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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CRITICAL ADULT EDUCATION IN POSTMODERN TIMES

By

DONOVAN PLUMB

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

IN

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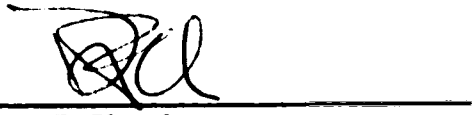

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To Carole and Jack Plumb

Abstract

This dissertation explores ways postmodernity intrudes on the cultural practices of emancipatory or critical forms of adult education. It contends that postmodernist discourses that thematize the crisis in 'representation', the commodification of culture, the compression of time and space, the fragmentation of identity, and the demise of hegemonic domination in favour of surveillance and seduction, provide the great service of raising deep doubts about critical adult education's emancipatory cultural practices. However, while postmodernist discourses offer a means to perceive nagging inadequacies with critical adult education's modernist perspectives, they do not offer a means for reconstituting critical adult education as an emancipatory enterprise capable of meeting the challenges of postmodern times. The thesis observes how only by becoming a 'more worldly,' 'radically democratic' enterprise, an enterprise that can engage in a cultural politics equal to the aporias of postmodernity but that does not reinscribe itself in a totalizing and exclusive discourse, can adult education continue in its emancipatory pursuits.

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CONTENTS

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Despite the efforts of many to repudiate it, postmodernism stands as one of the most significant theoretical developments of the late twentieth century. Its impact on contemporary thought is impressive. Rarely does a concept spur such heated debate across a range of disciplines or stimulate such rethinking of some of the most cherished ideas in contemporary society. Inflamed by a sensibility skeptical of the totalizations of modernity, postmodernism variously revises, deconstructs, or rejects the "maps" we have commonly held of our physical, social, cultural, or personal worlds. Postmodernism, to quote Frederic Jameson (1991) turns our eyes towards the "shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and the way they change" (p. ix). In its diverse manifestations it rejects reason, denies the existence of society, and posits the end of nature, of the subject, and of history. Moreover, for better or worse, it has attained the stature of a "cultural dominant ... a force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses must make their way" (p. 6).

In adult education, though, postmodernism has yet to cause a consequential stir. This is not because postmodernism is unimportant for adult education. On the contrary, I would suggest that it is of *profound* importance, particularly for that loose gathering of discourses some have identified as "critical adult education" (Collins, 1991; Griffin, 1989; Little, 1991; Welton, 1991a). My intent in this dissertation is to

explore ways the "force field" of postmodernism intrudes on the cultural practices of critical adult education. I contend that postmodernist discourses that thematize the crisis in 'representation', the commodification of culture, the compression of time and space, the fragmentation of identity, and the demise of hegemonic domination in favour of surveillance and seduction, provide the great service of raising deep doubts about critical adult education's emancipatory cultural practices. However, while postmodernist discourses offer a means to perceive nagging inadequacies with critical adult education's modernist perspectives, they do not offer a means for reconstituting critical adult education as an emancipatory enterprise capable of meeting the challenges of postmodern times. I argue that only by becoming a 'more worldly,' 'radically democratic' enterprise, an enterprise that can engage in a cultural politics equal to the aporias of postmodernity but that does not reinscribe itself in a totalizing and exclusive discourse, can adult education continue in its emancipatory pursuits.

Background of the Study

My own engagement with the issue of postmodernism began while I was working on another study, "The Significance of Jürgen Habermas for the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the Practice of Adult Education" (1989). Unsatisfied with the rationale Paulo Freire offers to ground the moral necessity of critical pedagogical practices, my intent in this study was to rework the theoretical foundations of critical adult education. I was convinced (and largely, still am) that Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action provides a better foundation for critical adult education than Freire provides. I demonstrated this by showing how a critical pedagogy founded on Habermas's theory of communicative action could easily address theoretical problems dogging Freire's theory. As I neared the end of this study, however, I began to understand (with no little disconsolation) that the

'postmodernist' critique of Habermas's theory raises deep and disturbing questions about Habermas's own efforts to provide a normative foundation for critical theory.[1] When I began to explore more fully the implications of postmodernism for critical adult education, I found that the varied discourses of postmodernism were far more emergent, diverse, and consequential than I'd ever imagined.

