That is why it is probably pointless to expect science and scientistically influenced projects such as psychology to be more 'human'. They cannot be changed, they can only be known for what they are. But this does not necessarily imply that nothing can be done. Lacan points the way to a possible alternative. Yet this is an alternative which is not itself a model and it is precisely because it is not that, paradoxically, it can be a genuine model. Lacan's work demonstrates its own scientificity but this is not something to be copied. No one can copy Lacan—that is part of his strength and attraction. What Lacan does demonstrate is the importance of reflexivity, something which scientific and humanistic psychology fail to demonstrate and with disastrous results. It is the very difficulty and obscurity of Lacan's texts which is the ground of their reflexivity. Lacan speaks both with the voice of consciousness and the unconscious. His style ensures that his is a masterful discourse but never a discourse of mastery—the fact that it has been so taken is itself explainable as the 'imaginary' need that we have for such a discourse.

Bowie has this to say about Lacan:

> What Lacan confronts as a theorist is an oceanic surge of cultural products, born of language and borne along in language, and what he then seeks is a logic with which that indefinite flow might eventually be arrested…his theoretical pronouncements are pulled in two directions at once: towards the promised logic, and back into the signifying welter of human speech, towards the formal language of mathematics and back into the unstoppable flim-flam of the desiring unconscious…[if Lacan] has the uncircumscribed provinces of 'speech' and 'culture' as his field of enquiry, how can he ever know when and where to stop theorising?
>
> (Bowie 1991:12)

The answer is that he could not stop theorising, nor could he ever reconcile the contradictions which traversed his work. Furthermore, he did not choose to and it is this which gives his work such resonance. Lacan's 'message' that

it is impossible to bring theorising to a close without becoming forever trapped in the realm of the Imaginary and the illusions of mastery reminds us of the inherent limitations of science, of our limitations as 'products' of science and the limitations inherent in modernity.

PSYCHOANALYSIS, EDUCATION AND THE POSTMODERN

At this stage we need to step back and ask, what can psychoanalysis, particularly in its more postmodern Lacanian form, teach us about education? On the face of it, the answer would seem to be very little; the concerns of psychoanalysis seem very remote from the concerns of the educator. Yet we want to try and show, in a psychoanalytic spirit, that things are perhaps not quite what they seem!

Any insight that Lacanian psychoanalysis might have to offer education lies in the very question we have just posed, *viz*. what can psychoanalysis *teach* us about education, since it is the very *possibility* of teaching or pedagogy that psychoanalysis poses in a stark form. Psychoanalysis is of course itself a teaching; in an important sense teaching is at its very heart since what after all is the practice of psychoanalysis doing but 'teaching' or 'facilitating the learning' of the analysand? To that extent, one could say that it is not so much a therapy but more a pedagogy, very much part of the 'educational' process in its widest sense. Furthermore, psychoanalytic theory can be seen as a form of teaching about the relationship between subjectivity, society and culture. As such it poses the question: what processes is education implicated in and with what effect?

It was Freud who foregrounded the importance of teaching when he described it as one of three 'impossible professions'. Here it could be argued that Freud, in saying this, was not merely pointing to the practical difficulties involved in teaching but to something much more radical, *viz*. the *impossibility* of teaching. Support for this interpretation can be found in the fact that psychoanalysis has always been critical of education—of pedagogy in the traditional, normally accepted sense of a teacher transmitting a body of knowledge to students—'education is one of those bad jokes that never seem to end' (Stanton 1983:85). As Felman (1987) points out, psychoanalysis has been been seen as wanting to do away with pedagogy or to transform it into an ultra-progressive form. However, this fails to recognise that psychoanalysis, although it is an anti-pedagogy, is by that very fact a pedagogy itself. To claim that teaching is impossible is itself a teaching.

Felman argues that teaching is always itself a psychoanalytical question because psychoanalysis is itself a teacher; it has modified 'the conception of what learning is and of what teaching is—psychoanalysis has shifted pedagogy by radically displacing our very modes of intelligibility' (1987:75). It 'teaches' us to think anew the question of knowledge and its transmission through its foregrounding of the place of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis is a pedagogy

because it makes accessible knowledge which is denied through repression—it provides 'a lesson in cognition (and miscognition), an epistemological instruction' (1987:76). Through psychoanalytic practice we learn that which we thought we did not know but actually knew all along. From psychoanalytic theory we learn the significance of this knowledge. It provides an 'epistemological instruction' because it forces us to rethink what it means to know and to not know—to recognise the everpresent implication of ignorance in knowledge, that what we know and what we don't know are always co-implicated.

The place of the unconscious in knowledge points to the presence of desire in knowledge. To understand this more fully we have to go back a step to the psychoanalytic critique of pedagogy and in particular to Lacan's critique of knowledge discourses. Lacan speaks of four fundamental discourses—the discourse of the University, the discourse of the Master, the discourse of the Hysteric and the discourse of the Analyst. For our present purposes, we shall concentrate mainly on the discourse of the University with some reference also to the discourse of the Analyst—these being the most relevant to the position we are exploring.

These discourses are all central, in different ways, in the production of subjectivity. The discourse of the University highlights the position of learners in a formal educational environment such as a school, college or university. In this discourse learners are in the position of receivers of a system or body of knowledge which is both dominating and totalised. Bracher compares it to a bureaucracy and describes it as

> pure impersonal system: the System and nothing else. No provision is made for individual subjects and their desires and idiosyncrasies. Individuals are to act, think, and desire only in ways that function to enact, reproduce, or extend the System.
>
> (Bracher 1993:55)

This 'systematic' knowledge is, in effect, a knowledge which is an end in itself. It is its own justification. It is *totalised* because it is pre-given and *totalising,* because it seeks to embrace within its compass all that there is to know. It is *dominant* because it brooks no challenge to the authority of its claims and *dominating* because it positions learners as completely subject to it. It is therefore alienating; learners can feel no ownership of this knowledge since the task they are alloted is to 'weave themselves into the system' (Bracher 1993:56). Borrowing Marxist terminology Lacan refers to learners as producing 'surplus value' in the sense that they are charged with producing more knowledge and in so doing they become, as it were, a cog in the machinery of the system, reproducing it and adding to their oppression through their production. Thus the discourse of the University structures the

subjectivities of learners, constructs their identity on the dimension of alienation, in a continual oscillation from passivity to inarticulate resistance.

As Felman (1987:76) points out, knowledge in the discourse of the University has a linear temporality. Knowledge is seen as cumulative and progressive, 'intellectual perfectibility…learning as a simple one-way road from ignorance to knowledge'. As we have noted on a number of occasions so far, totalising knowledge, the idea that everything can be known and that humanity progresses through the move from ignorance to knowledge, is a characteristic of the modern, and indeed it is possible to see Lacan's discourse of the University as referring precisely to the place of knowledge in the project of modernity. In particular, we can see the discourse of the University as being clearly embodied in science and the scientific attitude. Bracher (1993:58) argues that 'one factor that makes the discourse of the University so powerful and tyrannical is the force of its master signifiers, which operate, for the most part, surreptitiously. In the field of science…the major master signifier is knowledge itself.' Master signifiers are those words through which an identity is created—as Bracher (1993:24) explains, they are those words which bear 'our familial, national, ethnic, racial or sexual identity'. To remind ourselves of the earlier discussion, subjects *are* their signifiers—the latter are the words which define 'me', through which I recognise myself and am recognised by others—although, as we have stressed earlier, never completely and with certainty. For Lacan, master signifiers are in a sense what people desire to be recognised as, ego ideals, thus they are emotional investments. Consequently, they tend to be regarded as axiomatic, unquestioned and unquestionable. In the discourse of the University, knowledge as the master signifier of science—signifying that knowledge is intrinsically valuable—is emotionally invested and therefore unquestioned and unquestionable. This is why, as we have noted on a number of occasions, science claims that it can know everything, that it is progressively coming to know and more, that what it knows is valuable in itself and at the same time socially beneficial. In the discourse of the University scientific knowledge knows no bounds and no limitations. It is a self-perpetuating system of knowledge which is its own end and justification.

The question that now arises is how the discourse of the University can be countered and resisted. This is a question which has particular significance for education given that it so readily speaks the discourse of the University, bearing in mind also that the latter is not confined solely to universities. Lacan's answer significantly eschews resistance in the form of revolutionary action and change since for him such a course merely institutes another and even more oppressive form of discourse, the discourse of the Master. The discourse of the University, in the sense that its aim is knowledge as mastery is already a latent form of the latter. To pursue revolutionary change is merely to institute a more overt and clear-cut discourse of mastery. Lacan's answer therefore is that the discourse of theUniversity can only be resisted

through another form of discourse, the discourse of the Analyst which subverts all discourses of mastery.

The discourse of the Analyst is found in its purest form in the psychoanalytic session, or at least in the Lacanian psychoanalytic session since Lacan is scathingly critial of non-Lacanian forms of analysis on the grounds that they merely reinforce the power of master signifiers and repress even further the need of analysands to recognise their desire. Lacan argues that they merely serve to reinforce an illusory sense of autonomy—illusory because analysands are simply 'persuaded' to better adapt to the existing order. Without going into the details of Lacanian analysis, we can say that its fundamental aim is to bring the analysand to the point where she or he can acknowledge, identify and therefore start dealing with the master signifiers that construct identity. Bracher (1993:71) refers to this process as the 'mapping' of master signifiers and argues that it 'sets the stage for separation from the alienating master signifiers, which means recognising the questionable, relative nature, and the debilitating effect, of certain values or ideals—master signifiers of the ideal ego—that one has been taking as absolutes'. In other words, what one has taken as given, unproblematic, unquestioned and unquestionable is now 'de-invested' and relativised. The certain mastery provided by master signifiers is made uncertain, the masterfulness they provided unsettled. But this process does not lead to an expulsion of master signifiers since without these identity is impossible and madness is the outcome of a lack of *any* identity. One always has an identity, no matter how uncertain and changing this may be.

Here then is the significant point. The discourse of the Analyst does not offer subjects an Archimedean point outside any discourse from which, as in humanistic therapy, they can get in touch with their 'true self, throw off their alienation and live happily ever after! For Lacan, that merely reinforces alienation, for the root of oppression is the armour of an identity which subjects both happily assume but which at the same time is alienating. It is like the discourse of the University—it is not that students do not want knowledge but it is their very wanting which alienates by making them its object. The discourse of the Analyst does not offer a route out of alienation because for Lacan there is no such route. What it does, however, is offer a means of recognising the alienation and its roots in repressed desire; it does this by showing that identity is constructed, that master signifiers are not 'natural' but social (particularly, gendered), relative and not absolute. Above all, it does this by showing subjects that they are not themselves the master signifier par excellence—the masterful T, sovereign, autonomous, unified, self-knowing and self-masterful. Its way of doing this is to reveal to subjects the place and work of the unconscious.

We have returned therefore to the question of pedagogy, and in particular to the question of what psychoanalysis can 'teach' pedagogy. One of the most valuable contributions made by Lacan to psychoanalysis and to psychology

generally is his insight that the unconscious is not the place of instincts but of knowledge. This is not the knowledge of the discourse of the University nor is this knowledge learnt through a linear progression from ignorance to greater and greater mastery. Rather than traversing a fixed itinerary from ignorance to mastery this knowledge is learnt discontinuously with many diversions and sudden breakthroughs. This is a knowledge that does not seek closure and identity with itself but is always open and forced to difference by its location in the unconscious:

> the unconscious is a kind of *unmeant knowledge* that escapes intentionality and meaning, a knowledge spoken by the language of the subject (spoken, for instance, by his *[sic]* 'slips' or by his dreams), but that the subject cannot recognise, assume as his *[sic],* appropriate; a speaking knowledge nonetheless denied to the speaker's knowledge.
>
> (Felman 1987:77)

The existence of this 'unmeant knowledge' means that absolute knowledge is impossible; that is why the discourse of the University is ultimately illusory (although none the less powerful for that), rooted in the unfulfillable desire for a self-presence which can never be. As Felman (1987:78) points out Lacan has 'taught' us that 'human knowledge is, by definition, that which is untotalisable, that which rules out any possibility of totalising what it knows or of eradicating its own ignorance'.

Earlier, we argued that ignorance is always co-implicated with knowledge. It is now possible to see ignorance as the 'absent present' of knowledge but to do so requires abandoning the modernist notion of ignorance as the *lack* or absence of knowledge. Ignorance, rather, is that which is repressed and thus that which always escapes the totalising drive of masterful knowledge. It is Freud's 'willed forgetfulness', that which we cannot admit to knowing but which reveals itself outside of, and indeed disrupts, discourses of mastery. What then are the implications of this for teaching?

To answer this we shall largely follow and elaborate on Felman's anaysis which, in our view, is an insightful reading of Lacan's 'teaching' on teaching. Before doing so it is necessary to emphasise that Lacan himself primarily saw his own work as a 'teaching'. For those who have struggled, often unsuccesfully, with Lacan's elliptic and gnomic texts, this is perhaps difficult to understand, let alone accept. Yet it must be remembered that the bulk of Lacan's published works were 'seminars' which Lacan himself regarded as teaching sessions, part of a process of psychoanalytic training.

Felman (1987:80–1) argues that for Lacan teaching is not 'the transmission of ready-made knowledge…[but] rather the creation of a new condition of knowledge, the creation of an original learning disposition'. Lacan compares the teacher-student relationship to that between analyst and analysand where,

in the analytic session, the former is regarded by the latter as 'the one who knows', the one whose superior knowledge of the psyche will 'enlighten' and hopefully 'cure' the analysand. But the analytical session works only if the analyst is prepared to abandon this ascribed position of absolute mastery. The analyst's 'knowing' is not a pre-formed knowledge of the unique context and circumstances which each analysand brings to a particular session. In other words, the analyst has no universal knowledge (theory) that can be readily and uniformly applied to practice. This is why Lacanian psychoanalysis cannot be a science in the empiricist-positivist sense of science. It is first and foremost an interpretive 'science' and what the analyst knows is how to interpret each analysand's unique context and circumstances. Every analytical encounter therefore requires a re-staging of knowledge.

Teachers are culturally constructed as 'ones who know', as those who will fill a lack and thereby lead students from ignorance to knowledge. For Lacan, this construction, based on the powerful assumption of the self who possesses a self-transparent consciousness, wilfully forgets the place of the unconscious. The unconscious, however, reveals this as an illusion of consciousness. Consequently, it is impossible to see teachers as having a mastery of knowledge. Lacan 'teaches' us rather that it is impossible to be a teacher without also being a learner, that in order to be a teacher it is first necessary to abandon the position of the 'one who knows', recognising both one's own lack of knowledge and of self-transparency and mastery and that one's own learning is never, and never will be, complete:

> the position of the teacher is itself the position of the one who learns, of the one who teaches nothing other than the way he *[sic]* learns. The subject of teaching is interminably–a student; the subject of teaching is interminably–a learning.
>
> (Felman 1987:88)

The consequence of this is that the distinction between teachers and students or learners is never so clear-cut as it is conventionally cast, particularly in schooling. In discussing the teacher-learner relationship, Stanton (1983:87) argues that psychoanalysis provides the means to deconstruct the aspect of authority in the relationship. Any such deconstruction does not imply an advocacy of chaos in the classroom where everyone does what they will. On the contrary, it means discovery of limits, contrasts and shades: 'there are no differences in the sense that the teacher also learns and illustrates by that process, by the emotional commitment made, the release achieved when there is understanding between people who can and need to work together realistically'.

Lacan therefore can be read as suggesting that everyone–teacher or learner–should be a lifelong learner. However, it is important to stress that

what we are talking about here is not the humanistic conception of 'lifelong learning' as the continual adaptation to the needs of the existing socio-economic order. Nor is it merely a restatement of the notion of 'learner centredness'. For Lacan, this would be simply another example of the illusory primacy of self-transparent consciousness. Rather, it is an argument for teachers to continually question the ground upon which they stand, to question their own ready implication in a discourse of mastery. For this, teachers need to be trained to analyse what is repressed in order to foreground the affects,

> release the emotions and broaden the sense of fulfillment. The pupils then would be allowed to extend their analysis to their environment. To create the space they live in rather than just fit in with the set rules. Literally. To paint. To build. To co-operate. To participate. The limit then would be the analysis of the transference.
>
> (Stanton 1983:88)

This resonates with certain strands of progressive education but without its teleology of emancipated free expression and its containment within the overall framework of modernist educational theory and practice.

Psychoanalysis in a Lacanian mode, then, is itself radically self-subversive. Lacan in his own teaching continually subverted the inevitable tendency both of his own discourse to become a discourse of mastery and the attempts by his 'disciples' to cast him in the position of a master. What he taught therefore was inherently self-subversive, a process which did not simply examine its own ground but systematically cut that ground away from itself. Lacan in his teaching attempted to 'speak' the unconscious—hence perhaps the difficulty of his texts. But that very difficulty marks a self-subversion. Lacan does not produce texts that are models of clarity—his texts never mean exactly what they say or say precisely what they mean. They cannot. Thus the self-transparent, unified subject, the master of knowledge, cannot assume its traditional place of mastery. The body of knowledge which Lacan teaches is continually problematised and undermined and, as we have seen, is never captured by scientism. By his very example Lacan shows us what it can mean to be a teacher—and a learner—other than in the dominant discourses of modernity.

4

SUBJECT DISCIPLINES AND DISCIPLINING SUBJECTS

The subject in education

FOUCAULT AND THE POSTMODERN

Foucault's work has assumed a significant position in the developing 'canon' of the postmodern. However, an assessment of his writings in terms of their implications for educational theory and practice is problematic. Part of the problem is that Foucault himself resists categorisation. At various times in his life Foucault was attacked as an 'anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-marxist, technocrat in the service of new Gaullism, new liberal, etc.' (Foucault, quoted in Marshall 1989:99). Since his death in 1984, attempts have been made to see his writings as an extension of his own personality and engagement in sado-masochistic homosexuality (Lilla 1993; see also Miller 1993). The question 'Who is Michel Foucault?' is difficult to answer. Recently no less than three biographies have been published (Eribon 1991, Macey 1993, Miller 1993). But biographical details are in themselves not enough because the implication of any biography is that in order to understand what somebody says it is essential to understand who that somebody is by presenting their 'life' and thereby establishing their credentials. This is an implication which Foucault himself would have wanted to deny.

What to make of a set of texts which resist grounding and which can engender such widely differing responses is itself a postmodern challenge. This 'problem' can be expanded to encompass the very notion of Foucault as a postmodern writer. This is not simply due to his somewhat ludic rejection of the categorisations of his work: 'None of these descriptions is important by itself; taken together, on the other hand, they mean something. And I must admit that I rather like what they mean' (quoted in Marshall 1989:99). It is also because the focus of his work is on the emergence of *modern* institutions and the forms of governance associated with them. In this sense, Foucault's

position can be said to provide an analysis of the modern which unsettles the image it presents to itself and provides through this unsettling a condition for the emergence and development of the postmodern moment. He is a profound critic of the humanistic discourses of progress, emancipation and betterment that govern modern power-knowledge formations and which veil the effects of these formations within themselves.

Foucault's major work (1967, 1973, 1979, 1981) analyses the emergence of asylums, hospitals, prisons, and the discursive and material conditions of their possibility. He questions dominant ways of understanding modern practices, poses different questions and provides different perspectives and answers. In the 'Discourse on Language' (Foucault 1972) he highlights 'reversal' as his main methodological principle or strategy of investigation and writing. Reversal is a way of problematising the root assumptions of the modernist project—for example, that human thought has a natural tendency towards rationality or that the development of modern institutions such as the asylum, hospital or prison have simply followed the path of progress and human betterment, that sexuality having always been repressed has now been set free. As Shumway puts it:

> When tradition gives us a particular interpretation of an event or a historical development, Foucault's strategy is to to work out the implications of the reverse or opposite interpretation. The strategy of reversal tells Foucault what to look for by pointing to the simple existence of the other side of things.
>
> (Shumway 1989:15)

Foucault is normally referred to as a post-structuralist in company with writers such as Derrida and Lacan. His work emphasises the constitution of subjects and subjective experience through discursive practices, but he differs from Derrida and Lacan in that he is concerned to go beyond the role of language and textuality into an explicit consideration of the nature and role of power (see Barrett 1991, Couzens Hoy 1988). This is perhaps one of the reasons why his work has had a greater and more obvious influence on sociological and educational writing than other post-structuralist work.

We would argue that, however he is labelled, Foucault is located within the postmodern because he questions the rationalistic and humanistic grounds upon which modern society bases its conception of itself. He can be said to have contributed to the uncertainty and scepticism of the current period. He questions the story of the steady progress of society based on reason towards more humane 'enlightened' forms of governance. In place of this story of continuity and the history of 'great men' he focuses on discontinuities—for instance, the move from the use of violent torture and execution to imprisonment as forms of punishment (Foucault 1979)—and the specific, the stories of the particular members of social formations. He

attempts to construct a picture of the conditions of possibility for such discontinuities and ruptures and the ways in which the 'humanity' and emancipation associated with modern forms of governance re-position people into tighter forms of regulation and self-regulation. In other words, while modern institutions break with the pre-modern, for Foucault this is not the simple story of the progress of a newly discovered humanity, for power is still present within changing forms and relations of emancipation and oppression, power which is, however, hidden within modern discourses. Humanism therefore does not remove power but *reinscribes* it. We are no more 'human', 'emancipated' or 'rational' now compared to our historical predecessors, simply different (Marshall 1990:21).

It is not our intention to attempt a definitive critical reading of Foucault (itself a suspect notion) but to address some of the themes and issues in education theory and practice which postmodern approaches problematise, drawing on a reading of selected parts of a range of his texts. While he did not fully focus on the school and other educational institutions specifically in his investigations, aspects of his work—most notably in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979)—directly and indirectly address educational issues to such an extent that as Hoskin (1990:29) rightly claims: 'Foucault really discovered something very simple (but highly unfamiliar nonetheless)—the centrality of education in the construction of modernity.' In other words, modern forms of governance and social discipline are secured through education; in an important sense, they work through educating. In modernity, education replaces premodern coercion and subjugation. In this respect, education is not simply that which goes on in schools but is an essential part of governmentality, a crucial aspect of the regulatory practices of a range of modern institutions. In examining these practices, Foucault's work questions the mirror which modernity holds up to itself, the benevolent image of *emancipatory* practices (including education) which it chooses to see reflected there.

This reconceptualisation of modern institutions is largely achieved through rethinking first, the role of discourse through which practices and objects are constituted and defined and, second, the relationship between power and knowledge. Pre-modern forms of coercion are replaced by 'discipline' which works through discursive power-knowledge formations to produce modern forms of governance. Each of these notions, 'power-knowledge', 'discourse' and 'discipline', will be drawn upon in this chapter to examine the multiple meaning of the 'subject' in education. In the next chapter, the debate will be extended to a discussion of educational assessment, particularly competence-based assessment, and the extension of greater managerialism within contemporary educational institutions. Underlying these discussions will be a concern with the 'why' and 'how' of the disciplining of the subject achieved through modern educational practices. Of course, this does not exhaust the potential of Foucault's texts in rethinking

educational theory and practice (see e.g. Ball 1990a and 1990c, Kosmidou and Usher 1992, Marshall 1989), but it is indicative of the critique that is made available in drawing on those texts.

POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

Modernity's liberal-humanist paradigm which is dominant in Western industrialised countries and whose influence spreads even wider, accustoms us to seeing knowledge as distinct from, indeed as counterposed to, power. In this view, knowledge is a (disinterested) search for truth which power gets in the way of and distorts. It is these assumptions about power and knowledge which provide the grounds for arguments about 'academic freedom', the 'professional autonomy' of teachers, the need for 'balance' in the curriculum and the castigation of 'politicised' teachers and 'political education' as propaganda. What happens here and in many other situations is, first, that power is reified, constructed as 'thing-like' and second, as a thing it is monopolised by some or by certain institutions such as the state who then exercise it oppressively over others. Hence it is invariably equated with force and coercion and from this stems the view that power results in a distortion and corruption of knowledge. The implication is therefore that 'truth' and 'knowledge' are only possible under conditions where power is not exercised.

Equally, however, knowledge is considered 'powerful' precisely when it faithfully represents the world as it really is, i.e. when it can lay claim to the status of 'truth'. Scientific research is the means of discovering the truth of the world and the knowledge produced is then imparted through the educational system in various educational practices and forms. In this conception, knowledge, insofar as it is true, is considered to be 'powerful' precisely because it is supposedly the means of liberating oneself and others from power (embodied in expressions such as 'The truth will make you free'). The implication here is that power is always negative, oppressive, the source of coercion and illegitimate control, the removal of which allows individuals to realise their inherent rationality, express themselves freely and develop themselves fully.

This discourse of knowledge, power and truth provides a range of very powerful messages: truth is the basis for emancipation and progress; truth is gained from knowledge which faithfully reflects and represents the 'real' world; that such knowledge is only possible in the absence of power. Once these operating assumptions are present, anything which does not satisfy these conditions is thereby rejected as 'falsehood', 'mere belief', 'wrong-headed', 'ideological'. Thus other ways of constructing knowledge and truth are marginalised by this 'true path to truth'. All other forms of knowledge and truth are suppressed or debased, e.g. religious truth based on revelation, notions of Platonic truth based on Ancient Greek conceptions of truth as 'without forgetting', the knowledge and truth of literature, and practitioner-

based knowledge. They are suppressed, ignored or marginalised because they do not have the status of truth. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Foucault refers to powerful discourses as 'regimes of truth', giving as examples medicine, psychiatry and other forms of disciplinary knowledge. In describing them in this way he alerts us to the *politics* of discourses. He enables us to see knowledge differently, as 'tied to politics, that is to power' (Couzens Hoy 1988:19).

Modern times have witnessed 'a shift from seeing truth as a given property of those in power to seeing truth as a property of the referent [the material object] of discourse' (Barrett 1991:142). Despite their fundamental differences, both liberal humanism and Marxism share this discourse (or regime) of truth. The differences are over how and where power is exercised, in the political sphere by the state over the people or, more extensively, in the economic sphere by one class over others. During the development of state education in Britain in the nineteenth century, controversy surrounded the provision of 'useless knowledge' to working-class children rather than the 'really useful knowledge' sought by many working-class organisations (Johnson 1988). At stake in this conflict was an education based on the 'truth' of disciplinary knowledge and an education based on the 'truth' of working-class life, an education considered integral to action for emancipation. The 'truthfulness' of these positions led working-class organisations and the state to accuse each other of turning education into propaganda. However, what both accepted was the broader assumption that true knowledge, i.e. that which accurately represented 'reality', was only possible once the exercise of power, exercised either by the state or class organisations, was overcome. Such battles over 'education for the working classes' and 'working-class education' have also been experienced elsewhere (Welton 1991). 'Really useful knowledge' is considered possible only when the exercise of power in its variety of forms is removed. It is in this sense that the separation of knowledge and power can be seen as a crucial part of the 'grand' or 'metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984), the cultural legacy of the Enlightenment that continue to provide the significations that shape modern educational consciousness and practices. For Foucault, however, since truth is always already power, it is impossible to separate truth from power; the most that can be done is to detach 'the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time' (1980:3).

Modernity's discourse of power, knowledge and truth is thus brought into question (subjected to reversal) by the notion of power-knowledge:

> Modern humanism is therefore mistaken in drawing this line between knowledge and power. Knowledge and power are integrated with one another and there is no point in dreaming of

a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just
a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise.

(Foucault 1980:52)

Power and knowledge, rather than being counterposed are inseparable, immanent in one another, each a condition for the possibility of the other. Foucault argues that knowledge is always found in relation to its uses, in relation therefore to a form of power. Equally, 'no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge' (Foucault, quoted in Ball 1990c:17).

Thus power requires knowledge of the objects over which it is to be exercised effectively. Meanwhile, the conditions of possibility for certain forms of knowledge and their legitimation as truth-claims are 'brought forth' through power. Foucault (1979:27) argues that 'power and knowledge directly imply one another: that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations'. The particular notions of power, knowledge and truth associated with the discourses of modernity, therefore, are challenged in their self-understandings as transhistorical foundations upon which to base understanding, because they remove from debate the conditions of their own existence.

Power and knowledge are correlative, they are always found together in 'regimes of truth'. What is accepted as rational and truthful is therefore constituted on the basis of pre-existing power-knowledge formations:

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of
> multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of
> power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general polities' of
> truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes
> function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one
> to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each
> is sanctified; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the
> acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with
> saying what counts as true.

(Foucault 1980:131)

Knowledge, therefore, does not simply represent the truth of what is but, rather, constitutes what is taken to be true. For Foucault, it is what *counts* as true that is important. Countering the modernist assumption that truth is an outcome of methodologically controlled rational investigation he emphasises the 'production' of truth, a complex process operating at a multiplicity of levels:

> 'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the
> institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and

political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles).

(Foucault 1980:131–2)

Thus, rather than taking changes in knowledge as the progressive unfolding of truth, it is necessary to examine the complex exercise of power which is immanent in such changes. For instance, in education a discourse of the 'child' and 'child development' has developed (see Walkerdine 1984) in which the child has certain types of (natural) attributes that become the object of educational research and practice and which further 'establish' or produce the truth of the subject who learns. As Walkerdine argues:

the whole pedagogy itself is designed to permit the possibility of certain things considered 'natural' and 'normal' to children…. The practices are set up to produce certain responses, based on a theoretical edifice which defines them as natural. Their presence, therefore, becomes normal, their absence pathological.

(Walkerdine 1986:67)

Thus, during the 1960s learning by rote was constituted as an 'irrational' and 'unproductive' form of educational practice, producing 'passive' rather than 'active' subjects. As knowledge of the 'subject', the learner, changed under the impact of social movements, such as feminism, and trends in the scientific disciplines of the 'human', such as psychology and sociology, placed greater emphasis on individual personal development and the feelings of learners, the emphasis moved away from the didactic towards new pedagogies of learning by discovery and learning by doing. Such changes can be seen as based in the further development of those disciplines and the increasing truth of the knowledge they produce–a continuation of the modern 'metanarrative'. Alternatively, the conditions of possibility for that change in knowledge and the practices they engender and legitimise has to be sought in the forms of power and the struggles associated with them, forms which question and reconstitute what is rational and truthful.

Foucault's position may sound like an argument simply for contextualising the production of knowledge, an external relationship; he is in fact arguing that there is an immanent relationship between power and knowledge relations but also between power and for example, economic and sexual relations. However, these 'relations of power are not superstructural positions,

with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play' (Foucault 1981:94).

This needs continual emphasising, as the power of modern significations continues to operate even as we try to think and write the postmodern, and is a problem which underpins much of the casual dismissal of postmodern discourse as abstruse and 'difficult'. In other words, modern presuppositions, including those regarding the transparency of language and the need for 'plain' forms of speaking and writing, which are being questioned by the postmodern, are used to argue against the latter as a legitimate perspective, where the problematic nature of language is addressed in the way many postmodern writers construct their texts.

In reformulating the relationship between power and knowledge, power itself has to be reconceptualised. Foucault is challenging the notion that the exercise of power is simply oppressive, a negative force which weighs on us and stops us from doing things we would otherwise do. As we have outlined, such a view of power is presupposed in the regime of truth of liberal humanism. However, power is not simply a prohibition but is also active and productive, thus it should 'be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression' (Foucault 1980:119).

Power is manifested as relationships in a social network. It comes from below, induced in the body and produced in social transactions. Power, through knowledge, brings forth active 'subjects' who better 'understand' their own subjectivity yet who in this very process subject themselves to forms of power. Thus even humanistic discourses, which presuppose the individual as the privileged point of reference in social formations, are the products of power which establishes 'the individual' as a subject position to be occupied and make such a position desired—'the individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an "ideological" representation of society; but he *[sic]* is also a reality, fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called "discipline"' (Foucault 1979:194). The individual is thus both an 'object of power' and an 'instrument through which power is exercised':

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands…they [individuals] are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power…individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.
>
> (Foucault 1980:98)

DISCOURSES AND POWER-KNOWLEDGE

The locus of power-knowledge formations lies in discourse and the discursive practices through which 'regimes of truth' are constructed:

Discourses are…about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations… Thus, discourses construct certain possibilities for thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations.

(Ball 1990c:17)

Ball rightly demonstrates the scope of Foucault's position and the implications of rethinking the relationship of power-knowledge. Foucault is not claiming that a discourse is a set of true statements but rather that a discourse, in defining what can be said and thought, provides the means for statements to be assessed as true, the reasoning which enables truth-claims to be made and validated. He describes a discourse as a *system of possibility* which makes a field of knowledge *possible*. By doing this, discourses 'systematically form the object of which they speak…[they] are not about objects; they constitute them' (Foucault 1974:49). For example, 'to understand the history of madness, we do not look for some original object, madness in itself, to which all ideas of madness have ultimately aimed but rather we must look at madness as a term or concept reinvented at different periods for different ends' (Shumway 1989:17). Thus madness is not simply an object in the real world waiting to be discovered by empirical investigation but an object constituted by a modernist discourse of madness (see Foucault 1967).

For those who speak it, a discourse is a *given*–it operates 'behind their backs', it is an 'unthought'. It is not itself questioned although it is the means by which questions are asked. One consequence of this is that discourses not only constitute objects but 'in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention' (Foucault 1974:49). Discourse, therefore, 'speaks' but is yet silent– it is an absent presence, yet a powerful one, since what it is to be a speaker, an author or a knower, and with what authority these positions are held, is itself a function of discourse. A discourse author-ises certain people to speak and correspondingly silences others, or at least makes their voices less authoritative. A discourse is therefore exclusionary.

In speaking as a subject on a subject, we therefore need to be reflexively conscious of the conditions of possibility for what we say, how, where and with what effect (Lawson 1985). In deploying Foucault's notion of discourse, Ball (1990c) is able to give a very compelling reading of the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act in Britain. The latter made provision for a national curriculum and greater managerial 'responsibility' and 'autonomy' for schools. This is a trend which has been extended into other branches of what used to be termed 'the education service'; in the UK, Ball demonstrates how these shifts were made possible through a 'discourse of derision' upon which the new right was able to displace the ideas and people who were

discursively constructed as being responsible for the mismanagement of the education system:

> (T)his discourse of derision acted to debunk and displace not only specific words and meanings—progressivism and comprehensivism, for example—but also the speakers of these words, those 'experts' 'specialists' and 'professionals' referred to as the 'educational establishment'. These privileged speakers have been displaced, their control over meaning lost, their professional preferences replaced by abstract mechanisms and technologies of 'truth' and 'rationality'—parental choice, the market, efficiency and management.
>
> (Ball 1990c:18)

The discourse of derision was not only deployed in Britain. It has also had a powerful effect in America (Shor 1987) and Australia (Kenway 1990) where 'reforms' of education were also to the fore in the 1980s.

The notion of discourse as powerful enough to simultaneously constitute and exclude certain possibilities of thought and action can also be used to examine the conditions of possibility within particular teaching and learning situations. For instance, we might examine the positioning of the person, the subject, within the learning setting, in lectures, group work, rows, working on individual projects. Each of these embodies a certain discipline through forms of hierarchical observation, and provides certain possibilities of 'truth'. Some argue that positioning learners in groups around tables rather than in rows is more 'democratic'. However, it could also be argued that while this may create different discursive possibilities, it nonetheless simply reconfigures the regulation of students. They may not be so directly subject to the teacher/ lecturer, but they remain under the immediate scrutiny and surveillance of their peers. This shift has certainly been seen in moves in the workplace from the individual working on the production line to working as a member of a team, where self-regulation by the team has replaced more direct supervision (Mumby and Stohl 1991). Changing practices do not, then, do away with power but displace and reconfigure it in differing ways. These reconfigurations and displacements cannot simply be assumed to be more humane or democratic, or to be examples of 'progress'. It is in this sense, therefore, that Foucault invites us to 'reverse' the modernist rhetoric of progress. Everything is political and there is no power-less discourse.

DISCIPLINE AND POWER-KNOWLEDGE

Disciplinary practices are targeted at the body of the person because it becomes 'more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely' (Foucault 1979:138). Educational discourses which focus on the development of, for example,

knowledge, the mind or morals therefore displace from scrutiny the role of such practices in disciplining the body, 'in the correct use of the body which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing should remain idle or useless: everything must be called upon to form the support of the act required' (Foucault 1979:152). For Foucault, bio-power emerges as an object and strategy for the governance of human relations. It is therefore the body which is a critical site for the exercise of modern disciplinary power. In other words, the body becomes the main site for institutionalised attempts to integrate the subject into the social formation. Bio-power designates 'what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of the explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life' (Foucault 1981:143).

Educational discourses of knowledge and morals marginalise the body as solely, and even then not always, a site of physical exercise and punishment. As such, for Foucault they miss the centrality in modernity of the regulation of life through the body and the possibilities this has raised for placing 'life' at the centre of politics. Instead, it is seen as simply subject to a given nature. In this way, Foucault suggests modern discipline both asserts power over and through the body, but in evoking life as an object of knowledge and regulation it provides the basis for transgressive practices and an alternative politics to be lived and articulated. We will return to a fuller discussion of the possibility for resistance later.

Power-knowledge formations, therefore, operate through networks of discursive and material practices which aim to produce 'docile bodies' and 'obedient souls' (Foucault 1979). Hoskin (1990) interestingly points out in arguing for Foucault as a 'crypto-educationalist' that the Latin root of docile is 'docilus' or 'teachable'. These practices 'bring together the exercise of power and the constitution of knowledge, in the organisation of space and time along ordered lines, so as to facilitate constant forms of surveillance and evaluation' (Hoskin 1990:31). Here, then, power does not operate solely through coercion and repression, indeed such acts would be examples of the failure of power. Instead, power operates through 'knowledgeable' discourses and practices which intensify the gaze to which the subject is subjected by ordering, measuring, categorising, normalising and regulating. In disciplining the body, persons as subjects become governable, thus marginalising the need for coercion in the regulation of populations.

Thus, when discipline is effective, power operates through persons rather than upon them. It is when disciplinary regulation breaks down that coercion comes to the fore. The modern world is constituted in the never complete attempt to displace coercion by discipline, a difference which does not do away with the exercise of power, but reconstitutes it around different relations of oppression and emancipation, a contradiction which can be unsettled but cannot be overcome. Thus, to view the removal of corporal punishment from schooling as simply the creation of a more humane environment does not do justice to the complexity of the situation. It may be that such moves signify a

greater confidence in the regulatory role of these institutions, which obviates the need to use force (Marshall 1989). The hostility of the new right to these moves suggests that there is a genuine sense in which educational institutions are not seen to be instilling discipline sufficiently. While such positions view corporal punishment as a means of instilling discipline, an analysis drawing on Foucault puts an alternative position—that coercion through such punishment actually makes the school as a modern disciplinary institution unachievable. This is true for all modern disciplinary practices as:

> the techniques of discipline do not torture or brand the body to make it signify. Instead, they distribute bodies to various places and activities. They prescribe the bodies' movements, impose norms on its activity, watch out for any deviation, and exclude the non-conforming. In these ways, the body is connected with processes of meaning: it is tied to an identity, a level of ability, the specifications of a job, a criminal record.
>
> (Macdonell 1991:109)

All practices are 'knowledgeable', that is, practical acts where the mode of knowledge is performative. However, only those with a discipline-validated truth, i.e. a 'validated' human science, are power-knowledge formations and thus regulatory in their impact. Disciplinary truth and regulatory, 'disciplining' power are co-implicated—'by fixing subjects within their classifications, these sciences discipline us, exercise power over us, by labelling us good or bad, well or sick, sane or mad, according to disciplinary regimes of truth' (Frazer and Lacey 1993:179). Power-knowledge is integral to certain practices and it is through these that people become 'subjects' and 'subject'. The discourses of power-knowledge formations produce 'subjects' who become 'subject' to systems of regulation aimed at governance:

> Foucault uses discipline to identify a body of knowledge with a system of social control. A body of knowledge is a system of social control to the extent that discipline (knowledge) makes discipline (control) possible, and vice versa…. As knowledge develops so also do the parallel practices of controlling the outcomes of behaviour.
>
> (Marshall 1989:107)

In other words, disciplines as systematic bodies of knowledge are also regulatory regimes of 'knowledgeable' practice through which power is exercised. In order to be regulated, the person first has to be constituted as an active 'subject' and this takes place through a process of observation and surveillance, the criteria and methods of which are provided by the disciplinary knowledge of the 'human' sciences. Discipline, in both a power

and a knowledge sense, is manifest in the workings of the institutions of modern social formations. They are co-implicated with one another so that, as knowledge changes, so do the practices aimed at framing behaviour.

In the modern era, disciplinary knowledge, largely engendered from within the institutions of higher education and validated as 'truth' on the basis of their adherence to scientific method, has provided the legitimation for a range of knowledgeable practices which have extended regulation into the body of the person. Thus we are confronted with the ultimate paradox of Foucault's work for many educators. If we view education as an emancipatory practice, what are we to make of the ever more extensive knowledge generated in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, which call forth further dimensions of the learner to be framed for educational intervention? As Marshall suggests, rather than being emancipatory, humanistic progressive forms of education may represent:

> ever and more subtle refinements of technologies of power based upon knowledge which has itself been produced within or used by the discipline of education. This knowledge, constituted in practice, comes in turn to legitimate practice…. Power is still exercised in the search for normal and governable people. If it is more humane, it is more subtle; if it is less overt and involves less violence to bring power into play, it may be more dangerous because of its insidious silence.
>
> (Marshall 1989:108–9)

The human subject therefore has a paradoxical position in relation to the human sciences, as it is both an active knowing subject and an object being acted upon. It is both a subject and object of knowledge. Educational discourses elaborate this paradox, where 'students' become objects of knowledge and thereby subject to power which, at the same time, in certain ways, constitutes them as powerful subjects, with some being constituted as more powerful than others.

CONFESSION, SELF-DISCIPLINE AND POWER

Foucault's work on sexuality is important here. Rejecting the dominant view of the Victorian era as a period of sexual repression, he (1981:105) charts the massive increase in discourses of sexuality in that period which produced four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple and the perverse adult.

His argument is that in bringing forth the body as an object of knowledge, 'sexuality' became even more closely subject to regulation. The notion of 'repression' misconstrues this growth of regulation, in the process hiding the

basis of its own knowledge formation. In this way, a particular view of sexuality is 'naturalised', made an inherent aspect of the embodied subject, when it is actually subject to discursive and material change and transformation:

> Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.
>
> (Foucault 1981:105–6)

Persons are not natural givens in the world, nor is knowledge a process of discovering their 'reality'. Persons are constructed through knowledgeable discourses conditional upon and related to the exercise of power. As Couzens Hoy (1988:27) points out, for Foucault 'subjective experience is socially and historically constituted by factors that individuals learn to internalise without being consciously forced to do so'. This can be seen most vividly in the introduction of 'experience' into educational theory and practice. Bringing forth 'experience' as an object of knowledge results from and is a reconstruction of educational practices targeted at those aspects of a person which have been unspoken, in which truth about oneself is known through the practices of 'confession' (Foucault 1981). The notion of confession in humanistic discourse assumes that there is a deep truth or meaning hidden within subjects which, if it is found, opens the door to personal autonomy and emancipation. Foucault (1981:60) argues that confession is

> so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down…

However, through practices such as guidance and counselling, the 'confession', the ascribing of meanings to experience, is *already* an effect of power. In order to participate 'successfully' in the process of 'confession' the discursive and material practices which constitute confession as 'truth' must have already have been accepted.

In modernity, confession produces the 'truth' of the person and is manifested in the many institutions of the modern state–justice, medicine and of course education (Marshall 1990). Thus in confessing we feel liberated, even though we are still 'subject' to the power-knowledge formations that

shape subjectivity as an entity that confesses. Confession therefore results in regulation through self-regulation, discipline through self-discipline. Instead of being monitored, we monitor ourselves.

Power-knowledge formations operate both through the practices which inscribe the person as a particular subject prior to entering an educational institution and those practices they are engaged in once within it; in becoming a 'subject' we learn to be a 'subject' of a particular sort. It is our assumptions about the nature of the 'subject' which then inform our practices as teachers and learners, yet the effect of power which gives rise to the particular positioning of 'subjects' is effectively veiled. Thus, even within educational practices based on meeting individual needs, we have to be aware of the power-knowledge formations which construct the truth of the individual as a particular form of subject (Edwards 1991). Foucault (1980:98) warns us that 'the individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals'.

As was suggested earlier, it is an effect of power that the person is constructed as a foundation, a nucleus, about whom we seek to discover things and who learns things which have an inherent interest for that person. As educational practitioners if we seek to meet the needs of individual learners, a position which is at the heart of much liberal humanist and 'progressive' educational discourse, we are operating within a power-knowledge formation which discursively constructs the person in this particular way. When persons are constructed as particular kinds of learner they are inscribed as having characteristics which 'belong' to them; essentially they become a person of that type.

The identity of the subject who learns thus already assumes the effects of power-knowledge formations. When we learn, we not only learn a content, we ascribe a meaning to ourselves, the people around us, our world. For instance, we learn we are white, male, middle-class lecturers, teachers or facilitators, with all the baggage of complex and contradictory meanings and significations such concepts imply. Insofar as a conception of the subject as an essential nucleus is dominant, we learn to own each of these attributes as an aspect of ourselves as individuals, in which the discursive practices which have given rise to that position in the first place are lost. Our identities are constructed as asocial, displacing their already existing enmeshment in the power-knowledge formations without which sociality would be a logical and practical impossibility—'society without power relations can only be an abstraction' (Foucault 1982:222). People are constructed and come to construct themselves as persons open to praise: 'good', 'intelligent', 'responsible'—and blame: 'badly behaved', 'ignorant', 'rebellious'—in other words, in terms of their 'natural' attributes. But this construction is a function of discursive strategies which deploy 'scientific' knowledge to pathologise the

condition of particular persons through a process of division and normalisation as a means of regulating behaviour. In many of the older industrialised countries in the 1980s and 1990s such practices were exemplified in a powerful discourse about the 'unemployed', where they were constructed as lacking in motivation, skills and enterprise, a condition for which they were held to be *individually* responsible (see Edwards 1992).

This position obviously has very important implications for educational practitioners, when so much emphasis is placed in the educational enterprise on the meeting of individual need. Modularisation, flexible learning, open and distance learning, individual learning programmes, portfolios of achievement, the accreditation of prior learning–all have developed in Britain and elsewhere as ways of meeting the particular learning needs of individuals. The divining of the individual's needs and the coherence of the package the person progresses through are inscribed in the growing importance given to the practices of guidance and counselling.

For Foucault, such 'student-centred' approaches work to evoke a 'confession' from the person as an individual with a particular set of skills whose needs are regimented within a range of practices reinforcing the identity of that person as an individual with needs. Thus, it is not simply a question of counselling not 'really' meeting individual needs. This misses the point that counselling is deployed within a power-knowledge formation which constitutes the subject as an individual with needs which can only be articulated through a process of counselling. It cannot therefore escape its regulatory role despite the many protestations of student-centredness. Counselling discourses are another example of the power which lies immanent in a set of practices where power is hidden from the awareness of those through whom it circulates.

RESISTANCE AND POWER-KNOWLEDGE

People are positioned in a variety of subject positions, such as 'woman', 'man', 'child', 'parent', 'teacher', 'lover', 'clever', 'pushy'. It is through this positioning by a network of multiple determinations that discourses secure the affective and effective management of the people. However, this process is never complete or entirely successful for while discourses attempt to 'fix' human subjects, the very fact of multiple determinations undermines this attempt, thereby providing the possibilities of resistance. Thus, for instance, 'the multiple positionings accorded to women are often in contradiction and themselves provide sites for struggle and resistance' (Walkerdine 1986:74). Power is not monolithic and the multiplicity of determinations provides for an instability through which struggle and change can take place.

Power-knowledge discourses regulate in two different yet related ways. Here we return to the paradox mentioned earlier in this chapter. Discourses 'empower' by creating active subjects with certain capacities. But these very

capacities also 'disempower' by objectifying subjects, making them subject to power. In this process, knowledge is an aspect of regulatory power which operates 'externally'. At the same time, regulation can take the form of self-regulation, where knowledge is self-knowledge. At one level, this produces 'empowered' subjects: individuals who are empowered by learning and knowing more about themselves. However, subjects 'disempower' themselves in the very process of 'self-empowerment', because this very power of learning about oneself is also the condition for self-regulation; one learns the 'limits' of one's own possibilities—'limits' which are a function of discourses rather than 'natural' factors. The self is 'discovered' in order to be more readily mastered and regulated. The 'success' of modern disciplinary institutions is therefore gauged by their 'production of regimented, isolated and self-policing subjects' (Dews 1987:150).

In other words, as with other postmodern writers, Foucault argues that as 'subjects', there is no transcendental Archimedean position from which we can become 'empowered', but only particular discursive positions within power-knowledge formations. Emancipation is only possible within power-knowledge formations within which there are also immanent forms of oppression. Emancipation and oppression are not transcendental states, but are themselves practices situated within power-knowledge formations and certain kinds of liberal humanistic discourses. That is not to say they cannot have a utopian content but, as practices, they are far more complex than that:

> Coercion appears to be necessary for emancipation while simultaneously subverting emancipation. The emancipation/oppression distinction thereby deconstructs, and its deconstruction highlights an issue that critical educators tend to keep at the margins of their discourse: which forms of domination (coercion, constraint) are justified in furthering which forms of emancipation?
>
> (Cherryholmes 1988:165)

Thus, while certain subjects, including educators, may locate themselves within ever-present alternative discourses, these cannot simply express an emancipatory potential, but rather can give expression to on-going and changing resistance—the ability to disrupt, challenge and change. To locate ourselves in oppositional discourses, we have to be aware of the continual shift in the significance of the stances we adopt, as the effects of power-knowledge formations are not themselves static or uniform. In this sense, resistance for Foucault involves continual forms of transgression, a process without end rather than a transcendental state of 'emancipation'.

Many have drawn attention to 'resistance' as perhaps the most unsatisfactory element of Foucault's work. Certainly, for educators, this is a critical issue, since the possibility of resistance must be a feature of any

theorisation of education. In a sense, the problem arises because Foucault does not have an explicit *theory* of resistance.

Yet it would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that Foucault has nothing of significance to say about resistance. Certainly, his emphasis on discipline(s) might seem to consign subjects to the all-enveloping grip of the carceral society, assigning to them the position of helpless victims of domination and manipulation. This, however, is to miss an important element. Subjects are formed through their positioning in discursive practices and power-knowledge formations but Foucault (1980:95) argues that resistance is immanent in power—'where there is power there is resistance; and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'.

In the earlier discussion on discourse we argued that, for Foucault, discourse *excludes*. Discourses constitute exclusions and these exclusions form parts of other discourses—alternative and possibly oppositional discourses where there are other meanings and other subject positionings. No particular discourse is ever either monopolistic or monolithic. Foucault argues that a discourse can be a focus for resistance, a basis for an oppositional strategy.

Foucault consistently set his face against what he called 'the tyranny of globalising discourses' (1980:83)—he even claimed of himself *'Je suis Pluraliste'* (Foucault quoted in Balbus 1988:143). It could be argued, therefore, that for Foucault there is a plurality of powers rather than a monolithic power and this itself necessarily generates a plurality of resistances which, as Balbus (1988:143) rightly argues, is why 'he [Foucault] insists on the multiplicity of sources of resistance and refuses to privilege one as any more revolutionary or universal than any other'.

Resistance and power then, like knowledge and power, are inseparable. In the *History of Sexuality* (1981) Foucault argues that resistance is actually the *product* of power. To understand what Foucault is getting at here it is important to remind ourselves that he does not reify power. Power, it will be recalled, is relational, existing only in its exercise. It is always a way of acting upon acting subjects by virtue of their being capable of action and thus of the capacity to resist (see Foucault 1982). When Foucault talks of power he uses metaphors such as 'nets' and 'capillaries'. The latter immediately suggest countervailing pressure or resistance; things fall through nets. Through these metaphors Foucault wants to suggest the plurality or diffusion of power. It is everywhere and yet 'nowhere'—or at least there is nowhere that power cannot be resisted: 'resistance, like power itself, is not centred anywhere but spread out over the surface of the power network' (Shumway 1989:139). As Game (1991) argues, for Foucault, the relational nature of power subverts any attempt to stabilise it.

Another aspect of this is that since there is no single monolithic power and no monopolistic discourse, there are oppositional discourses and elements within discourses which are oppositional to one another or which at least can

have opposite effects. One consequence of this is that subjects are multiply positioned and multiply determined: 'the complexity of networks…opens up strategic possibilities' (Game 1991:46). This means that in effect subjects are formed and shaped rather than determined in a conventional deterministic sense. Fairclough (1992:59) gives counselling as an example. He argues that counselling as a form of confession is 'a discourse technique in practice…with contradictory orientations to domination and emancipation…it brings the inside of people's heads into the domain of power-knowledge, but it is also a technique for asserting the value and individuality of people'. As we have noted before, for Foucault there is always reversal—subjugation also produces the possibility of refusal.

In sum, therefore, Foucault's work contributes to the postmodern critique of modernity by posing new questions in new ways about social practices and the assumptions which underpin them. In this sense, he provides a sustained critique of humanism and the grand narrative of history as leading towards inevitable progress and betterment. As we have argued, learning is a central feature of the functioning of disciplinary power, which is not simply located in institutions of education, but is central to the significance of modern organisations regulated by and through the knowledge of the human sciences. Effective learning, the training of the body and soul, renders unnecessary the requirement for more direct forms of coercion, although these forms never entirely disappear. To suggest that a 'critical' stance is sufficient to undermine the disciplinary impact of that training is to miss the point that such stances can be contained within the overall disciplinary framework of modern power. Given the importance of learning to modern forms of social formation, it is unsurprising that particular sites for learning have been developed for the population as a whole and that they have a particular significance in building discipline (as both knowledge and social control):

> Educational sites are subject to discourse but are also centrally involved in the propagation and selective dissemination of discourses, the 'social appropriation' of discourses. Educational institutions control the access of individuals to various kinds of discourse.
>
> (Ball 1990a:3)

It is to an examination of some of the practices by which this is achieved that we now turn.

5

EXAMINING THE CASE
Competences and management

Having examined the broad theoretical underpinnings of Foucault's texts we now turn to some of the detail of how the governance of people comes about. While Foucault focused primarily on the operation of power-knowledge in prisons, asylums and in relation to sexuality, these institutions are 'successful' within modern power-knowledge formations insofar as they 'educate' people to particular 'regimes' rather than subject them to coercion. A corollary is that institutions of education are also important sites of regulation in modern social formations:

> The chief function of the disciplinary power is to 'train', rather than to select and to levy; or, no doubt, to train in order to levy and select all the more... Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise.
>
> (Foucault 1979:170)

The question that now arises is how this is achieved.

OBSERVATION, NORMALISATION AND EXAMINATION

For Foucault, the exercise of modern disciplinary power is exemplified in the panopticon (Foucault 1979), the nineteenth-century Benthamite design for a prison, in which individual cells encircle a central observation point. Each individual is isolated from the others and subject to observation. However, as they cannot see those who observe them, they do not actually know whether they are being observed or not. Thus an awareness is constituted among the cell occupants that they might be observed, even though they cannot be sure whether or not this is the case at particular moments in time. For those within the cells, the possibility of being observed is sufficient for them to

tailor their behaviour to what they believe is expected. In other words, they 'police' themselves, thereby avoiding the need for direct 'policing'. For Foucault, the panopticon is the perfected metaphor of modern disciplinary power.

Disciplinary power therefore functions through practices of observation and surveillance. Subjects are constructed in their individuality and subjectivity by a process of itemisation and atomisation, as they become subject to the categorisations generated to 'understand' and 'learn' more about them and their actions. Foucault (1979:170) argues that 'instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it [disciplinary power] separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units'. The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that exercises power by means of observation. Categorisations are embodied in dossiers, files and records of various kinds. Thus subjects are *inscribed,* as 'the examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them' (Foucault 1979:189). The person becomes an individual 'case', subject to on-going examination and record–'a case which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power' (1979:191). As the need to regulate increases, so does the need to know more about individuals. Hence the knowledge generated and the categories needed to classify this knowledge increase. Surveillance becomes ever more pervasive yet without necessarily appearing to be oppressive, geared as it is towards the 'humane' satisfaction of individual 'need'. In this way 'a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency' (1979:176).

In education this process can be discerned in the increased scope and impact of assessment procedures, evaluation and appraisal mechanisms, for instance, curricula vitae, education certificates, standard assessment tests, records of achievement, school reports, appraisal forms. Teachers and lecturers are increasingly both agents of and subject to the disciplinary process of individual measurement and assessment, both in their work with students and the practices they are subject to (see Metcalfe 1991, Ryan 1991). Through the processes of examination and documentation, the population is reconstructed as individual 'cases', subject to disciplinary practices.

This process of recording is not neutral. Since it works through a norm, it normalises whilst categorising. The categories (or norms) by which individuals become 'cases' through sorting and classification creates boundaries and exclusions. Thus they have an ethical and political as well as a purely descriptive role:

> The power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences.
>
> (Foucault 1979:184)

The significance of a norm is that it works by excluding; it defines a standard and criteria of judgement thus identifying all those who do not meet the standard. In this way, a picture is provided of what a person is 'good at' and correspondingly where she or he is 'lacking' or 'deficient'. Foucault (1979:184) talks of the normalising gaze: 'a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish [establishing] over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them'.

Persons, therefore, become subjects by being classified in relation to norms. In effect they become their capacities and it is through these capacities, or the lack of them, that they become 'objects' of surveillance, examination and governance. The significance and power of normalisation is precisely that it appears to be neutral. In its objectivity it appears to be simply a neutral procedure for ascertaining inherent 'natural' capacities. Thus normalisation is a manifestation of power which appears to be a power-less application of scientific disciplinary knowledge, e.g. psychiatry, penology, educational psychology. A power-knowledge discourse always points away from power towards the 'objective' measurement of what is there 'naturally'. Assessment is therefore carried out against 'objective' criteria which subjects have to accept (because not to do so would be irrational and deviant) as saying something about what they are as persons. But, as we have noted before in discussing disciplinary power, assessment has a double effect insofar as it is a process of *objectification,* of persons becoming objects to be classified and measured and of *subjectification,* where they become subjects who 'learn' the truth about themselves.

THE CASE OF COMPETENCE

In recent times in Britain and elsewhere, there has been much emphasis on instrumental learning, focused particularly on the needs of the economy, within certain, particularly post-school, branches of education. This has existed alongside a cross-current of moves towards more student-centred humanistic forms of teaching and learning. While such tendencies can be seen to be functioning in many of the educational systems in the industrialised countries, we shall confine our discussion here to the 'reform'

of vocational qualifications around the notion of occupational 'competence' in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as an example of the wider processes currently at work. In doing so we will demonstrate the important insights a Foucauldian analysis can provide in assessing the significance of these changes.

Since the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1986, much debate and controversy has been generated by the introduction of competence-based qualifications with a consequent proliferation of literature to draw on. A number of positions are discernible in the current debate. First, there are those that question the notion of competence as an adequate conceptualisation of human activity and therefore a valid basis for assessment (e.g. Ashworth and Saxton 1990). They argue that the notion of competence introduced ignores the human qualities and wider notions of knowledge and understanding which are integral to the education of people. Second, there are those who doubt that the competence-based system can be delivered at a cost and standard of quality that will gain credibility (see Raggatt 1991). Third, there are those who argue that the aim of increasing the pool of skilled labour through increasing competence will not be achieved, as the competences developed remain too narrowly conceived (see Hyland 1992).

All of these arguments have an important part to play in the evolution of competence-based education and training. However, although apparently different, they are all arguments about whether or not it will work. Our interest is in the *work done* by the discourse of competence and we want to explore this by repositioning this discourse within a framework that draws on Foucault's texts. The question that then emerges concerns the significance of the power-knowledge formations, the discursive and material practices, that have developed around the notion of competence in relation to the continuities and disjunctions in the governance of the modern disciplined subject. In other words, what role do discourses of competence play in modern power-knowledge formations and with what possibilities for resistance?

An exploration of the discourse of competence must first be related to ideas of surveillance, discipline and power-knowledge. In an attempt to provide a definitive statement on competence, the NCVQ in 1988 published its criteria and related guidance. In this document, competence is defined as 'the ability to perform a range of work-related activities, and the skills, knowledge and understanding which underpin such performance in employment' (NCVQ 1988:8). The significance of this is that it is not simply performance, what a person can do, which is to be judged, but also apparently the skills, knowledge and understanding which go into that performance. While this has spawned much debate about whether 'underpinning' skills, knowledge and understanding can be inferred from successful performance or whether they need to be assessed explicitly (e.g.

UDACE 1989, Ashworth and Saxton 1990, Wolf and Mitchell 1991), our interest is in how discourses of competence displace and reconstruct knowledge in relation to the notion of competent performance in work.

The NCVQ (1988:10) states that providing for progression in levels of competence 'does not imply building into the requirements of an NVQ knowledge and understanding beyond the needs of the employment to which the award relates'. This is particularly significant because it is the perceived failure of knowledge-based vocational qualification which has legitimised a shift towards the notion of 'competence' where knowledge is purely instrumental. It is noticeable that the discourse of competence marginalises knowledge and understanding unrelated to workplace performance. As we saw in the previous chapter, disciplinary power aims to produce 'docile bodies' and 'obedient souls'. Education in general, and competence-based assessment in particular, exclude certain forms of knowledge in order to enable the maximising of correct performance. Resistant and oppositional knowledge and understanding engendered through alternative discourses to those related to the particular vocational competence being performed are marginalised in the attempt to maximise the performance (or usefulness?) of the worker. In competence-based qualifications, the conditions which would make alternative agendas possible are thereby displaced by the normalising processes of education and assessment.

This is not to argue that the discourse of competence does not incorporate notions of knowledge and understanding in some form. NVQs are meant to be a universal framework of workplace qualifications and there are clearly many types of work, particularly those high in the status and reward ladders, where qualifications centred on pre-defined performance alone would be considered unacceptable and 'inappropriate'. For instance, a lawyer needs a knowledge of legal case history to be able prosecute or defend their case successfully. A teacher needs to know the subject they are to teach. This knowledge does not of itself ensure that they are 'competent' teachers or lawyers, but without it they are certainly not able to be competent. The exclusionary effects of a particular power-knowledge discourse of competence thereby tend to deny the knowledge which can make 'competent performance' possible. Thus the knowledge of a worker may be more important than the discourse of competence allows. Here we witness a kind of 'return of the repressed' of knowledge within the discourse of competence which attempts to repress and exclude it.

The narrow conception of skills, knowledge and understanding as tied to successful performance of activities also raises problems in relation to the transferability of skills which, it is argued, is crucial to the flexibility required by the workforce for a successful economy. Flexibility may well demand the type of knowledge and understanding unrelated to immediate performance which is silenced by the functional analysis upon which occupational competences are based by the NCVQ. To be able to solve problems in the

workplace may require a wider resource of knowledge than that defined as necessary to underpin performance specific to a job task.

The response to these challenges to competence-based qualifications in relation to their narrowness and applicability has been to extend their range rather than reconsider the grounds on which they have been formulated. For instance, notions of generic competences are constructed rearticulating ideas of 'core skills' which extend the range of educational intervention into areas previously constituted as attributes of the person. General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), which are not specific to actual job performance but provide a broader introduction to a vocational area, have been developed. These developments remain firmly located within the paradigm of competence established by the NCVQ. The body is 'trained' to be the instrument of the individual in the successful performance of their work tasks, either alone or in working with others. A desire for mastery of occupational performance in which the worker is positioned is thereby embedded within the development of competence-based qualifications.

This paradigm is now becoming increasingly dominant in the discourses of education and training in Britain and is providing the means by which the practices of teaching and learning are being reconstructed. Its power is attested by its seeming imperviousness to critique. Elsewhere, competence-based qualifications are also being developed, although there are differences in formulation and implications in different national schemes. For instance, Raggatt (nd) argues that the development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Britain is linked to a Fordist conception of employment needs, continuing the divisions of mental and manual labour which has been the historical base of British capitalism. By contrast, he argues that competence-based qualifications in Australia are being formulated in the light of shifts in the economy to post-Fordist forms of organisation, in which people work in teams and mental and manual labour are integrated. In other words, British reforms are addressing an agenda of the past, while Australia is addressing an agenda of perhaps a postmodern future. However, while such differences are important in charting the specifics of the work of discourses of competence, the argument is over the appropriate range of knowledge relevant to work performance, not the fact that knowledge is reduced to the role of supporting work performance. 'Post-Fordist competences' do not of themselves escape the nexus of power-knowledge; rather they may provide a more systematic framework for examining the competence of individuals.

While much has been made of NVQs as a continuation of the discourse of vocationalism and instrumentalism within the education and training sphere, this oversimplifies the situation. The NCVQ government departments and other organisations articulate competence not simply through a discourse of vocationalism, that qualifications should more closely match the 'needs' of

employers, although that is certainly there. What is different and most significant in the current discourse of competence is its projection as a 'progressive' form of educational and training practice. This has happened though its articulation in humanistic language and practices of meeting individual need, providing equal opportunities for access and progression, etc.... Thus:

2.3   In considering awards for accreditation as NVQs, the National Council will wish to be satisfied that…

2.3.4   the award (an NVQ) should be free from any barriers which restrict access to individuals wishing to obtain it. For example, an NVQ should be independent of:

*   the mode of education and training required;
*   upper or lower age limits for the assessment or award of the qualification, except where legal restraints make this necessary;
*   a specified period of time to be spent in education, training or work before the award can be made.

2.3.5   awarding bodies have ensured that no overt or covert discriminatory practices in regard to gender, race or those with special needs are built into the specification or its assessment procedures…

(NCVQ 1988:9–10)

Student-centred learning, negotiation of individual learning programmes, the accreditation of prior learning, the valuing of non-educational and training institutions as sites of learning, the need for guidance and counselling of learners; all of these now form an essential part of the discourse of competence (see Jessup 1991). In other words, the dichotomy of 'traditional' and 'progressive' educational discourse is elided.

It would be tempting to dismiss this simply as an ideological appropriation of 'progressive' ideas which mystifies the regressive narrowness and vocationalism of NVQs. While this allows many 'progressive' educators to maintain an ethical high ground, it fails to address the politics of the situation (see Edwards 1993), the complexity of hegemonic practices (Whitson 1991) and the very questioning and mobility of meaning which is central to postmodern and certain other philosophies of language (see Cherryholmes 1988, Macdonell 1991). As we have noted in the previous chapter, Foucault (1981:101–2) argues that there can be 'contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can on the contrary, circulate without their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy'.

It is precisely through its articulation with liberal humanist ideas that discourses of competence are powerful, not simply within the formal structures of education and training but, more important, over and through

learners. The assessment of performance through competences, articulated within the dominant liberal humanist discourse is powerful in sustaining a regime of truth and in itemising and normalising the behaviour of people in the workplace. Discipline and governance are exerted as the ever more 'humane' exercise of power.

Different strategies operate in the social formation at any one time and provide the basis for the breakdown of established discourses, their fracturing and rearticulation in different forms. There is thus a constant struggle to 'make sense' of a situation in order to exert power within and through it. What 'sense' is made itself manifests certain positions within the power-knowledge nexus. However, what is clear is that certain discourses cannot be said to 'belong' to particular groups or positions. They can be articulated in varying ways in varying discourses with different underlying strategies. This has to be kept in mind when examining the intermixing of discourses of competence with that of liberal humanism. The fact that those operating within a liberal humanist discourse are generally most vociferous about the appropriation of 'progressive' ideas clearly demonstrates the limits of that discourse and the relatively powerless position of those located within it.

Since the Ruskin College, Oxford, speech by the then British Prime Minister, James Callaghan, in 1976, there has been an overwhelming number of reports, speeches, White Papers, media items on the failure of the education and training system to provide the necessary skills for Britain to be competitive within the globally integrated markets of late twentieth-century capitalism (see Ball 1990c). Two major recessions and on-going un-and under-employment have not dented that view and in many ways have only added to its volume. It seems the further the British economy slips in terms of competitiveness, the more responsibility is placed on the education and training system as a major cause. This is itself a significant discursive movement, as it veils the roles and responsibilities of the state, financial institutions and employers in bringing about the 'economic crisis'. Numerous accounts of employers bemoaning the lack of literacy and numeracy of school leavers and others seemingly provide eloquent testimony of this failure. The apparent inability of people with qualifications to actually perform what they know in the workplace is a further example. This discourse is not restricted to Britain but also can be found in most of the older industrialised countries whose economic competitiveness has been undermined by changes in the global organisation of capitalism (CLMPC 1990, Kenway 1990, see Shor 1987). Paradoxically, however, this modernising message of greater economic relevance does not always fit with the more 'traditional' view that a decline in standards of behaviour in the social formation is accompanied by a decline in standards of knowledge, standards which can only be maintained by the study of academic disciplines (Kenway 1990). However, while different positions are maintained in

discourses about education, they largely share a power-knowledge formation which construct this field as being in a state of 'crisis'.

This 'crisis', what in the previous chapter was described as stemming most powerfully from the new right's 'discourse of derision', has provided a climate into which the discourse of competence appears to offer a credible and appropriate solution. It is therefore no accident that 'reformers' have hit on the notion of competence as the basis for reconstructing vocational qualifications. Behind competence stalks the spectre of incompetence; the view that it is people being unable to do the jobs asked of them to a satisfactory standard, if at all, which leads to uncompetitiveness in the economy as a whole. 'Competence' offers a 'warm' and 'obvious' common sense solution to the problem as constructed. To favour 'incompetence' is surely irrational? We feel confident that the job will be properly done when someone is known to be competent. Who would want to have a filling attended to by an 'incompetent' dentist, or have their brakes fixed by an 'incompetent' mechanic? Competence, therefore, is not a purely factual matter. Within a discourse of competence there is a rhetorical force and persuasive power, a desire for mastery and control, which can be deployed to great effect (see Jessup 1991).

However, competence to perform a work role also involves a form of discipline. Through functional analysis, NVQs are broken down into units and elements of competence with their associated performance criteria and range statements. Each element has to be assessed to demonstrate that a person is fully competent (NCVQ 1988:15). Here the process of atomisation and itemisation noted earlier is present. Thus 'competence' is not just a matter of performance, but of surveillance and control over the learner. Broader notions of assessment, of examinations and practical work, are refined into the practice of assessment of the smallest detail, in which each performance is clearly circumscribed by the performance criteria. The learner's performance is inscribed as competent or not competent and incorporated into a vast bureaucratic web which documents and charts their progress through the various elements, units and levels. The process of continuous assessment, of credit accumulation towards an NVQ, is therefore in another sense a continuously expanding surveillance of the learner, and a continuous disciplining through the goal of competent behaviour at every stage of the process. There is no space for independence of thought or action along the way if one wishes to achieve competence and find a space in the workforce.

We therefore want to question the view that continuous assessment is incontrovertibly 'better' than end-of-course assessments in allowing people to demonstrate their full potential. The stress which is meant to detract from performance could be argued to be greater in the constant process of observation and recording associated with continuous assessment in a situation where the space for anti- or counter-hegemonic thought and practice

are closed down. Rather than simply being more student-centred as humanistic discourses suggest, continuous assessment therefore can be said to refine the processes of surveillance and examination, disciplining the subject more intently into the achievement of the goals of learning embedded in the assessment criteria. Contemporary developments in schooling make it more effective in closing the spaces in which outcomes other than those valued in the curriculum can be articulated.

Increased surveillance does not necessarily mean the direct gaze of the tutor/lecturer/assessor. The latter is certainly necessary at the point of assessment, to judge, to tick off (for competence or incompetence), to log. However, surveillance is inscribed in the very list of competences and performance criteria that are put before learners as the desirable goal of the learning process; it is implicit in those criteria and made manifest when assessment takes place. Through their inscription in the NVQ system, persons become a bundle of competences; in effect, they *become* their NVQs. However, because the performance criteria are public, they appear even more as objective forms of measurement from which the exercise of power is drained. In fact, they appear to be empowering precisely because they are publicly available to learners. Learners 'know' what they have to demonstrate and can assess themselves as they move towards that goal. In operating within a discourse of competence, learners themselves become the subjects of their own surveillance; like the prisoners in the cells of the panopticon they sit in judgement upon themselves. In the discourse and practices of competence-based qualifications, they are disciplined through self-discipline. Through them, power is exercised over them.

Objections to competence on the grounds of its crude behaviourism are therefore misplaced. The suggestion is that competences are simply behavioural objectives in a new guise. This however is to misunderstand the nature of the discourse of competence. Competences are cast in behavioural terms but the discourse is itself not behaviourist. It is precisely because it is not, but rather interwoven with liberal humanist discourse that it is powerful. Behaviourism, somewhat like astrology, is no longer considered reliable, truthful and useful knowledge; it can no longer constitute the knowledge base of a 'regime of truth'. Not being 'person-centred' it cannot be deployed in a power-knowledge formation where self-discipline is central.

The discourse of competence is also criticised on the grounds that, because the behaviourally expressed competences are specified by employer-dominated Lead Bodies, they necessarily reflect the narrow interests of employers. Competence, it is argued, therefore must be a form of domination by employers over the workforce, and must produce a workforce of victims passive to their own oppression. However, the power of competence is far more insidious than this in its constitution of 'active' competent subjects.

In its liberal humanist form, competence is more a form of 'seduction' than of oppression (Bauman 1992). It embraces student-centred learning in

building its own rationale, evoking the need for individuals to take more control over their own learning in order that they can become competent members of the workforce. In an era of structural unemployment, this is a very powerful message. It at once evokes the means for economic survival and the individual's ability to take control of the means of that survival. In being incorporated into this discourse, self-discipline through self-control and competent performance reconfigures the need for direct control of the workforce. With and as part of competence, we see flatter management structures, people working in teams, an encouragement to participate more fully in the working environment as a unit. Forms of self-management rather than management imposition regulate the individual's labour. Paradoxically, therefore, as we have witnessed an intensification of labour processes in increasing productivity, we have seen a weakening of traditional authoritarian management structures and practices. More direct forms of management power are replaced by the 'humane' practices of human resource management and development, themselves predicated on the evolving knowledge of management science and its establishment as an increasingly powerful subject discipline. It is therefore not surprising that such changes have been associated with an increasing emphasis on the effective and efficient management of organisations, including institutions of education and that management competences were one of the first areas to be defined within the NCVQ framework. Thus, the desire for mastery over occupational performance through self-discipline is matched by a desire for mastery over the workforce, in which the desire is veiled by being manifested in humanistic discourses of competent management and human resource development.

'MANAGING' EDUCATION

As we have said, for Foucault modern social formations are the never complete attempt to discipline and manage populations in the most effective ways, in order to maximise the usefulness of that population. To manage effectively requires effective managers. However, once again, the notion of 'effective manager' needs to be situated within the particularities of a power-knowledge nexus. There are differences of management practice, between, for instance, the authoritarian owner-manager and the human resource developer. Competences identified for management cannot reflect both these notions. Embedded in such competences are a notion of 'good' management practice. Management competences originating through the deployment of the knowledge provided by humanistic psychology into the field of work, tend to embed the notion of the 'progressive' manager, the human resource developer, working towards and within post-Fordist forms of work organisation. The competent manager therefore signifies not simply a set of

work performances, but also a type of working organisation and a particular ethic.

In its practices, competent management encompasses more thoroughly the discipline of those who work within the organisation. It is in this sense, as Ball (1990b) argues, that management becomes a more effective form of 'moral technology'. Thus although post-Fordism has been identified with the postmodern condition (Harvey 1991), thereby suggesting that the human resource developer is the postmodern managerial form, such managers are still subject to modern disciplinary power.

Competent management is therefore archetypally a modern form of practice in which the effects of power from which it arises and to which it gives effect are removed from scrutiny to be constituted as the 'technical' resolution of problems. As Ball (1990b:154) argues: 'political, ideologically-loaded decisions are choked by bureaucratic-administrative systems and attempts are made to displace issues of moral and cultural identity with the imperatives of administrative efficacy'. As with the discourse of competence, notions of 'effective and efficient management' have a power which goes beyond what is said to the way it is said:

> Management theory views the social world as locked into irrational chaos, as needing to be brought into its redeeming order. It constructs its superiority via a set of potent discursive oppositions; order is set over and against chaos, rationality against irrationality, sanity against madness, neutrality against political bias, efficiency against inefficiency, and meritocracy against political influence. It is the linguistic antithesis of crisis and as such it has a central political role in the 1980s.
>
> (Ball 1990b:157)

In this sense, it does not 'make sense' to be managed 'inefficiently' or 'ineffectively'. We require 'value for money' and 'quality' of goods and services. If this is obtained through effective and efficient management, then all to the good. This is as true for institutions of education as it is for other organisations. In fact, given the ways in which these institutions are constituted as failing to educate and discipline satisfactorily, the deployment of more effective management of those organisations is constructed as the only solution. However, in reconstituting the school, college or university as an organisation to be managed, the discourse of teaching and learning is also displaced from its central organising role in such institutions and reconstituted. Ball argues that this is:

> part of a 'radical right' thrust to gain closer and more precise control over the processes of schooling, and that the discourse of management plays an essential role in achieving this shift and

justifying these new forms of control. Certainly, recent government statements attribute a key role to management as a mechanism for the reform of schools and the disciplining of teachers.

(Ball 1990b:155)

Thus, what goes on within educational institutions, both in terms of teaching and the management of the organisation as a whole, becomes subject to greater surveillance, articulated through a discourse of accountability.

As a result, Headteachers, Principals, Presidents, Vice-chancellors are repositioned as managers of these organisations, while teachers and lecturers have their professional status and autonomy redefined. They become repositioned as technicians, deliverers of a curriculum–e.g. NVQs, national curriculum targets–established elsewhere (Cherryholmes 1988). In this process, teachers and lecturers become increasingly subject to surveillance by processes of appraisal and professional development through which they are monitored and monitor themselves in relation to their own effectiveness, the attributes of which are constructed as neutral norms, masking the effects of power from their operation. Ironically, then teachers themselves become subject to the very discipline to which they subject learners.

Once again, it is possible to read such developments in different ways. Opportunities for continuing to learn may indeed be an advance on the expectation that teachers and lecturers should practice throughout their careers without such opportunities. Certainly, if any institution can be a learning organisation, educational institutions would seem to be the most likely and appropriate. However, the apparent sense of this belies the point that education is centrally a modern practice and, in Foucault's terms, a disciplinary practice. The effect of becoming a learning organisation subject to effective management is not simply a matter of closer regulation of teachers and lecturers, it is also manifested in the reconstitution of their professional status. It is significant that British government disputes with teachers' unions in the 1980s used the notion of a lack of professionalism in taking industrial action as a weapon against that action. The notion of being an educational 'professional' is therefore redefined with notions of 'autonomy' and 'the right to be critical' replaced by 'disinterestedness' and 'accountability'–'teachers are trapped into taking responsibility for their own 'disciplining' through schemes of self-appraisal, school improvement and institutional development. Indeed, teachers are urged to believe that their commitment to such processes will make them more professional' (Ball 1990b:162).