In the beginning, my explorations of postmodernism remained fairly close to the debate transpiring between Habermas and the post-structuralists. Jean-Françoise Lyotard (1984) contends that, despite his efforts, Habermas does not escape the thorny epistemological problems that have plagued modern thinking since the Enlightenment. According to Lyotard, Habermas cannot sustain his claim that his theory of communicative action is able to provide a firm, rational foundation for an emancipatory critical practice. Like other meta-theoreticians before him, such as Marx or Freud, Habermas offers a grand narrative of emancipation that is ultimately foundationless. My investigation of the debate that ensued from this criticism (particularly Habermas's (1987) response, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*) led me eventually to consider the writings of key post-structuralist[2] thinkers—Derrida and Foucault[3]—and to attempt to come to terms with their strong critique of Western rationality.

Very early in my research, I recognized that the post-structuralist critique of rationality presents problems for emancipatory politics. It undermines all easy and taken-for-granted explanations of domination and resistance and questions the rationality of any political agenda. To make matters more complex, as I continued to read, I discovered that postmodernist discourses extend considerably beyond the

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[1] Richard Rorty's (1985) "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" and Martin Jay's (1984) "Epilogue: The Challenge of Post-Structuralism" in *Marxism and Totality* were texts I recall being most disturbing for me.

[2] As I clarify in Chapter Two, French post-structuralism is but one of many discursive formations to advance postmodernist ideas and should not be confused as the postmodern discourse.

[3] The key texts of these thinkers are noted in Chapter Two.

philosophical pursuits of the post-structuralists. I began to encounter sociological accounts of postmodernity (those of David Harvey, 1989, and Scott Lash, 1990, to mention two of many) and realized that postmodernism also theorizes a radical change in the nature of our society that irrevocably alters the conditions in which emancipatory practices operate (Harvey and others name this new social arrangement "postmodernity").[4] The proliferation of computers and telecommunications technology, the emergence of post-Fordism and its attendant changes in production and consumption, the change in demographic and migration patterns, the rise of social movements, and the decline of Soviet Socialism all conspire to produce a dramatically different world than that of even a decade ago.

It would have been simpler, at this point in my research, to forget the more philosophical concerns of postmodernism and to forge ahead developing totalizing accounts of the emergence of postmodernity and its effects on culture. However, my exposure to proliferating feminist, anti-racist, and post-colonial discourses on postmodernism challenged me to remember that any understanding I might achieve of postmodernity is always and irrevocably perspectival.[5] Discussing the implications of postmodernism, I realized, is never easy. It means calling into

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[4] Throughout my thesis I will distinguish the various forms of the word "postmodern" as follows: *Postmodernism*, refers to those discourses that attempt to thematize a changed mood or "structure of feeling" or social configuration that we are now experiencing (these discourses are usually distinguished by their awareness that this new mood calls into question previous ways of representing reality); *Postmodernity* refers to an era or society in which this mood or social configuration is dominant. *Postmodernization* refers to the development or intrusion of this mood or social configuration. Some theorists very sensitive to the new "structure of feeling" pervading our culture contend that there is no way to represent this new social form (to do so reiterates past presumptions about being able to objectively represent reality). These theorists reject the term postmodernity. While I share the caution of these more adamant postmodernist thinkers, I believe the word "postmodernity" has important heuristic value and use it throughout my thesis. On occasion I will use the term, *postmodern times*, to indicate, not so much a social structure, but an environment or era permeated with or even obsessed by a sense of the postmodern.

[5] This challenge came, not only from my reading, but from actual encounters with feminists (my spouse is writing a thesis on third world feminist literature and postmodernism) and with people from the third world (students and faculty in my department). One must not underestimate the power of rich discursive environments to challenge unrecognized prejudices.

question whatever basis we might use for "representing" postmodernism, be it Marxist, liberal, feminist, or post-colonial. While I would not go so far as some postmodernists to argue that it is impossible to offer a positive account of anything, I do concur that there is no external perspective from which one finally can capture the essence of postmodernism or its implications for emancipatory practices. To a large extent, the meaning of postmodernism and its impact on specific contexts has to be worked through from the beginning each time. No totalizing framework can capture its contemporary significance.