Surveillance and examination is ever more embedded in practices in and around educational institutions. League tables of examination results, research selectivity exercises, assessments of teaching quality, all subject such institutions to ever closer scrutiny (Cherryholmes 1988:152), and the 'consumer' is supposedly ever more empowered in their 'choice' of

educational opportunity. These trends are associated with the rise of the new right who, through a discursive regime of truth, have 'developed an apparatus of power-knowledge that sought to establish the boundaries within which "normal, moral and socially responsible" education is defined and outside of which all else may be regarded as deviant' (Kenway 1990:170).

It is parents who have been constituted as the constituency to whom, in particular, schools are accountable: 'the concerned parent is cast as a figure of reason and sanity naturally opposed to and set over against the wild experimentation and unorthodoxies of the uncaring teachers' (Ball 1990c: 33). Parents are deployed to observe and judge schools although their actual presence is irrelevant to the pressures felt by the schools themselves. In panoptic fashion, they must act as though the parents are observing and judging them whether or not they are. In this sense, disciplinary power is not simply exercised through modern institutions but also over them, particularly when they are not seen to be effective in their role as disciplinary institutions.

We have come a long way from the discussion of competence and management competence, but it is important to appreciate the ways in which different strands of practices are co-implicated in each other to create a sense of the contemporary world. Discourses of competence are another dimension of this disciplinary process. People are 'empowered' to disempower themselves. In taking on one set of power strategies, they relinquish others. This is where the closure offered by statements of competence, the strict criteria for measuring competence is highly significant. Student-centred learning has traditionally involved a certain open-endedness in learning outcomes and the space for generating alternative views, knowledges and practices, although ultimately circumscribed by its humanist presuppositions. Diversity was valued and the regulation implicit in such practices less tightly bound. With competence, there is closure; all learners are tied into a centrally determined pre-defined set of goals, whose meaning and practice are circumscribed. The goal of learning is competence demonstrated in a specific set of ways—nothing more, nothing less. Diversity in the learning process is evoked, but not realised in its outcomes. Experiential learning is evoked, only to be framed within a predetermined set of goals. In the process, what is constructed as valuable in experience and learning is reformulated, with critical and more abstract forms of discourse being denigrated, dismissed and silenced as 'theoretical', 'irrelevant' and 'academic'.

This homogeneity may seem inconsistent with the free market, *laissez-faire* attitudes of new right conservative governments. However, the deregulation of the market and its impact on social and economic life result in the need for greater regulation elsewhere. A different kind of subject is required, one with agency who is also an atomised individual, asocial yet

respectful of the social order. One way to manage this is through the education system. Homogeneity is also consistent with human resource management. The view that workers and employers might have different interests is marginalised as discourses of human resource management incorporate and unify management and workforce into a team able to 'compete against the best', the ever-present other—with the threat that not to accept this position is to act irrationally and inefficiently and hence to make oneself unemployable.

Discourses of competence attempt to repress certain conceptions of knowledge and understanding in order to sustain an agenda where competence-based qualifications appear to be the appropriate response. A regime of truth is established which derides certain forms of knowledge as 'theory', irrelevant to 'getting the job done well'. This is most noticeable in neo-conservative governments' approaches to the training of teachers, in which 'theory' is constructed as the reason for the failure of progressive tendencies in education since the 1960s and which can only to be countered with a greater emphasis on the practice of classroom management. Here the competent teacher is constructed not as one who knows that something is the case, or knows how to teach, but who can actually teach competently according to pre-determined criteria of competences. The veiling of certain forms of knowledge as 'theory' to be removed from the curriculum of teacher training is something which also finds support among many trainee teachers, who thereby deny themselves the forms of autonomy and the right to be critical which were previously the defining characteristics of the teaching profession.

This emphasis on performance is also part of the 'no nonsense' management style of discourse that has become so powerful since the 1980s. The greater emphasis being put on the notion of 'practice' in the training of teachers to which 'theory' is subordinated and instrumental is reflected in institutional arrangements and forms of assessment to which trainees are subject. More emphasis is placed on teachers training within the schools rather than the 'out of touch' education departments in higher education institutions and portfolio-based assessment is given greater importance than the more traditional essay. Trainee teachers therefore become increasingly subject to the on-going self-monitoring of their own experience and practice within which the possibilities for alternative and resistant formulations and discourses are severely limited. Dissatisfactions will still be articulated, but the framework is more likely to be 'moaning in the staff-room' than any more considered response. In this sense,

> privileging practice without due consideration of the complex interactions that mark the totality of theory/practice and language/ meaning relationships is not simply reductionist; it is a form of theoretical tyranny. Theory…becomes a form of practice

that ignores the political value of theoretical discourse within a specific historical conjuncture.

(Aronowitz and Giroux 1991:92)

Paradoxically, therefore, in becoming more occupationally competent, teachers may relinquish a capacity for contextualising and reflexively understanding their practices. The management of the classroom, the learning programme, the curriculum, displaces wider practices from educational agendas. The provision of education

> is reconstituted on the twin bases of central state control—of curriculum, of testing and of teachers—and free-market, parental choice. These modes of regulation are intended both to provide social and political stability and to isolate and neutralize, as far as possible, the influence of reformist public educators…
>
> (Ball 1990c:58)

The co-implication of notions of occupational competence with a greater emphasis on the 'effective' and 'efficient' management of organisations and people is effected not simply in the rapid development of management competences, but is further demonstrated in the very structure of NVQ awards. NVQs actually inscribe a division of labour into the qualifications structure, so that the higher levels of award within each occupational sector are for management competences. In every sphere of occupationally related learning, therefore, it is managers who are attributed higher levels of competence than those in supervisory or non-supervisory positions. The competent shop manager is therefore more highly qualified than the competent shop assistant. The desire for mastery of particular occupational competences is compounded by desire for mastery within the division of labour.

RESISTANCE AND EDUCATION?

The discussion of competence and management drawing on Foucault's texts may seem to offer an overly determining view, in which modern discipline is exercised completely over and through people through power-knowledge practices. It would seem on this reading that we are 'trapped' by discipline. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is one of the chief criticisms made of Foucault's work—'Foucault's description runs the risk of marking out the "ideal" of discipline, in which the schoolchild, soldier, worker become fully trained, blindly obedient bodies, like domesticated animals, or, rather, like robots' (Macdonell 1991:120). Macdonell goes on to argue that Foucault tells us much about 'subjection' but 'little about discourse which, rather than merely countering, is able to bring about disidentification and a change of terrain' (1991:113).

We need, therefore, to bear in mind Walkerdine's argument (1986) that subject positions are contradictory and that the possibility of resistance to dominant practices is always possible. However, she also points out (1990), rightly in our view, that resisting power can itself be an attempt to act oppressively, for example boys resisting the power of the female teacher through the deployment of a sexist masculinity.

However, it is the transgression and subversion of modern forms of discipline that largely result in Foucault being situated as a postmodern writer. It is only through continually exploiting the opportunities for resistance offered in the contradiction and ambiguities of modern discipline that the latter remains incomplete:

> We must make allowance for the complex and unstable powers whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.
>
> (Foucault 1982:101)

What is impossible is to escape from power in some simple and utopian expectation of emancipation. The effects of power-knowledge formations are never complete. They are continually challenged and undermined by a 'return of the repressed'. As we have already emphasised, where there is power, there is also resistance. Thus there is always scope for learners, and education and training practitioners, to create a space where, for instance, the displacement of knowledge within the NCVQ conception of competence can be challenged and made more open. Disidentification, 'an effect of working "on and against" prevailing ideological subjection' (Macdonell 1991:40) is possible. Subversion, through harnessing that which the dominant discourse seeks to exclude or repress, is a possible counter-strategy. Thus, in relation to our discussion of competence, knowledge and understanding cannot be totally and permanently repressed without subverting the whole enterprise. This is, in an important sense, the point of weakness in the discourse of competence—what it tries to exclude but cannot and which therefore becomes a potential and ever-present site of resistance.

The discourse of competence not only widens the scope of what is considered to be vocational education and training by defining what vocational education and training should be about, it also acts as a form of regulation and self-regulation. The power of competence is exercised by removing that exercise from our own gaze. Competence constructs and reflects a new technology of power and of the self. The closer examination of the discourse of occupational competence, therefore, uncovers the ways in which power is exercised through and by it. In critically gazing upon it from within power-knowledge formations, highlighting the forms of surveillance and discipline inscribed within it, we open new avenues for oppositional discourses and resistance.

Foucault's analysis has not had the impact upon the understanding of education and training one might have expected (Marshall 1989) and it is certainly not without its difficulties (Couzens Hoy 1989, Hoskin 1990). Some of these are more general difficulties which, it is argued, are inherent in the postmodern moment (McLaren 1986). Some feminists have deployed notions derived from Foucault to reconceptualise the inequalities experienced by women. Barrett argues that his work ties in with feminist critiques of essentialism and 'offers a much more sophisticated methodology for providing an account of sexual identity than the traditional "social construction of gender" models' (1991:150). Others, however, question the scepticism towards modernity associated with Foucault's texts as with the postmodern as a whole:

> Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes 'problematic'? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be adequately theorized?
> (Hartsock, quoted in Aronowitz and Giroux 1991:79)

Certainly, this is a significant issue. However, this does not affect the view that Foucault's texts are highly suggestive as to the ways power can be said to operate at the heart of human subjects. In this sense, as the political becomes personal so the personal cannot escape being political.

While Foucault's texts provide much that is of interest in the questioning of modern humanistic educational practices as 'emancipatory', 'rational' and 'progressive', and as such contribute to the uncertainty of the present which is associated with the postmodern, their relationship with the postmodern is itself problematic. The concepts of power-knowledge, discourse and discipline can be deployed to examine the conditions of possibility whereby discourses of the postmodern have themselves become powerful at this point in time. The implications of this for educational theory and practice are as yet unclear, but are likely to make what is learned, where and how, ever more contested and contestable.

NOTE

A shortened version of the ideas in Chapters 4 and 5 appear in Edwards R. and User, R. (1994) 'Disciplining the subject: the power of competence', *Studies in the Education of Adults* 26, 1:1–14.

6

THE 'END' OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

READING, RELEVANCE AND RESONANCE

In writing about Derrida and education we are faced with the problem that he appears to have nothing directly to say about education. Thus to read Derrida from the standpoint of an educator, with an educational perspective and with a view to gaining educational 'pay-offs' from one's reading, must inevitably force us beyond our immediate standpoint into foregrounding, sooner or later, the general question of how a writer is to be read, of how any writer 'speaks' to us. Commonly, and particularly with educators, there is a tendency to think of this in terms of a writer's 'relevance' and we then ask the question, 'What is being said that is useful or capable of being applied to my concerns? Will I as a result of my reading become more "enlightened" and "efficacious"?'

Reading Derrida presents a number of specific problems. His writing is not only dense, elliptical and difficult but full of in-jokes, multi-lingual puns, allusions, word plays and other literary devices. Derrida 'plays' with texts, both philosophical and literary. We expect, and are used to, apparently academic texts conforming to academic canons of writing but Derrida's writing, although immensely erudite, deliberately does not conform to these canons. Although it presupposes an understanding of the issues, debates and controversies which constitute the history of Western philosophy, Derrrida does not attempt to elucidate and explain this history in the conventional way as a history of ideas. Rather, he seeks to subvert and render it problematic through his deconstructive approach. Thus one reason why Derrida may appear to be irrelevant is his deliberate attempt, in presenting his ideas through philosophical texts, to destabilise the 'normal' processes of reading.

Perhaps the most significant thing about Derrida is that he does not actually want to 'say' anything that traditionally philosophy would consider worth saying. Derrida's work is 'against the grain' of Western philosophy for

he does not seek, as a philosopher, to accurately represent in his writing 'how things really are', or to struggle towards the 'truth' of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical questions. If he wants to say anything at all 'philosophical' he wants to say that philosophy is writing, the creation of texts, and that writing is itself a metaphor for the process of endless interpretation that is the search for 'truth'. For Derrida, the problem is the *multiplicity* of truth; it is impossible to arrive at the *one* truth because there is always interpretation. His way of 'proving' his point is through the self-exemplification of endless writing. It is for this if nothing else that Derrida is both part of and contributes to the postmodern moment.

Seen this way, it would seem that, as educators, we face the problem that before we can even begin to figure out how Derrida may be useful to us we have to be able to 'read' Derrida's texts and, in order to do that, we have to try and get into his 'world'. This is the case with all texts, but the need is particularly acute with Derrida. We cannot approach him with our 'normal' educational or even academic, philosophical frames of interpretation and reference because these are part of the very project which Derrida seeks to interrogate and challenge. He requires us to be particularly vigilant because he recognises the power of these frames and our inability to rid ourselves entirely of them.

Difficult though this may be, there is, however, an even bigger problem. This involves the question of what it means for a text to be 'relevant' or 'useful', or for what it says to be capable of being applied in the cause of enlightenment or efficacy. Since Derrida is not trying to 'say' anything about, as Rorty (1982) puts it,'the relationship between words and worlds'; since writing (and the written text) is itself the message rather than merely conveying the message, Derrida is clearly not in the business either of enlightening us about the 'facts' or of attempting to solve our problems. If Derrida is approached in this spirit disappointment will inevitably follow because he tells us little that is 'relevant' in the sense of useful or capable of being applied. What we 'find' in Derrida is a highly abstract yet idiosyncratic treatment of intensely philosophical questions. He seems to tell us nothing that will help us to deliver the curriculum more effectively, nothing that will help us to become more efficacious as educational practitioners. He does not enlighten us in the sense of adding to our stock of knowledge about educational facts of the matter.

Faced with this situation it would be hardly surprising if we felt that there seems obviously little point in studying someone whose work appears to be so irrelevant to educational concerns, particularly if getting to grips with this work is such a difficult task. As always, however, what is apparently most obvious (and Derrida warns us about the seductions of the 'obvious') is that which is in greatest need of interrogation. For one thing, we should not take our educational concerns for granted, we should not assume that we know incontrovertibly what they are. It is one thing to be grounded in practice it is

quite another to have our horizons of understanding defined exclusively by practical problems. Perhaps we should not, for example, simply take it for granted that the prime educational concern is the practical problem of delivering the curriculum most effectively. Or perhaps we should not assume that the way this is defined as a concern is the only way it can be defined. If we were to problematise our concerns and the way these are so often defined for us we might then find that Derrida does more readily 'speak' to us because it is precisely the taken-for-grantedness of our 'concerns' in general that Derrida seeks to question.

Like other writers within the postmodern moment, Derrida's 'language' is a problem particularly for those formed in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of saying what we mean in the most transparent way possible. We implicitly believe that the nearer communication is to the source of truth in speaking subjects and their intentions then the more trustworthy it becomes. This is undoubtedly the source of the faith in lectures, a good example of what Derrida calls 'phonocentrism'–the privileging of the voice and speech. As a consequence, the more 'writerly' writing is, the less it resembles speech, the less transparent to what it represents and the more its concern with other writing rather than the world–then the more it is suspected as an untrustworthy medium for conveying true intentions and accurate pictures or representations of the world. Derrida, however, wants to bring to our attention that transparency and clarity are not necessarily the prime concern. Hence the word plays, the puns, the jokiness and general air of 'unseriousness' which pervade his texts. All of these are 'tools' in a deconstructive strategy whose aim is to subvert the taken-for-grantedness of phonocentrism and the transparency of language.

Derrida wants to bring to our attention the fact that to focus on transparency and clarity as the prime concern is, first, to ignore the infinite disseminative power of language and, second, to assume that it is always controllable, even if only potentially, by the speaking subject and/or the author. This assumption is a consequence of ignoring disseminative power and is the heart of the notion that the subject is the 'master' of language. The critique of mastery is a thread (or 'trace' in Derridean language) that runs throughout his work. It is a theme that is particularly appropriate in the educational context with its resonances of 'master', 'mastering' and 'mastery'.

To question the belief that language is always under control plunges us into a realm of 'strangeness' because, thinking as we do in terms of powerful either/or binary oppositions, this implies that if we are not in control of language then language must control us. Derrida sees this feeling of strangeness and its accompanying anxiety which we find so hard to cope with to be a consequence of the need for logocentric closure. What he seems to mean by this is that binary oppositions shape the very structure of thought by constructing an 'essential' centre, an authorising presence, which it is

assumed will collapse if the opposition is undermined. If the centre does collapse and subjects do not control language then the very notion of a centred, 'sovereign' subject is undermined. As we have seen in earlier chapters, many troubling 'postmodern' questions then emerge. Who and where is the subject? If the subject in control of language is rendered problematic are not thereby deprived of any sense of agency and therefore of efficacy?

As educators this seems particularly hard to cope with because a notion of agency and efficacy seems essential to our functioning in a context of practice. Similarly, to question the notion of 'relevance' in the sense of 'useful to acting in the world' also plunges us into strangeness because such a questioning seems to add nothing to our agentic capacities and hence to our practical effectiveness. We think of the centred subject, the subject-as-centre, the rational and autonomous decision-making subject, as constituting relevance in some essential way and therefore as responsible for mapping the world of words onto the world of things.

In the same way that Derrida reminds us that clarity and transparency of language is neither always possible nor desirable so too, by plunging us into strangeness, he reminds us that the same is the case for relevance. In effect, to make relevance the prime concern is once again to assume that language is always under control, that it is always mastered. It is to assume that a text can be read unequivocally, that a single, definitive meaning can be extracted from it and that the meaning so extracted is always one that can be 'applied' and will therefore enlighten us and make us more efficacious in furthering our pre-defined concerns. It is, in effect, to assume that the text can always be *mastered* because it always transparently conveys a 'presence', an essential meaning or, as Derrida would put it, a 'transcendental signified', which can be read off on to practice. Through this reading, one's agency as a subject will be re-confirmed and one's efficacy as a practitioner enhanced. Thus the 'power' of the self-present subject enables the text to be mastered and the mastery of the text's 'presence' makes the subject 'powerful'. It is against this notion of 'presence' and its implied closure of meaning that Derrida's critique of 'metaphysics', or the basic structures of Western thought, is directed.

Derrida highlights the implications of this 'logocentric' position. One is to do with how a text *ought* to be written and read; implicitly there is a prescription that it ought to be written transparently and read with the pre-understanding that there is a single true meaning which can be found. If this is not the case, if its meaning is undecidable, then it seems to follow that a text is not worth bothering about. A second implication is that a *text* (a piece of writing) is merely an unfortunate neccessity and that it would be so much better if its message could be conveyed ostensively or 'by injecting meaning straight into the brain' (Rorty 1982:96). A third implication is to do with how a text 'speaks' to us, the implication being that if it does not speak in the

language of relevance and usefulness then it has no 'truth' to convey. This is the way that Derrida's text is very often treated, particularly when it is read from a 'practical' perspective.

Perhaps we might get an insight into Derrida's 'truth' if we shift our ground and think of his texts not as providing us with *a* truth which will strengthen our agency and improve our efficacy but as providing us with a way of seeing differently—which might, of course, strengthen agency and improve efficacy in a different way. This 'truth' can perhaps be best characterised as a kind of *resonance* (a term which, significantly, we hesitate to use because it is one normally associated with the 'voice' rather than writing). Resonance cannot be readily defined although it can be recognised when it happens and this is what happens, we would argue, in reading Derrida in a certain way.

It does not follow that the failure to precisely define resonance is a problem. Rather, this is perhaps the way it should be because 'resonance' refers to ways of seeing and thus of understanding where one is unsure of the exact meaning of what one has understood. Yet if something resonates one feels something important is happening, and one can only feel this if what is happening has a certain purchase with one's concerns. In this sense, resonance is to do with the *familiar*. But equally it is to do with the *unfamiliar* since that which resonates has a quality of strangeness or otherness about it which 'captures' and 'captivates'. There is a feeling that something important is being said without being quite sure what that exactly is, a feeling most clearly experienced in reading novels or watching films.

With resonance, the meaning of what is being seen anew and the 'meaning' of this for practice is ambiguous. But because one recognises, if only dimly, that something important is happening, one also recognises that it is not simply a matter of knowing more but of seeing differently. However, even this is not the end of the story, for resonance is also the recognition that there is more to be known and more to be said. When something resonates one is not at the end of the journey, one has not reached one's goal or telos but rather another starting-point.

Derrida's texts manifest what could most aptly be called 'drifting' in the sense that they have no obvious starting-point (e.g. *Glas* 1986, *Limited Inc.* 1988) and no definitive goal (in the sense both of an aim and an end-point). Their 'essence', if such a term can be properly used about Derrida, is their very textuality and, for this reason, they appear to be simultaneously about everything and no-thing. This 'drifting', which is a kind of ever-present decentredness, means that they do not offer a clear position, they do not clearly demonstrate what they are 'about'. Thus they elude totalising explanation and determinate truth. It is precisely this drifting which many, including educators, find particularly infuriating.

At the same time, however, few would deny that his texts are immensely creative. He has altered not only the way that we understand philosophy—

metaphysics, epistemology and ethics–but also how we understand the whole logocentric project of Western thought wherein education plays such an important part. He has provided us with a different and rich conceptual vocabulary through which we can both think difference and think differently.

Texts such as Derrida's that drift creatively are those that can only relate to their readers through resonance. It is through their creative drifting that things are seen differently. The qualities of familiarity that doubles with strangeness, of recognition with obscurity, light within dark, originality and repetition, the seeing and the yet to be seen, are some of the characteristics of resonance. Nothing has been 'proved' yet we feel the touch of truth. We see in a way which relates to our concerns and, at the same time, in ways which help us to reformulate those concerns through both seeing difference in and recognising different ways of thinking and speaking. We are provided with a new set of conceptual resources and a different set of vivifying metaphors from which perhaps even momentarily we can escape from the power-knowledge discourses of epistemologically grounded and scientifically validated 'truth', from the logocentrism, as Derrida would put it, of our ways of thinking and speaking.

Reading Derrida with the eyes of an educator (and we cannot help but do this since Derrida shows us that there is no reading outside of a context) requires us to suspend customary logocentric habits of reading. It requires us to stop or at least question the search for totalising explanations and determinate truths; it requires that, in effect, we stop striving for a mastery that we think will make us more powerful. We have to get out of a habit of mind which sees the only point of reading a text to be that of extracting knowledge and truth which is relevant, useful and efficacious. In other words we have to start undoing the presuppositions and predispositions which hold us captive.

Yet even to begin seeing things this way is to begin to recognise the difficulty of the task because we understand our context as educators to be precisely that of producing and disseminating certain knowledge, determinate truth, mastered and masterful meaning in the service of the mastery of self and the world. As educators we are captivated by this 'grand narrative' of truth and progress through truth, we are caught within its folds because education's historical role has been cast as that of an agent of its realisation. We cannot unmesh and dispossess ourselves of our cultural frameworks and reference points, the weight of Western metaphysics, by a mere act of will–or, if we try, they will only reassert themselves like the return of the repressed in the very act of dispossession. We have to recognise the power of the narrative in the very act of deconstructing it, we have to recognise our complicity even as we critique it.

THE LOGOCENTRISM OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

In his *Intimations of Postmodernity* Bauman (1992:xiv) refers to Spinoza's dictum that 'if I know the truth and you are ignorant, to make you change your thoughts and ways is my moral duty; refraining from doing so would be cruel and selfish'. Bauman argues that it is this notion, of the *necessity* to educate, of education's historical role to enlighten and emancipate, which is at the very heart of the project of modernity. He goes on to argue that this project is constituted by a particular kind of ideology or narrative of *culture* which represents the world 'as man-made, guided by man-made values and norms and reproduced through the on-going process of learning and teaching' (1992:2).

This narrative tells the questionable story of what it is to become human. First, that it is a process where an inherent incompleteness or prematurity is made good through immersion and participation in culture. Second, that becoming human is a learning process where knowledge 'tames' natural instincts and replaces them with reason. Third, that learning must imply teaching since it must be deliberate, systematic and controlled and purveyed by those 'in the know'. In other words, it must take the form of formal education. Bauman (1992:3) argues that the narrative of culture 'represents the world as human beings who are what they are taught', with education the centre of the humanising process, the process of completion which is both the condition and the effect of social living.

Bauman is pointing to the co-implication of modernity, enlightenment and emancipation and to education as the necessary link between these. It is in this sense that it is possible to refer to the educational *project* because we want to suggest that education should not be understood as some kind of transcendental good or as something that follows 'naturally' from a recognition of the essential attributes of 'man' (which is what it has been conceived of traditionally in the philosophy of education). Rather, education is itself a historically located cultural construct, constructed through a narrative which is not simply a means of understanding the world but also of continually changing it through the attempt to mould the subjectivities of those within it. To understand oneself through a narrative is to be shaped by it. As Kvale points out:

> A narrative is not merely a transmitter of information. In the very act of telling a story the position of the storyteller and the listener, and their place in the social order is constituted; the story creates and maintains social bonds. The narratives of a community contribute to uphold the values and the social order of that community.
>
> (Kvale 1992:34)

The narrative of culture wants human beings to understand themselves as particular kinds of being with a particular kind of relationship to the world. Education is the agency that brings this about.

Spinoza's dictum about the necessity to educate is a clear assertion of the legitimacy of those who possess 'true, valid knowledge' not only to pass this on to others who do not possess it but to tell others 'what to do, how to behave, what ends to pursue and by what means' (Bauman 1992:9). In other words, what is being established here is not only the necessity to educate but that this education is to shape the very conduct of life. Education, then, is expressed through a 'legislative' discourse which confers the power to fix the limits and boundaries that define what is to be included and what excluded in the service of creating the 'rational' man fit to live in a rational society–'man' is here not an example of unreflexive sexist language but is used advisedly because women, regarded as creatures of passion and unregenerate victims of their animalistic nature, were rigorously excluded from this project. Bauman argues that this was a concept of the human being shaped by knowledge and knowledge-givers. It assumed that the one characteristic human beings shared above all others was 'the infinite capacity to be acted upon, shaped, perfected' (Bauman 1987:68).

Derrida 'speaks' to us precisely because he provides the means to question this narrative and its embedded project at a time when both the narrative and the project are breaking down–to some extent because of Derrida's influence. Derrida's text resonates by appealing simultaneously to the familar and the strange–strange because the link between education and modernity is so much part of our discursive and practical landscape; it is something that we both *think* through and yet cannot think *'through'*. But it is at the same time familiar because we know, if only intuitively, that this landscape is beginning to look increasingly postmodern–fragmented and 'unreal'. Bauman claims, rightly in our view, that we are currently witnessing as an aspect of the trend to postmodernity, a breakdown of this legislative discourse and a consequent crisis in the educational project. The authority of 'legislators' is challenged and undermined. The narrative of culture is reconstituted in a postmodern way from an emphasis on sameness to difference, from fixed to multiple identity, the one to the many, from homogeneity to heterogeneity and diversity. If becoming 'human' is still the goal it is no longer an externally imposed goal. By being defined in personalist rather than foundational terms, it is now a largely undefinable 'goal' with a variable content and with a varied means of attainment, with no one of the variations privileged as intrinsically better than any other. Education may still be in the business of creating a subjectivity but with subjectivity itself a site of struggle, it is no longer so fixed and invariable and no longer exclusively the subjectivity of the 'rational man' fit for the rational society.

This movement involves the replacement of 'legislators' with their legislative discourse and accompanying legislative reason with 'interpreters', interpretive discourse and interpretive reason. Bauman characterises the latter as dialogical, concerned with the continuation of dialogue as against foreclosure and closure and geared 'to the process of reciprocal communication' (1992:126). Perhaps not unsurprisingly, he locates Derrida within this interpretive discourse and has this to say about his work:

> Derrida's philosophy is one of a contingent world and contingent knowledge; one in which the dividing line between the world and knowledge is no longer clear or wished to be clear. With that dividing line, go all other sacred boundaries.
>
> (Bauman 1992:130)

The setting of boundaries is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of Western thought and indeed of philosophising, of thinking about that thought. One way in which Derrida challenges the notion of boundaries is by exposing and challenging logocentrism, the philosophical habit of thinking 'transcendentally', of a thought that sees meaning as residing in a presence or centre outside thought; for example, that the meaning of a text is to be found in some presence outside the text, that which the text is 'fundamentally' about. To posit this is to set a boundary, to fix what legitimately falls within the boundary and that which is to be excluded. It is implicitly to assume that there is always a single source of meaning which is the final arbiter and which makes the closure of meaning possible. Boundaries, in determining inclusions and exclusions, reinforce and sustain this assumption.

A logocentric position implies that interpretation is about finding the source, origin or centre and hence the text's singular truth and meaning–the one, deep and perhaps hidden meaning. Derrida, on the contrary, argues that the interpretation of a text works through what he calls the logic of supplementarity. The sense of this is that to interpret a text is not to find its centre in the form of its origin or goal, what its author intended or what its meaning unequivocally 'points to,' but to create another text in a process which is potentially infinite. This happens because of the disseminative power, the infinite openness of language and endless provisionality of meaning. There is therefore no 'end' to interpretation, no limit to ways in which texts can be read and therefore no 'end' to the meanings of a text. To read is not to find a deep hidden meaning, a foundation which justifies the enterprise and underlies all the various possible interpretations, but to be open to the disseminative power and multiple meanings of the text and therefore to recognise its *lack* of an origin or goal.

There is no doubt that once this claim is taken seriously we are indeed plunged into a strangeness. The setting of boundaries and limits is something

which is almost second nature to us and in opening up the yawning gap of infinite dissemination all our certain reference points and unconscious presuppositions seem to be in danger of dissolution. As Bauman (1992) indicates, the problem is that having challenged one boundary, for example that between the text and its interpretation, other boundaries, such as that between speech and writing, subject and object, rational and irrational, male and female—all the boundaries which function as the foundations of thought and action thereby become problematic. Consequently, it would be easy enough, as many have done, to dismiss all this as a species of nonsense, and dangerous nonsense at that since, by removing foundations, everything now seems to be cast into a relativistic morass where 'anything goes', where everything can mean anything.

Now this would be one way of coping with the strangeness. Yet to do so would be to ignore or hastily pass over Derrida's argument that there is a reflexivity at work such that boundaries are dissolved in the very process of drawing them. A boundary is a 'marking off' and therefore implies a process and a means of marking. Language is the best example of this; language 'marks off the world, it doesn't merely reflect the markings that are already present—that is why there can be no such thing as pure presence. Language is a structure of relational and limitless differences ('the chain of language'). It is through this structure that meanings 'mean' but equally can never be fully and finally hammered down. In other words, language, like any means of marking has an inner structural dynamic which both 'holds down' or closes meaning and at the same time opens it by subjecting it to the endless play of dissemination. Payne (1993:121), in his discussion of Derrida's account of language, argues that 'rather than controlling meaning, defining it, making it present, words are inundated by signification'. Thus closure and openness, dissemination and the fixing of meaning, contingent and certain knowledge, limiting the unlimitable, are all dual aspects of the process of marking off, of boundary setting.

Deconstruction, the term most familiarly appropriated from Derrida's texts, gains its rationale and purpose from this characteristic of language and texts. Payne describes deconstruction as:

> The name given simultaneously to the stress created in texts (between what they want to say and what they do say) and to the detection of such gaps. A deconstructive reading attends to the deconstructive processes *always* occurring in texts and *already* there waiting to be read.
>
> (Payne 1993:121)

Deconstruction is conventionally understood as a strategy for reading texts. On the other hand, as is clear in Payne's quote, there is more to it than this since deconstruction or a 'deconstructive process' is already present in texts.

And it is because of the existence of this process that a deconstructive reading can take place.

If we focus for a moment on the 'stress' which constitutes the deconstructive process in texts it is clear that it is to do with the difference between what a text *wants* to say and what it *actually* says or, as Norris (1987:19) puts it, 'between what it manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained* to mean'. Norris describes this difference as 'aporias' or 'self-contradictions' found in texts. Derrida (1976) is at great pains to point out that deconstruction is neither 'destruction' nor a new method of reading texts. For one thing, it requires a careful and meticulous reading of texts from *within*. For another, it works through showing how texts deconstruct or subvert *themselves*. Deconstruction, in other words, works because of the contradiction between the closure of meaning that language always seeks to impose and the ultimate impossibility of that attempt–'the impossible desire of language…to make present the permanently elusive' (Payne 1993:121). In other words, it is not simply a different way of reading, among others, but comes about through the very 'nature' of language.

EDUCATION AND THE LOGIC OF SUPPLEMENTARITY

In any process of boundary fixing, therefore, subversion means that exclusions fail. This is the mark of a logic of supplementarity which, according to Derrida, is a logic which is always at work. It is worth elaborating his notion of 'supplementarity' further, not least because the only time that Derrida writes about education directly occurs in the context of his deconstruction of *Emile,* Rousseau's treatise on education. It is Rousseau's notion of education as a supplement which provides the deconstructive moment for Derrida, a moment which provides him with the opportunity to show the workings of supplementarity in the subversion implicit in any attempt to fix boundaries and exclusions.

In *Emile,* Rousseau, writing as a faithful disciple of the Enlightenment narrative of culture, centres his text of education in nature. He wants to show that nature (in the sense of human nature) is the origin or foundation of education. Education must 'listen' to and be in accord with this nature, i.e. people's innate propensities and capacities to develop and fully realise themselves. The assumption here, then, is that nature is a self-sufficient and self-present origin and the task of education is to enable this origin to fully emerge and express itself against the distortions and constraints of the social. Thus education, although a cultural artefact, can, when it is properly directed, allow human nature to be truly itself. Thus 'culture' brings out and 'realises' nature and this is what Rousseau means when he refers to education supplementing nature.

The problem is, Derrida argues, that Rousseau conceives of nature as both full and lacking, both complete and incomplete. Education is something that

is added on to an already present completeness yet at the same time is also necessary to fulfil an incompleteness. When Rousseau describes education as a supplement he invokes a logic of supplementarity that 'makes nature the prior term, a plenitude that is there at the start, but reveals an inherent lack or absence within it, so that education, the additional extra, also becomes an essential condition of that which it supplements' (Culler 1983:104). A supplement, then, is something that both completes *and* replaces. The supplement 'harbors within it two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary' (Derrida 1976:144). The word itself has an ambiguity of meaning in signifying both an adding on to something that is already complete and an adding on to something that is lacking, thus replacing it by this 'adding on'. This ambiguity of meaning, this 'curious double logic which inhabits the word and prevents its sense from ever being quite captured by a stable definition' (Norris 1987:110) is brought together with subversive effect in the logic of supplementarity.

Consequently, Rousseau's text deconstructs itself because in the very process of making nature *foundational,* i.e. the origin, by supplementing it with culture in the form of education, nature is constituted as insufficient and incomplete. The hierarchical binary opposition, 'nature/culture', which structures his text undermines itself, the opposition flips over and the hierarchy reverses with education becoming the 'essential condition'. As Lovlie (1992:127) points out, to give 'education the task of making nature more natural only makes nature insufficient and secondary'. That which is constructed as foundational is therefore always lacking, it is a supposed fullness built on a void, a completeness that is always deferred, never realised. The supplement always 'stands in' but in doing so it always defers the full presence or completeness of that for which it is the 'stand in'. By supplementing or standing in for nature, education replaces, substitutes for, nature; thus the goal of an education in accord with, that fulfils nature, is endlessly deferred and can never be realised.

The logic of supplementarity is not confined in its workings to education yet it is in education that this logic is most powerfully present. In deconstructing Rousseau's text Derrida is not trying to reveal some deep hidden truth about education, but by pointing to the work of supplementarity he makes us think anew about the educational project. Thus our 'reading' of Derrida's reading of Rousseau's text on education stimulated the choice of title for this chapter in that it deliberately seeks to invoke a Derridean resonance by playing on the word 'end'. The idea was to try and convey its double signification, its 'curious logic', in order to create a space where the play of words might loosen up a play of thought. On the one hand, 'end' as termination suggests that the educational project as traditionally conceived, the educational project in the modernist sense, may be coming to an end in the displacement of modernity by postmodernity. Hence, also, the suggestion of 'end' in a temporal sense, that the time of modernity may be coming to an

end, that the modernist project is running to the end of its course. On the other hand, 'end' as goal or purpose is meant to suggest the teleological self-understanding of education, a project that always understands itself as fulfilling a goal and as therefore always having a purpose or mission which is now increasingly unsustainable, hence coming to its end.

As we saw earlier when considering Bauman's analysis of the modernist narrative of culture, education is conceived in that narrative as essential to the goal of producing the rational man fit for a rational society. The 'end' of man is therefore to complete the work of nature by substituting reason for passion. It follows therefore that once it has done its job, education is at an end. This can be seen very clearly in the self-understanding of schooling. There, education is seen in terms both of a goal and a terminus—the goal of compensating for incompleteness in order to produce people fit for society which, once achieved, means that education is no longer required. At the end of compulsory schooling the majority are ejected into the world of work, the minority after further completion in further and higher education following soon after.

What is at work here is a logic of supplementarity which is at once denied yet which somehow escapes this denial. As was suggested earlier, the work of completion is never completed, even though schooling is based on the attempt to enforce the notion that it is. This has led to the marginalisation, in many cases, of other forms and levels of education, for example adult and continuing education. Very often, the latter has been confined to the ghettos of 'training' and 'leisure-time activity'. Adult education has been constructed as a supplement, as an adding on to something that was already complete and completed. Yet we can also see adult education as the supplement that substitutes for and replaces schooling, the place where the learning inculcated by schooling is 'unlearnt'. In effect, the self-defined goal of education cannot be realised in schooling. There is no end to incompleteness and no end of completeness. Schooling can neither have an 'end' (goal or purpose) nor can it itself be an 'end' (terminus).

This seeing anew allows us to understand differently the significance of the increased contemporary importance accorded to those activities which come under the heading of adult and continuing education. In terms of training one could point to its re-creation and re-formation within the framework of a performative mastery of competences which replaces (rather than simply adding on to) a cognitive mastery of knowledge-based skills. That it is a matter of replacement rather than adding on can be seen in the demise of craft training and the installation of performance-based competence. Yet competence-based training neither has an end (goal) nor is an end (terminus). It has no end in the former sense because it fulfils no purpose intrinsic to people's 'nature' and is not an end in the latter sense because becoming competent is an endless process; one can never, as it were, become competent enough.

Equally, there has been a re-formation and re-creation of 'leisure-time activity' such that it is no longer seen as a largely inconsequential and frivolous addition to an already completed educational formation but an essential aspect of a lifestyle and of the formation of self in certain desired directions. The 'postmodern' self is not considered complete without the consumption of courses in computer languages, wine-tasting or weekends immersed in French culture. These activities have no end (goal) since they are their own end and no end (terminus) since the desire which animates them is endless; in the postmodern one can never consume enough, one's lifestyle is never complete.

At this point, we would like to just step back from this unfolding narrative and ask what is happening? We have argued that the logic of supplementarity works through education to subvert the notion of nature as complete in itself. We have argued, furthermore, that the logic of supplementarity also enables a subverting of the notion of *education* as complete in itself. Now what we want to emphasise is that there is nothing in Derrida about this, it's not something upon which he takes a position. What he does is to deconstruct the 'nature/culture' opposition and hence the notion of 'nature' as a foundation or origin, the privileged pole of the opposition, by showing how the logic of supplementarity subverts both this hierarchical opposition and the very notion of a foundation or origin. By doing this he creates a resonance which does two things. First, it unfolds a space which makes possible a writing, the creation of a text enfolded in his where, in a sense, one is not simply writing one's *own* text but writing 'on' *his*. Second, it provides the conceptual resources to 'think through' the educational project, specifically that education is itself subject to supplementarity and that therefore education should perhaps itself be seen as a text. We shall return to this possibility and explore it more fully in the next chapter.