Every stage of my reading and thinking about postmodernism was always with critical adult education in mind. Critical adult education is, quite simply, where my political and intellectual commitments lie. It is my constituency, it is where I work, it is where I meet my comrades. I am committed to critical adult education because I believe it is important, not so much on the basis of what it has been (its history is interesting but it has never possessed the transformative power of other social movements) or what it is. It is important because of its potential to become an important site of transformative struggle. In this regard, I share Michael Welton's (1991) insight that "collective protest is best understood as a collective learning process" (p. 40). The reason Welton and I retain an interest in Habermas is that while "[a] theory of emancipatory learning has always been *implicitly* present within the Marxian tradition; it is only with Habermas that we begin to see the 'learning theory' become *explicit* and self-conscious" (p. 22). Critical adult education is a social movement that struggles to optimize the conditions for collective learning. As a critical adult educator, my site of struggle is the struggle to learn together.

Postmodernism, to reiterate Jameson's phrase, constitutes a "force field" in which critical adult education must now make its way. On the one hand, postmodernism at its deconstructive best offers critical adult education a way to flush out the lingering essentialisms embedded in its theoretical tissue. On the other

hand, carried to its skeptical extremes, postmodernism also threatens to undermine critical adult education's emancipatory intentions. Postmodernism presents critical adult education with theoretical and practical conundrums that it must address if it hopes to continue as a meaningful emancipatory enterprise. Unfortunately, however, critical adult education is woefully ill-prepared to deal with these challenges. To date, very little has been published in critical adult education that even mentions postmodernism. In Chapter Two, I note that only a handful of articles deal with postmodernism none of which offer a very penetrating treatment of its challenges. To complicate matters , besides its recent flirtations with the ideas of critical theory and feminism, the theoretical trajectory of critical adult education has carried it away from the conceptual traditions that sustain postmodern discourses. As a number of writers have identified (Collins, 1989; Connelly, 1992; Keddie, 1980; Rubenson, 1989), adult education in general has, until recently, been resolutely psychologistic (even behaviouristic) in its orientation.[6] Even in cases where critical adult education manages to avoid the worst of the individualistic and reductionistic excesses of mainstream adult education, its usual focus on action (the imperative to make real changes presses hard in many contexts) precludes the development of theoretical discourses capable of fielding the complex issues of postmodernism. Discourses that might help identify the implications of postmodernism and work through its conundrums lie far outside critical adult education's discursive horizons. Cultural studies is barely known (this might begin to change now that John McIlroy (1990; 1991) is investigating the links between the *Worker's Education Association* and important figures in cultural studies like Raymond Williams), post-structuralism is approached only by the occasional feminist, post-Marxism has yet to be 'discovered', and radical education is largely ignored (Giroux is just too theoretical!).

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[6] Rubenson (1989) notes that the psychologism of adult education is far more pronounced in North America than it is in Europe.

The absence of postmodernism in critical adult education places me in a rather paradoxical position. On the one hand, it is easy to assert that what I intend to do is unique and, given the magnitude of postmodernism's impact in other disciplines, probably quite timely. On the other hand, though, it burdens me with the difficult task of discussing postmodernism from the ground up, as it were, building bridges to other discourses, introducing new theorists and new concepts, pointing out traps, dealing with misconceptions. While it would be nice to presume my readers share my own experience with postmodernism so that I could cut to the chase and pursue what I hold to be the key issues of postmodernism for critical adult education, I must, at the same time, yield to the pedagogical imperative of making sense of postmodernism and its challenges for people who are unfamiliar with it. Like a traveler arriving home from a far-off land, I cannot tell a small tale of a specific thing that happened to me along the way. Rather, I must tell a big story, a story that relates and situates and provides the impetus for other critical adult educators to grapple with the challenges of postmodernism.

Research Approach

It is very difficult to circumscribe a single method that I deploy in this study. For one thing, this study has multiple intents, each of which demands different strategies and approaches for its fulfillment. My political interest in arguing that postmodernism has important implications for critical adult education demands that I assert and substantiate a series of claims, sometimes with philosophical arguments, sometimes with sociological evidence, sometimes with historical synopses. My pedagogical interest in offering a document that can reveal the importance of postmodernism to critical adult educators and in doing so stimulate them to pursue its implications demands that I communicate the relevance of postmodernism for their concerns, sometimes by raising important and implicative questions,

sometimes by telling a good story, sometimes by demonstrating a hermeneutic sensitivity to other discourses. My research interest in expanding the theoretical horizons of critical adult education to render it better able to meet the challenges of postmodernism demands that I forge bridges between the discourses of critical adult education and other discourses, sometimes by discussing the pertinence of key sources; sometimes by identifying common concerns, contributors, issues, histories; sometimes by explaining tough or controversial topics or ideas.

Perhaps what is more important, postmodernism itself makes it difficult for me to circumscribe a particular method for this study. As Rosenau reports, "many post-modernists contend there are no methods, no rules of procedure to which they must conform, only the anti-rules, the 'skeptical' rigor of their post-modernism" (p. 117). Postmodernism is skeptical about the possibility to discern external, unified, and transcendental truths, no matter how rigorous the method. To quote Rosenau again, for postmodernists "the world is so complicated, chaotic, and intertwined that it would be impossible to untangle the threads that connect all these interactions or offer any definitive pronouncement about the direction or magnitude of the forces that pulse and shiver about us" (pp. 112-113). To a certain degree, I agree with this perspective. My own understanding of postmodernism, for instance, is complex and variegated, incomplete and intertwined. Why would I want to offer a clear and reasonable representation of postmodernity when no such 'reality' actually exists? Why would I want to pursue a method that underplays the heterogeneity and complexity of postmodernism's implications for critical adult education?

This does not mean, of course, that I intend to abandon all efforts to make sense, to develop plausible arguments, to seek substantial evidence to back up my claims, to present a coherent picture of critical adult education in postmodern times. I do not follow the postmodernists all the way down the road of relativism. Drawing on a wide variety of methodological approaches throughout the thesis, I endeavor to

offer a strong and convincing argument that postmodernism threatens the continued relevance of adult education's cultural practices, and that critical adult education must address its paradoxes. At the same time, however, I do not intend to give the false impression that the implications of postmodernism for critical adult education are neat and tidy. Neither I nor anyone else can provide a unified and coherent explanation of what postmodernism will eventually imply for critical adult education. This, I submit, will only be worked out discursively by critical adult educators themselves.

Overview of the Study

Through recounting the discourses of postmodernism, this study hopes to offer a clear and (if we remain resolute in face of postmodernism's full and disconcerting implications) informative perspective on the modernist essentialisms that lie at the heart of critical adult education. At the same time, the study intends to guard against the impression that postmodernism totally undercuts the emancipatory potential of critical adult education. While critical adult education can benefit from the profound and disturbing challenges of postmodernism, the time has yet arrived when critical adult education should abandon its emancipatory (even modernist) intentions. Thus, at the same time as I endeavor to foster critical adult education's engagement with the aporias of postmodernism, I also explore tentative solutions that can help adult educators begin to imagine ways they can address the conundrums of postmodernism.

While many critical adult educators have heard of postmodernism, not many have much inkling about what it is, where it came from, who propounds it, or why it is of concern to critical adult educators. Therefore, the first task of the study is to illuminate the theoretical and historical legacy of postmodernism and to explore its potential implications for critical adult education. *Chapter Two—The Challenge of*