DERRIDA AS SENTIMENTAL EDUCATOR

Generally speaking, it is a mistake to try and account for someone's work by pointing to their biography. It is doubly a mistake in the case of Derrida who has gone out of his way to subvert notions of presence, origins and transcendental signifiers and signifieds. Yet there is also a need to make this double mistake because there is a significance about Derrida's biography which throws valuable light on what he is 'up to'.

As Tavor Banet (1989) points out, Derrida comes from a petit-bourgeois Jewish family which was partially assimilated. He is and is not a Jew. He was born and grew up in Algeria, so he is and is not an Algerian. As an Algerian Jew he is and is not a Frenchman. His higher education took place in France and his working career has been in French higher education establishments. Yet despite his scholarship he has never attained the full panoply of honours that a person of his intellectual eminence would normally attain (for example,

unlike Foucault or Eco he has not been elected to the College de France). He therefore is and is not in the academy. He spends a great deal of time in America where his work is more respected than in France. Thus he is a Frenchman in American society.

He is both one and the other; neither one nor the other; between, undecidable. It's perhaps hardly surprising that Derrida has described his primary experience as 'a feeling of non-belonging–of "otherness"' (Wood and Bernasconi 1988:74). He has always characterised himself as working at the margins of philosophy. The motifs of alterity, difference, supplementarity, decentredness (he doesn't just write about it, he lives it through the way his texts are written) 'texture' his texts. Derrida as text merges into the texts of Derrida.

It would be easy enough to categorise Derrida as some kind of wild-eyed fringe revolutionary philosopher. Yet Derrida, despite all the liberties he takes with philosophy, does not engage in 'wild' philosophy (see Wood 1990). Again, he is very much 'in' yet also outside it. He is very much aware of the power of philosophical language and of Western metaphysics and of his own immersion in this general text. The question he continually poses is how philosophy can reflect upon itself from a site which is outside of logocentric language and closure. His answer is that it can only be from a site which would be 'other' to philosophy and therefore not reducible to it. But if it is 'other' to philosophy then it escapes the philosophical language which is the only language we have. Hence his dilemma–a dilemma which is in a sense an absent yet powerful presence through all his texts. That is why he also keeps insisting that deconstruction is not a method, another philosophy or an attempt to recast philosophical language but rather a vocation–a response, and hence an openness, towards the other. Tavor Banet argues, rightly in our view, that Derrida's significance lies in teaching us

> the sense to know how much we do not know and how much of what we know is an artificial construct; the sense to remember that there are limits to our knowledge, and a beyond to those limits which, no matter how far we extend our knowledge, our writing and our game will remain infinitely other and incapable of assimilation by us.
>
> (Tavor Banet 1989:226)

It is because the story of education is one of the infinite possibilities of mastery that Derrida teaches us to recognise our limits as educators. He does this through helping us to recognise the play of indeterminacy and thus the limits of certainty and decidability. It is here, perhaps, that we might begin to detect Derrida's key resonance for educators, because it could be argued that Derrida is himself an educator, although obviously not in the way this description is commonly used. What we want to suggest is that Derrida is a *sentimental educator.*

Derrida shows how the one powerful story, the Enlightenment's 'narrative of culture', can be deconstructed. This 'story' is one that has itself been best captured and expressed through a story. What we have in mind here is the *bildungsroman,* the novel of self-formation, of the achievement of autonomy through the acceptance of social constraint–the 'paradigm' story of education. The story is of the learning experienced through 'life', always of a young man, in terms of a difficult journey through confusion and self-doubt into an eventual maturity and self-understanding. What is at stake in the journey is the conflict between individual desires and the demands of the social–the individuation/repression, nature/culture polarities discussed earlier. The conflict is resolved through the hero coming to understand the need to live in a way that fulfils his autonomy; a way which ensures a balance between the competing demands. Lovlie (1992:120) argues that in the *bildungsroman* 'the perfect development of individual life follows a continuous course from origin to end, from birth to death'. Here we see at work a metaphor, 'the thread of life', which is also powerfully present in the story of education.

As Donald (1992:173) points out, both the form and structure of the *bildungsroman* and the social control mechanisms of education focus on the formation of subjectivity 'within a field structured by forces of power and authority'; a subjectivity that is forged in the conflict between desires and social constraints, nature and culture. Donald goes on to argue that the story of the *bildungsroman* has been institutionalised by psychologists, philosophers and teachers to the extent that it forms a powerful 'sub-text' of the story of education. It was through the *bildungsroman* that the categories of authenticity/convention, creativity/compulsion, individuation/repression were disseminated and produced the terms for a new mode of conduct and a new relationship of the self to the self, categories which structure the educational form and message.

However, although Derrida provides the conceptual resources by which this story can be deconstructed it would be a mistake to assume that Derrida got there first. To do so would be to downplay the influence of intertext, resonances and traces. One of Derrida's 'antecedents' is Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education* (1991). This novel, which has much of the form of the *bildungsroman,* tells the story of a young man, Frederic Moreau, and his 'education' through a number of adventures in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. What Moreau learns from all this is the question that the story poses. In what way is he 'educated'? In answering this question Flaubert's story shows itself to be very different from the story of the *bildungsroman*. Unlike the hero in the *bildungsroman* Moreau does not learn the constrained autonomy of the centred self. He is educated neither into accepting the need for social constraint, nor into affirming himself as a 'free spirit' rising above such constraint. Rather, his autonomy is indeterminate since it can never reach an end. Moreau's 'problem' is that he is a subject of desire, a desire that can

never be fulfilled. But the significant thing is that Moreau comes to recognise himself as such a subject, he comes to recognise that his autonomy will always be enfolded in indeterminacy and thus unachievable as a final, determinate goal. He has learnt the 'postmodern' message of discontinuity and fragmentation of the self, that to use Lovlie's (1992) phrase, the thread of life is a 'severed' thread. This is, in effect, his 'sentimental education'.

It is precisely because Derrida helps us understand the play of indeterminacy and discontinuity that he is a sentimental educator. It is through this understanding that we can deflate claims to authority—which in education often takes the form of claims to speak for and on behalf of others. Education, true to its Enlightenment heritage, is full of people who speak for others, who seek to do good by them in the name of emancipation and progress. This speaking for, no matter what its intent, always has the potential to become too monological, too universalistic and too exclusive. The world is too complex to be changed purely by rationalistic projects, 'disinterested' research and the 'one big idea'.

It follows from this that the work of change is always 'in process', inherently uncompletable and constantly open to question. This questioning, in which education can play a potentially significant part, involves opening oneself to the call of different, marginal and transgressive 'voices' and engaging in sustained critique of logocentric regimes. Derrida, through his texts, through his very example, shows how this can be done; not by head-on attacks and not through speaking as the masterful 'sovereign' subject but through wit, irony and subversion exemplifying the meaning of the decentred yet critical subject. It is for this reason, if for no other, that the ludic dimension of the postmodern moment should neither be dismissed or ignored. Derrida shows clearly that the ludic need be neither frivolous nor reactionary.

7

EDUCATION AND TEXTUALITY

EDUCATION, VIOLENCE AND SIGNIFICATION

In previous chapters, we outlined the co-implication of modernity, enlightenment and emancipation and the critical role of the educational project within this. It is as the essential vehicle of socialisation that education fulfils this role. Most significantly, it is a role conceived as the means whereby a particular kind of socialisation is achieved–one which frees 'man' from the bonds of dependence on an external 'authority' in all its forms by recovering through education that which is natural in 'man'.

It is reason that is considered to be the most natural, innate characteristic of 'man'. The road to autonomy and emancipation is traversed by living according to the dictates of reason. Autonomy, therefore, refers to a situation where, through reason, one obligates and controls oneself from a source inside or natural to oneself, from one's authentic self. More precisely, it is freedom from dependence because what supposedly prevents autonomy is dependence on anything that is external or other to oneself, that is, in effect, unnatural or 'other' to reason. Otherness can take many forms; other people, superstition, opinion, belief, religion, the authority of secular and ecclesiastical rulers, language, and the self s inauthentic tendencies, particularly the self under the sway of passion and emotion. The common feature in these varieties of otherness is that of an authority imposed on self which does not originate in self and which is not in accord with reason. To become autonomous, therefore, requires the elimination of otherness, the variety of externally imposed forms of authority.

The only form of authority seen as exempt from otherness is education. Education involves constraint in the sense that to become educated requires submission to pedagogues and pedagogic norms, but this constraint has always been seen as both necessary and desirable because it appears to be the only means of achieving the end of 'recovering the natural'. It is a means of socialisation where individuals can become both fit for society i.e. are both

constrained *and* autonomous, emancipated *within* the social framework. Living according to the dictates of reason, it is argued, does not therefore involve anarchy but, on the contrary, the acceptance of 'well-regulated liberty' (Donald 1992). Education is not, then, 'truly' constraint, since it is a justifiable constraint, a constraint that ultimately is good for you, reminding us that power produces as well as excludes. Not only that but, because pedagogues are 'in the know', whatever authority they exert is in the individual's best interests. Rather than a form of otherness to be eliminated, education is the means of eliminating otherness. Here we see education very clearly as a discursive practice which is at once both incarceral and liberating, repressive yet active–a practice which reached its fruition with the advent of mass schooling. As Donald points out:

> the techniques of public and mass schooling...have persistently attempted to shape children to their measure by means of disciplines that claim, like Rousseau's Tutor...not only to understand the nature of the child, but to be able to emancipate it.
> (Donald 1992:12)

Incarceration, being 'banged up' in classrooms, the 'compulsory' of compulsory education, practices of surveillance, monitoring and control, all these go hand in hand with the creation of active and 'capable' subjects within a discourse of autonomy and emancipation rooted in 'nature'. Yet both, in their different ways, are manifestations of violence insofar as they attempt to reduce difference, contingency, provisionality and 'play' to the 'one' and the 'same'.

Thus, there is and always has been a dual face of education–a duality which has had a differential impact in social class terms. By the mid-nineteenth century, with the coming into being of mass education, the mission of education in relation to the working class was clearly influenced by the perceived need for control. This was expressed very clearly by Leonard Horner, a factory inspector, who in 1837 wrote:

> To put the necessity of properly educating the children of the working class on its lowest footing, it is loudly called for as a matter of police, to prevent a multitude of immoral and vicious beings, the offspring of ignorance from growing up around us, to be a pest and a nuisance to society; it is necessary in order to render the great body of the working class governable by reason.
> (cited in Donald, 1992:23)

What strikes us as particularly significant in this quote is the notion of rendering the working class 'governable by reason'. Presumably if the working class could not govern themselves by reason then they could at least be brought to accept being governed by it and, in this way, cease being 'a pest and a nuisance to society'. It is clear that the working class are constructed as

the other, very much the feared and threatening other, and here education is constraint without the justifying gloss of constraint in the service of autonomy and enlightenment. If the other could not be eliminated then it could at least be domesticated.

However, what is also significant in this quote is that although Horner clearly sees education as a matter of containment, he is not advocating a literal policing. The working class are not to be domesticated by force but by being brought to accept the right of reason to govern. What we see here, then, is the beginnings of 'schooling as the paradigm of modern techniques of government' where *subjectivity* becomes a 'domain for systematic government in the pursuit of socio-political ends' (Rose 1990). Self-control comes to substitute for externally imposed control.

On the face of it, we seem to be drawing more on Foucault now than on Derrida, and in the process going over well-trodden ground whose significance is apparently clear without the benefit of Derrida. Yet once again there are resonances. 'Violence' is a constant theme that runs throughout Derrida's work. It is true that his concern seems to be more with metaphysical violence, or linguistic violence as he sometimes terms it, but equally it is possible to find in Derrida the co-implication of this kind of violence with institutional violence. Indeed he argues that metaphysical violence is the condition for all other forms of violence. As he puts it; 'military or economic violence is in structural solidarity with "linguistic" violence' (Derrida 1976:135).

Derrida's notion of 'violence' can only be understood in terms of his metaphysics. Despite many appearances to the contrary Derrida does have a metaphysics. He does not deny the existence of the real but rather sees it as being heterogeneous and always in flux. All attempts to know the real are based on the epistemological systems of Western philosophy or 'metaphysics' in Derrida's terminology. These systems are commonly characterised by their totalising impulse, by their attempt to reduce heterogeneity to homogeneity, difference to sameness, the flux to the stable and the given. In particular, they attempt to limit and close the disseminative power of language, 'to arrest the inherent tendency of signs to refer to other signs, ad infinitum' (Parker 1989:124). Derrida (1978) describes this process as involving a metonymical (and hence endless) search for a 'centred structure'—the authorising presence that we discussed in the previous chapter. If, for example, the transcendental signifier 'God' no longer serves as the centre, then others such as 'Truth' or 'Reason' can be metonymically substituted. He argues that:

> The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play.
>
> (Derrida 1978:279)

In effect, then, the search for a centre, an authorising presence, a foundation, consists of a never-ending substitution of transcendental signifiers in an attempt to erect permanent hierarchies and rigid boundaries. It is the continual attempt to halt the 'play of difference' in the real and substitute the fixity and permanence of the 'one' and the 'self-same' by means of unequally weighted binary oppositions. For Derrida, this is a totalising and 'totalitarian' process which can succeed only through a violence which halts the play of difference and institutes the reign of the 'same'. All attempts to know the real through 'getting behind' the system of significations that is language are attempts to totalise, to en-close and 'master' it, and are therefore forms of violent imposition. The centred structures, the unequal binary oppositions, that structure thought and by which we know the real are not simply its reflections but powerful interpretations, networks of organised meaning which exert a coercive force. As we have seen earlier, Derrida describes Western metaphysics as 'logocentric' in that any meaning not in accord with a centralising rationalistic logic of identity and non-contradiction (the self-same) is marked off and excluded.

This notion of violence seems to us to have a productive resonance in relation to education. There is a sense, as we have tried to explain, in which education can be seen as a form of institutionalised violence, where bodies and souls are disciplined and controlled. But this institutionalised violence is intimately linked, and perhaps one could say made possible, by the metaphysical violence within which the message and hope of education is concealed. Following Derrida, education is a site where the real is mastered and assimilated violently; where the tendency of signs to refer to other signs is forcefully arrested, meanings reduced to a single, determinate meaning; where otherness is brought under the control of reason, difference reduced to sameness, its 'threat' domesticated and thereby rendered malleable and harmless.

At the same time, however, education is also a site where the play of meanings escapes the violence of logocentric closure. The educational process is incarceral yet also hermeneutical and critical. It always contains within itself the potential to question dominant forms of knowledge and totalising explanations and to tear away the veils within which these are enshrouded. It has the potential to question the status of the definitive, the certain and the 'proven'. It is a site where the play of difference can escape the 'fundamental immobility' and 'reassuring certitude' of logocentric closure, a site of endless dissemination.

Education, like all cultural activities is immersed in and formed by significations. Students bring meanings with them from their life contexts, there is a context of meanings which they engage with through the process of learning and a conflict of meanings between the experiential, the pedagogic and the cultural codes transmitted through the curriculum. Education is always open to the play of difference in meaning yet always subject to

attempts to en-close and fore-close this play. In this sense, then, education can be understood as a 'text' and as Game (1991) argues, since culture or the social is written, then texts are 'real'.

This argument can be further elaborated by comparing schooling with adult education. In certain forms of adult education the attempt to fix meanings is not so powerfully present as it is in compulsory schooling. Learning is not constructed as a finite, once-and-for-all process but as continuing throughout life and even outside the confines of the classroom. Consequently, the contest over meanings, particularly the meaning of experience, and the process of creating and re-creating meanings is potentially endless. The task of the teacher is not constructed as being confined solely to the purveying of fixed cultural significations and the 'master' discourses of disciplines. Thus there is a more relaxed and 'liberal' attitude to teaching. Teaching is a moment in the learning process where knowledge, rather than being conveyed as predefined, is created in the interaction between teachers, learners, disciplinary knowledge and experiential meanings.

WRITING AND EDUCATION AS TEXT

When we think of the 'reality' of education it is often as being either about socialisation or individuation. In other words, the text of education in all its various forms is constructed and therefore understood in terms of a binary opposition of 'repression/liberation'. It is around this opposition that the political debate over education is repetitiously polarised—the educational conservatives stressing the socialisation/repression pole of domestication, the educational progressives the individuation/liberation pole of emancipation. In a Derridean spirit of dissolving binary oppositions we suggest that education is neither exclusively one nor the other but *both* and that furthermore there is no resolution (no Hegelian synthesis) where the opposition can be transcended. Instead, there is a continual and unresolvable tension and conflict where who prevails at any point in time is not a matter of philosophy, i.e. who has the best (rational) arguments, but of history, i.e. power.

Education, therefore, presents two faces and neither is any more authentic nor genuine than the other. In effect, there are two separate but interlinked educational discourses. One is to do with social control, maintenance and reproduction of the social order, the transmission and inculcation of the norms of cultural authority. The other is to do with the realisation of agency and autonomy through developing the capacity of reason. They interlink in that 'modern education has consistently been allotted the task of sustaining social relations by creating psychologically adjusted, productive, enterprising and patriotic citizens' (Donald 1992:170). Sustaining social relations is a task which is increasingly difficult to fulfil, if indeed it ever could be fulfilled, by

mere repression alone. As we have seen, psychological adjustment has become a matter of techniques for moulding subjectivities through inculcating self-monitoring and self-managing capacities. New technologies of the self construct agency and autonomy in new ways.

However, whether the project of education is constructed as domestication or as the fulfilment of autonomy through reason the stakes in the game are always the same, *viz.* the moulding or formation of subjectivities. This in itself is ultimately the search for a lost origin, the origin of a nature which must either be realised by a social order or made adaptable to its needs. Derrida shows us that this search is impossible. He shows that no matter how thoroughly the search is conducted the goal is elusive, something always escapes to resist the closure which is the goal of the search. So it is with education. No matter how much education is pursued as a centred project, as the recovery of a lost origin which justifies the moulding of subjectivities, something always escapes. The attempt to make education into a controlled and controlling project is never total, that which eludes the totalising grasp always makes education ultimately uncontrollable.

The notion of an 'origin' is based on the appeal to a human nature which precedes society. In Rousseau, for example, it is an appeal which was harnessed to progressive ideas and movements for social reform. Equally, however, it is an appeal which readily lent itself to conservative attacks on the modernist project and the Enlightenment ideals, the grand narratives, of reason, progress and emancipation. The very ambiguities in Rousseau's thought illustrate this clearly; on the one hand, the appeal to natural justice, that 'man is born free but is everywhere in chains' and on the other, the continual harking back to a 'natural' community, a community of immediacy and self-presence where everyone could communicate with everyone else because there was no corrupting mediation.

In his deconstruction of Rousseau's text, 'Essay on the Origin of Language', Derrida (1976) argues that Rousseau, despite his intentions, cannot in his text recapture this natural, pre-social origin. It is therefore a pure ahistorical mythology. As Norris (1987:127) points out: 'history is immobilised, turned back towards a non-existent point of origin which suspends all dealings with change, difference or political circumstance'. Derrida locates Rousseau's myth of origin in his repression of writing, which is constructed as the feared and rejected other because, in making mediation possible, it becomes the source of corruption. At the same time, however, writing makes articulate thought possible and, because Rousseau is seeking to articulate his thoughts, he cannot escape writing and therefore mediation–'Rousseau's text confesses what he is at such pains to deny' (Sarup 1993:39). Rousseau is, as it were, 'hoist' by the logic of his own textuality, his need to write.

When Derrida speaks of writing he does not simply mean empirical writing, written marks on a page–least of all does writing equate to books,

the written down. Instead for him, writing means 'arche-writing', that which is always already codified–the system of cultural signs, inscriptions and grammatical rules and classifications by which *speech* as well as empirical writing is determined. Culture is always 'written' in the sense that there is no pre-cultural real which is simply represented. Derrida argues that there is no such thing as self-present speech (what he calls *'s'entendre parler'*–understanding or being present to oneself as one speaks, the idea that in speaking I am 'present' to myself). Speech has been privileged on the grounds that, because it is not mediated, meaning is immediate to it. Derrida refers to this privileging of speech, or phonocentrism, as we saw in the previous chapter, as an example of the 'metaphysics of presence'. Yet, for Derrida, it is impossible to be present to oneself since it is impossible to escape mediation and the 'play' of language. Thus speech, far from escaping mediation, is actually made possible by writing in the sense of 'arche-writing'.

Thus Rousseau's privileging of speech over writing, his construction of speech as 'natural' and authentic and of writing as the 'unnatural' and inauthentic other is undermined because it is only through writing and its cultural effects that Rousseau can even think the 'origin'. Rousseau forecloses meaning by refusing to accept this and by doing so he erases historical, social and sexual difference–in the process, he leaves his text open to take-over by a conservatism of origins and authoritarian 'natural' community. Nor, according to Derrida, is the search for an origin in nature confined to Rousseau. It is to be found also in the classics of contemporary structuralist thought, for example in Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, who argued for speech as the natural authentic condition of language and in Lévi-Strauss, the cultural anthropologist. In 'The Writing Lesson' (1966), Lévi-Strauss describes his encounter with the Nambikwara who, according to him, lack all knowledge of writing. His text is a kind of apology, a confession of guilt, in which Lévi-Strauss argues that his very presence as an anthropologist in their midst introduces writing to the Nambikwara with disastrous consequences. For Lévi-Strauss, it is the Nambikwara's lack of writing which is the source of their community with nature, their being at one with their world, and the absence in their 'community' of social problems. Lévi-Strauss therefore sees himself as the bearer of writing and the representative of everything that corrupts the pure simplicity of origins.

Derrida (1976) however will have none of this. He argues that the unequal distribution of knowledge and power, all the effects of an imposed writing denounced by Lévi-Strauss, were already present before his arrival on this 'innocent' scene. The latter sees writing only in its narrow sense rather than as arche-writing. By repressing arche-writing Lévi-Strauss refuses to see that a social order which did not treat selves as autonomous, where there never was any natural 'presence', is already present before his introduction of writing in

the narrow sense. The violence which Lévi-Strauss attributes to writing already exists:

> if writing is no longer understood in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation, it should be possible to say that all societies capable of producing and of bringing classiflcatory difference into play practise writing in general [or arche-writing].
>
> (Derrida 1976:109)

Arche-writing is therefore already present, embodied in classiflcatory differences, in culture as 'writing'.

Derrida's deconstruction of the notion of natural origins suggests that there is not, and never has been, any space for 'presence', for unmediated, genuine communication between people free from classiflcatory differences and therefore free from the operation of power and repression. In deconstructing the nature/culture opposition Derrida shows that the very notion of 'nature' must presuppose 'culture' in the sense of arche-writing.

In deconstructing the speech/writing opposition, Derrida shows that any privileging of speech over writing collapses. As we have seen earlier, we seem in speech to be putting our very thoughts into words, filling them with meaning, and as we hear ourselves speak we seem to be hearing our thoughts (the *'s'entendre parler'* mentioned earlier)—hence the idea that in speech we seem to be present to ourselves, in direct unmediated touch with ourselves. But Derrida points out that when we speak it is our words which have been put into thoughts. It is the pre-existence of language which fills our thoughts with meaning and as a consequence we do not have complete control either over what we say or over how what we say will be received by our interlocutors. Instead, we must depend on a language which is filled with meanings from which we borrow and reproduce. Because language is, for example, gendered we cannot say that in speech we are in control of what we say and fully present to ourselves because we speak, without realising it, in a gendered way. Speech is a specially woven tissue of meaning and it works in exactly the same way as writing (in the narrow sense). Moreover, the idea that speech is unmediated and thus closer to truth or the originating thoughts in the mind is itself presupposed and produced by writing. It is writing which produces the illusion of autonomous speech, it is writing which refers to speech as the foundation of its own legitimacy.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these deconstructions. First, that the binary opposition 'nature/culture' is a subset of the opposition 'speech/writing'. Second, that speech presupposes writing (arche-writing) and is subject to the same 'play' as writing (in the narrow sense). Third, that writing (in both senses) is a necessary condition of sociality. The 'social' and 'writing' can only be conceived together. Fourth, the process of breaking down these binary oppositions necessitates a third term which would apply to

both terms of the oppositon, rendering them open to critical scrutiny and ensuring that the oppositions are not re-asserted. Following Derrida, we will call this term 'text'.

The deployment of such a term implies that everything we understand about the world is by virtue of that understanding endowed with meaning and is therefore part of a text. A text is any organised network of meaning; its characteristic is that it is always interpretable. Derrida is perhaps most famous for his statement that 'There is nothing outside the text' (although what he says in French is *'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte'* which is perhaps more appropriately translated as 'There is no outside-text'). Against the charge by his critics that he is merely setting up another form of idealism, he argues that every attempt to move beyond a text to, as it were, discover its true meaning in the 'outside' of the text is bound to fail, for the study of the 'outside', since it is itself a reading, simply generates another text. Texts cannot be reduced to transcendental signifiers (intentions) or transcendental signifieds (fixed external references), all such intentions and references being predetermined by meaning. The very notion of 'inside-outside', yet another of the binary oppositions which structure Western thought, is thereby rendered problematic.

However, to understand Derrida's notion of text it is necessary to go beyond what we would normally understand by this term. In The Conflict of Faculties', responding to his critics who deny that deconstruction has any political consequences he writes:

> It is precisely for strategic reasons that I find it necessary to recast the concept of the text by generalising it almost without limit, without any limit that is. That's why there is nothing 'beyond the text'. That's why South Africa and apartheid are, like you and me, part of this general text, which is not to say that it can be read as one reads a book. That's why the text is always a field of forces: heterogeneous, differential, open. That's why deconstructive readings are concerned not only with library books…they are not simply analyses of discourse. They are also effective or active interventions that transform contexts without limiting themselves to theoretical utterances even though they must also produce such utterances.
>
> (Derrida 1982:167–8)

This notion of the general text suggests that the 'realities' of politics and of education, normally thought of as only raising questions of institutional structures and power, cannot be separately understood from discursive structures and systems of significations. It is precisely for this reason that everything, including education, becomes the 'general text'. Dependent as these 'realities' are on the hierarchical binary oppositions of Western

'metaphysics', they are inevitably affected by the deconstructive work of reversing and displacing those hierarchies. Deconstruction subverts the restriction (through binary oppositions) of meaning in texts (in both a narrow and general sense), opening them up to show how meaning is organised in powerful interpretations, and what function that organisation serves–some interpretations are more plausible and powerful than others.

When, therefore, we think of the 'reality' of education as being either about repression/socialisation or individuation/liberation we are implicitly claiming that there is some reality which is outside the general text, an origin or pre-discursive real, outside language, culture and signification, to which the text (in both the wide and narrow sense) of education refers and from which it obtains its meaning. Derrida's texts suggest, however, that the 'meaning' of education is not to be found in this 'outside' but rather in the inside, in the story or stories (narratives) which education tells about itself or, perhaps more accurately, the stories told for and about it.

These stories, like all stories, have a plot, a narrative, a cast of characters including heroes (Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Piaget) and villains (feared and rejected others) and a style (a set of metaphors which 'animate' the text). They are constructed through the binary oppositions of Western metaphysics and through an intertextual matrix (other stories, e.g. of science and of gender) which constrains what can be thought and said. These stories are con-textualised in a history which denies historicity, which denies context; a history, moreover, which is a his-tory–it is as Derrida would say 'phallogocentric' because its logocentrism is implicitly patriarchial where men can enjoy an autonomy and full self-presence denied to women who are categorised as non-men, haunted by absence and unreason. This means that these stories, because they are texts, always have sub-texts, that which is implied but not overtly stated, their implication in and merging with powerful logocentric regimes. Above all, stories are 'read' and through being read have effects–effects that position 'readers' in different ways which affect their lives by rendering them as powerful or powerless subjects.

EDUCATION AND SUBJECTIVITY

Leitch (1983) argues that for Derrida, since everything is textualised, all selves appear as texts. Deconstruction, in foregrounding the text as 'subject', constitutes selves or subjects as texts. Subjects are enmeshed in language and cultural significations, there is no independent reference point, no unmediated 'presence', from which they can know and create themselves. Since they cannot be present to themselves, they cannot understand themselves outside of the stories or narratives from which they are constructed. With no self-present subjectivity, the logic of supplementarity, the endless substitutions of meaning, the play of *différance*–Derrida's term

both for the differing (the 'play of difference') and deferral (the 'postponement') of meaning—comes into play.

Derrida is arguing that subjectivity is not a description of an essential unified self. If it is a text, a structure of signs and meanings, then there is no centre, no origin or end, which holds this self together. Here then, once again, we have the notion of the decentred subject, a subject which, as Lovlie (1992:125) points out, if taken to its extreme, becomes anonymous, 'an ensemble of stage performances…a proliferation of roles, the progressive showing of (sur)faces'. This decentred relative self is *reflexive,* it knows that it is not a self-present self yet this in itself is not a new (perhaps postmodern?) centre but merely another self-description. It constitutes yet another story or narrative through which subjects construct themselves.

A great deal of Derrida's work is concerned with deconstructing the notion of an authentic, self-present and therefore centred subjectivity. As we have suggested, in his deconstruction of Rousseau's texts he shows how Rousseau's attempts to inscribe his authentic self through writing is ultimately contradictory. Since he cannot present this self in a way which will pin it down and convey its essential authentic meaning other than through writing he leaves himself open to the 'différance' of writing. The self he wants to present is lost in the structural imperatives of the text where the medium of writing determines the re-constructions and re-presentations of the self. What is presented is therefore not an 'authentic' self in the Enlightenment sense but, literally, a fictional self- one that is capable of many meanings.

Derrida, on the basis of this, has often been accused by his critics of dissolving or 'killing off' the subject with disastrous consequences. Certainly, Derrida's decentring of the subject threatens the notion of agency and autonomy, of the self-creative subject transcending the constraints of the social, of self-present subjectivity—of a self-conscious subject which can know the real through direct access to it. Educators cannot fail to be concerned when the notion of the subject as autonomous agent is apparently threatened in this way. This notion, after all, tends to be seen as the central and necessary feature of any educational practice, given that the latter is to do with bringing about changes in subjectivity through appropriate interventions. The fear is that if there is no autonomous subject with agency then educational intervention seems completely futile.

It could be argued that the reason we get into problems in education over subjectivity is that we are trapped in the story of the free-wheeling, individualistic sovereign subject of the Enlightenment. Yet whilst subjects may not have authentic selves, autonomy and agency in this sense, this does not mean that the notion of agency is something we want to throw away all together. The problem lies in the notion of the subject as the originary authenticating source that knows itself by being present to itself and through not being touched by otherness.

Derrida addresses himself precisely to this problem. What he is doing is

undermining the notion of the subject centred on itself who is also the centre of the world and substituting the notion of a subject that is part of the text of the world (Bernstein 1991). Through undermining the centred subject he challenges the 'metaphysics of presence', the privileging of consciousness, and the kind of 'general text' that goes with this. In the sense that he is trying to put anything in its place (and if he is, he does so obliquely) it is the notion of a situated subject. The story he wants to tell is that we do not make ourselves from ourselves but are formed in the significations of history, culture and discursive practices (the general text). Our experience, particularly our experience of ourselves, is always situationally mediated. Situating subjects in this way requires, therefore, that autonomy and agency be re-theorised rather than abolished. In this retheorisation, autonomy and agency would cease to be founded on innate characteristics that have to be either developed or repressed through education. Rather, they would be seen as things that are constructed and re-constructed, created and re-created, through practical and discursive encounter and engagement, through the kind of stories that are told and the kind of work these stories do.

As subjects, we create and re-create ourselves through the stories that are told and where we ourselves figure as the characters in the drama. But there is no *one* story, although there is *a* story, a very powerful story, that says there is. Some stories 'enclose' and by so doing provide a world which can be controlled. These are stories based on the fear, as we have noted in an earlier chapter, that without closure the world, and in particular the social order, would get out of control. But if there are many stories then the world in a sense is always out of control–and that is perhaps what Derrida means by his critique of the metaphysics of presence. Imposing a closure therefore denies openness and attempts to fix subjectivity. Although all our stories will provide some kind of closure, some anchoring of meaning, this is always bound to be temporary. We are after all always 'in' closure, if only in the sense that all thinking necessitates making distinctions, inclusions and exclusions, and setting up hierarchies. Derrida recognises this only too well but what he does is to show that we desire more than this, that we are motivated by a logocentric desire for a fixed origin or centre, an absolutely stable ground which can serve as the basis for permanent hierarchies and rigid boundaries– and ultimately of a mastery of the uncertainty and instability of provisionality and 'play'. That is why there is a clinging to the story of only one story, why there is a constant seeking of the story that provides a single definitive closure, a closure that places us permanently inside closure.

REFLEXIVITY AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

By foregrounding writing and the 'text', Derrida enables us to highlight the textual dimension of education. As a consequence, reflexivity becomes an important issue for educational research. Reflexivity is itself not a particularly

new issue, indeed it could be said to be as old as Western philosophy itself. Certainly, there has been a strong tendency to regard it as a major epistemological 'problem'. This is a problem which is itself a product of philosophical discourse. Moreover, it has generally been considered a problem to be avoided because it supposedly influences or 'contaminates' the status of research outcomes as truthful representations and valid knowledge-claims.

At its simplest, reflexivity claims that since the activity of the knower always influences what is known, nothing can be known except through those activities. The question that then follows from this inevitable reflexivity is that if research, the making of knowledge-claims, is dependent upon the activity of the researcher, can such knowledge ever be truthful representation—in other words, are we as researchers researching the world, or ourselves as makers of knowledge-claims? Can research ever be anything more than a subtle form of writing the self? These questions suggest a further and perhaps a key question—what kind of 'problem' is reflexivity, indeed is it a problem at all? We might want to argue that by foregrounding how we construct what we research, reflexivity is no longer a problem but a *resource*. It helps us to recognise that we are a part of rather than apart from the world constructed through research. More than this, however, by becoming aware of the operation of reflexivity in the practice of research, the place of power, discourse and text, that which goes 'beyond' the purely personal, is revealed.

Of course, it would be simplistic to suggest that all that is required is a foregrounding of reflexivity. Very often, recognising the place of reflexivity is to also unduly personalise research. There is indeed a personal element in research, a 'personal' reflexivity, which points to the importance of the researcher's autobiography and lived experience, where values and standpoints not only influence the choice of subject researched but also how the research is carried out, how 'data' is generated and how its significance is evaluated. However, reflexivity is not purely a matter of the 'personal'. Autobiography and lived experience are themselves notions in need of problematisation. A failure to do so assumes lived experience as 'presence', a pure unmediated and authentic knowledgeability, and autobiography as the true and direct 'speech' of the autonomous, self-present individual. Yet if we follow Derrida, lived experience is always mediated by language and discourse and autobiography is written, it is a text and therefore constructed through textual and intertextual conventions and strategies.

At the same time, reflexivity is not confined to the personal. It does not simply direct our attention to the problematics of the researcher's identity but also to the 'identity' of the research. Here the question highlighted is: what is going on in this research? What kind of world or 'reality' is being constructed by the questions asked and the methods used? There is also a disciplinary or epistemic reflexivity where the focus is on research as located in epistemic communities. This location of research means that any piece of

research always carries within itself an epistemology–a theory about knowledge and truth and their relationship to the world or 'reality'. This epistemology is never 'innocent' because it always contains within itself a set of values–which means that there is always a *politics* of research, an implication of research with power relations. Epistemic reflexivity makes us aware of the necessary place of research communities and the power of exclusion and closure of such communities. It therefore provides the means for interrogating and problematising our immersion as researchers within them. We shall refer to this as the *sub-text* of research.

The significance of reflexivity in research has a number of dimensions. In doing research there is always a reflexive understanding potentially present– 'in our action is our knowing' (Lather 1991a:xv). If this reflexive understanding is to be a resource rather than a source of bias we have to subject ourselves as researchers to critical self-scrutiny; in other words, we have to *be* reflexive. Furthermore, since reflexivity is not purely 'personal' there are implications for 'being reflexive'–it is not merely a matter of being 'upfront' about one's personal values and standpoint.

What needs to be recognised in the notion of being reflexive is the 'social' subjective in the sense of the embodied and embedded self. What reflexivity in this sense draws attention to is that the self that researches has an autobiography marked by the significations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, race, etc. In other words, it is the decentred self, the self as text that, as such, is also part of the general text. These significations are therefore socio-cultural products that are part of a practice of writing with *effects* upon both the form and outcomes of research. We shall refer to this as the *con-text* of research.

Reflexivity therefore involves 'finding out about (or researching) ourselves' but in the sense of recognising our immersion in the historical and the social, the inscription or 'writing' of self in the practices, language, discourses and interpretive culture which constitute the practice of research. Research is a practice of knowing that constructs a reality to know about–'we as researchers construct that which we claim to find' (Steier 1991:1). But as Steier goes on to point out 'constructing is a social process, rooted in language, not located inside our heads' (1991:5). This means that accepting reflexivity does not assume a subjectivist position that reality is a purely personal construction. Reflexivity, then, foregrounds the implication of the personal within what is 'beyond' the personal; it is as much about the inscribed ('written') I as the inscribing I (the 'I' that writes)–the 'I' that is a subject constituted by language and discourses rather than the self-present autonomous 'I' of scientific and humanistic discourses.

Following Derrida, we want to argue that research is, above all, a textual practice of representation through which certain things essential to research in the 'objective' mode are achieved. For example, it is through a textual practice of writing that the creation, decontextualisation and separation of the

subject that researches from the 'object' researched, a process considered essential to generating truthful representations and therefore to rigorous, 'scientific' research, is made possible. Research, then, is necessarily embodied in the production and reading of a written text but the significant thing is that not any text will do. In the main, a particular kind of text, the academic text, is required. As Parker and Shotter point out, these texts,

> by the use of certain strategies and devices, as well as meanings, [are] able to construct a text which can be understood (by those who are party to such moves) in a way divorced from any reference to any local and immediate contexts. Textual communication can be relatively decontextualised.
>
> (Parker and Shotter 1990:2)

Academic research texts are ostensibly about 'reality' but the reality in which they themselves are situated, from which they are produced and through which they can be read, falls out of view through decontextualisation. They can thus deny their own being as textual practices, as practices of writing with their own particular 'strategies and devices' to which only those 'party to the necessary moves' have access.

This implies that the research text is not simply a faithful representation of a reality outside the text. Since texts are constructed, the distinction between text and reality becomes blurred or at least the conventional dualism of 'text' and 'outside the text' becomes open to question. As Parker (1989) points out, because this dualism is itself taken to be 'real' we assume that we can check out the truth of the text, the adequacy of its representations, by going back to the reality it is about. But in doing this we would simply end up with another text—we are back to Derrida's claim that there is no 'outside' of the text. In arguing for the adequacy of representations, researchers do not simply appeal to something 'outside' the text but do adequacy-guaranteeing things within and through writing. The 'truth' of research is an outcome of textual strategies rather than the extent to which the text faithfully represents 'reality'.

It is through writing that various textual strategies and devices can be deployed. We shall refer to this as the *pre-text* of research. This pre-text, expressed most importantly by a textual strategy of narrative realism, is a vital and necessary ingredient in the construction of the research text. Narrative realism emphasises certain and singular meaning and the *reporting* of an already existing ready-made reality. Most significantly, the text constructed from narrative realism does not draw attention to itself *as a text*. As Woolgar (1991:28) points out it is a text whose status is that of 'a neutral medium for conveying pre-existing facts about the world…[its] neutrality exempts it from consideration as a species of social/cultural activity'. The text operates at a different meta-level to that which it is about, it does not

apparently create the 'about' because it is not supposed to be productive. Thus narrative realism can function as a textual strategy where the 'problem' of reflexivity appears to have been banished.

The academic texts of research are therefore 'writerly' texts which yet point away from their 'writerliness'. Through narrative realism they direct attention away from themselves as texts to that which they purport to be about. Yet because it is writing that makes narrative realism possible, these texts clearly demonstrate that it is only through writing that the constitutive effects of writing can be denied. The textual strategies of writing have as their most important effect that writing can conceal its own being as writing. As Derrida (1976) points out, writing can only be disprivileged through the use of metaphors of inscription (see also Payne 1993). Through writing, the focus can be shifted from the text to that which the text is about. It is writing which makes possible the 'becoming invisible' of textuality.

This centrality of writing creates an ambiguous situation in relation to reflexivity. At one level, by making the realist text possible writing both enshrines reflexivity and at the same time appears effectively to deal with it. On the face of it, therefore, we could simply keep on researching 'reality' through the production of realist texts and come up with outcomes that 'work'. In this sense, it seems pointless to think about reflexivity either as a problem or as a resource. However, it would be unwise to dismiss reflexivity so quickly. Steier (1991) reminds us that 'reflexivity' can also mean acting in a habitualised, 'knee-jerk' way. Thus if we are not reflexive then we can easily become 'reflexive' in this other sense. In particular, by taking textuality for granted, by taking writing 'at its own word', we blind ourselves to the *effects* of textuality.

When we talk about texts and textual practices we should not have in our minds some paradigm of 'harmless' and 'unworldly' literature. Texts, after all, are the means by which powerful discourses and hierarchical binary oppositions are disseminated. As part of the general text of society, texts have real exclusionary and disempowering effects. Reflexivity is therefore not 'dealt with' by the realist text; rather, it is the workings and effects of power through texts that are effectively hidden. Reflexivity still has a part to play, at the very least in helping us consider, as researchers, the way in which our methodologies, dualisms, frameworks and categories, all the basic intellectual 'tools' of research, are implicated with power.

Reflexivity thus raises the unavoidable question of whether we can avoid researching our research practices, including ourselves as researchers. As we have outlined, there are textual practices and strategies for avoiding this and in the actual doing of research it is very often avoided, even when research is self-consciously not located in a positivist paradigm. In a sense, what the research paradigm is does not really matter, since reflexivity is present regardless of the nature of the paradigm. This means that the question of the

effects of such an avoidance is relevant to any kind of research–but perhaps especially so in educational research.

In educational research the need to problematise the practice of research is not unfamiliar. With the increased emphasis on practitioner-based and action research, and the popularity of ethnographic approaches, it is now becoming fairly common. To some extent, there is an awareness of the operation and implications of reflexivity and, increasingly, educators are careful not only about what they do in research but also about its meaning, significance and effects. However, in educational research there is still little attention paid to the textuality of research and its reflexive effects. Of course, this is to some extent due to the effectiveness of writing in concealing reflexivity. So effectively does it do this that our 'natural' attitude is simply to want to get on with our research and not bother too much with the 'meta' questions raised by reflexivity.

In education it is important to be aware of reflexivity because even when we have some confidence that our research is useful or even emancipatory, we are still 'objectifying', still speaking *for* others in the name of doing good by them. We are still attempting to mould subjectivities in a modernist way, still attempting to bring about changes in the name of 'progress'. Thus an awareness of reflexivity enables us to interrogate our own practices of research, in terms of how they can become part of dominant and oppressive discourses through a 'reflexive' acceptance of the neutrality of research, and in terms of how we, as researchers, are implicated in such discourses despite our best intentions. As long as textuality is taken for granted, as long as writing is seen as merely a neutral vehicle for describing and theorising an 'outside reality', the process will continue.

Educational researchers are of course not unaware of the problems of the academic text. But there is a tendency to see these problems purely as ones of accessibility and 'language' and, the reason for this is probably education's inherent phonocentrism. In effect, the problem is seen as one of communication, or of blocked communication, and therefore a problem of writing generally rather than of the particular effects of a particular kind of writing. Correspondingly, the answer is seen in terms of writing as if one were not writing, of producing 'accessible' texts that report practice or lived experience so transparently that they do not appear to be texts. But this is really no final and complete answer because such texts only conceal rather than eliminate their textuality and in so doing conceal their own possible immersion in powerful discourses.

Educational researchers need, then, to be aware of the *textuality* of any form of research and beyond this they need to have the means to interrogate research *as* text. Furthermore, practitioners need to be able to 'read' research texts. By foregrounding the textuality of research and the reflexivity inherent in this textual staging of knowledge it becomes possible to develop a critical awareness of the place of textual strategies, such as narrative realism, and

thus to be better placed to problematise their assumptions, directionality and effects. In this way, educational researchers and practitioners can 'subvert' dominant forms and become critical writers and readers with alternative strategies of their own.

We would like, therefore, to put forward a possible framework that hopefully provides critical conceptual resources for interrogating textuality and foregrounding reflexivity in the production (writing) and consumption (reading) of research texts. This framework draws heavily on Derrida's notion of the 'general text' which subsumes but goes beyond specific texts. We argue that the work that the textuality of texts does can only be understood by becoming aware of and using certain features which they have in common:

- *con-text* (or that which is 'with' the text); the situatedness of the researcher/reader—embodiedness, embededdness, e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, biography;
- *pre-text* (or that which is 'before' the text); language and signification, binary oppositions, writing and textual strategies, culture and interpretive traditions;
- *sub-text* (or that which is 'beneath' the text); professional paradigms and discourses, power-knowledge formations.

Reflexivity and critique, critique through reflexivity, are skills which educational practitioners and researchers need to develop. But as Wood (1990) points out, it is not always the case that reflexivity is best secured by the use of a reflexive strategy. Neither is it the case that didactic expositions are appropriate. Reflexivity, given its elusiveness, can only be approached allusively. This is where the framework outlined above can be useful. If the production of 'writerly' texts, i.e. texts that foreground their own textuality, is only sometimes possible, then there can at least be an awareness that research and the production/consumption of texts are one and the same process. Research, in other words, is more than just 'finding out' about a pre-existing world.

8

TELLING STORIES
The legitimising of knowledge

LYOTARD IN CONTEXT

We now turn to the work of Jean-François Lyotard, whose text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) (hereafter referred to as *PMC*), is central to the discussion of the postmodern moment. First published in French in 1979, with an English edition appearing in 1984, *The Postmodern Condition* provides a view of changes in the production and legitimising of knowledge derived partly from an analysis of changes in technology under late twentieth-century capitalism and partly from a philosophical analysis drawing on Kant and Wittgenstein.

While it is clear that, unlike the writers we have previously examined in detail, Lyotard does explicitly engage in debates within and about the postmodern moment, it is also important both to recognise the specifically philosophical base for his investigations and their varied nature. Thus, while *The Postmodern Condition* is often used as a pivotal reference point in many texts on and within the postmodern, its philosophical base and complexities and Lyotard's wider writings (see, for example Benjamin 1991 and Lyotard 1992) are often ignored, particularly when deployed in the discussion of education. In this way, the discussion of the work of Lyotard is subject as much to the processes of exclusion and inclusion as any other text and hence a much simplified 'story' of Lyotard's position tends to be portrayed. In many ways, our discussion here will replicate these standard processes. We will focus primarily on *The Postmodern Condition* as the basis for our explorations, drawing upon other texts where relevant. However, we also wish to avoid some of the simplification and trivialisation that sometimes appear in the minimal deployment of Lyotard's ideas in the field of education. To this end, we will attempt to give greater regard to the sophistication and allusive qualities of the positions offered by Lyotard.

Throughout this text we have attempted to provide both a background to the texts and ideas which are influencing the postmodern moment and to

amplify their significance for the theories and practices of education. In many respects, this is more straightforward in the case of Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition* is a report on 'knowledge', the production, conveying and learning of which is a central educational concern. It is a report which presents the impact on knowledge of changes in technology and capitalism, and the philosophical challenges wrought by situationist (see Plant 1992), post-structuralist and deconstructive theories and practices. Thus, as Frederic Jameson says in the Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition,*

> This seemingly neutral review of a vast body of material on contemporary science and problems of knowledge or information proves on closer inspection to be a crossroads in which a number of different themes–a number of different books–intersect and problematise each other.
>
> (*PMC:* vii)

In reporting on knowledge, therefore, Lyotard is engaging with a range of contending views and it is from that complex weave that we will draw certain central strands.

In this chapter, we shall first examine Lyotard's analysis of science as a form of language game that can be placed alongside narrative knowledge. This will be followed by an exploration of the role of grand or meta-narratives in legitimising modern scientific knowledge and its institutional supports. Lyotard offers, with many similarities to Kuhn, a reflexive account of modern science, arguing that it depends upon 'non-scientific' meta-narratives to legitimise its own practices. By so doing it falls into inconsistencies with disastrous consequences. From this, we will consider the 'incredulity towards metanarratives' which, as we have seen, Lyotard (*PMC:* xxiv) argues is a defining characteristic of the postmodern. This will lead to a consideration of 'performativity', which Lyotard argues is the basis for legitimising the postmodern condition of knowledge. Finally, we shall briefly discuss the significance of the 'post' in the postmodern. While certain issues of educational theory and practice will be indicated in this chapter, it is primarily in the next that we will focus specifically on Lyotard's analysis of research and learning in the practices of education; practices which he claims are being transformed with the changes in the way knowledge is legitimised. It is there also that we shall address certain ambiguities and problems in Lyotard's position, some of which he elaborates himself (Lyotard 1992), and in particular whether he is endorsing or being critical of the postmodern condition.

NARRATIVES AND SCIENCE

Like all writers, Lyotard adopts a certain stance towards the issues and problems he identifies. Obviously, in the process of adopting a stance, only

certain issues and problems are identified and elaborated in specific ways. In a manner characteristic of postmodern texts, familiar issues are addressed in unfamiliar ways and unfamiliar issues are brought to the fore for discussion and resolution. *The Postmodern Condition* is a study of 'the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies', described as 'postmodern'–that which 'designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts' (*PMC:* xxiii). We therefore have early indications of Lyotard's stance in relation to this study, as it is the 'game rules' governing science, literature and the arts which have been transformed in the twentieth century and resulted in a postmodern cultural condition. Game rules are those narratives which provide science, literature and arts with their legitimacy in social formations and the 'crisis of narratives' (*PMC:* xxiii) is the underlying context for the postmodern condition.

Thus, central to Lyotard's stance is the turn to language and, specifically, the notion of 'language games' derived from the work of Wittgenstein. In this sense, *The Postmodern Condition* in many ways presupposes the postmodern stance in turning away from more conventional social scientific explanations and basing its study on 'emphasising facts of language' since 'the observable social bond is composed of language "moves"' (*PMC:* 11). In other words, for scientific knowledge to exist, it has to be expressed in language, in a form of narrative. It is therefore subject to the rules which govern the ways in which languages are used within social formations. As we have already argued, scientific discourse sees itself as producing knowledge of the real world 'out there'. What Lyotard is saying is that this may be its self-understanding of what it is doing, but the fact that it is 'in' language is obscured or veiled; science assumes a transparency of language which is highly questionable.

Drawing on the philosophy of language, Lyotard identifies three forms of utterance which position in a particular way the sender of a statement, its addressee and the referent, what the statement deals with. Denotative utterances position the sender as knower, the addressee as having to give or withhold assent and the referent as needing correct identification. These are essentially utterances of truth and falsehood. By contrast, performative utterances are ones in which the utterance has an effect of producing the referent. Lyotard's example is 'the university is open' uttered at a convocation. The addressee does not have a role to play in verifying the truth or otherwise of the utterance. It is a declaration, the utterance of which produces what is uttered. The other type of utterance identified is prescriptive where the sender expects of the addressee that to which is referred. There are thus many different modes of discourse and many types of utterance, each of which is a language game:

> the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of
> rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be
> put—in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a
> set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in
> other words, the proper way to move them.
>
> (*PMC:* 10)

These rules only exist on the basis of an explicit or implicit contract between language users and without the rules there would be no game.

What we have here then is a reconstitution of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social contract theory, but at the level of language rather than individuals living in a state of nature (see Barron 1992). These are large claims, but they are also qualified. Lyotard does not consider all social relations to be language games. However, they are the necessary minimum for the existence of society. Simply by being named, 'the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he [sic] will inevitably chart his [sic] course' (*PMC:* 15).

For Lyotard, this contrasts with modern views of society as a functioning system where knowledge is indispensable. Here, society is seen as a unified totality and diversity is seen as threatening to the system. Thus the effects of such a conception are totalitarian. It is the very diversity of language games which constitute the social bonds between individuals yet which threaten the modern system. Diversity is predicated on the proliferation of narratives which modern technology has spawned; 'the society of the future falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology (such as structuralism or systems theory) than a pragmatics of language particles. There are many different language games—a heterogeneity of elements' (*PMC:* xxiv). Society as a totality is displaced by 'flexible networks of language games' (*PMC:* 17) in which there are continually opportunities for fresh moves. We shall see later how this notion can be deployed in education to move away from the notion of education as providing people with knowledge functional to the system to that of giving local 'voice' to the different and shifting knowledges through which the social formation is constituted.

It is for these reasons that Lyotard rejects conventional social scientific approaches, since for him these are underpinned by a representational conception of language where the social bond is constituted in ways inconsistent with language games. The notion of language games evokes the always provisional, shifting, opaque characteristics of utterances. To convey a view of the social formation which gives a true representation necessarily involves utterances and language games. Thus, paradoxically, in the very espousing of a representation as true, we are already in the midst of language games which undermine the very notion of representation. The rules of language games provide for a consensus on what is to be considered 'true',

but cannot establish truth independent of language. For the language games of modern science, which is a prime producer of knowledge and truth, this is particularly problematic as its denotative utterances thereby have to be examined as moves within those games rather than *establishing* the truth they espouse.

Sarup (1993:136) comments that 'the main difference between scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge requires that one language game, denotation, be retained and all others excluded'. In other words, the logic of modern scientific knowledge and its assumption of its own legitimacy as a discourse of truth about the world results in the exclusion of other language games or forms of knowledge and a denial of their legitimacy. Thus, Lyotard argues that the scientist classifies narrative knowledge

> as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilise, educate, develop.
>
> (*PMC:* 27)

This imbalance between narrative and modern scientific knowledge has concrete consequences. Narrative knowledge results in a form of tolerance towards other discourses as 'it approaches such discourse primarily as a variant in the family of narrative cultures' (*PMC:* 27). By contrast, it is in the privileging of a certain form of knowledge, modern science, that we most clearly witness the symptoms of 'the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilisation' (*PMC:* 27).

We therefore can see in Lyotard's argument a number of familiar strands of the postmodern moment emerging, some of which we have touched on already in other contexts: first, the significance of the emergence of modern science with its empiricist epistemology and views of language as transparent and representational; second, the privileging of scientific knowledge over other forms of knowledge; third, given the privileged status of such knowledge, the importance, indeed the necessity, of imparting it to others–in other words, the centrality of education to modern science, as a condition for its ascendancy and an outcome of it (*PMC:* 24–5); fourth, the oppressive consequences of those assumptions, in that the totalising of knowledge results in totalitarianism, the exclusion and silencing of difference.

Lyotard's focus on language leads him to examine the relationship between scientific and narrative knowledge. As language games, scientific and narrative knowledge have equal validity, but they have also to be recognised as different. Each has its own rules and moves. Neither narrative nor scientific knowledge can validate the other since 'the relevant criteria are

different' (*PMC:* 26). Yet there has been precisely such a confusion of narrative and scientific knowledge. In the legitimation of modern science, its status as a discourse of truth has been privileged in a way that has been impossible with narrative knowledge: Science, far from successfully obscuring the problem of its legitimacy, cannot avoid raising it with all its implications, which are no less sociopolitical than epistemological' (*PMC:* 18).

The modernist resolution of the problem of legitimacy has been to turn to grand or metanarratives. Although inconsistent from the stance of language games and the rules of science constructed by such games, it is in the deployment of metanarratives that modern science legitimises itself. The grand narratives provide an epic story of knowledge: 'the State spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the State's own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to obtain the public consent its decision makers need' (*PMC:* 27–8).

Thus, behind modern scientific knowledge is what Lyotard calls a meta-narrative, metadiscourse or grand narrative which seeks to legitimise science as a form of knowledge privileged over other forms of knowledge. Modern science is therefore in the paradoxical position that 'it cannot know and make known that it is true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all' (*PMC:* 29). As well as being reflexively paradoxical, this confusion of language games which is part of modernity results in politically disastrous consequences.

It is because science and technology have had a greater interaction with language in the last few decades that the postmodern condition, postmodern knowledge and postmodern science have developed. In other words, the very practices of science are metamorphosing under the impact of language-related developments. Lyotard identifies a number of these influences:

> phonology and theories of linguistics, problems of communication and cybernetics, modern theories of algebra and informatics, computers and their languages, problems of translation and the search for areas of compatibility among computer languages, problems of information storage and data banks, telematics and the perfection of intelligent terminals, paradoxology.
>
> (*PMC:* 3–4)

Thus the centrality of language is not merely a matter of philosophical assertions—it is echoed by changes in technology and moves towards a 'post-industrial information society' where language clearly plays a central role. A key question, therefore, is how scientific knowledge is to be legitimised in the postmodern moment, particularly as this now has to be achieved with a prior recognition of the place of language games, where the grand narratives of modern scientific knowledge, given their inconsistencies and socio-political

consequences, no longer hold sway. The grand narratives are now being 'dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements–denotative, prescriptive, descriptive' (*PMC:* xxiv).

In deploying an analysis based on language games, Lyotard is therefore pointing to the ultimate reflexive paradox of modern science. It relies on a form of myth to legitimate itself, which given its own discourse it must reject as a valid, truthful form of utterance. 'Myth', as Lyotard (1992) himself points out, may be inappropriate here, as these metanarratives are not backward-looking; they do not refer to a mythical past. Rather, they are oriented towards the future, towards what modern scientific knowledge is capable of achieving. They therefore provide a teleology, a goal to be achieved by the further development of modern scientific knowledge. Lyotard primarily turns his attention to two of those grand narratives of the legitimation of modern science, their institutional supports and their epic role with their interweaving with the history of particular nation-states. The first is the grand narrative of the liberation or emancipation of humanity and the second, the speculative unity of all knowledge.

GRAND NARRATIVES AND KNOWLEDGE

The grand narrative of emancipation is one with which we are already familiar through our earlier discussion of the project of modernity. Here, the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge is legitimised on the grounds that it results in progress towards the emancipation of humanity. This narrative stems from French political thought of the eighteenth century and is institutionally embodied in the French revolution and its aftermath.

Lyotard argues that to be critical of the development of modern science is to place oneself in the position of being against progress and emancipation, to be in favour of obscurantism, superstition and dogma. In this grand narrative, therefore, everyone has 'a right to science' (*PMC:* 31). The state is therefore able to intervene actively to further the development and spread of scientific knowledge towards a goal of progress and for the benefit of all: 'the State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the "people", under the name of the "nation", in order to point them down the path of progress' (*PMC:* 32). Through this grand narrative, the state is thus able to legitimately take control of the institutions of education in the name of placing people on the path of progress towards their own emancipation. The legitimacy of modern scientific knowledge is therefore posited on and reproduced as a specific set of relationships between 'the state', 'the people' and 'the nation'. The state gains legitimacy from the nation to produce the emancipation of the people who are to be tutored into it through the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

This grand narrative therefore gives a privileged position to education as a key area of organised activity through which the legitimation process

stemming from it is to be secured, with an emphasis on primary education rather than higher education. Primary education aims to introduce all the population to the *legitimacy* of scientific knowledge, thereby giving embodiment to the emancipatory thrust of this grand narrative. Higher education, meanwhile, is required to provide the functionaries of the state and 'the managers of civil society' who will be the intermediaries in perpetuating the legitimacy of the grand narrative. Lyotard sees these practices as, for example, fundamental to the educational policies of the French Third Republic. In other words, they only 'make sense' on the basis of the presupposition that humanity is the hero of liberty and that it is progress towards liberty which the state must work towards by supporting the institutions that produce scientific knowledge.

The second grand narrative identified by Lyotard and embodied in the German Hegelian tradition and the policies of the nineteenth-century Prussian state, is a speculative narrative. Here, science is legitimised not in relation to the progress of humanity towards liberty, but on the grounds that it contributes to the unity of all knowledge. In this sense, there is a much greater concern with the 'truth' of science than with the ethical and political questions of 'justice' which concern the state. In fact, it is suspicion of the state's use of science which partly results in this emphasis on 'truth' and the unity of knowledge as the criteria governing the legitimacy of modern science. Here:

> The language game of legitimation is not state-political, but philosophical…. Philosophy must restore unity to learning, which has been scattered into separate sciences in laboratories and in pre-university education; it can only achieve this in a language game that links the sciences together…in a rational narration, or rather metanarration.
>
> (*PMC:* 33)

In other words, the legitimacy of modern science is only possible through overcoming the fragmentation of knowledge consequent on the emergence of different disciplines and subject areas and their extension into non-university areas of education. This grand narrative is not concerned with the usefulness of knowledge, or even the immediate truth-value of specific claims to knowledge but rather with its value in relation to the position it occupies within the speculative unity of all knowledge. It is upon this position that its legitimacy rests. Thus all knowledge must be brought within a totality, a view which taken to its logical extreme, Lyotard argues, was embodied and exemplified, in different ways, in the practices of Stalinism and Nazism.

Much of the above may sound very unfamiliar. It is linked to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tradition of German idealism, most notably exemplified in the work of Hegel, where human history leads

through a dialectical process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis to the realisation of the Idea, a totality where all knowledge is unified. Here,

> the humanist principle that humanity rises up in dignity and freedom through knowledge is left by the wayside. In this perspective, knowledge first finds legitimacy within itself, and it is knowledge that is entitled to say what the State and what Society are.
>
> (*PMC:* 34)

It is philosophical idealism rather than philosophical humanism which forms this grand narrative, where scientific knowledge is legitimised on the basis of its relationship to the unfolding of Spirit. This legitimacy can only be made manifest through the procedures of speculative philosophy, which are to be found within the 'speculative University'.

The impact on education of this metanarrative is to emphasise the importance of the university as an educational institution in which academics are provided with the freedom from outside influences to pursue knowledge as they see fit, guided by the movement towards speculative unity, the totality and totalisation of knowledge. They can provide critical comment on the state and society from their position of privilege but are disbarred from an active political role. While Lyotard's discussion is largely built around the founding of the University of Berlin, he sees this model as the basis for much of the development of higher education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In examining these two grand narratives, there is much that is familiar within debates about education: its emancipatory purpose, its use to the state, the role and importance of different sectors of education, questions of academic freedom and accountability, of pursuing knowledge for its utilitarian outcomes or for 'its own sake', the relative importance of different subject areas, the question of whether fragmented or holistic views of knowledge result in greater understanding. The list could be elongated indefinitely. For Lyotard, each of the grand narratives is capable of contributing and giving legitimacy to different positions adopted in such debates and the same tradition (Lyotard gives Marxism as an example) might draw on both legitimising epics.

However, while Lyotard is critical of the grand narratives he also recognises their on-going power, particularly that of the grand narrative of emancipation which, he argues, is gaining new rigour, although in a revised form since the emancipation of humanity is not simply built upon the state legitimising the people's pursuit of emancipation, but upon a notion of self-government where 'the subject is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself' (*PMC:* 35). Here the emphasis is not on legitimating the denotative utterances of science as truthful, but on legitimating prescriptive judgements over what is just. Scientific knowledge is to inform people of the reality

within which their prescriptions are to be executed. In other words, while the emancipation of humanity remains the metanarrative, it has been reworked in its relationship with other forms of utterance. Thus, the relationship of modern scientific knowledge to the state is altered when knowledge is given a critical function. It is no longer a matter of scientific knowledge in the service of the state legitimised as working towards the emancipation of the people. Scientists are able to withhold their support for the state if they consider that which they are being asked to support is unjust. However, unlike the metanarrative of speculative unity, in which knowledge is referenced to the realisation of the Idea or Spirit, here 'knowledge has no final legitimacy outside of serving the goals envisioned by the practical subject, the autonomous collectivity' (*PMC:* 36). In other words, the grand narrative of emancipation is reinvigorated not on the basis that science automatically results in progress, but rather that it informs the prescriptive decisions of the collectivity as to the proper direction of progress. Thus the grand narratives of modern science are able to change and develop even though the postmodern condition of knowledge suggests their demise. The modern and postmodern can therefore sit alongside each other, even as each contests the possibility of the other.

However, the significance of these grand narratives for Lyotard is that in confusing different language games, historical outcomes are produced which run counter to the promise of emancipation they espouse:

> In the course of the past fifty years, each grand narrative of emancipation—regardless of the genre it privileges—has, as it were, had its principle invalidated. All that is real is rational, all that is rational is real: 'Auschwitz' refutes the speculative doctrine…. All that is proletarian is communist, all that is communist is proletarian: 'Berlin 1953', 'Budapest 1956', 'Czechoslovakia 1968', 'Poland 1980'… refute the doctrine of historical materialism…. All that is democratic is by the people and for the people, and vice versa: 'May 1968' refutes the doctrine of parliamentary liberalism…. Everything that promotes the free flow of supply and demand is good for general prosperity and vice versa: 'crises of 1911 and 1929' refute the doctrine of economic liberalism, and the 'crisis of 1974–1979' refutes the post-Keynesian modification of that doctrine.
>
> (Lyotard 1992:40)

In this sense, Lyotard is offering a critique of the gap between the modern project of progress, reason and emancipation in which humanity desires to be master of its own destiny and the historical circumstances of modernity. The failure to fulfil the promise of the grand narratives is not due to the failure to pursue them fully or correctly, that is, to pursue modernity to its end, but rather lies in the contingency of historical events which escape the clutches of

reason and rationality (see Norris 1990). Modern science attempts to 'capture' that contingency with the aim of producing progress and emancipation. Yet the confusion of language games only serves to mask its failures and the failures of the grand narratives:

> It is not a lack of progress, but, on the contrary, development (technoscientific, artistic, economic, political) which created the possibility of total war, totalitarianisms, the growing gap between the wealth of the North and the impoverished South, unemployment and the 'new poor', general deculturation and the crisis in education (in the transmission of knowledge), and the isolation of the artistic avant-gardes (and for a while now, their repudiation).
>
> (Lyotard 1992:97–8)

Thus, embedded within a complex philosophical argument is a devastating critique of the effects of the modern project in its many guises, a critique which has led to what some commentators see as an undue scepticism towards claims to universal notions of truth and knowledge (see Norris 1990, Sarup 1993, Squires 1993). However, for Lyotard advances in science are only adding to the historical problems that destroy the modern project while giving the impression of completing it. The notion of Progress is no longer tenable.

FROM LIBERTY/TRUTH TO TECHNICAL EFFICIENCY/ PERFORMATIVITY

Lyotard views the grand narratives he identifies as having lost credibility under the impact of technological change since the Second World War, the reinvigoration of liberal capitalism, and the emphasis on the individual enjoyment of goods and services. However, the problems are deeper, as Lyotard identifies the seeds of its own destruction within each grand narrative.

The grand narrative of speculative unity contains within itself a scepticism towards the scientific knowledge which it seeks to unify into a totality. Thus, the fragmentation of science which this grand narrative is seeking to overcome is continually reintroduced. The need to legitimise knowledge as part of a totality is undermined by scientific doubt and scepticism. The hierarchy in which knowledge is organised on the assumption of speculative unity, with primacy being given to philosophy, breaks down. For Lyotard, disciplines 'disappear, overlappings occur at the borders between sciences, and from these new territories are born… The old "faculties" splinter into institutes and foundations of all kinds, and the universities lose their function of speculative legitimation' (*PMC*: 39). Thus we witness the development of new areas of knowledge, for example, cultural studies, media studies, critical theory, and new forms of organisation both within higher education and beyond, as the generation of knowledge is no longer confined to or policed by the universities.

Similarly, the grand narrative of emancipation also results in its own demise, as the distinction between the denotative statements of science and the prescriptive statements of practical reason mean that science is revealed as a language game with its own rules equivalent but not superior to other language games: 'the game of science is thus put on a par with others' (*PMC:* 40). Science is yet another language game. Since a statement may be true but not necessarily just, its status as a condition for emancipation and progress is undermined.

Thus, we see that it is the very delegitimisation of science which has provided the grounds for Lyotard to explore the grand narratives of legitimation and the way in which the language game of science becomes subject to scrutiny as a language game. The unifying grand narratives embodied in social systems are split asunder to become part of the range of language games proliferating under the impact of technological development. The situation is now one in which:

> nobody speaks all of those languages, they have no universal meta-language, the project of the system-subject is a failure, the goal of emancipation has nothing to do with science…. Speculative or humanistic philosophy is forced to relinquish its legitimation duties.
>
> (*PMC:* 41)

It is in this way that modern science becomes subject to a postmodern condition.

We hope it is clear why Lyotard suggests that the postmodern moment results in and from 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. It is this incredulity which may be the single most important idea to be taken from his work and deployed in the discussion of education (see for instance Giroux 1988a and Nicholson 1989). It can be seen both as an outcome of responses to the changes taking place in the more developed countries and as an approach which engenders those outcomes. As language and information play an increasing role in our lives, so the privileged status of science comes into question. The grand narratives themselves have increasingly been seen to be failing. In other words, as the promises of modern science to emancipate us or unify all knowledge have not been achieved, so the status of scientific knowledge has come into question.

Although sociality is fragmented into increasing numbers of language games undermining the notion of society as a totality, for Lyotard a different basis for legitimising knowledge emerges to combat this tendency. Rather than a denotative language game of truth and falsehood, or a prescriptive language game of justice and injustice, there emerges the technical game of efficiency and inefficiency, or 'performativity' as Lyotard calls it. In other words, as both a condition for and an outcome of the postmodern condition new criteria emerge to be applied to all language games by decision-makers.

Decision-makers 'allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimising the system's performance–efficiency' (*PMC:* xxiv).

It appears, therefore, that Lyotard is introducing a fresh grand narrative into the postmodern condition, one which is deployed by decision-makers as a criterion for judging our languages games. This is especially true when we consider that he provides us with a history of the emergence of technology based on optimising performance for wealth and dating back to the late eighteenth century. However, caution is necessary as the grand narrative function involves legitimising knowledge on the basis of a teleology which is lacking where conditions are based on optimising the efficiency of the system. Efficiency has no end. Thus, while there is the maintenance of a social totality by decision-makers similar to that found within the grand narratives, the lack of a teleology and the competition it faces from the proliferation of language games means that it is unable to be established as a grand narrative in itself. Thus, while efficiency becomes a defining criteria for the authorities, postmodern knowledge cannot be manipulated by them since 'it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (*PMC:* xxv).

Performativity does not legitimise knowledge but rather embodies what science has become in the postmodern condition, which in itself has been made possible by the development of technology. In this situation, knowledge becomes a commodity to be exchanged, to be produced, sold and consumed. Intellectual property rights thereby become a major aspect of international debate and negotiation. Knowledge as an informational commodity becomes 'the major stake-holder in the world-wide competition for power' (*PMC:* 5). Knowledge is translated into quantities of information and, more specifically, Lyotard suggests, translatable into computer language. That which cannot be translated will be discarded. Meanwhile, much effort is being placed in providing the technology to increase what can be translated. Statements acceptable as statements of knowledge are increasingly governed by the logic and technology associated with computers. This is a process which also witnesses the reconstitution of the workforce around knowledge-intensive industries and services. Information circulates in ever-increasing networks, through satellite, computer networks, by telephone, interactive video, etc. Accessing and decoding information becomes a major concern beyond the control of the nation-state. Optimal efficiency becomes the defining characteristic of the validity of science.

What science produces has to be capable of exchange and consumption, or it will be discarded as not worthy of being encompassed within the language game of performativity. The nineteenth-century association of technology with profit has now extended to include science as the 'spirit of performativity' becomes generalised. Thus:

> the State and/or company must abandon the idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation in order to justify the new goal: in the discourse of today's financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power.
>
> (*PMC:* 46)

In this situation, knowledge or computerised information is power and utterances of whatever kind increase their performativity by increasing the amount of information which is available to the person making the utterance. Without access to information and the ability to translate it, our utterances lack the measure of efficiency required and leave us powerless.

The proliferation of information and the technology to access it can thereby be seen to have ambiguous consequences in relation to the nation-state. While the state may attempt to sustain the efficiency of the social totality, information and technology remove the state from its central role in the social formation. Other players, most notably multinational corporations, become much more active, operating outside the gambit of the nation-state rather than through it. As well as economic powers, this proliferation allows other parties in the social formation to network together outside the controlling influence of the social totality, and occasionally in opposition to it, in ways which were not previously possible. It is in this sense that some have attempted to reintroduce the modern grand narrative of emancipation in a modified form, as localised networks become the basis for resistant and emancipatory practices previously impossible under the state's tutelage of the social totality. This has certainly been the case in some of the appropriations of Lyotard by critical pedagogues and feminists. It is also the basis of Lyotard's rejection of homology, or the uniformity of experts and their criterion of efficiency, as an ultimately terroristic device. He argues instead for paralogy, what Nicholson (1989:199) refers to as 'the technique of identifying and undermining the metaprescriptives of established language games by constant innovation and experimentation in order to generate new ideas'.

Here we see a theme taken up elsewhere by Lyotard (see Benjamin 1991 and Lyotard 1992) of implicitly positioning resistance with the avant-garde. This links his analysis of the postmodern condition of knowledge with postmodernism as a cultural position. As Sarup comments:

> Rejecting totality, Lyotard and other postmodernists stress fragmentation—of language games, of time, of the human subject, of society itself…. (T)his belief was also held by the historic avant-garde movements. They too wanted the dissolution of unity. In their activities the coherence and unity of the work was deliberately called into question or even methodically destroyed.
>
> (Sarup 1993:147)

Innovation and the disruption of the established order is the key to both. Thus, while a grand narrative of emancipation may not be feasible, it does appear that Lyotard sees resistance as an effective strategy. We will examine the resistance of paralogy in the postmodern moment more fully in the next chapter.

WHAT'S IN THE 'POST'?

First, however, we wish to conclude with some discussion of the significance of the 'post' in the postmodern condition. The *mélange* of language games that are part of the postmodern also seem to include aspects of the modern, as well as having histories in themselves. Why then does Lyotard espouse a postmodern condition?

In an earlier chapter we examined some of the many ways in which the postmodern has been conceptualised. Part of that discussion referred to whether the postmodern moment can be seen as a distinct rupture with the modern, whether it is part of the modern, or whether it is an intensification of one particular aspect of the modern. In attempting to answer this question, the only thing which is clear is that the answer is unclear.

This is as true for Lyotard's work as elsewhere. It is clear, for instance, that both incredulity towards grand narratives (the postmodern) and the legitimation of science by them (the modern) can be found in contemporary social formations. While this suggests that they are stances within history rather than separate moments of historical development, this does not help us to establish their relationship with each other. To do so we need to turn to another discussion (Benjamin 1991, Lyotard 1984 and 1992) of modern and postmodern culture. This may appear to take us away from our main concerns, but we need to bear in mind that, given the importance of narrative for Lyotard, the rules of narrative have a crucial importance. These rules are cultural as well as linguistic. Thus questions of aesthetics play a critical role in examining narratives. This is one of the reasons why the postmodern moment has witnessed the growth in importance of cultural analysis and the spread of its influence throughout the varying areas of knowledge and communication. With the emphasis on narrative, utterances become subject as much to aesthetic criteria as to those of truth, justness or efficiency.

In his essay 'Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?', Lyotard (1992) responds to the attacks on the active experimentation in the realm of culture which have been associated with postmodernism and the view of some, particularly Habermas (1992), that the fragmentation engendered by the postmodern moment have neo-conservative consequences. The apparently ludic consequences which follow the questioning of modernity are seen to be undermining the social totality and with that the humanism which is central to the modern project: 'there is some call to order, a desire for unity, identity, security, and popularity…' (Lyotard 1992:14). For Lyotard, control

over active experimentation in the realm of culture, the work of avant-gardes, in the name of 'realism' is what is being sought since this 'protects consciousness from doubt' (1992:15). He argues (1992:16) that 'realism—which can be defined only by its intention of avoiding the question of reality implied in the question of art—always finds itself somewhere between academicism and kitsch'. Art in its widest sense is therefore split between those who work within the rules of art and those whose work fundamentally questions those rules. The aesthetic criteria which privilege realism also provide an audience for realist works. By contrast, the avant-garde finds itself without a guaranteed audience because its work disrupts the rules of realism; therefore it can be said not to 'make sense'.

Lyotard offers two examples of realism in the service of authority. The first we would recognise as linked very firmly to his views of the modern in *The Postmodern Condition*. Art in the service of the political party is designed to provide correct narratives and the audience for that art to fulfil feelings for unity and simplicity. The world may be uncertain, but the role of art is to engender a reality and sensibility which help to resolve those uncertainties in a narrative form. Nazism and Stalinism are the examples Lyotard uses, the grand narrative of speculative unity embodied in the nation also finding expression in culture and modern aesthetics.

The second example Lyotard outlines provides us with resonances of the contradictory potential of the postmodern moment mentioned above. For realism, subject to the authority of capital, is held to take a 'transavantgardist' position, which can be seen as a dimension of postmodernism within contemporary culture:

> Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: you listen to reggae, you watch a western, you eat MacDonald's at midday and local cuisine at night, you wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong, knowledge is the stuff of TV game shows.
>
> (Lyotard 1992:17)

Here, then, realism is not about grounding culture in some narrative of social totality, but rather it 'panders to the disorder which reigns in the "taste" of the patron' (1992:17). Aesthetic criteria of what is beautiful are replaced by the realism of money in which the value of artistic works is measured by their profits. In a sense, therefore, Lyotard is arguing that the view that 'anything goes', the ludic reduced to a notion of amusing oneself in consumer society, can be argued to be part of a capitalistic realism. In other words, he himself sees the eclecticism which is often associated with the postmodern moment as subject to the authority of techno-scientific capital.

This picture is further complicated by his view that 'modernity, whenever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery

of the lack of reality in reality—a discovery linked to the invention of other realities' (1992:19). Thus, while in the realm of modern knowledge a metanarrative acts as the basis for legitimation, a sanctioning of certain utterances as 'true', in the realm of culture modernity is the basis for undermining the view that there is a reality accessible to all. There are resonances here with the role of modern science in questioning reality, but while science attempts to uncover reality modern culture questions that there is a reality in this sense. Its role is to 'obstruct the formation and stabilisation of taste' (1992:20) and its work is done by avant-gardes. The culture of modernity, of avant-gardes, is therefore in opposition to cultural realism and involves questioning the rules of art. In this sense, it can also be said to be questioning the project of modernity particularly as espoused in the grand narrative of speculative unity which seeks stability and order. Its relationship with the grand narrative of emancipation is more problematic, as it is possible to suggest that the reinvigorated grand narrative identified by Lyotard (*PMC:* 35–6), in which the critical function of knowledge is reintroduced, has resonances with modern culture's constant questioning of the rules of art. However, there remains the issue of the teleology of emancipation which is not to be found in Lyotard's view of modern culture. Here again, we witness Lyotard's stance as one of resistance rather than liberation, a position we have already discused in relation to the other writers we have examined.

While transavantgardism can reduce the avant-garde to the realism of capitalism, consumption and profit, the role of avant-gardes in modernity is to question the rules governing art. It is therefore unsurprising, given the incredulity towards grand narratives that Lyotard associates with post-modernism that he conceives the latter as 'undoubtedly part of the modern. Everything that is received must be suspected, even if it is only a day old…' (1992:21). However, while constant questioning makes post-modernism part of the modern, a 'work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Thus understood, postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent' (1992:22).