Postmodernism,—makes a provisional foray into the landscape of postmodernism and tracks its influences into the theoretical discourses of critical adult education. This, it turns out, is no simple task. If we follow Jameson (1991) for a moment and posit that postmodernism is a "structure of feeling" (Jameson uses Raymond Williams's term here) that pervades our contemporary culture, it is unlikely, despite our efforts to pin down the concept of postmodernism and to specify its influence in critical adult education, that we will have much luck putting a tack in the toe of this shadow. But perhaps this is not such a big problem. I suspect that, whether we admit it or not, most of us are infected enough by the "structure of feeling" of postmodernism (Dick Hebdige (1988, p. 224) calls it a "malais") to accept the irresolvable indeterminacy of many concepts we once strove hard to "operationalize" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 12). Our position in the "force field" of postmodernism already provides a different sense of why we might rehearse its legacies in relation to critical adult education. Accordingly, in this chapter I do not try to stabilize, or to define, once and for all, a coherent meaning for postmodernism. Nor do I offer a precise and all inclusive analysis of its impact on the theory and practice of adult education. Rather, through examining the contested, conflicted, and contradictory discourses of postmodernism, I move to enhance that uncomfortable feeling of "ambivalence" (Zygmunt Bauman, 1991), that sense of lost moorings pervading our world, including the discourses of critical adult education. In the end, the ultimate challenge of postmodernism for critical adult education is the nagging sense that the firm boundaries that once existed for its cultural politics have diffused. The register of values, of knowledges, and of practices that expressed its emancipatory intentions can no longer comfortably contain the quirks of a postmodern world. The purpose of this second chapter is to prepare for a more exacting exploration of postmodernism's implications for critical adult education in the remainder of the thesis.

To understand the impact of postmodernism on critical adult education, it is necessary first to articulate some notion of what critical adult education actually is. Critical adult education is not a tightly bounded discursive formation. Throughout its history it has been ravaged by the diversity of its discourses. It has had not one but many histories; has embraced the work of very different people; and has encompassed a diversity of contradictory, often competing theories, methodologies, and strategies. Still, in order for my story to make sense, I must offer some conception of critical adult education. The question that arises is: What is critical adult education and how is it implicated in the project of modernity? In *Chapter Three—Critical Adult Education and the Project of Modernity*—I examine/reconstruct critical adult education's complicity with the "project of modernity." The chapter draws variously on Jürgen Habermas's (1984,1987) account of system/lifeworld relations and Gramsci's (1971) notions of hegemony/counterhegemony to position the cultural politics of critical adult education. In it, I observe how the dominant discourses of critical adult education are understandable within Gramsci's and Habermas's modernist perspectives, particularly the idea that domination in our contemporary world is effected discursively. The four following chapters narrate an array of postmodernist challenges to this modernist construct.

As a social activity that aims to foster collective learning, critical adult education emerges out of and draws upon the symbolic realm of culture. Many theorists contend that, in postmodernity, culture is no longer being produced for the purposes of ideological control but as a lucrative commodity in its own right. Moreover, the cultural elements being produced by "culture industries" are not discursive and oriented towards meaning but are figural and are oriented towards pleasure. In *Chapter Four—Declining Opportunities: Cultural Practices in Postmodernity*—I contend that, while critical adult education assumes a discursive notion of culture (cultural elements are primarily linguistic and open to rational assessment through

argumentation), cultural commodification produces cultural forms that are increasingly figural (cultural elements are images whose validity we can only indirectly discuss). I argue that domination is effected very differently in the "figural" cultural regime highlighted by postmodernism than it is in one that is "discursive." Consequently, critical adult education must think very seriously about its capacities as an emancipatory cultural practice if it is to continue to be relevant in a context where the storm of video images, sporting spectacles, and shopping malls flattens the landscape of meanings.

In *Chapter Five—Space and Time: The Dimensions of Domination and Resistance in Postmodernity*—I claim that postmodernity alters the time and space within which critical adult education carries out its cultural practices. I suggest that critical adult education no longer possesses a reliable map of how dominant social forces control space and time. The daunting task of constructing a new cognitive map of "the world space [and time] of multinational capital" (Jameson, 1991, p. 54) and imagining new ways to resist domination in this new space/time now confronts critical adult education.