Here as elsewhere in Lyotard's work we may feel he is mirroring the avant-gardism and questioning of rules that he supports. As such, his meaning remains allusive and elusive. There appear to be three strands to his position. In the realm of culture, postmodernism is part of the modern. Yet a work can only become modern if it is first postmodern. Further, postmodernism is in a constant state of being born within the modern. It therefore appears, as Jameson suggests (1984:xvi), that postmodernism is a cyclical moment in the constant emergence of new modernisms:

> The postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he *[sic]* writes or the work he creates is not in principle governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged according to a determinant judgement, by the application of given

categories to this text or work. Such rules and categories are what the work of the text is investigating. The artist and the writer therefore work without rules, and in order to establish the rules for that which will have been made.

(Lyotard 1992:24)

While some view this as a confusion of postmodernism with aspects of modernism (see Callinicos 1989), it is necessary to avoid the sense of historical stages which such terminology tends to suggest, as 'modernity is not an era in thought, but rather a mode…of thought, of utterance, of sensibility' (Benjamin 1991:314). Thus, recurrence rather than development is the key to understanding the relationship between the modern and postmodern (Morris 1992) in which 'the post is necessarily a question of experimentation…' (Beardsworth 1992:52).

This may seem a somewhat convenient position for a postmodern writer like Lyotard to assume, as it rationalises the many difficulties we may have as readers in interpreting his texts. However, it would also appear that in the realm of aesthetics and culture, the relationship between modernism and postmodernism is far closer than in the realm of science. The culture of modernity to which postmodernism is nascent would appear to have greater resonances with the questioning strand of the postmodern condition of knowledge than with the performative strand of modern grand narratives. However, it is precisely such attempts at 'totalisation', as we are suggesting here for Lyotard's texts, that Lyotard (1992:25) wages war on.

A HAPPY ENDING?

We have come a long way from the discussion of education, but we feel it is important to examine some of the 'complexities' of Lyotard's writings, in order to avoid some of the simplistic appropriations of his work that have taken place. We are left with many questions and uncertainties, but as a postmodern writer, we would expect this from Lyotard, as he attempts to disrupt the order of our own narratives and reading of narratives. At one level, this suggests that Lyotard provides a varied set of arguments and positions which cannot be reconciled. However, this assumes the legitimacy of reconciliation–totalisation–as a form of reading. To 'make sense' of Lyotard demands that we avoid totalisation and thus the argument that there are inconsistencies in his position and instead focus on particular narratives. As such, a happy ending to this chapter on Lyotard is not a rounded conclusion, but rather the continuation of questioning and a sense of the fragments of understanding provided by his analysis. It is with these thoughts in mind that we now turn to considering the purposes and practices of education within modern and postmodern conditions.

THE END OF THE STORY
Education, efficiency and resistance

GRAND NARRATIVES AND MODERN PRACTICES OF EDUCATION

In the last chapter, we made reference to the way in which Lyotard's work has a number of significant implications for the theory and practices of education. In this chapter, we wish to focus on these issues more specifically, as they provide a basis for understanding some of the changes that we are currently witnessing in the world of education and some of the possible stances that can be adopted in relation to these changes. At its most general, we can say that Lyotard, like other writers within the postmodern moment, argues that resistance and subversion are the key postmodern condition that replaces the emancipatory promises of modernity. Given education's central role in the modern project, questions arise about how it does this and how it can respond in the postmodern moment.

We have seen how the grand narratives of modern science provided the basis for particular forms of educational practice. The grand narrative of progress, where the development of scientific knowledge supposedly results in the emancipation of humanity, is most closely associated with the project of modernity. Here scientific knowledge replaces myths, beliefs and superstition by discovering the 'truth' of the world. Science becomes the guarantor and route to truth and emancipation. The emancipation of humanity thus requires that people are given access to scientific knowledge, since the condition of their emancipation is that they live subject to the 'laws' uncovered by science. Thus, as we have seen, the educational programme which is legitimised here focuses on primary education as a condition for initial schooling of everyone into science. The state takes responsibility for education and different groups play different roles according to the amount of education they receive. Thus teaching and learning are the main concerns of education within this grand narrative.

By contrast, the grand narrative of speculative unity privileges higher education, and particularly the university, as the primary site for education. It is in isolation from the pressures of government and other concerns that universities are able to work towards the totalisation of knowledge under the arch of philosophy. Within this metanarrative, the different branches of knowledge are organised into disciplines, some of which are more 'fundamental' than others. It is the task of philosophy to provide the boundaries of disciplines and integrate them into a speculative unity. This grand narrative thereby provides a way of organising knowledge, one which was and remains influential in many universities. In addition to privileging universities as sites for the production of knowledge, the concern is not for the students, but indirectly for the academics, as it is they who work towards the unity that is sought. Here, then, is the basis for justifying academic freedom and the 'retreat into the ivory tower' to pursue the development of knowledge unconstrained by concerns for 'relevance'. The search for scientific knowledge is not disturbed by 'worldly' considerations; the state allows universities to produce knowledge 'for its own sake' in return for universities not interfering in the running of the state.

We can see embodiments of both these strands in the modern practices of education. The emancipation of the people and the speculative unity of knowledge are capable of informing the practices of different parts of the provision of education in different ways. Initial schooling becomes the primary concern for the state. Later stages of education can be left to autonomous institutions. So long as they produce the necessary cadres to fulfil the functions necessary to the state, they can be left to get on with the pursuit of knowledge. Education is understood as freeing people through the process of learning and to be about the pursuit of knowledge which serves that end. Scientific knowledge is privileged as the form of knowledge which best achieves this.

It is precisely that privilege, and more generally the position that knowledge is an end in itself or a condition of emancipation, which has been brought into question since the Second World War. It is the criterion of performativity introduced through advances in technology and changes in capitalism which has most seriously challenged this position.

TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION

Lyotard views the impact of technology as having inevitable consequences for knowledge, in particular with the way knowledge is produced (researched) and transmitted (learnt). Things learnt from machines are being applied to humans. Artificial intelligence both attempts, to mirror the capacities of the human brain, but also provides clues as to how the brain might function. Genetics draws its theoretical understanding from cybernetics. Knowledge is being researched and produced in ways which are only possible through the

development of technology which in itself affects the forms of knowledge produced. Similarly, technology has had a direct impact on learning:

> The miniaturisation and commercialisation of machines is already changing the way learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited. It is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-processing machines is having, and will continue to have, as much of an effect on the circulation of learning as did advancements in human circulation (transportation systems) and later, in the circulation of sounds and visual images (the media).
>
> (*PMC:* 4)

There are many examples of this, for instance, the increased use of information technology in teaching and learning situations and the availability of computers as consumer products to be used in the home. There are now learning packages available for a whole range of subjects which individuals are capable of working through at their own speed and at times that suit them. Thus technology has organisational implications for the circulation of learning. Whereas human circulation made possible people coming together to learn and educational media made possible the reception of different forms of learning, the circulation of knowledge provides the basis for individualising learning in a more complete and active way. Individuals can access the information and through their computers can interact with it and with others, without having to attend a conventional centre of learning. The 'real' world of learning becomes the world of computerised learning.

The proliferation of computers with their own logic and prescriptions actually impacts upon what can legitimately be called knowledge because knowledge has to be in a form which can be computerised. Nor does this simply affect the form of statements of knowledge. It also impacts on the relationship of individuals to knowledge. Rather than the acquisition of knowledge being linked to the training of minds,

> the relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume–that is, the form of value.
>
> (*PMC:* 4)

Thus educative processes need no longer be about the development of the individual but instead constitute a relationship between producer and consumer where knowledge–quantities of information–is exchanged on the basis of the value it has to the consumer, and in which consumers commodify their 'experience' in exchange for qualifications (Usher 1989a).

In this situation, the state plays less and less of a role as the information available for circulation in the social formation comes from a wide range of sources. The control of learning through state-sponsored institutions is replaced by networks of information, in which to be 'educated' is to have consumed the information necessary for the optimising of performance. Underlying these changes, therefore, is the criterion of efficiency. This is a world of education, increasingly familiar, which functions more and more like a marketplace (see Kenway, with Bigum and Fitzclarence 1993):

> The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?' In the context of the mercantilisation of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to 'Is it saleable?' And in the context of power-growth: 'Is it efficient?'
>
> (*PMC:* 51)

Lyotard's concern, then, is with the impact of these changes on higher education. Useful knowledge in this sense is that which improves the performance of the system and is saleable. The trading of knowledge thereby spreads from the commercial realm to the realm of higher education, with institutions increasingly reconstructing themselves as enterprises to compete in the knowledge business. The privileged status of higher education as the producer of knowledge is therefore lost as it becomes part of a wider knowledge market—including research and development departments of large companies, consultancies, think tanks—with which it competes.

PERFORMATIVITY AND EDUCATION

The principle of performativity in education is linked to the performativitiy of the social system, with each aspect of the educational process being subject to the requirements of efficiency. The task of education is to operate in the most efficient ways to provide individuals with the learning they require to optimise their contribution to the social system. Lyotard argues that certain kinds of skills are required for this to occur: 'any discipline with applicability to training in "telematics" (computer scientists, cyberneticists, linguists, mathematicians…) will most likely receive priority in education' (*PMC:* 48).

As the modern grand narratives fade under the proliferation of technologically engendered language and information, the epic story of the progress of the social totality collapses. However, even while the modern totality fragments the postmodern condition allows a non-epic legitimation of knowledge to optimise the efficiency of the system. Since that system is firstly an economic system it is to fulfilling the requirements of the economy under

conditions of global competition that education finds its rationale in the postmodern moment. In this,

> learning and its transmission no longer command the authority which once made us listen to intellectuals when they moved from the lectern to the podium. In a world where success means gaining time, thinking has a single but irredeemable fault: it's a waste of time.
>
> (Lyotard 1992:47)

Thus, in line with the decline of the modern grand narratives, 'educational institutions are becoming more functional; the emphasis is on skills rather than ideals' (Sarup 1993:138).

There is also a social dimension to the performativity of education as social cohesion is still required of the system. This is not a new role for education but it has a different trajectory in the postmodern moment. Lyotard argues that under the grand narrative of emancipation, education embodied and disseminated a model of life, with higher education producing an elite to guide the nation towards emancipation. By contrast, performativity simply demands skilled performance within job roles, with particular importance being given to those in professional roles who manage civil society. Rather than being governed by some vision of a just society, the activities of professionals are increasingly governed by the criteria of efficiency. Skilled performance, or competence, becomes an increasing part of the educational agenda and an increasingly important and valued outcome of educational processes.

Lyotard, then, provides an explanatory framework for the turn towards competence-based qualifications and vocationally relevant education. In this situation, higher education supplies 'the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions' (*PMC:* 48). There is a sense, then, in which the system appears to be far more functional and powerful under the condition of performativity than it did under the grand narratives. However, it needs to be borne in mind that the nature of the totality has changed, as it is no longer harnessed to the teleologies of the grand narratives but fragmented, in a sense held together by the pragmatics of individuals functioning within the system to optimise its efficiency. The social system is going 'nowhere' even as it changes; it is 'simply' being driven to maximise its efficiency.

Lest this be considered too monolithic a view of higher education, Lyotard suggests that students—addressees within the languages games of higher learning—are changing and constitute different groupings according to the form of learning they enter. The young of the 'liberal elite', who previously entered higher education with a concern for social progress and emancipation, now receive training for competence in particular professional

occupations. This observation appears to have some nostalgic element for a time when students did take an active interest and involvement in issues of emancipation. Lyotard's own background involved him in the student upheavals in France of the late 1960s. Disillusionment with the failure of students to continue to fulfil at least an oppositional role may well be fuelling his own position.

A second group of students (*PMC:* 49) are those who are 'addressees of the new domains of knowledge linked to the new techniques and technologies'. In other words, those students who are learning the new technologies and languages of technology which are the base for many of the changes in knowledge and education. A third group of students are those who Lyotard somewhat cryptically calls 'mainly unemployed'. These are students in the arts and human sciences, the numbers of which, he argues, are far greater than the jobs available to them if they want to use their learning directly in the world of work. Lyotard seems to be suggesting that higher education can provide a 'warehousing' of young people who can be statistically counted as unemployed because what they are learning will not result in employment. This is an argument which is more often deployed against training schemes for young unemployed people and suggests that optimising the efficiency of the system may well involve sustaining educational opportunities which do not necessarily have employment outcomes. However, it could be argued that these areas need to be brought more securely under the arm of performativity to produce more efficient outcomes. Moves in Britain to articulate the competences that students of the humanities and social sciences gain through their studies in higher education (see UDACE 1991) suggest this might be the direction in which certain countries are heading.

In examining higher education, Lyotard takes a somewhat stereotypical view of the student body in the sense that he sees them only as young people. However, many in higher education are mature students and this needs to be recognised as older adults, with their different cultural histories, may well enter higher learning with vestiges of the grand narratives intact. Nor is this beyond the scope of some young people either. Further, the reinvigorated grand narrative of emancipation, which we discussed in the last chapter, might inform the position of certain teachers. So, while Lyotard's position is suggestive, it needs cautious assessment.

Lyotard identifies another dimension to improving the performance of the system. This is the increasing role of continuing education, not only in higher education but elsewhere in the education system as well. In recent years, there has been a general move in the older industrialised countries to recognise that in a rapidly changing world initial education does not provide individuals with a sufficient repertoire of skills to last them a lifetime. In our daily lives, we are increasingly faced with the complexity of the world, a complexity which bears on our sensibilities.

To encompass certain dimensions of this complexity, notions of 'lifelong learning' and the 'learning society' have risen to a higher position on the agendas of opinion formers and policy-makers. Transmission of knowledge *en bloc* to young people is seen to be in need of replacement by an *a la carte* menu of continuing education from which adults choose according to their circumstances and requirements. Once again, however, for Lyotard efficiency is dominant and these developments are primarily tailored to changing job requirements by which economic competitiveness and social cohesion are to be sustained and performance improved. The purpose of continuing education for adults is therefore that of 'improving their skills and chances of promotion, but also to help them acquire information, languages, and language games allowing them both to widen their occupational horizons and to articulate their technical and ethical experience' (*PMC:* 49). We can therefore expect to see the burgeoning of continuing education, and particularly continuing vocational education and continuing professional education, given the requirements of the system for greater efficiency. This is already producing tensions for adult educators operating within a grand narrative of emancipation.

However, there is a contrast between the range of opportunities for continuing education made available to the professional and technical 'elite' and for other sectors of the workforce. While educators may operate within a grand narrative of emancipation, focusing attention on education for those who are 'disadvantaged' within the social system, performativity as a criterion applied to any sector of education, but particularly continuing education, removes questions of justice from the debate. Thus, noticeable shifts have taken place in British government policies from making the most of all of society's human resources when demographic downturn and economic upturn was in progress in the late 1980s, to a more circumspect view of equal opportunities in the period of recession and high unemployment in the early 1990s. Performativity would seem to require the constant possibility for continuing education for the elite, but not necessarily for other groups, thereby perpetuating differences, if not injustices, depending upon the language game one is moving within. Equal opportunities is contingent and not integral to technical efficiency.

Overall, therefore, higher education as an embodiment of the modern grand narratives is increasingly subject to forms of accountability, in which its own efficiency and its optimising of performance functional to the social system come under scrutiny. As knowledge stops being an end in itself 'its transmission is no longer the exclusive responsibility of scholars and students' (*PMC:* 50). In itself, this is not necessarily an unattractive idea as the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself has not provided the basis for emancipation or the speculative unity of knowledge by which the practices of higher education have traditionally been legitimised. However, we would argue, with Lyotard, that the forms of accountability linked to the

performance of the system are resulting in limits being set on the educational process which narrow the range of opportunities available even while, at the same time, 'quantities of information' become more widely available. In other words, while more information is made available through educational practices, its educative role is becoming more problematic.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The performativity principle is seen as having an inexorable impact in higher education on both what is learnt and how that learning is acquired. In this situation, Lyotard views teachers as increasingly replaced by machines. Rather than the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, the latter will have access to learning packages which they will work through themselves.

This is a form of learning associated with open learning and distance education, in which discrete packages of learning are made available to students through various media, including, increasingly, the medium of information technology, which they study on an individual basis and at times and places of their own choosing. The content of what is to be learnt is conveyed through technology. However, it remains the case that students still need to be taught the processes of learning (Murphy, 1988). Thus, Lyotard (*PMC:* 51) argues that 'elementary training in informatics and especially telematics, should be a basic requirement in universities'. This is both to enable students to use information technology, to learn computer languages, and also to be able to make decisions about which packages can provide the answers to the questions addressed. The role of the teacher is not to convey content but to guide students to relevant learning packages and provide them with the skills to learn successfully through this method. In other words, learning to learn becomes a major prerequisite of higher education, with the advantage in these games of learning lying 'with the player who has knowledge and can obtain information' (*PMC:* 51). Here, then, we again see notions which are more usually associated with 'empowering' forms of student-centred learning being constructed as a means of enhancing the performativity of the social system.

While Lyotard's argument is restricted to higher education, it is clear that many of these processes are impacting upon other parts of the school and post-school world. Computer suites and learning resource centres are increasingly part of many schools and post-school college settings. They are also an important part of much continuing education provided in the workplace.

Lyotard's position, therefore, provides a cogent challenge to any attempt–and there are many–to legitimise open and distance learning by way of the grand narrative of emancipation. Within the latter, as Fox (1989:275) says, open and distance learning 'represents "freedom to learn", "learner-

centredness" and "open access"'. By contrast, legitimised by performativity, open and distance learning 'is valued for its pragmatic effects in enhancing the efficiency of the social machine as managed by the decision makers' (1989:275). While for Lyotard it is clear that the latter is replacing the former, Fox argues that the situation is still one of competing visions, in which the grand narrative of emancipation still holds sway among the many educationalists involved in open and distance learning. He argues that such educationalists need to become more aware of Lyotard's position and that of the postmodernists more generally, as a way of 'distinguishing which legitimating rhetoric is the "Trojan Horse" for what hidden political agenda and what, anyway, are the merits of the case' (1989:267). This is a position we would endorse.

The fragmentation of knowledge into packages or modules of quantities of information, in turn requires some process of integration on the part of the student. No longer required to work to satisfactorily link knowledge to the grand narratives of emancipation or of speculative unity, performance is enhanced through relationships built around brainstorming. As well as the performance criterion, almost nostalgically, 'sounding the knell of the Professor' (*PMC:* 53), it also introduces different processes of learning, in which grounding in a single discipline is replaced by 'inter-disciplinarity', new moves and new games. Changes in knowledge under the influence of technology thereby result in organisational changes that produce different language games and which enable students to more readily participate in them.

INVENTION, RESISTANCE AND LITTLE NARRATIVES

Having analysed the impact of performativity on the practices of (higher) education, it might be thought that the postmodern moment is that of the monolithic technical efficiency of the social system to which all else is subject. Opposition to this position would seem to largely involve a return to the modern grand narratives, particularly that of the emancipation of humanity, which, according to Lyotard, the very development of the postmodern condition has rendered obsolete.

For Lyotard, however, resistance takes a different form, one grounded in an acceptance of the postmodern condition, the rejection of grand narratives, but also in the rejection of the criterion of performativity. He argues that while performativity is applied to the development and transmission of knowledge, the knowledge produced actually undermines it. Returning to the question of science, therefore, Lyotard (*PMC:* 54) argues that 'the pragmatics of postmodern scientific knowledge *per se* has little affinity with the quest for performativity'. Thus, while science may be subjected to the criterion of performativity, postmodern science demands a constant process of invention, in which legitimation is not sought from outside science, in the non-scientific

discourse of philosophy for instance, but within it. In postmodern science therefore efficiency is a contingent factor, while questions of legitimacy are integral to it since it constantly questions the rules of its own language games in precisely the same way as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, Lyotard argues that the cultural avant-garde constantly questions the rules governing art and aesthetics. Thus, 'the striking feature of postmodern scientific knowledge is that the discourse on the rules that govern it is (explicitly) immanent to it' (*PMC:* 54). In other words, it is a social practice, rather than the producer of transcendental 'truth'. Postmodern science does not function within the ambit of modern science legitimised by a grand narrative, nor is it necessarily subject to efficiency but instead operates within its own language games, reflexively questioning the rules of its own game as it develops. Rather than metanarratives providing science with an epic purpose, therefore, postmodern science produces its own 'little narratives' *(petits récits)* of self-legitimation and is constantly reinventing itself. Thus, 'the little narrative…remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention' (*PMC:* 60) in science and elsewhere.

This is capable of generating a non-teleological resistance to performativity, because the very development of postmodern science undermines the notion of system within which the optimising of performance operates. To optimise the performance of a system requires that all the variables affecting the system can be known and calculated and therefore predicted. There is measurability and predictability to systems. Yet it is precisely such systems, including the social totality and science in its postmodern moment, which are being dissolved in the postmodern proliferation of language games. Thus, unlike modern science's self-conception of its ability to predict as a dimension of its desire for control and mastery, postmodern science is neither able to predict or control. Postmodern science is therefore unable to master its objects, undermining modern science's desire for mastery. To develop this postion Lyotard draws on the fields of quantum mechanics and sub-atomic physics. Continuous and predictable development to optimise efficiency cannot be sustained, because the more postmodern science finds out, the more it seems that systems cannot exist as predictable entities. The assumptions of modern positivist science are thereby undermined along with narratives which rely for their legitimacy on some notion of the performance of totalised systems.

Having spent much of his time providing a critique of modern science as the grounds for the development of truth and liberty, and on the possibility of the criteria of scientific knowledge being applied to other language games, Lyotard somewhat contradictorily then deploys the findings of postmodern science to legitimise his own position in opposition to performativity. In a sense, therefore, he uses the findings of postmodern science to undermine a certain view of the social formation, in precisely the way it has also been used

to support the development of the social system in particular directions. As Benhabib comments, he therefore ends up,

> privileging one practice of knowledge to serve as a criterion over others. This criterion is provided by the model of a discontinous, fractured, and self-destabilizing epistemology, said to characterise [post]modern mathematical and natural science. We may have woken from the Faustian dream but not from the scientific one!
>
> (Benhabib 1990:121)

Lyotard appears to repeat the confusion of different forms of language game, a criticism he deploys against the use of the grand narratives of modern science. The difference seems to lie in the fact that grand narratives provide modern science with a goal, while postmodern science provides a questioning stance, without an overall purpose, in support of little narratives:

> Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as un-decidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterised by incomplete information, 'fracta', catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorising its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectiflable, and paradoxical. It is producing not the known, but the unknown.
>
> (*PMC:* 60)

The postmodern moment therefore involves a competition between the performativity of systems and the unpredictability of science, in which the narratives of the latter suggest the impossiblity of the former, even as it is deployed by decision-makers as grounds for decision-making, including 'reforms' of education.

In opposition to performativity, Lyotard therefore seems to suggest we should stick with little narratives legitimised by paralogy, the process of invention—contrasted with innovation which is 'under the command of the system, or at least used by it to improve its efficiency' (*PMC:* 61). Paralogy is 'a move (the importance of which is often not recognised until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge' (*PMC:* 61). Invention within a language game and innovation to improve efficiency can cross over each other. Postmodern science is therefore legitimised not as a process which produces knowledge, but as a constant and localised questioning of knowledge.

Rather than the totalising and totalitarian consequences he argues to be the consequences of the desire for mastery of systems in modern science, postmodern science provides the model for 'an "open system" where a statement becomes relevant if it generates ideas, that is, if it generates other statements and other game rules' (*PMC:* 64). Postmodern science would seem to provide the basis for 'the imaginative development of knowledge' (*PMC:*

64). While this has no end, it nonetheless seems clear that generating ideas is far more preferable, and indeed more scientifically 'correct', than putting the 'certainties' of science to use in enhancing the performance of the social system. However, there can be no straight translation of the language game of postmodern science to the social formation, as the latter more complexly is 'a monster formed by the interweaving of various networks of heteromorphous classes of utterances (denotative, prescriptive, performative, technical, evaluative, etc.)' (*PMC:* 65) from which it is not possible to gain a social consensus over the rules of each of the language games within it. Opposing Habermas, therefore, Lyotard argues that 'consensus' like the 'social totality' is outmoded. Justice can only be built around the recognition of the variety that exists in language games and consensus is localised to players of particular language games. Resistance is therefore not about establishing an alternative which is doomed to failure but about recognising ambiguity and working at a local and localised level to gain consensus in language games whose rules are constantly under question.

Rather than being the instrument for controlling society under the performativity principle therefore, Lyotard suggests an alternative possibility arising from the computerisation of society. If the public are given free access to memory and data banks, this would supply them 'with the information they usually lack for making knowledgeable decisions' (*PMC:* 67) where the stakes are knowledge itself. In this way Lyotard sees himself as providing an 'outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown' (*PMC:* 67). As Barron (1992:36) comments 'the strategy proposed, then, is one of perpetual struggle to voice ideas, opinions or injustices systematically excluded from the universe of phrases: a continuous incitement to speech'.

In putting forward this position, it is hardly surprising that Lyotard's arguments have been used to articulate the need for spaces, including educational spaces for the 'speech', the little narratives, of excluded others so that the latter are enabled to find and articulate their 'voices'. Localised strategies which provoke questions rather than certainties provide the basis for resistance. In other words, the postmodern condition is still one to be struggled over and within, and not to be accepted as a natural phenomenon.

STORIES, COUNTER-STORIES AND ARGUMENT

Any assessment of Lyotard's position would demand more than we are capable of here (see Benjamin 1992). Benhabib (1990) has argued that Lyotard ignores the important distinctions between the natural, social and human sciences. Connor (1989:36) also questions Lyotard's analysis of science, particularly as the 'postmodern' sciences he draws upon are not necessarily tolerant of unpredictability but remain aimed 'towards the construction of unifying theories to account for the operations of all the

forces known in nature'. Others (e.g. Squires 1993) have suggested that the rejection of all grand narratives itself removes the possibilities for resistance. Rejection should be focused only on essentialist and mono-causal grand narratives. Such criticisms undoubtedly have force.

The range, complexity and suggestiveness of Lyotard's writing is beyond doubt. In this way he exemplifies the questioning and inventiveness which is his preferred stance in the postmodern moment, a stance which we have argued is required by it. In posing new questions in different ways, he asks us to be reflexive in relation to our own assumptions and the language games we move within. For education, this is particularly important, as the grand narratives of the modern which have governed much of the thinking about the purposes and practices of education since the Enlightenment, are undermined by developments which they themselves have spawned. Do we necessarily progress towards emancipation through the development of modern science? Does education contribute to that progressive development? Is knowledge to be pursued for its own sake? Is there a structure to knowledge which represents the truth? Do such questions 'make sense'? There is a very real sense in which Lyotard, like Foucault, Derrida and Lacan, challenges us to rethink the nature of knowledge and the function of education, at a time when the grand narratives are under challenge by postmodern developments and the linked but not identical criterion of performativity.

In this situation it is important to bear in mind that the modern and postmodern are not a simple historical division, where the postmodern condition replaces that of the modern. Certainly, the postmodern moment can be seen as an outcome of historical change, but the metanarratives of modernity continue. Recurrence rather than progress is the key to the relationship between them. Thus, in the world of education there are competing positions and narratives on education as a whole and within different sectors of education. While Lyotard has his own preferred position which rejects grand narratives and opposes performativity in favour of the constant inventiveness of little narratives, it is only one stance within the contemporary world. Given the proliferation of language games he himself describes as part of the postmodern condition, it is therefore somewhat problematic that he espouses a particular position as one which could encompass a 'respect for justice'. His narrative of little narratives would seem to offer a grand narrative of the postmodern condition, in which support can be drawn from postmodern science rather than in contradiction to modern science. This is a paradox Lyotard (1992:40) himself recognises: 'one is then tempted to give credence to a grand narrative of the decline of the grand narratives'. This is a position for which he has been criticised by others (e.g. Sarup 1993).

We have also emphasised Lyotard's position as one of resistance, opposition and inventiveness without end and without a specific goal. The

politics of this position has been much discussed. Sarup (1993), echoing Habermas, views Lyotard as a neo-conservative. However, others, while recognising the lack of clarity as to political affiliations arising from his texts, argue that 'Lyotard's postmodernism implies the need for a renewal and further development of the modern democratic tradition…. A pluralistic and self-organizing civil society independent of the state–a type of anti-politics–is an indispensable condition of democracy' (Keane 1992:91, 94).

Benhabib (1990:123) argues that his position is politically ambiguous and ends up articulating 'a neoliberal interest group pluralism plus the democratization of computers'. In a situation of the increased performativity demanded of the system to optimise efficiency and power, little narratives may seem to provide a somewhat powerless resistance. It would seem to leave us playing at the local margins of power while power remains concentrated at the economic and political centre. It is on such grounds that many feminists have criticised Lyotard's work (e.g. Fraser and Nicholson 1988), as the recognition of differences expressed through little narratives do not do away with the need for grand narratives to articulate commonalities. Rather, commonalities and differences need to be recognised as articulated simultaneously in language games. Thus, the simplifications offered by Lyotard, a criticism of *The Postmodern Condition* which he himself accepted (Lyotard 1992:29) can be said to limit the possibilities for resistance that he obviously considers so vital.

We also need to recognise that while performativity may be inconsistent with the 'findings' of postmodern science this does not necessarily stop it from being powerful. As books on management with titles such as *Thriving on Chaos* (Peters 1987) demonstrate, performativity is capable of incorporating the attitude of a constant questioning within its own frames of reference. Assaults on performativity in the name of 'progress', 'truth' or 'liberty' may no longer 'capture our hearts and minds', due to the questionable results of such assaults in the history of the twentieth century. However, there is a question about the extent to which localised invention leaves us subject to the 'realism' of the capitalist social system rather than providing frameworks for resistance. The desire to resist, to relinquish power may be postmodern, but resistance implies a power against which one is resisting, and relinquishing power to the powerful may have even more disastrous consequences than have occurred as a consequence of modern science's desire for mastery. It is for these reasons that the dialogue continues between feminists, critical pedagogues and postmodern writers such as Lyotard–a dialogue on the respective strengths and weaknesses of contributions to the on-going questioning, understanding and, in certain cases, purposive changing of the contemporary world.

10

THE CULTIVATION OF
DESIRE

EXPERIENCE AND THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

What has emerged so far in this text is a certain commonality of themes that inform the texts of the postmodern moment. At the same time, the ambiguous and uncertain significance of these texts has been highlighted. For many it is that very uncertainty, that very openness, which is the problem with the postmodern. We however feel that, although it has its dangers, openness and provisionality provide reconfigurative opportunities in relation to emancipation and oppression. Postmodern texts challenge the ordered view of history as progress towards emancipation through the development of reason and scientific knowledge. They have foregrounded the desires at work within this narrative, particularly the desire for mastery but also the way in which pleasurable desires are organised as part of regimes of governmentality (see Rojek 1993).

The postmodern moment has developed in a period of great economic and social change where a neo-conservative economic liberalism has been dominantly seen as the solution to the problems of capitalism and where there has been a growth of movements for social change such as those around issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and the environment. The success of new right neo-conservatism has been paralleled by a growth in the new middle classes. Feminism challenges patriarchal social formations and knowledge. In capitalism, the emphasis has shifted from production to consumption and the new middle classes are characterised by a concern for 'lifestyle'. In crude terms, and we would stress this is not an either/or situation, what we have witnessed is a reconfiguration in emphasis from the modern, the rational, the male, the producer, and the mass market, to the postmodern, desire, the marginalised, the consumer and market niches. We would argue that postmodern texts provide the space to foreground the latter.

The postmodern moment is co-implicated within these complex shifts and changes and within it there are different strands of influence. It is to an

exploration of these that we turn in the first part of this chapter. Having done that, we intend to focus our discussion on experiential learning which we take to be a nexus of educational theory and practice for the postmodern moment. The shifts outlined above have been taking place in parallel with an increasing emphasis on 'experience' within educational settings, both at the level of teaching and of research. While this in itself is significant, there are two further reasons for our stance here. First, experience provides a ready territory for the foregrounding of desire. In evoking experience a site is more readily provided for the cultivation of desire. Second, this site has an open and ambiguous significance within which many different and competing meanings can be articulated.

Experience is most often accorded importance as the 'authentic' representation and voice of the individual. Experiential learning has been constructed as a progressive and emancipatory movement within education, a shift away from the learning of canons of knowledge which, it is argued, marginalise the majority of learners by not giving value to their voices and thereby demotivating them. It is constructed as the 'progressive' humanistic dimension of educational theory and practice. We want to suggest that experiental learning is far more complex and contradictory than this. Dominantly, experience has been conceptualised within a liberal humanist paradigm, in which autonomous subjects are constructed as the source of meaning in their own lives. As we have seen in previous chapters, post-structuralist forms of analysis have deconstructed this conception to bring out the ways in which the liberal humanist subject is constructed as pre-social or asocial. As a consequence, the emphasis is now on subjects who are part of the world where there are already meanings, where signifying systems already exist (Kosmidou and Usher 1992, Usher 1992). The meanings through which experience is interpreted, being so dependent on signifying structures and processes, thus have a fluidity which leaves experience constantly open to reassessment. Thus, while experiential learning can be argued as signifying a move from the modern to the postmodern in the theory and practice of education, a movement from the application of reason to the cultivation of desire–the engagement of the whole person with their conscious and unconscious feelings, wants and needs rather than simply the reified, rational part of the person–unconditional support for its emancipatory potential is, however, more problematic.

LATE CAPITALISM AND THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

The relationship between the postmodern and capitalism has been explored largely in terms of the significance of consumption. Harvey (1991) argues that the 'condition of postmodernity' is the continuation of the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, as

formulated by Marx. In this sense, the postmodern is a surface but nonetheless important shift in capitalism rather than a fundamental break.

The argument is that the economic crises of the 1970s resulted from the continued commitment of liberal democratic regimes to the welfare state, at a time when productivity and profitability had begun to decline. This led capital to seek out new sites for investment thus reducing the tax base of those regimes. Support for the welfare state, therefore, could only be sustained by printing money, itself resulting in inflation. The project of the new right, exemplified by the policies of the Thatcher government in the UK and the Reagan administration in the USA during the 1980s, was an attempt to resolve this contradiction. Capitalism in the older industrialised countries was to be made to work again by cutting back on support for the public sector, reducing labour costs by undermining the power of organised labour and introducing attractive tax regimes. Economic success was redefined in terms of achieving low inflation, low taxation, increased productivity and profitability, rather than the more welfare-statist notions of full employment, public services and the 'safety net'. These fundamental economic changes have accompanying postmodern cultural features.

Here, the postmodern is also used to refer not so much to the structural changes in capitalism, but to the related growth of the 'consumer society'. Although the notion of consumer culture can be traced back to the nineteenth century, it has become a theme for more general exploration in the period of post-Second World War economic growth and prosperity. This is particularly true since the 1960s. It is this link between the postmodern and consumer culture, the celebration of consumption and the consumer which, for some, makes postmodernism appear more strongly as the 'cultural logic' of a new stage of capitalism (Jameson 1984). In this sense, the significance of the postmodern lies in the emphasis on consumption and novelty, that is, the desire to consume beyond any notion of material need. Here 'experience' collapses into consumption, with an increased emphasis on the consumer as the primary focus of analysis.

Consumption in the postmodern moment plays a dual role in relation to this 'late capitalist' stage of development. In emphasising consumption, it both reflects and encourages the growth of consumer culture which itself provides a continuing market for new goods and services. We are encouraged to consume more and more often, with a consequent shift in emphasis towards constant innovation in the production of goods and services. This in turn is associated with neo- and post-Fordist shifts in the organisation of the economy and the workplace (Murray 1989). Market niching replaces mass production. As such, the continued profitability of capitalist organisations is reproduced, as long as they are able to keep up with the levels and types of innovation unleashed and expressed in the desires of the consumer. The 'educating' of these desires is a key role for the culture industry of which

education can be now seen to be a part. Furthermore, the very idea and existence of such an 'industry' is itself significantly postmodern.

An important consequence of this shift in emphasis to consumption and the consumer in the postmodern moment is that it undermines the identity, solidarity and sense of certainty and place which had been built up around centres of production. In other words, the primacy of class relations is effaced as is the focus on control of the means of production as central to social and economic change. One effect of this has been to engender spaces for those marginalised by discourses of class to more effectively articulate their concerns. Alternative oppositional practices have both contributed to the critique of class relations and developed as an outcome of the displacement of class and the foregrounding of the consumer. Here, power is not expressed in opposition to capitalism by a socio-economic class, but by individual consumers expressing their choices through the market in consuming the products of capitalism to construct certain lifestyles. Within these contradictions, the roles and effects of oppositional positions remain highly ambiguous and uncertain in a constant struggle of movement between resistance and incorporation.

Lash (1990) has argued that postmodernism has a contradictory relationship with capitalism. On the one hand, as the latter's relations and practices come into question through the undermining of its authority, postmodernism can have emancipatory outcomes. However, a common culture of consumerism with shared values and aspirations across class divisions, means that there is less need for direct authority and other forms of overt social control. When we become self-disciplined consumers seduction replaces repression (Bauman 1992)—although repression does not disappear. Here, the emphasis on consumption and the celebration of consumer culture seems entirely consistent with the free market views of the new right. The market is seen as the mechanism that can most successfully supply the demands of the consumer, and once the desires of the latter have been unleashed there is no limit to the demands made. In addition, as the state steps back from its direct role in supplying goods and services, it is up to the market to supply what consumers want and, even more important, the desires of individual consumers are continually fired to ensure the continued prosperity of the economy. Thus, in the 1980s, we witnessed consumer rather than investment led 'recoveries' from recession and a shift from manufacturing to services in the economy. In the recession of the early 1990s, the British government bemoaned the lack of consumer confidence and expenditure in an attempt to blame consumers for the continuing recession. Pavarotti singing in Hyde Park, London, is therefore a classic example of the postmodern and the market working hand in hand. Opera is taken out of the opera house and made available to millions of consumers and millions of dollars are made from

the sales of television rights, compact discs and videos. It is both 'democratic' and very profitable!

THE NEW MIDDLE CLASSES AND THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

Another significant argument is that the postmodern moment has been associated with the rise of what has been termed the 'new middle classes'. This is the social group who experienced, and benefited from, the greater opportunities for higher education present since the 1960s and have gone on to work in the expanded and expanding realm of cultural production and services. The new middle classes are the artists, academics, educators, critics, architects, advertising agents, media workers, etc., who have carried the 'youth culture' and counter-cultural informality and hedonism of the 1960s and 1970s into their adult lives. The demands for new and changing experiences by this social group are now serviced by constant consumption, through which an oppositional stance to the norms of the established order are maintained. In this scenario, the new middle classes have taken up and domesticated the tradition of the bohemian and the avant-garde. They have made it part of their own lives and lifestyles and attempted to extend it to the social formation as a whole.

Writing of French society at the end of the 1970s, Bourdieu (1989:370–1) sums up many of the traits of the new middle classes. He argues that their lifestyle is based on rejecting everything which is 'finite, definite, final'. They are concerned to escape 'competitions, hierarchies and classifications and, above all, scholastic classifications, hierarchies of knowledge, theoretical abstractions or technical competences'. They see themselves as fighting against taboos and 'complexes' and apply a 'cultivated disposition to not-yet-legitimate culture (cinema, strip cartoons, the underground), to everyday life (street art), the personal sphere (sexuality, cosmetics, child-rearing, leisure) and the existential (the relation to nature, love, death)'.

The sensibility of the new middle classes is marked by a tension between the oppositional and popular, by the breaking down of the barriers of high and popular culture, art and everyday life, and an avant-gardism of constant innovation and playing with identity. It is the sensibility of the postmodern moment that distinguishes them from the rest of the social formation. Mediated through consumption in the marketplace, innovation is most available to those with the greatest monetary and cultural capital. In this respect the 'radicalism' of the 1960s and 1970s counter-culture can take on a different light.

Featherstone argues that the key to the pursuit of the new middle class and their postmodern sensibility is the adoption of a learning mode towards life. It is this social group which is the bearer of explicit notions of 'lifelong learning', 'learning through life', 'learning is for life'. It is integral to their

sensibility, the values, assumptions and aspirations of their cultural stance. Opposition to the established order is gained by giving priority to experience as the mediator through which meaning is constructed, and the demand for new experiences and new meanings. In this, experience and learning feed each other. Experience is gained through novelty and consumption informed by learning which, in turn, results in new types of experience. If the distinction between art and everyday life is broken down, so are the boundaries within which learning is held to take place. The new middle classes are concerned with identity and take a learning stance towards life as a means of expressing their identity; they learn to consume in particular ways to become an identity. The culture industry both serves this learning—educating the consumer—and makes it necessary—we are bombarded with images we are asked to experientially identify with and which we must learn to interpret.

In this sense, it is possible to see the articulation of postmodern positions as the ideological support for the project of the new middle classes. Drawing on Gramsci's notion of 'organic intellectuals', the members of the educated elite which espouse the self-identity, values and interests of a class, Bauman argues that:

> (t)he concept of 'postmodernity' makes sense in so far as it stands for this 'coming out' of the intellectuals. The other way of putting it is to say that the concept of 'postmodernity' connotes the new self-awareness of the 'intellectuals'—this part of the educated elite which has specialized in elaborating principles, setting standards, formulating social tasks and criteria of their success or failure.
>
> (Bauman 1992:94)

There is a need for caution concerning the extent to which these attitudes and practices have extended beyond the new middle classes into other parts of the social formation. We also need to consider the congruence of this supposedly emancipatory position, with its threat to established positions and attribution of value and status to previously devalued areas, with the rise of the new right and with governments propounding free market economic policies and authoritarian social attitudes. This latter development would appear to be inconsistent with postmodern trends, yet it could be seen as a neo-conservative response to them, reflecting tensions and contradictions within the thinking and policy of these governments. Many of their members and supporters are themselves members of the new middle classes, products of the period and cultural milieu associated with the postmodern moment.

The congruence between certain trends within the postmodern and the ascendancy of neo-conservative governments lies in the emphasis on consumption and consumer culture and an attack on the cultural

establishment–seen from the perspective of the new right as 'progressive' and from that of the new middle classes as 'traditional'. While there is much about the postmodern that is inconsistent with new right attitudes and practices, for instance its celebration of diversity of lifestyles and its emphasis on transgression, they seem able to occupy the same space with little difficulty. In general, and we would wish to stress this at present, the values and aspirations of the new middle classes have something in common with a politics of the 'new' left and of 'new' social movements. Similarly, the new right elements of conservatism are associated generally with the traditional petit bourgeoisie. Hostile towards the working class and socialism and resentful of the snobbishness and patronage they experience from the bourgeois capitalist class and landed aristocracy, the petit bourgeoisie have been central in formulating and supporting the projects of the new right and establishing agendas for neo-conservative governments. The petit bourgeoisie are generally critical of a cultural establishment from which they feel excluded, and seeing themselves as capable of 'making it' on their own tend to be hostile towards education. At some danger of simplification, it is possible nonetheless to see this hostility manifested in the withdrawal of financial support from galleries, museums and the like by neo-conservative governments and the desire to make culture, like everything else, commodified and submissive to market discipline. In this sense, cultural value is reduced to market value with the consumption of culture resting in the ability to pay. This combination of financial capability and cultural sensibility is most likely to be found among members of the new middle classes.

The sociology of the postmodern, therefore, identifies sections of the new middle classes, the cultural producers and disseminators, as attempting to generalise and domesticate the bohemian, avant-garde oppositional counter-culture traditionally associated with artists and intellectuals to themselves, their lives and the social formations they are part of and influence: 'the advocates of post-modernity have constructed themselves, through their fluent appropriation of television and the arts, as educators of their audience' (Field 1991:103). This is as true in the realm of education, as it is elsewhere although it tends to be implicit rather than explicit. Few educators would consciously construct themselves as postmodern but it may well be the case that more and more they are practising within the postmodern without fully recognising this.

FEMINISM AND THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

The troubled or 'uneasy' relationship between feminism and postmodernism has been touched on earlier but we return to it with more explicit reference to education in the postmodern. By focusing on feminism, we may be said to be ignoring wider gender issues and particularly, the issue of masculinities (see

Brittan 1989, Segal 1990). We do not underestimate the importance of this issue, but because 'men's studies' have arisen largely as a response to the challenges of feminism rather than from any integral interest in or recognition of the power men have as men, we feel that feminism has more significance in relation to the debates we are engaged in here.

The women's movement has challenged the oppression of women in many fields and a variety of ways. As we have seen, it has both made use of the spaces offered by the postmodern moment for the articulation of a range of critiques against that oppression and in so doing contributed to the very questioning and decentring which is seen as characteristic of the postmodern. Feminists have argued that the subject as constituted in modern discourse is a gendered subject in which the masculine is privileged over the feminine. The subject encompasses the human subject and knowledge which is privileged within the hierarchies of education. In this sense, the modern project of education may in its very nature be argued to be a significant contribution to the inequalities confronted by women.

At the level of the human subject, for instance, Gilligan has argued that the notion of the healthy personality and 'normal' human development embedded in psychological discourses has a male gender-specific basis. 'Normal' development aims towards autonomy, independence and separateness, goals which are linked more specifically to the gender identity of masculinity. The psychological development of feminine identity does not depend upon separation from the mother as a condition for individuation in the same way as it does for the male child. Therefore separation is not an essential feature for the development of the 'normal' woman as it is for the 'normal' man:

> For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since the separation from the other is essential for the development of masculinity.... The quality of embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationships which characterizes women's lives in contrast to men's, however, becomes not only a descriptive difference but also a developmental liability when the milestone of childhood and adolescent development in the psychological literature are markers of increasing separation. Women's failure to separate then becomes by definition a failure to develop.
>
> (Gilligan, quoted in Tennant 1988:60–1)

The psychological constitution of the human subject with specific gender identities is therefore in conflict with the 'norm' of the healthy personality, leaving women in an endless catch-22. On the one hand, in not developing in line with norms women are immediately constructed as inadequate; their differences turned into deficits. On the other, in attempting to develop in line

with those norms, they can also be constructed as failures, because they have abandoned the feminine ways in which they are expected to act. While influential, Gilligan's work has been criticised for providing an essentialist account of the construction of gender identity—which as we have seen many feminist writers are unhappy with and as a consequence have turned to more postmodernist theorisations which problematise essentialism.

From a different perspective, Walkerdine (1989) has also argued that within the theories and practices of education there are embedded gender assumptions which systematically oppress women, with similar contradictory consequences to those we have outlined. In her view, the Enlightenment project embedded in modern education of primacy in the development of the rational self and rationality, reflects masculine values and identity: The "thinking" subject was male; the female provided both the biological prop to procreation and to servicing the possibility of "man"' (Walkerdine 1989:269). The development of the rational subject has been embedded in modern educational practices from which women were and are excluded on the grounds they could be 'swayed' by emotions which undermine the capacity for rational thought.

We can see here a number of strategies operating to deploy and regulate a regime of gender identities, to develop rational masculinity over and above emotional femininity. In this sense, the very attribution of culture over nature can be said to involve gender distinctions with a regime of the feminine constructed around the natural and emotional and the masculine constructed around the cultural and rational. The Enlightenment can therefore be critiqued as an essentially masculine project. Nor has the recognition of women's ability to reason overcome these divisions. 'Women, taken also to possess the capacity to reason, were allowed to enter the competition. If they had enough ability…it is still up to women to prove themselves equal to men' (Walkerdine 1989:270). Walkerdine's argument is that even when women do achieve educationally, it is grounded in some conception of women having to work harder then men. In other words, women's performance is devalued. Thus, a woman performing well in a caring area may be given limited value because caring is constructed as involving the development of the feeling subject and is therefore considered more 'natural' to them. Meanwhile, women performing well in an area such as engineering may be given limited value because it is not what is expected of them: 'The struggle to perform academically and to perform as feminine must seem at times impossible' (Walkerdine 1989:277).

It may hardly be surprising in the light of the above that much attention in feminist pedagogy has been given over to the importance of experiential learning and the recognition of feelings as an important dimension of educational theory, practice and development. In this sense, unless the human subject is gendered, diversity recognised as central to human development, and the primacy of reason in educational development

questioned, the oppression of women will continue. Feminism in the contemporary era has contributed to that process and it is precisely the consequent fragmentation and decentring which is associated with the postmodern moment.

These moves have not been homogeneous, nor without controversy. The political and theoretical challenges of feminism have themselves fragmented, particularly around the questions of ethnicity, sexuality, the role of men in feminism and the issue of masculinity. The gendered subject has itself become the subject of further decentring and fragmentation:

> Having exposed the 'masculinity' of humanism in the name of feminine difference, one must surely go on, by the same logic, to expose the generalizing and abstract (and quasi-humanist) appeal to feminine difference in the name of the plurality of concrete differences between women…. The way, then, lies open to an extreme particularism in which all pretensions to speak (quasi-humanistically) in general for this or that grouping, or to offer an abstract and representative discourse on behalf of such putative groups, must give way to a hyper-individualism.
>
> (Soper 1990:234)

The emancipatory potential of feminism under the impact of the postmodern and contributing to it has been questioned in the light of the continuation of gender inequalities and the relative failure to change these through active political struggle: 'One is bound to feel that feminism as theory has pulled the rug from under feminism as polities' (Soper 1990:234). The arrival of 'post-feminism' has raised issues about the consequences of the notion of the postmodern subject which feminism has helped to construct:

> The idea of the malleability of personal identity is both a source of hope and an occasion for despair. Hope, because it means that change is always possible; despair because it implies that a belief in the real, true, authentic self is a fanciful indulgence.
>
> (Tennant 1988:64)

How far the postmodern has contributed to the continuation of despair and oppression rather than hope and emancipation, or is in the process of reconfiguring the contradictions of emancipation and oppression, is an ambiguity present in any discussion of the postmodern.

As we suggested, feminists have also questioned the silence on the issue of gender among many of the key texts contributing to the postmodern moment and the contribution of feminism to that moment (e.g. Morris 1988). It is felt that this leads to 'postmodern' resistance failing to articulate with the actual practices of oppositional groups, with negative consequences for

emancipatory outcomes. While we have some sympathy with this position, it does however, seem to assume a reified notion of emancipation beyond the ambiguities and contradictions within which we feel such notions have to be constantly explored and questioned.

THE POSTMODERN AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

It is clear from the above that no single narrative can encompass the totality of the postmodern moment and postmodern texts would refute the possibility of such mastery. Understanding is fraught with ambiguity and contradiction, as it becomes clear that the range of positions to be occupied within a single space are many and varied and that the nature of the space is constantly contested. We would argue that the desire to produce a unitary view, an example of the logocentrism discussed in previous chapters, is itself an effect of the project of modernity and its need for a transcendent 'neutral' vantage point. By contrast, what we have been highlighting so far in this chapter is the way in which the very fragmentation and decentring espoused in postmodern texts is mirrored in the conditions of and for the postmodern moment.

We now turn to the difficult question of how these differences can be seen to be articulated in the theory and practice of education. We want to argue that central to understanding contemporary economic, social and educational changes is the increased legitimacy given to conceptions of 'experiential learning' and the cultivation of desire as a condition of and for the postmodern. Previously, it has been argued that the modern project of education is to do with the cultivation of reason and autonomy as the condition of and for an economic and social progress built upon the cumulative growth of a scientific understanding of the world and its associated technical rationality. What we wish to suggest is that in the postmodern moment the 'educational' is recast as the cultivation of desire through experience(s) as a condition of and a response to the economic and social fragmentation initiated by the uncertainties of scientific and foundational knowledge, the limits of technical rationality and the consequent failings of the modern project. In this context, experiential learning both as a theory and as a set of practices provides a nexus for understanding the shift from the cultivation of teleological and grounded reason to the cultivation of open-ended and unsuppressable desire; in other words, from the modern to the postmodern. This cultivation is both a condition for and an outcome of the contradictory strands within the postmodern discussed so far–late capitalism, the growth of the new right, the emergence of the new middle classes, and movements for social change such as feminism and anti-racism. It is to an exploration of that nexus we now turn.

Much has been written about experiential learning (e.g. Boud *et al.* 1985, 1993, Boud and Griffin 1987, Kolb 1984, Weil and McGill 1990). It has

become a particularly accepted part of adult learning theory and practice. Virtually a dominant discourse, it has gained wide support in the last decade or so, corresponding to, although not actually directly linked with, the growing interest in the postmodern. The assessment and accreditation of prior experiential learning, the use of experience as a resource for learners, experiential learning cycles—all these are now part of the terrain of learning. The focus on and valuing of experiential learning is rightly celebrated, particularly as a gain for adult learners, in both giving value to the learning that takes place outside of formally structured education and training opportunities and in the cultivation of difference in the diverse interpretations of the lifeworlds that people articulate. There is an acceptance within experiential learning of the investment of meaning, of desire, in the particular stances people adopt.

The tendency in most of the writing on experiential learning has been to focus on three main topics: first, arguments for the importance of experiential learning as a valid form of learning alongside others; second, the exploration of how people learn from experience; third, prescriptions on how experiential learning can be best facilitated. The debates have therefore been largely normative, i.e. arguing whether or not experiential learning is a 'good' thing, or mechanical, i.e. how does it occur and how can it be improved. Little has been said about why it has become an important discourse at this particular point in time (see Usher 1992).

Theories of experiential learning are not new. As Kolb (1984) has demonstrated, the essential ingredients of the notion can be found in the earlier works of Dewey and Piaget, among others. These ideas influenced and informed the notion of child-centred education in schooling during the 1960s and 1970s. However, while the practices they engendered have come under attack from new right organisations and governments for supposedly reinforcing and failing to overcome the 'underachievement' of many children in schools resulting in falling 'standards', the theory and practice of experiential learning has gained in importance particularly in the post-school sector of education.

This is inevitably a simplification, but a useful one, as it outlines what appears to be a contradiction in educational policy and practice. However, by exploring why experiential learning has gained in importance, we want to suggest that the notion of experiential learning, like the postmodern, itself offers a space where the conflicting assumptions, values and strategies of certain elements of the new right, the new middle classes and feminists can engage in the never-ending struggle to construct a 'common sense' of the world. It is a struggle which involves first, establishing experiential learning as the legitimate ground for education and then contesting particular conceptions of it.

There are two aspects to the link between the postmodern and notions of experiential learning that we wish to explore, both of which have been

indicated in the previous sections. The first is the way in which experiential learning can be said to sit comfortably within the postmodern moment; experiential learning as a crucial component of postmodern culture and sensibility. The second aspect is the importance given to experiential learning in the 1980s with the ascendancy of elements of the new middle classes to positions of cultural and educational prominence and new right governments to positions of power. The two are obviously inter-related.

The postmodern moment may not be a new historical epoch, but it reflects and puts forward a set of values based on overcoming distinctions between high and popular culture, art and everyday life, reality and appearance. With the engendering of heterogeneity through the overwhelming of the social with information and images, a single, transcendental, rational, 'true' explanation of the world becomes impossible to find. As Fox (1993:7) puts it: 'reality has been replaced with simulation, rationality by multi-vocality, monolithic organisation by fragmentation, theory by play'. The universality assumed of certain forms of discourse and the notion of social progress is rendered problematic.

The universal rationality, knowledge and truth of modernity are brought into question, as the property of an elite establishment working to maintain its power. Taken to its logical extreme, there is no global, universal knowledge, only local, particular knowledges. The 'disinterested' producer of knowledge is no more. In the postmodern moment we are all producers of knowledges, but through participation and immersion not detachment:

> The postmodern perspective reveals the world as composed of an indefinite number of meaning-generating agencies, all relatively self-sustained and autonomous, all subject to their own respective logics and armed with their own facilities of truth-validation. Their relative superiority may be argued solely, if at all, in pragmatic and overtly self-referential mode, with no claim to supracommunal authority.
>
> (Bauman 1992:35)

These themes should have resonances for anyone familiar with discourses of experiential learning. First, the theme of the relativity of knowledge, where a greater equality of status is accorded to knowledges generated from a wide number of sources, including everyday life. In this, experience is not a pre-given but constantly constructed and reconstructed. The diversity of experience is recognised and its articulation asserted. Associated with this is the changing role of educational practitioners. Rather than being the source/ producers of knowledge and taste, they become the facilitators of knowledge, helping to engender and interpret the knowledges and tastes produced by others:

> The role (of the intellectual) shifts from one of confident educator, who possesses confidence in his [sic] judgement of taste and the need to mould society in terms of it, to that of the commentator, who represents and decodes the minutiae of cultural objects and traditions without judging them or hierarchizing them.
>
> (Featherstone 1991:140)

Bauman (1992), as we saw earlier, has termed this shift as one from legislator to interpreter.

Second, there is the attack on the canon of high culture and its privileged position within education and training with, correspondingly, a valuation of learning derived from popular and mass culture, including everyday life. Third, there is the shift from the discursive (the word) to the figural (the image), immersion rather than detached appreciation. This can be seen in the shift away from book learning to an emphasis on experience as a resource for learning, on learning by doing, and the use of audio-visual aids in programmes of learning. Meaning is constructed through experience rather than simply being conveyed by it.

Finally, in giving value to the experiential and the learning engaged in as part of everyday life, the claim is being made that in essence there is no single point of judgement for what is 'right' or 'wrong' learning; all will depend on a person's situatedness in the social formation and the sense a person brings to and takes from it (see Kosmidou and Usher 1992), their con-text, pre-text and sub-text (Edwards and Usher 1993). There is no single ordered view of the world to be imparted, but multiple 'realities' to be constructed through an already interpreted experience. Our knowledge and understanding of history and the present are relative and partial, dependent upon the meanings we take and which regulate and construct our experience.

It is the consumer (the learner) rather than the producer (the educator) who is articulated as having most power in this situation and given greater importance. Rather than being seen as a problem or a source of error and confusion, the fluidity of the world and its constantly changing images are identified as pleasurable, as something to be enjoyed. The cultivation of desire and informality is the aim, an aim to be pursued without a sense of guilt. We learn to be ludic and learn through being ludic. Most importantly, the experiential is given primacy over the rational. As Baudrillard (1983) argues, when the 'real' is no longer what it used to be, there is a greater emphasis on lived experience. To be postmodern is to experience the world in a way and to an extent in which it has not been experienced previously, by participation and immersion in its images. It is to recognise that experience is not a direct representation of the world, but is itself a construct, the outcome of discursive practices (see Usher 1992).

Notions of experiential learning can therefore be said to both reflect and position us towards the postmodern, expressing at the level of educational

theory and practice what is also true for us in the wider social formation. It may not be coincidental that the focus on experience and the inability to make coherent, ordered sense of the postmodern world has been associated with the rise of the practices of guidance and counselling. This is as much the case in the educational context as well as elsewhere. These practices can be seen as ameliorative, trying to provide the coherence and meaning we cannot find by ourselves amongst the postmodern abundance and confusion with which we are faced. This is increasingly how these practices are viewed and valued in education and training wherein modularisation, credit accumulation and transfer and flexible learning provide a range of choices to which people are subjected (Cooper 1991).

However, there is another, perhaps contradictory, side to these practices. By helping people to focus on their experience, to help them give voice to their personal histories and aspirations, guidance and counselling are also part of the postmodern, assisting people to operate more effectively within the confusion. In this sense guidance and counselling can be seen as enabling a form of self-discipline, helping the individual to establish the 'controlled de-control' of the successful negotiator of the postmodern rather than succumbing to overload and breakdown: 'autonomy turns into the defining trait of postmodern agents—self-monitoring, self-reflection and self-evaluation become principal activities of the agents, indeed the mechanisms synonymical with their self-constitution' (Bauman 1992:202).

Without the cultivation of desire through experience, postmodern sensibilities would not be possible. Its ascendancy in the world of learning theory and practice has, in many ways, paralleled the importance given to postmodernism in the realms of culture generally and for very similar reasons. The 1980s in particular witnessed a burgeoning in the literature and practice of experiential learning. On the one hand, this has provided the space for a range of innovative practices and provided the theoretical underpinning for the valuing of the concerns and learning of previously marginalised groups. The postmodern, as we have already noted, has partly arisen from and provided a space for the struggles of women, minority ethnic groups, homosexuals, etc. to be recognised (see Westwood 1991). On the other hand, and at its crudest, the interest in experiential learning can also be argued to be a reflection of the rise of elements of the new middle classes to positions of prominence in the educational and cultural contexts, from which position they have been more effective in putting forward the values and attitudes which they have been the bearers of and which they themselves have developed.

Tensions and contradictions therefore lie at the heart of the postmodern moment, the foregrounding of experience and the cultivation of desire. As with the discussion of the postmodern in the early part of this chapter, we need to explore how the espoused emancipatory dimensions of the valuing of experience have cohabited and thrived at a time of neo-conservative government.

It is often the case, and indeed it can be seen as part of modernism's logocentric project, that concepts tend to be examined in terms of a search for definitions, as though they can be tightly determined. However, the desire to overcome ambiguity leads to assertions of certainty which exclude and oppress. The resolution of problems is given priority over the desire to question, even though resolutions only result in new questions. Certainty is valued over doubt. All of which can be said to be part of the modern project of the ascendancy of reason, where the excluded other is precisely the constant questioning and deconstruction that characterises the postmodern moment. Rather than tight definitions therefore, we find a constant struggle without end or resolution to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct meanings in 'making sense' of the world. In this sense, and reflexively in its own terms, the postmodern can be said to be the return of the repressed of modernity.

Concepts can more usefully be thought of as terrains which can be occupied by a number of shifting and conflicting points of view. Alliances are made and broken, new parties join the fray, others leave. A postmodern perspective itself shows that there is no single definition to be tied down which everyone, irrespective of the historical moment or space they inhabit, will agree on *ad infinitum*. Thus, at a surface level, people may appear to be agreeing in their use of concepts, but underneath there are conflicting values, assumptions and strategies at work. As with the postmodern itself, this is the case with the increased emphasis given to experiential learning in the theories and practices of education.

While we are conscious of the possible reification stemming from the use of models to schematically summarise an argument (Boud and Walker 1993), nonetheless the positions we have been exploring may usefully be charted along the dimensions of experiential learning originally put forward by Henry (1989) (Figure 10.1).

As we have said, experiential learning, like other concepts, is not something found in nature but is socially constructed and struggled over. Different groups give it their own particular meanings and construct it in their own ways. With the new middle classes, it is invested with the signification of autonomy and the search for meaning (the Personal quadrant). For the new right, with their emphasis on the vocational, the signification is adaptation to a pre-defined notion of the 'real world' and of learning that is applicable and relevant to that 'world' (the Practical quadrant). Thus both mean different things by experiential learning. For the new middle classes it means personal autonomy and development as the expression of lifestyle. For the new right it means relevance, usefulness, self-discipline and market effectiveness. However, despite these differences in meaning, there are also common elements. First, experiential learning is a necessary aspect of a consumer-oriented socio-economic order which both the new middle class and the new right support albeit for different reasons. Second, it is a means

THE LEARNER

Autonomy

Transformative

NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Personal

NEW MIDDLE CLASSES

LEARNING *Application* —————————+————————— *Meaning* **LEARNING**

Practical

NEW RIGHT

Exploratory

Adaptation

THE LEARNER
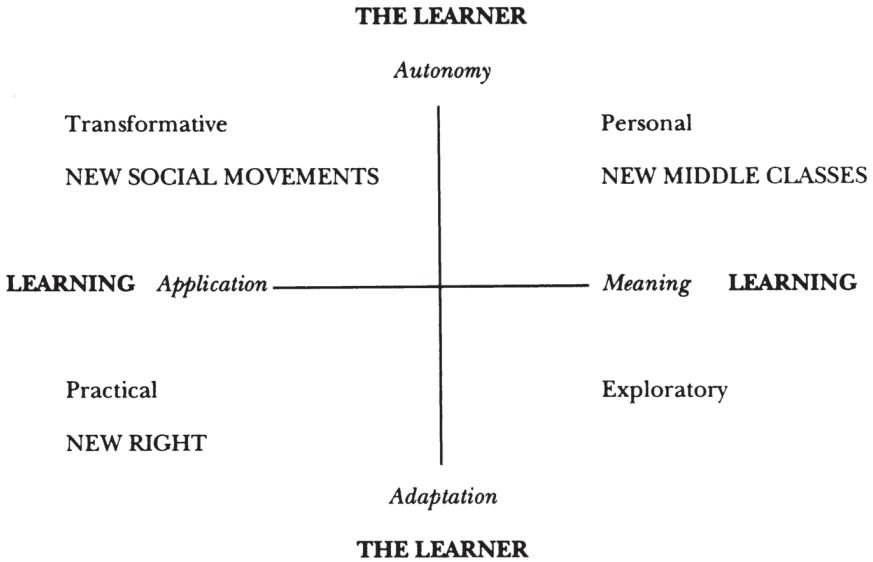
Figure 10.1 Experiential learning in the postmodern

by which the cultural establishment (including aspects of education) can be resisted and replaced. For the new middle class, the cultural establishment and the education system is 'stuffy', oppressive—generally, not progressive *enough*. For the vocationalist new right, they are undisciplined, unaccountable and divorced from the 'real world'—in other words, *too* progressive and 'unworldly'.

The limits of such models in providing interpretive frameworks is demonstrated in the fact that we have not charted many other, including feminist, perspectives within it. This is largely because we feel these do not fit simply within a single quadrant, but rather cross constantly between what we have termed the Transformative and the Exploratory quadrants. Thus, the search for meaning within a pre-defined 'real world' centres on producing transformations of self in the service of greater autonomy but without necessarily seeking to change the 'world'. Within new social movements and perhaps also feminism, there is a project of challenge and transformation of self and society where autonomy is created (and recreated) through application (struggle) within specific social formations. It is within these quadrants that we would wish to situate the dimension of postmodern ludic resistance, as challenge is often offered in 'playful' ways, such as the tying of ribbons to the fences of nuclear bases, and where an oppositional stance is 'fun' despite its 'serious' intent.

However, as we have seen above, whether this transformative notion of experiential learning is capable of sustaining the challenge rather than being

incorporated remains ambiguous. The Exploratory quadrant can just as easily become the site of confessional practices. In many ways, we would see the notion of autonomy as itself already subsumed in the general discourse of modernity. Whilst there may not be a completely shared commitment to experiental learning as part of a consumer-oriented society, feminist notions of the importance of experience also present a challenge to the cultural establishment. Thus the practices associated with experiential learning, such as the accreditation of prior learning, learning contracts, learning by doing, are themselves capable of multiple significance and cannot be said to inherently support the perspectives of particular social groups—although they do increasingly appear to be a central feature of contemporary and, often oppressive, educational practices.

Neo-conservative governments, the new middle classes and oppositional forces struggling for equality and against oppression have therefore all felt able to support initiatives based on the validity of experiential learning. As Ball (1990c) has pointed out, a strange alliance indeed. The accreditation of prior learning, work-based learning, learner-centred curriculum frameworks, encouragement for the autonomous learner—all embody, recognise and give expression to the validity of experiential learning. Within this general support there are different and contradictory forces at work. For many, experiential learning is one of the means of breaking down the barriers to and within education. By valuing experience and its potential as a resource for learning, people are enabled to value themselves more fully, challenge the barriers erected by traditional education practices and raise their critical awareness of the operation of power in the social formation. The focus on experience gives people a 'voice' they do not otherwise have in the practices of 'traditional' education.

In relation to the new right and neo-conservative governments, we would suggest that a consistency in governmental policies and practices in relation to experiential learning can be discerned. We have and are still undergoing major and rapid economic and social change with cyclical, temporary unemployment apparently giving way to structural, on-going unemployment. Flexible specialisation is resulting in core and periphery workforces with the growth of an 'underclass' (Galbraith 1992, Harvey 1991). The certainties of economic growth and full employment which underpinned and fuelled the post-war period have given way to uncertainty and a loss of confidence in governments and markets to effectively 'manage' the economy. This seems to be a significant characteristic of postmodernity. Uncertainty and the breakdown of established patterns of work and life lead to tensions and the possibility of increasing deviance, delinquency and disorder. The role of government in 'managing' this process in some way in order to avoid greater instability remains integral and unchanged. One obvious way in which this can be done is through law and order. Another is through the education system.

Governments' attitudes toward education are therefore governed by a desire to (re)establish (self-) discipline among learners, in order that they become and remain law-abiding citizens–even if poor, unemployed, homeless. Initial schooling is regarded as now being little more than 'play', with too much emphasis being given to opening children to diverse experiences and self-expression. Self-expression results, it is argued, in 'bolshiness' rather than self-discipline. This is dealt with by governments taking more control of what goes on in compulsory schooling, for instance, by the introduction of a national curriculum, regular tests and exams, cutting back on the importance of assessed course work, increasing class sizes and re-introduction of whole-class teaching approaches.

In the post-compulsory sector things are different. Students are largely there by choice. However, the need for (self-)discipline continues and this is where experiential learning comes in as a useful component of the new right's strategy. Rather than taking greater control of what takes place in the post-school arenas, the government divests itself of control; directly, by giving more power to employers, indirectly, by encouraging opportunities for people to learn outside of education and training institutions and to have that learning assessed and accredited outside the education system. Having socialised children into (self-)disciplined behaviour, youth and adults are educated and trained into and by the (self-)discipline of labour. In other words, experiential learning is largely circumscribed by employers' needs for particular kinds of labour and consumers. Experiential learning unsettles the established order, but this can only go so far in order that the limits of the social order are maintained. Thus the importance of assessment and accreditation procedures in valuing only certain forms of experience and learning rather than others. In other words, the turn to experience is a means of by-passing experienced practitioners and negating the power of their professional judgement. The regulation of experience is placed outside the control of practitioners, and placed instead in centrally formulated anticipated outcomes e.g. competences and SATs of learning. In this way, as we suggested in our earlier discussion of competence-based education, experiential learning is opened and closed in the same moment.

Support for experiential learning brings together different wings of conservatism. It combines the anti-education culture, and particularly hostility to the 'progressive' practices of teachers, lecturers and tutors, with a more socially authoritarian desire to assert control over the outcomes of experience. In this way, the power of the consumer and the market is asserted over that of the producer and the education system, thereby transforming experience into a commodity to be exchanged for credit towards qualifications (see Usher 1989a, 1992).

We have suggested that experiential learning is central to the theory and practice of education in the postmodern moment. However, as we have seen, it is also inherently ambivalent. It can neither be thought of as inherently

emancipatory nor inherently oppressive. Rather, experiential learning has both an emancipatory and an oppressive potential and these are always in tension with each other. This tension can be and is exploited, with different groups emphasising one dimension over another in relation to their own interests. Yet there is never a final 'victory' of the emancipatory over the oppressive or vice versa. Tension, contradiction and ambiguity prevail as that which is submerged remains present as a kind of 'grit in the machine', as a kind of return of the repressed.

Even as we argue for the centrality of experiential learning to the postmodern moment, we cannot escape its ambiguities and contradictions. Experiential learning can be deployed as a strategy within a teleology of disciplines and discipline (see Usher 1993b) to contain and domesticate the cultivation of desire underpinning its adoption. Alternatively, it can be deployed as a nexus for the continued questioning of and resistance to the forms of power which situate us as subjects. As such, experiential learning can be seen as both a more effective means of disciplining the whole subject rather than simply the reasoning part of the subject and a strategy to subvert the dominance of an oppressive reason. In this sense, while the postmodern moment re-engages the silenced 'other' of desire, we have, since it is a complex and changing construct, to be cautious that we do not reify desire itself.

Much of the above is necessarily of a very general nature and is open to challenge. Our intention has been to get away from an educational discourse which constructs experiential learning in logocentric terms as a 'natural' characteristic of the individual learner (see Usher 1993a). Instead, we have tried to locate experiential learning in its context by showing how a number of disparate groups—new middle classes, new right governments, feminists—are able to articulate their cultural assumptions and strategies within the contestable and ambiguous terrain it offers. By locating it in its context, we can begin to discern why a language or discourse (pre-text) of experiential learning has been both an effect and a condition of these developments. We can also begin to examine the implication of experiential learning with power (its sub-text).

Experiential learning is no longer a purely educational issue—least of all is it any longer just an approach to teaching. The support for experiential learning has gained ground as part of the condition for and outcome of the postmodern moment. In educational theory and practice, the cultivation of desire through experience therefore plays a critical role in the development of the postmodern but, as with the struggle over the content of reason within the modern, there is a struggle over the meaning and significance of the experience to be cultivated in relation to the postmodern, with different groups contesting the terrain of 'experience'. Aligned with and central to the contemporary struggle is the reconfiguration of emancipation and oppression in the postmodern moment. Experience is foregrounded in the postmodern

challenge to the metaphysics and epistemology of modernity and is a central terrain for the playing out of disruption, resistance and desire over order, mastery and reason.

Yet experiential learning is fast becoming a central object in a powerful and oppressive discourse. Such are the ambiguities of the postmodern within which educational practitioners must work.

11

CATCHING THE (LAST) POST

And now the end is near. However, before drawing a curtain over this particular text, it becomes necessary to write a closing chapter—a task which presents us with a problem. Final chapters are normally conceived as a set of conclusions, summarising the lines of argument developed earlier and putting forward propositions for the future. For educationalists struggling with the implications of the postmodern moment, it would be understandable to follow Lenin and ask: what is to be done?

However, we do not feel it appropriate to answer in the direct way which is implied by the question. Certainly we do not feel able to answer the question fully. The postmodern critique of grand narratives renders 'blueprints' for change problematic. If universalist explanations are thrown into doubt then so too are universalist prescriptions for action. Thus, far from offering certain reassuring closures as conclusions, the very task we face is how to cope with, operate within and challenge the openness, uncertainties and diversities of the postmodern moment. To offer conclusions would therefore be internally inconsistent in a text of this sort, dealing as it does with the 'messages' of the postmodern moment. We therefore continue to offer certain observations and resonances, rather than firm conclusions, which will almost certainly not be shared by everyone. However, it is precisely the diversity, the range of differences and the openness of the meaning of discourses that we seek to be part of and to encourage readers to participate in and perhaps even enjoy. Even we, as authors, have differences and disagreements, which are both given expression in and excluded from this text. This final chapter is therefore not so much a finality, a bringing down of the curtain, an ending, but instead an opening, a raising of the curtain. A refusal of totalising explanations must necessarily involve a refusal of totalising conclusions.

The writers and texts we have examined in previous chapters share a common characteristic of wanting to question some of the fundamental

assumptions upon which the dominant modern 'Western' Enlightenment view of the world has been based:

> All propose that the way we speak and write reflect the structures of power in our society. All share the focus on language as a productive, constitutive force as opposed to views of language as reflective, representative of some reality capturable through conceptual adequation.
>
> (Lather 1989:12)

Epistemologically, the postmodern moment signifies a paradigm shift:

> Whether in analytic philosophy, contemporary hermeneutics, or French poststructuralism, the paradigm of language has replaced the paradigm of consciousness. The shift has meant that the focus is no longer on the epistemic subject nor the private contents of its consciousness but on the public signifying activities of a collection of subjects.
>
> (Benhabib 1990:112)

However, this paradigm is not properly a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense since the most significant characteristic of those located within it is that they recognise their location. As a consequence, language is reconfigured as *inscription* and the effects of this, both in terms of emancipation and oppression, are problematised. The self-conscious unified subject of humanism is dispersed into a network of signifying practices thereby making identity itself the site of struggle. Subjects can only understand themselves and the world of 'things' through their immersion and participation in the world of signs. In this sense, the postmodern moment foregrounds the politics of identity, where subjectivity is

> both socially produced in language, at conscious and unconscious levels, and a site of struggle and potential change… This focus on the fundamentally relational nature of identity results in the historically constituted and shifting self versus the static and essentialized self inherent in the concept of the free and self-determining individual.
>
> (Lather 1989:17)

However, although located within this paradigm of language, the texts and writers we have discussed do not provide a single univocal position. They are undoubtedly part of and make a significant contribution to the postmodern moment, but there are important differences between them as well. While each writer has been placed within the new paradigm, it is important to reflect on the different theoretical positions they articulate within it. On this basis, Lacan, with a starting point in structuralism examines the 'laws' of language through which people become subjects and thus questions the

modernist assumption that the subject is the reference point of thought and action; Derrida, more clearly a post-structuralist, undermines the modern conception of reason and rationality and its associated logocentrism, and thus opens up the question of the suppression of difference in education; Foucault, in his analysis of the pervasiveness of modern disciplinary power and the effects of regimes of truth, is usually considered a post-structuralist, although he would strenuously resist categorisation; and Lyotard is perhaps more explicitly postmodernist in addressing the postmodern moment through his critique of grand narratives and examination of the performativity of contemporary knowledge and possible responses to it. These differences need emphasising otherwise there is the danger of creating a 'grand narrative' of the postmodern moment, an internally consistent totalised critique of totalisation (see Morris 1988). These are the inescapable ambiguities and contradictions of the postmodern moment where escape is sought from the desire to master the contradictions that lie at the heart of the modern project and whose failure to recognise this desire produces exclusions and oppressions.

Exclusions are also apparent in the texts we have examined here. We could have drawn upon other texts by the writers upon whom we have focused. We could have drawn upon other writers. Selection has been an inevitable part of the writing of this text, as it is with any text. Our selection has been motivated by our own desire (although hopefully not a desire for mastery!) manifested in our choice of those writers having a significant impact upon the postmodern moment and who are themselves part of that moment; writers without whom it would be difficult to engage with contemporary issues of culture, identity and knowledge.

'Engagement with' is different from 'solutions to'; and it is probably clear from what has gone before that the postmodern moment is one of questioning and critique, rather than the positing of confident alternatives. Thus, resistance to the exercise of power, the constant reconfiguration of emancipation/ oppression, are articulated in place of espousals of progress through reasoned reform or emancipation through revolution. It is the rejection of, the refusal to unquestioningly accept, these notions of progress on the grounds of their masking the continuation of forms of oppression that is an important characteristic of the postmodern moment. It also involves the recognition that power can be productive and that not all resistance to power is emancipatory, that oppression itself is multi-dimensional. Hence the significance of a reconfiguration of emancipation/oppression rather than simply attempting to keep alive the modernist discourse of progressive emancipation (Foucault 1980, Harvey 1993, Walkerdine 1990, Young 1990).

What, then, is the place of education, its role and purpose in the postmodern moment? Here, there are a number of possibilities. First, a continuation of the modern project of education and a rejection of the postmodern moment as a temporary aberration. We can see this trend

manifested in the continuing power of liberal humanist discourse and its notion of learner-centredness in the fields of vocational education and training. This ignores the postmodern critique of modernity but it could be seen as offering a form of education with some congruence for the postmodern moment insofar as opportunities, albeit limited, are provided for subjects to negotiate the complexity and uncertainty of postmodernity. Second, there could be a retreat from the postmodern moment into a form of 'cultural restorationism' (see Ball 1990c). Here the modern project is reasserted, or more accurately re-imposed, around a sense of 'shared' cultural values perceived as threatened by the consumption-orientation, uncertainty and heterodoxy of the postmodern moment. This head-on confrontation with the postmodern moment is manifested in the continued emphasis on prescribed curriculum content based on disciplinary knowledge. Third, there could be the explicit deployment of aspects of the postmodern condition in reasserting modern power relations. The conversion of knowledge into 'information' and its packaging into open and distance learning forms may in many cases support the performativity of knowledge production and dissemination. Here, education supports the reconfigured power relations of late capitalist social formations. Fourth, certain dimensions of the postmodern moment may be introduced into the theories and practices of education to reinvigorate the modern project of education. Examples here might be the emphasis on lifelong learning, the recognition and exploration of cultural difference, of educational provision for and by marginalised and oppressed groups. The reflexive recognition of the power of education may play an important role here.