In *Chapter Six—Postmodernism and Identity*—I argue that postmodernism posits notions of identity that challenge critical adult education's assumptions about collectivity, self, and agency. Modernity's autonomous, self-constituting subject that underlies the political impulses of critical adult education disintegrates in postmodern society into a fragmented and incoherent flux. At the collective level, macro-subjects like nation, class, race, or gender deteriorate into composite factions, a "diaspora" that defy reunification or representation. At the individual level, the self no longer achieves a substantial and fixed identity but dissolves instead into a confluence of desires and subjectivities, a divided, jostled, "schizoid" individual, to use Deleuze and Guattari's (1977) term. I submit that, in the end, the dispersions of postmodern culture challenge the notion of identity (inextricably bound to notions of

individual self-determination) privileged by critical adult education. Postmodernism confronts critical adult education with the task of reconstituting itself based on notions of identity that are far more open and heterogeneous than it would previously admit.

The emergence of postmodernity alters the way domination and resistance are effected in society. As Zygmunt Bauman (1992) notes, hegemony becomes less important as a means for securing compliance while surveillance and seduction (both expedited by advanced technology) take on a more important role (p. 14). Given that critical adult education constitutes itself as a counterhegemonic cultural practice, the following question arises: In what ways does postmodernism undermine the cultural politics of critical adult education? In *Chapter Seven—Domination and Resistance in Postmodern Times*—I build upon the three previous chapters and contend that critical adult education no longer possesses (perhaps never did possess) a reliable understanding of domination and resistance in contemporary society. Postmodern discourses that thematize the commodification of culture, the compression of time and space, and the fragmentation of identity call into question critical adult education's representations of domination and resistance. Going further, I discuss how postmodernism not only rejects the notion of hegemony, but questions the very presumption that it is even possible to *represent* domination and resistance. This deeper level of postmodern skepticism undermines any stable or enduring grounds for positive political action. It is also, I suggest, what makes postmodernism most devastating for critical adult education. Postmodernism denies critical adult education the comfort of a secure and universalized normative foundation for its cultural politics. The chapter concludes with the observation that, if critical adult education is to survive in postmodernity it must develop new ways to constitute itself as an emancipatory political enterprise without rewriting itself into the totalizing metanarratives of dominant institutions.

In the final chapter of the thesis—*Critical Adult Education in the Terrible Terrain*—I contend that, refracted by the discourses of postmodernism, critical adult education can no longer afford to constitute itself as a closed discursive formation. Instead, it must move to repoliticize its borders and to remain open to the many often contradictory and anomalous discourses that disclose the multifaceted dimensions of our society. At the same time, however, it must not allow the heterogeneity of these discourses or the excessive, and as many observe, irresponsible antimodernism of postmodernism to be seduced into a vertiginous and nihilistic state, where it loses its capacity to engage in meaningful and committed political action. Seeking connections and common sentiments amongst a range of theorists like Stuart Hall, Stephen White, Jürgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and a host others, I use this chapter hint at the possibilities of a radical cultural politics that permits critical adult education to balance both demands — the postmodern demand for openness to contingency and heterogeneity and the modernist demand for liberating action — in productive tension. Taking postmodernism seriously, I assert, means waking up once more in that terrible terrain which critical adult educators as *organic intellectuals* are fated to inhabit—the terrain of dialogical practice, where knowledge is never closed but where political action always involves, what Stuart Hall (1992) identifies as, "the arbitrary closure" (p. 278). Postmodernism offers critical adult education no techniques, no strategies, no final answers. In the end, its only power is the power to seduce, to dissuade, to disrupt. It is precisely this, however, that I insist recommends it most to critical adult education. Postmodernism, I show, offers the service of dispelling any hope that critical adult education can ever be restful (or that we should ever wish it so). For better or for worse, it makes clear the tension between knowing and acting of which critical adult educators are destined to bear. Taking postmodernism seriously leads critical adult educators into a very difficult political terrain where Gramsci's (1971)

dictum, "Pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will" (p. 175) must be exercised to the extreme.