While such possibilities exist already within the practices of education we also recognise the need to say something about the possible characteristics of education in the light of the socio-cultural tendencies that constitute 'postmodernity'. Here, we attempt to provide some tentative answers to the question of what the educational form might look like (with)in the postmodern. We have described one of the main characteristics of the postmodern moment as 'incredulity' towards grand narratives. The grand narratives may be far from dead but they have certainly lost much of their motivating and justificatory power. In preceding chapters, we have tried to present various ways in which this situation has been theorised and the implications for educational theory and practice of this radical change. In our discussion of Derrida, for example, we noted the significance of his work for deconstructing education's own self-understanding as a 'project'. The end of education conceived as a 'project', of education as the vehicle for realising the modernist project, is one of the main characteristics of education in the postmodern. Coming to an end as a project implies that education can no longer be understood or understand itself as an enterprise standing above history and particular cultural contexts. It can no longer be dedicated—in its various forms—to the achievement of universally applicable goals—truth,

emancipation, democracy, enlightenment, empowerment–pre-defined by the grand narratives. This 'end' has certain implications for the educational form.

First, education would be more diverse in terms of goals and processes and consequently in terms of organisational structures, curricula, methods and participants. Education would 'take its cue' from the diverse cultural contexts in which it was located rather than from universal logocentric norms. Instead of seeking to reduce everything to the 'same' it would become instead the vehicle for the celebration of diversity, a space for different voices against the one authoritative 'voice' of modernity. However, given the significant place of reflexivity in the postmodern moment the cultural context would not determine the educational form in any straightforwardly causal sense. We would envision rather a situation of co-implication, of mutual interaction.

Second, given this co-implication, the age-old question of whether education is to merely reproduce the social order or is to be the vehicle for social change could no longer be answered definitively either way. Indeed, such a discourse would have no work to do since the determinism and predictability upon which it is premised would no longer be present. Foundational knowledge, given its self-understanding that it discovers the truth of an independently existing 'reality', enshrines predictability and control at its very heart. The postmodern questioning of this enshrining means that education cannot be considered part of a predictable 'reality' and therefore can neither control nor be controlled. With this unpredictability, education could no longer readily function either as a means of reproducing society or as an instrument in large-scale social engineering. Educational sites would neither be determining nor determined. It is in this sense that education becomes limitless both in time and space, potentially escaping the epistemological, political and physical boundaries imposed on it by modernity.

Third, the loosening of foundations makes questionable educational provision as the production and dissemination of disciplinary knowledge. The latter has its place but it is no longer a dominant one. Equally, however, education does not become merely outcomes-based instrumentalism. Again, that too has its place but it would be only part of a diversity and plurality of educational offerings. This implies that any attempt to place education into a straitjacket of uniform provision, standardised curricula, technicised teaching methods, and bearer of universal 'messages' of rationality or morality would be difficult to impose.

Fourth, education in the postmodern is likely to be characterised by different levels and kinds of participation. At the risk of over-simplifying a complex situation we would want to argue that modernist education has tended to be elitist. Even in countries where mass participation has prevailed, the tendency has ultimately been to exclude rather than include. Aside from compulsory schooling, there has been a rhetoric of participation and, in some sectors of education, genuine attempts to encourage wider participation. In many cases, however, such attempts have been based upon participation in

those modern forms of education that we have critiqued. Education in the postmodern, based as it is on cultural contexts, on localised and particular knowledges, on desires and on the valuing of the experience of learning as an integral part of defining a 'lifestyle', cannot help but construct itself in a form which would better enable greater participation in a diversity of ways by culturally diverse learners.

Finally, and perhaps most important, education in the postmodern is likely to be marked both by a general decentring and a general loosening of boundaries. We have seen in earlier chapters the significance of these as markers of the postmodern and we have, for example, extensively discussed the decentring of the subject We would want to argue that co-implicated with this is the decentring of educational authority, control and provision. We see this, however, as part of a more encompassing trend that loosens and blurs boundaries and demarcations, that increasingly renders exclusions and inclusions problematic. In previous chapters, we referred to this general process as 'de-differentiation'. Its consequence is the breakdown of boundaries both within education in terms of, for example, clear demarcations between different sectors, and in terms of the relationship between education and cognate fields. There are two implications here. One is that the formally constituted field of education could no longer claim the monopoly of the 'educative' since potentially every activity in every context could claim to be educative. The other is that education ceases to be narrowly construed and becomes instead an aspect of life itself. The 'educated person' is not simply someone who has been credentialled through completing the 'rites of passage' controlled by specific educational institutions. Everyone, in different degrees and to differing extents, is an educated person. The educational is separated from the credentialled, even as educational credentials become more important in the (postmodern) economy.

These then are some of the possible characteristics of the educational form in the postmodern moment. Some are already with us, others may never come to pass. All are subject to power and the struggles for and within its matrices. Inevitably, then, what we are presenting is speculative and as such, should not be construed as the universal features of a hypothetical future. Yet such speculations do present some interesting possibilities. The possibility of a 'loosening-up' and decentring of education is one that we would generally welcome. The same would be the case for wider participation and engagement by hitherto oppressed and marginalised groups. We also recognise the dangers. We are still sufficiently modernist to hanker after education that can influence the pace and direction of social change even though we no longer feel able to think of such change as constituting pre-defined progress. There are dangers too in decentring—it is not improper to at least raise the question of whether someone, somewhere has to assume responsibility for educational provision, no matter how diverse and contextualised it may be. Furthermore, if everything becomes educative then

there is a danger that education can be seen to have no distinctive role whatsoever. Learning from experience becomes sufficient unto itself, as the state retreats from its responsibilities within modernity.

We put all this forward as lines of enquiry rather than definitive positions. As such they only reinforce for us the need to foreground the questions of the postmodern moment, as the different strands above operate in different ways and in different sectors in the world of contemporary education. In other words, diversity and uncertainty of purpose have already been built into education, education is already co-implicated in the postmodern moment. To turn away from engagement with the postmodern is therefore already to exclude certain terrains of educational theory and practice from legitimate questioning and critique. If educators are to become reflexive about their own theories and practices, they need to refuse such exclusions.

We are conscious that a position of constant questioning, of constant refusal, is not in practice an easy one to sustain because of the forms of discipline to which educators are themselves subject. In addition, the problem-solving orientation of modern social formations tends to require answers to the problems posed. We resist that demand as for us the 'answers' lie in the process of continually asking 'questions'. For some, this may sound like a reiteration of Freire's demands for problem-posing as the grounds for emancipatory pedagogy, the movement from the banking pedagogy of oppression to the conscientisation of liberation (see Freire 1978, McLaren and Leonard 1993). But such a juxtaposition would involve collapsing the discursive openness of the postmodern moment into the radical humanism of modernity. In other words, the questioning process has a different basis and its outcome is not grounded in a social ontology of humanism nor guided by some teleology of emancipation. For us, it is about reconfiguring emancipation/oppression in favour of the excluded and oppressed. In this, we need to recognise, however, that the oppressed might also become oppressors, that there is always a danger of simply replacing one totalising, oppressive discourse with another and that therefore any reconfiguration is provisional and open to question. For instance, talking of deconstructionism, Richer (1992:15) comments that it 'aims to loosen systems that otherwise, in their self-satisfaction, in their seriousness, would produce ever more totalising and totalitarian effects'. That means loosening up our sense of the purposes and practices of education and subjecting them to a more critical gaze than the project of modernity allows:

> To learn to see not only what we do but also what structures what we do, to deconstruct how ideological and institutional power play in our own practices, to recognize the partiality and open-endedness of our own efforts, all of this is to examine the discourses within which we are caught up.
>
> (Lather 1989:20)

This is not a position which would be universally supported. The most explicit attempts to engage with the postmodern moment, in relation to education, come from those who seek to hitch it to a project of reinvigorating a politics of emancipation. It is to a brief exploration of such positions that we now turn.

POSTMODERN EDUCATION/EDUCATION FOR THE POSTMODERN MOMENT

For those who desire the continuation of the modern project—both neo-conservatives and progressives—the postmodern is represented as a moment of danger. For neo-conservatives, it represents a threat to 'traditional' values and cultural norms. It is the language of their contemporary hate figure, the 'politically correct' (see Lather 1989). For progressives, including many socialists, Marxists and feminists, the postmodern undermines emancipatory goals and in its supposed nihilism, contributes to the ascendancy of neo-conservatism or is neo-conservative in itself.

While some 'progressive' elements, most notably in North America, have sought to develop positions in critical opposition to the postmodern (see Finger 1991), others have sought to integrate aspects of postmodernity in developing their views on education. This is reflected in the literature on critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy is a broad and diverse field of theory and practice drawing on aspects of the modernist perspective of the later Frankfurt School, feminism, Freirean pedagogy, postcolonial discourse as well as postmodernism to construct a radical approach to education. Its very eclecticism is therefore resonant of the postmodern moment but at the same time makes it difficult for us adequately to encompass what has itself become a contested terrain. In general, however, critical pedagogy, by discriminating between the emancipatory and neo-conservative aspects of the postmodern, has attempted to incorporate the former into a reconceptualised pedagogy that supports and furthers emancipation and a radical participatory democracy. Giroux (1988a:7) is explicit about the need for educators to 'integrate the central features of a postmodernism of resistance with the more radical elements of modernist discourse'. He and others have in recent years been prolific in developing the terrain of critical pedagogy (see for example Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991, Giroux 1992, McLaren 1991a and b, McLaren and Hammer 1989). In the process, they have put forward a number of key explanatory concepts e.g. border pedagogy and postcolonial pedagogy. While it is problematic to generalise, these positions largely argue for education, and more specifically schooling, to provide a 'voice' for those excluded others oppressed in modern social formations. The oppressed, whatever the nature of their oppression—class, gender, ethnicity, colour, sexual preference, etc.—must, it is argued, be given the opportunity to participate fully and equally,

the oppression they face being made explicit as a basis for moving to a more democratic social formation:

> For educators the modernist concern with enlightened subjects coupled with the postmodernist emphasis on diversity, contingency, and cultural pluralism, points to educating students for a type of citizenship that does not separate abstract rights from the realm of the everyday, and does not define community as the legitimating and unifying practice of a one-dimensional historical and cultural narrative.
>
> (Giroux 1988a:26)

In this sense it is the role of education to be more explicit in enabling learners to become citizens within the social formation, where the latter is recognised as diverse and pluralistic yet where power both within and across states functions to oppress and exclude certain social groups. The grand narrative of emancipation is thereby deepened within critical pedagogy to encompass the structures and experiences of oppression. In carrying out this role, educators become cultural workers and education a form of cultural politics, with emancipation and democracy deepened by a process of what Giroux terms 'border pedagogy':

> Border pedagogy is attentive to developing a democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life. It presupposes not merely an acknowledgement of the shifting borders that both undermine and reterritorialize different configurations of culture, power and knowledge. It also links the notions of schooling and the broader category of education to a more substantive struggle for a radical democracy.
>
> (Giroux 1992:28)

For critical pedagogues therefore, the principal issue is the introduction of heterogeneity and the recognition of difference into educational practices. This is not simply an espousal of liberal pluralism but an issue that the postmodern moment both requires a response to and at the same time enables. In addressing this in the educational setting, students and teachers are empowered and can struggle more effectively in and for a democratic society. In a sense therefore it can be said that the 'crisis' of the modern liberal state as reflected in its failure to provide for all its citizens, in the decline of participation in elections and disillusionment with formal politics, brings forth critical pedagogy as one response, authoritarian populism as another. Education as a form of cultural politics is therefore an attempt to reconceive and reconfigure the notion of citizenship in the postmodern

moment, where the democratisation of culture and the economy is held to be as necessary as conventional views of citizenship linked to the workings of the state and its political institutions (see Gilbert 1992). Thus modern conceptions of citizenship in which 'progress' comes about through the nation-state are displaced by a postmodern notion where the state no longer has primary responsibility for producing progress and where citizens are required to become active on their own behalf. Critical pedagogy aims to support such activity in order that the oppressions and exclusions of modernity are not reinforced. Border pedagogy therefore must

> not only call into question forms of subordination that create inequities between different groups as they live out their lives but also challenge those institutional and ideological boundaries that have historically masked their own relations of power behind complex forms of distinction and privilege.
>
> (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991:194)

Within this commitment to a radicalised democracy, educators are therefore encouraged to develop practices analagous to those most unassailable of border crossers, vampires and, of course, Count Dracula; an offer heavy with both attractions and distractions!

These boundaries are not simply within nations but between them as well, the relations between these having themselves become problematic in the process of globalisation and with increased ethnic plurality. It is in decentring the Eurocentric, imperialistic and racist discourse of modernity in response to globalisation and multiculturalism that critical pedagogues have adapted and developed the notion of postcolonial pedagogy (McLaren 1991a, 1991b, McLaren and Hammer 1989). The notion of the colonised subject living through the codes of the oppressor yet as active subjects able to formulate challenges to such oppression is a controversial one and has been used to theorise gender inequality as well as racism. However, in the process of decentring the simple binary oppositions of modernist discourse, postcolonialism has provided further grounds for the criticalist foregrounding of the shifting and complex manifestations of power in the very identity of the subject who speaks. Giving that subject 'voice' is therefore not simply a re-espousal of liberal pluralism but a complex working through of those factors by which the 'voice' is constituted. Critical pedagogy is concerned with deconstructing authoritative voices—those who speak for and on behalf of others—both at the global macro-level and at the localised micro-level—the classroom is itself a 'colonised' site.

Critical pedagogy is a powerful and attractive narrative of education which both takes account of and challenges aspects of the postmodern moment. As presented here, it is also a simplification of a variety of positions put forward by the writers mentioned. However, despite its attractiveness and similarity to aspects of our own position, it is also one with which we and

others have many points of difference. Ellsworth (1989) evaluated the problems arising from her attempt to put critical pedagogic principles into practice. Working with a group of students on a 'Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies' course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison led her to turn a critical gaze upon critical pedagogy itself. She argues that critical pedagogy:

- is still tied to the mastery and masterfulness of reason with the consequence that the role of the critical pedagogue becomes one of ensuring 'that students are given the chance to arrive logically at the "universally valid proposition" underlying the discourse of critical pedagogy–namely, that all people have a right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the democratic social contract' (Ellsworth 1989:304)–in other words, there is the danger of an agenda being established where learners are led to pre-defined goals;

- masks a reconfiguration of the imbalance of power between teacher and student in its discourse of empowerment and dialogue: 'student empowerment has been defined in the broadest possible humanist terms, and becomes a "capacity to act effectively" in a way that fails to challenge any identifiable social or political position, institution, or group' (Ellsworth 1989:307);

- does not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the complexities and effects of power underlying the notion of giving people a 'voice'. As such, it remains at an abstracted level of discourse, rather than engaging with the specifics of students' voices and strategies. Thus, silence itself may signify a strategy to cope with and/or challenge certain experiences of oppression, which educators can only work with by understanding the specifics of the situation;

- presupposes and requires:

  a classroom of participants unified on the side of the subordinated against the subordinators, sharing and trusting in an 'us-ness' against a 'them-ness'. This formula fails to confront the dynamics of subordination present among classroom participants and within classroom participants in the form of multiple and contradictory subject positions.

  (Ellsworth 1989:315)

In other words, the diversity introduced into the classroom is subsumed by the teleological goal of a radicalised democracy, thereby ignoring the way difference in the critical pedagogy sense is subject to the play of difference (and différance in the Derridean sense). As Brah (1992:140) argues 'it is evident that the concept of difference is associated with different meanings in different discourses'. It is also worth remembering Foucault's view that the recognition of difference does not necessarily result in the displacement of modern disciplinary power but rather in its further refinement.

Ellsworth's experience seems to demonstrate the requirement for a fuller post-structural understanding, in order that the very differences critical pedagogy aims to surface be worked with adequately (see also Bryson and de Castell 1993). It is important here to emphasise the post-structural analysis of the multiple and contradictory subject positions constructed through discourses, as such an analysis highlights the depths and complexities of the exercise of power in modern social formations. In co-opting certain aspects of the postmodern moment to a radicalised project of modernity, critical pedagogy seems to exclude certain dimensions of post-structuralist forms of analysis that are a key feature of the postmodern moment. The teleological certainty of the modernist goal, even in its postmodern formulation, sits uneasily with the uncertainty and provisionality of the postmodern moment. The tension between the espoused goals of democracy and emancipation and the complex workings of power and oppression runs throughout the criticalist literature.

Ellsworth was subject to a somewhat abrasive rebuttal by Giroux (1988b), repeated in Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) and McLaren (1988), for which, rightly in our view, they were in turn criticised by Lather (1991a). In many ways, the nature of the rebuttal led to substantive points surrounding Ellsworth's attempt to develop a critical pedagogic practice being somewhat pushed to the margins. Perhaps the most important point here is the view that Ellsworth constructed critical pedagogy as a straw person where its openness as a developing field was both foreclosed in a contestable set of meanings and collapsed into a teaching technique. While we have some sympathy with this criticism it nonetheless remains unclear from the criticalist texts what this field, open or otherwise, signifies for educational practice. McLaren and Hammer (1989:53) for example, claim that they 'are not not moving away from the concrete but rather towards the complexity of the concrete'. However, apart from general assertions of criticalist contributions to emancipation and democracy, and the role of educators as 'transformative intellectuals', it remains unclear how the 'complexity' of critical pedagogy is to engage with the concrete complexity of more immediate educational, social and political concerns. While there is some recognition of this issue (McLaren 1991b), its marginality remains a significant lack. The understandable desire to avoid simplistic adoption of techniques appears to have resulted in a curious silence on concrete educational practices.

Ellsworth's critical response to critical pedagogy has found support elsewhere. For instance, Peters and Marshall (1991:124–5) argue that the notion of empowerment put forward in the literature of critical pedagogy is co-implicated with liberal individualism with the consequence that 'critical pedagogy still participates in the tradition of liberatory politics which depends fundamentally on a social ontology privileging the individual as an agent of all social phenomena, signification and knowledge production'.

Thus certain conceptual investments are articulated from within the paradigm of consciousness, which the paradigm of language has subjected to critique and dispersal. Thus the espousal by critical pedagogy of the continuation of the emancipatory aspects of modernity and its rejection of some central tenets of the postmodern moment results in the undermining of its own project.

Critical pedagogy wages a struggle on two fronts—on one front, against the Marxist 'correspondence' theory of schooling and on the other, against the new right 'cultural restorationists'. It rejects the argument of the former that educational sites are both determining and determined insofar as their only function is as sites of social reproduction, responding to the needs of the capitalist economy and producing workers 'fit' to take their place within it. Equally, it rejects the attempts of the latter to impose a cultural 'oneness' of shared values and pre-defined curricula based on 'disciplinary' knowledge. The common theme in this two-pronged struggle is the need to restore a 'language of possibility'. Such a language is considered a necessary part of the reskilling of teachers, involving 'not only the understanding of the role of the school in the social order but also the possibility of counter-hegemonic sensitivities, possibilities and probabilities…' (Kanpol 1992:15). Here, critical pedagogy seeks to counter the notion that teachers are simply the helpless agents of the system and replace it with the notion of teachers as 'transformative intellectuals'. The argument is that as the language of possibility empowers teachers, so too does it empower students. Classrooms become multicultural sites for a diverse learning free of patriarchal, racist and imperialistic discourses. Thus the language of possibility becomes a 'politics of possibility' and therefore a politics of 'hope' in the possibility of forging a radical democratic society. Critical pedagogy therefore foregrounds politics and hence emancipation by interactively linking educational practices at the micro-level with political action at the macro-level.

It is very clear, even from this brief exploration, that the issues and problems raised by critical pedagogy are undoubtedly of vital significance. Certainly, they provide the most systematic commentary on and reformulation of the contemporary educational situation. To that extent, we have much sympathy with the criticalist project. On the other hand, we also believe that its critics have a case. Apart from the problematic nature of the goal of democracy and/or emancipation—the desire for such goals in the face of the different and contradictory positioning of subjects is highly questionable. Students enter education already formed in certain ways. They are already active subjects with their own desires and agendas. Thus, even assuming the emancipatory intentions of teachers, what students actually get from their learning depends on what they themselves make of their experience: how they construe meaning in relation to the structure of their prior understandings and beliefs (Whitson 1991:82).

Critical pedagogy seem to assume that its goals can be unproblematically translated into outcomes, thereby excluding from consideration the particular investments and desires of students. Possible contradictions between the desires of critical pedagogy and the desires of actual learners, including those beyond initial schooling, do not seem to be given much weight. There are other outcomes of education besides democracy, but these tend to be excluded. We would not question the sincerity of the criticalist desire for emancipation and its opposition to oppression, but what is presented is a discourse of postmodern education that at one and the same time seems both under-theorised and over-theorised: over-theorised, since it is not clear how the arguments can be translated into educational practice and under-theorised, because the modern goals of education are left hanging as totems for which it is assumed there are immanent and shared understandings. In this sense, many criticalist texts seem curiously unreflexive as they do not subject themselves to the forms of critical engagement to which they subject others. Thus, for instance, while there is a recognition of the importance of pleasure and desire in pedagogic processes, there is a paradoxical rejection of the ludic dimension of the postmodern moment, precisely the dimension which foregrounds pleasure and desire. Then again, the conceptualisation of 'resistance' whilst embracing a postmodern opening up of meaning ends up precisely closing it—which is probably what underlies Ellsworth's unease about criticalist discourse.

The suggestion that education be reformulated as a form of cultural politics aimed at the goal of a radical democratic society seems to ignore the power and inequality which critical pedagogy aims to displace. Education in most countries, or at least initial education, is a state responsibility. Given existing power inequalities and the state's role in mediating, supporting, engendering and reproducing them, it seems somewhat wishful thinking that it will support educational processes which may well undermine its own legitimacy and functioning. Of course, as we have noted earlier, this may well change. As criticalist discourse acknowledges, a radical democratic social formation entails more than elections for government and may well undermine the basis of the liberal democratic as well as other forms of modern state. But to suggest that schooling can be given over to this goal is, to say the least, over-optimistic as it stands, even given the reconfiguration of the role of the state and the nature of citizenship. Education as a form of cultural politics on this basis ignores the need for a political economy of the state without which it remains impotent to achieve the transformations desired. We have only to look at the recuperation of student protest post-1968 to witness the active role of the state, and at the importance of the economic context to recognise the limited possibilities of education defining its own role. In this sense, we feel that critical pedagogy, and the notion of border pedagogy, presupposes the very democratic social formation to which

it aspires. We would also want to argue as we did in an earlier chapter, that the postmodern moment actually involves extending the notion of education beyond schooling into lifelong learning. Critical pedagogy, with its continued focus on schools rather than the whole range of educative practices, demonstrates a major gap in its concern for a democratic society.

Giroux has argued that:

> in recent years the forays into popular culture by well-meaning artists and academics have devolved into exercises of intellectual and colonial tourism. The promise of fields like cultural studies and media studies has been undercut by their lack of specificity and contact with the constituencies under analysis…. This is particularly true when white intellectuals distance themselves from the dominant culture and whiteness by focusing on the popular culture of the 'Other' only, after spinning webs of 'clever' criticism, to return to it more intensely.
>
> (Giroux 1992:243)

To our minds, this is precisely what much critical pedagogy signifies in failing to engage fully with the concerns of the postmodern moment while itself signifying 'a recourse to theory'. Norris's comment that this is 'typically the response of any marginalised fraction of dissident intellectuals' (1990:1) might well be apposite here. This could be attributable in part to the particular reading of the postmodern moment in North America, where postmodernism as a form of critical technique has tended to be dominant (see Easthope 1991, Aronowitz 1993). Critical pedagogy has responded to this limitation, yet also seems to be trapped by it. The attempt to politicise the postmodern moment appears therefore to be at the expense of engaging with some of the fundamental challenges posed by postmodern and particularly post-structuralist analyses.

Here we would draw a contrast between critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy. The former has drawn upon aspects of the postmodern moment, particularly derived from Lyotard, the adoption of Derrida in North America and ensuing debates about and within postmodernism. The latter is marked generally by a fuller engagement with the texts of Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. In other words, there is a postmodern influence upon critical pedagogy, while there is a re-reading of pedagogy through the deployment of post-structuralist analyses within feminist pedagogy. In the end, the criticalist project is a *project*. It continues the modern project of emancipation through the adoption of certain postmodern ideas. Feminist pedagogy, on the other hand, aims to lay open the ambiguous and contradictory processes of emancipation and oppression by the deployment of post-structuralist analysis (see for example Bryson and de Castell 1993, Lather 1991b).

DISRUPTION, DESIRE AND RESISTANCE

It is for some of the above reasons that we do not believe a conclusion is either possible or desirable. Prescriptions would place us in a position of being above history and context, the possessors of a superordinate truth, able to pass judgement on the appropriateness or otherwise of particular educational responses to the postmodern moment. The readings we have offered here of particular texts and their resonances in our understanding of the purposes and practices of education are meant to enable more people to engage in the debates and struggles which influence all within the postmodern moment. Thus we do not seek to prescribe educational solutions. We do place ourselves firmly on the side of resistance but with due recognition of the productive yet oppressive role of power, and in alignment with the particular and contradictory struggles of excluded individuals and groups rather than within a teleology of democracy or emancipation (Haraway 1988). This is not something that is resolved or resolvable in specifically educational settings, but rather any and all educative settings wherever and whenever they occur in the social formation.

As the writers and 'authors' of this text, we share in the uncertainties and ambiguities of the postmodern moment. As we have seen, others have attempted to appropriate certain aspects of the postmodern for a revitalised democratic project in which education continues to play the central role allotted to it in modernity (see for example Aronowitz and Giroux 1991, Giroux 1988a, 1992, McLaren and Hammer 1989). Acts of will to assert the viability of a radical democratic practice signify a desire for utopia in which despite McLaren's (1986) views to the contrary, the means of achieving such practices remain unclear given current configurations of power. They come perilously close to a retreat into a form of certainty and closure which is seriously, and in our view convincingly, questioned by the postmodern moment. Counter-factual desires no doubt inform much action but whether such shifting territory is best formulated within a discourse of utopia, however provisional, with its closure in relation to goals, is open to question.

Unless this seems like a too ready and uncritical acceptance of the postmodern moment, we also have to recognise our own formation, and the consequent desire for mastery, within the project of modernity. This in itself may well contribute to feelings of uncertainty as our own values and ambitions come under challenge within the postmodern. It is not comfortable to turn away from the teleologies of emancipation and knowledge and the 'security' of modernity when these frame so many of our own desires. Nor is this helped by our ambiguous role as academics writing on education. As we have argued, education is a central aspect of the modern project. To be at once operating within educational institutions and writing about education, yet questioning the fundamental bases of educational theory and practice is not without its tensions. Perhaps we should resign!

As we have seen, for some, resignation, relativism and nihilism are the inevitable responses to the postmodern moment. It is from this basis that postmodern texts have been attacked for their neo-conservative consequences. As we move to the end of the twentieth century we witness a period of uncertainties–economic, political, social, cultural, ethical, epistemological, ecological. Postmodern texts, such as those examined here, contribute to that uncertainty and are themselves an expression of it. The postmodern moment is itself uncertain of its own identity and significance. Its incredulity towards the grand narratives of modernity implies an incredulity about itself.

If 'emancipation' and 'knowledge' are chimeras deployed in the exercise of an omnipresent power, what point is there in challenging dominant practices? What basis is there for such challenges? Resignation and the further withdrawal from the public into the private realm seem to offer a security apparently lacking in the postmodern moment. Thus even as the possibilities for mastery are apparently undermined by uncertainty and ambiguity, certain aspects are transferred from the public to the private domain in an attempt to re-assert feelings of control amidst uncertainty. It is in this sense that the postmodern moment and neo-conservative tendencies intersect. Yet, ironically, it is also precisely because of its nihilism that the postmodern has been attacked by neo-conservatives arguing that the relativism it promotes undermines the stability of the social order and promotes an amorality harmful to culture and ethics. The postmodern therefore destabilises both certain neo-conservative and certain progressive positions. Yet an acceptance of relativism and nihilism is not the only choice. As Lather (1989:16) argues 'fears of relativism and its seeming attendant, nihilism or Nietzschean anger, seem to me an implosion of Western, white male, class-privileged arrogance– if we cannot know everything, then we can know nothing'. The relativism of modernity needs to be distinguished from the partiality and particularity of the postmodern moment.

The postmodern, then, is criticised by both neo-conservatives and progressives and nowhere is this more the case than in its ludic manifestations, Paralleling the distinction between sense and nonsense, attempts have been made to distinguish the 'serious' and ludic aspects of the postmodern. The 'serious' aspects are equated with resistance and appropriated for their critical purchase on the postmodern moment, while the ludic are dismissed as a succumbing to the consumerism of late capitalism. To be ludic, to be playful, is constructed as inherently contributing both to the neo-conservatism of the period and the 'descent' into nihilism.

However, it is precisely the conception of inherent meaning that the postmodern moment has so convincingly questioned. The postmodern itself cannot therefore be inherently neo-conservative, nor indeed can its ludic aspects. We find arguments to the contrary unsatisfactory and wish to highlight the importance of and the possibilities offered by the ludic in

disrupting the exercise of power, whatever its intent. In a sense, therefore, we feel that being ludic should be taken 'seriously' as itself a resistant stance and that the exclusion of the ludic can only serve to mask power more effectively. We say this because the denial of the ludic is a denial of desire. It is a reaffirmation of a universal reason and a formal-computational rationality as the primary focus of discourse and practice. To be serious is to be rational and to be rational is to be serious. We are therefore firmly back within the project of modernity and the exclusions upon which that is based, including the exclusion of desire and modernity's own reflexive desire for mastery of others. In appropriating only the serious aspects of the postmodern the challenge which the postmodern can offer to the exercise of power in any of its forms is thereby undermined. Given the dominant place of a particular kind of reason in modernity and given that this can only produce, in a limited way, the desires for resistance and change necessary to oppose modern power, those who reject the ludic as such are already conceding the game to those they oppose. We would want to suggest that in revaluing the ludic, we can at least provide the opportunity for people to desire alternatives. They may not of course, and the alternatives may be heterogeneous and not ones everyone would support, but they do reach parts which modern rationality appears incapable of reach- ing. We therefore see the ludic as integral to the postmodern moment and not merely a reactionary aberration.

Thus, neo-conservatism is only one possibility in the postmodern. In questioning the limits and limitations of modernity, its oppressive consequences, it is also possible to argue that resistance is more tangible, even though it might not result in the emancipatory utopia posited by modernity. In other words, the postmodern moment can give us greater critical purchase on the situations we confront and enable us to transgress the boundaries of modernity rather than be contained within them. In the postmodern moment, resistance and transgression, rather than emancipation, signify the possibilities for challenging dominant forms of power. In Gramsci's terms, it is analogous to the war of manoeuvre rather than the war of attrition, but it is a war without guarantees and it is a reality of many wars that have to be fought on many fronts. And it is also a war without end, a constant refusal of mastery and of being mastered. It is in disrupting the exercise of power, rather than seeking to overcome it, that resistance is expressed and such resistance can take any number of forms.

The use of war as an analogy for postmodern resistance may be uncomfortable to those of us formed by a dominant discourse of liberal humanism, of the triumph of a 'benevolent' reason in the development and progress of human history. This may be particularly true as we witness the increasing manifestation of wars and civil wars grounded in notions of ethnic and religious difference—difference as a desire to exclude, to refuse to recognise 'otherness' and therefore to oppress and kill, rather than to share and respect. War is a disruption of the modern narrative and is treated as

such. It is inhuman and irrational. It breaks the boundaries of modernity. Order and reason have to be restored. Yet such disruptions are part of human history and not aberrations from it. They manifest and signify the struggles and desires of people, the conflicts that the modern project attempts to exclude and repress. They are ever present and, in a sense, the postmodern moment is about re-introducing them into the narratives of human history and thus recognising their force. It is uncomfortable and messy, but struggle and desire, of which actual wars are only one expression, are endemic, and the postmodern moment provides a perspective that takes seriously the extent to which 'reason's dream' of peace and harmony is precisely that–a dream. In this sense, using war as an analogy brings out the diverse significance of difference as a basis for oppression and emancipation in modern discourse and for a reconfiguration of emancipation/oppression within the postmodern moment.

In this sense, as Whitson suggests, the postmodern attempts to be anti-hegemonic without being counter-hegemonic:

> The essential and unique contribution of 'hegemony' is its revelation of how the program of dominant groups is advanced, not simply by excluding oppositional programs, but by locating the opposition within the total ideological and sociopolitical structure in places where the opposition may be harmless or even supporting to the structure's viability.
>
> (Whitson 1991:79)

Counter-hegemonic oppositions, such as those of critical pedagogy, are in a sense already incorporated within the interests of dominant groups. Debates about the political significance of the postmodern, the post-structural and a radicalised democratic alternative can therefore be seen as debates about their hegemonic significance.

We are therefore faced with a number of perplexing possibilities in examining education and the postmodern moment. The postmodern can be seen as an historical juncture, a cultural movement, a certain type of critique, an epistemological challenge, a turn to language. It can be constructed as neo-conservative, the retreat of intellectuals, the theoretical arm of new social movements. The heterogeneous uniting of these strands is what we have termed the 'postmodern moment'. However, it should be clear from what has gone before that we do not view this moment as an historically distinct or coherent period. While the modern project has been questioned it has not disappeared. Other forms of critique are alive and well. The postmodern thereby signifies both the uncertainties of the period and is itself a position on those uncertainties. Even that is a simplification of course, as different postmodern texts are capable of a variety of readings. As we have said, the four principal writers we have examined in this text do not provide a single

coherent postmodern view. Rather, all are influential in different ways within the postmodern moment.

Nor does the questioning of the role and purpose of education in modernity necessarily rely on a postmodern critique. Education has always been a contested arena and its dual oppressive and emancipatory significance has been the subject of constant debate. However, the disagreements about education's emancipatory possibilities have largely been contained within an assumption of the basic validity of the modern project of progress. In other words, there may have been disagreements about the means being used and the constraints being put upon the progress towards emancipation, but the modern project itself was left unquestioned. The distinctive question facing education in the postmodern moment is the oppressiveness of the humanism and rationality which legitimise educational practices. In other words, the parameters of the debate are questioned and the very possibility of education providing its espoused goals are thrown into doubt.

There are obvious dangers with this for, as we saw in the discussion of Lyotard, the supposed demise of grand narratives has resulted in and from the ascendancy of performativity in education. Managerialism, vocationalism, instrumentalism have all come to play an increasing role in educational discourse and practice. In one sense then, we could say that education is becoming more explicit about its role in servicing the requirements of the dominant power of capital and in providing an avenue for satisfying a desire to construct 'meaningful' lifestyles. However, this also has to be recognised as a far more contradictory process, as these moves are accompanied by the increasing espousal of liberal humanist notions in education. As we saw in the discussion of competence-based qualifications, the governance of bodies is in many ways becoming more oblique and yet increasingly apparent; a tension divides the positions adopted on educational theory and practice ever more seriously. Lyotard's postmodern position and Foucault's post-structuralist analysis of the modern in themselves therefore give us differing perspectives on the processes at work. The former argues that modern grand narratives of liberal humanism are defunct, while Foucault demonstrates their continuing and insidious power.

In fundamentally questioning the modern project of education, the postmodern moment does not signify a failure to engage in issues of oppression and emancipation but a reconfiguring of the way such issues are conceptualised. Oppression and emancipation are not polar opposites, the one excluding the other, as the logocentric discourse of modernity implies. As we have suggested, they are co-implicated in ever shifting patterns arising from on-going struggles. It is for this reason that resistance rather than emancipation has become the key to much postmodern discourse. Postmodern resistance is about historically situated subjects reconfiguring the complex and contradictory patterns of emancipation/oppression. Modern notions of emancipation are an 'escape from history', a denial of the

oppressions and exclusions necessary in enabling certain forms of emancipation to be expressed. In this situation, as the boundaries multiply, which side you are on becomes an ever more troubling ethical and political question.

We have attempted in this text to illustrate how the postmodern moment is already signified in educational theory and practice and the contribution postmodern analysis can make to understanding processes at work in education. We have not attempted to put forward an explicitly postmodern position on education, largely because we consider it inconsistent with the postmodern to do so; the totalisation that would be demanded in such a task would rely on too many exclusions to 'make sense'.

THE REFLEXIVE MOMENT

Finally, we turn to the status of this text. On British television there used to be an advertisement for Condor pipe tobacco, in which the smoker filled his pipe while pausing to reflect. Lighting the pipe was 'the Condor moment' This is our Condor moment. Like all tobacco advertisements in Britain, it also acts as a health warning. However, what we are pointing to here is more than reflection, with its implication of a transparent self-consciousness. This is a notion located clearly within the paradigm of consciousness which, as we suggested has been displaced by the paradigm of language. Within the postmodern moment, in the light of this paradigm, we face a more fundamental reflexive issue, that 'to recognise the importance of language is to do so within language' (Lawson 1985:9). Reflection itself therefore loses its transparency as it becomes subject to the struggle over meaning embedded in signifying practices.

This is a text about the postmodern moment. Yet it is largely written in conventional academic discourse. It is presented in the form of a reasoned set of arguments, analyses and discussions which attempt to produce some clarity in an unclear field. Given the types of texts 'read' in earlier chapters, should we not perhaps have written in a different style or adopted a different approach? These are issues over which many who write in the field of the postmodern have struggled:

> Knots and tangles in our understanding, uncertainties, interwoven metaphors, thoughts too contextualised to be widely communicable, emotional nuances, all these and more, which might manage containment in a more wrought form like poetry or narrative, are bleached out in this standard expository style…. To do more would necessitate a literary style at odds with the demands of analysis, and probably become too experimental, and therefore restricted in readership, to serve its purpose.
>
> (Middleton 1992:11–12)

This is why the text that has unfolded is about the postmodern and education and not a postmodern text about education.

It is a text, however, which is subject to the forms of analysis contained within itself. Authorial intention is inscribed in the text The 'authors' can be decentred in any examination of the text. The text can be deconstructed. It can be examined as part of a power-knowledge formation. Its position in relation to grand and little narratives can be evaluated. As we noted at the very beginning, part of the difficulty in reading Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard rests in their attempts to write in self-exemplifying ways which reflexively take account of the analysis their texts offer.

We cannot escape these dilemmas. Nor can this text. To suggest otherwise would be to accord our voices a form of transcendentalism, to give them an authority they cannot have. In writing this text within the postmodern moment we recognise that it is not 'innocent'. It is not simply a reflection of an already existing 'reality' of the postmodern moment, but has in effect created another 'reality' about that moment. Following Lather (1989:8), we are 'well aware that [we have been] not so much describing postmodernism as…inscribing, marking with words that impress [our] own investments of privilege and struggle…' on what has gone before. We hope it is one which others with an interest in education will be able to participate in and question critically. We also recognise that while we have argued against conclusions in favour of resonances, this in itself is a form of conclusion, a closure, and the resonances we offer signify a certain set of meanings. Such are the reflexive ambiguities of the postmodern moment, in which our stances, including those of the postmodern, are not 'different accounts of the same "thing", but different closures and different things' (Lawson 1985:129). Thus, like Lawson, this text itself signifies a closure:

> a place where one can be. To suggest that this is the only place to be would be laughable. As if there could be only one landscape painting, or one portrait! But this is not to say that this text is the same as all others, and of equal value. You may think that it resides in an un-satisfactory location–precarious, unclear, uncharted. Or you may think it desirable–a place where one can breathe. Do what you will with 'it'.
>
> (Lawson 1985:129)

The embers die, the curtain goes up.

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