Chapter Two

THE CHALLENGE OF POSTMODERNISM

It seems customary, in recent years, for authors to preface their investigations of postmodernism with what often appear as rather embarrassed accounts of why they think it still warrants attention. Perhaps one reason for this emerging ritual is that, as Scott Lash (1990) points out, "postmodernism is, patently, no longer trendy" (p. ix). Having attained the status of a household word, in-the-know academics who once were proud to be called postmodernists now want nothing to do with it. Lash comments on how editors of a few suave journals even boast that *they've* never had an issue on postmodernity (p. 1). No longer stylish, academics need other reasons for taking postmodernism seriously.[1]

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[1] The magnitude of postmodernism's impact overwhelms any attempt to provide a comprehensive listing of even its principle texts. The University of Alberta library collection (comparable to the collections of other large public universities) lists 115 monographs under the subject heading "postmodernism" 60 of which have publication dates 1990 or later. On the other hand, the UofA library lists 330 books on "adult education" of which only 15 were published after 1990. Journals have even been even more responsive in their treatment of postmodernism. Many have devoted entire issues to the topic. A representative sample providing some indication of the staying power of postmodernism includes: *Texas Law Review* 60 (March 1982); *Telos* , no. 62 (Winter 1984-85); *New German Critique*, no. 33 (Fall 1984); *International Organization* 38 (1984); *Cultural Critique*, no. 5 (Winter 1986-87);*Theory, Culture, and Society* 5 (June 1988); *Alternatives* 13 (1988); *Millennium, Journal of International Studies* 17 (1988); *International Studies Quarterly* 34 (1990). In an interesting footnote, Pauline Marie Rosenau (1992: 4) notes articles on postmodernism from a wide range of disciplines including: forestry, engineering, management, industrial organization, property development, business, systems analysis, accounting, and corporate design. While articles on postmodernism in adult education are few, postmodernism has begun to be considered in general education. In

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Aside from its flagging faddishness, there are other problems with postmodernism that may make theorists feel obliged to justify their continued interest in the term. Dick Hebdige (1988) points out that the word "postmodernism" has been bandied about so much in the past decade that its meaning is stretched and attenuated to the point that it almost useless as a clarifying concept. As Hebdige relates:

> When it becomes possible for people to describe as "postmodern" the decor of a room, the design of a building, the diagesis of a film, the construction of a record, or a "scratch" video, a television commercial, or an arts documentary, or the "intertextual" relations between them, the layout of a page in a fashion magazine or critical journal, an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the "metaphysics of presence", a general attenuation of feeling, the collective chagrin and morbid projections of a post-War generation of baby boomers confronting disillusioned middle age, the "predicament" of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism [Hebdige goes on with a dozen more examples]...then it's clear we are in the presence of a buzzword. (p. 181-182)

So nebulous is its meaning that groups left, right, and center simultaneously revel in its wonders and deride its limitations. As Henry Giroux (1992) writes, "denounced by different factions on both the left and the right, supported by an equal number of diverse progressive groups, and appropriated by interests that would renounce any claim to politics...[postmodernism] does not lend itself to the usual typologies of categories that serve to inscribe it ideologically and politically within traditional binary oppositions" (p. 50-51). Surveying in amazement the "motley crew of strange bedfellows" who "ran to embrace [postmodernism] as soon as it appeared," Fredric Jameson (1991, p. xiii) wonders why we even need such a

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particular, the journal *Educational Theory* has regularly included articles exploring selected aspects of postmodernism for education.

term. What service can possibly be served by a word that *everyone* already knows everything about (including my neighbor's fifteen year old boy!)?

Proceeding on a different tack, Marshal Berman (1982) and David Frisbey (1985) suggest that *modernist* writings of people like Baudelaire and Simmel, and artistic movements like the Dadaists and early surrealists, all of which highlight the fragmentation, the fleetingness, the insubstantiality of modern life express the basic outlook of postmodernism. Even Karl Marx (1967), with his famous claim that in capitalist modernity: "all fixed, fast-frozen relations...are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify...all that is solid melts into air" (p.83) (taken by Berman to be the title of his book), grasps the ephemerality of contemporary society long before postmodernists make their similar claims. As Lash and Friedman (1992) recount, modernism is not nearly as uniform as postmodernist accounts set it up to be. Modernist discourses can be divided amongst those that try to preserve the moral, universalizing, and utopian vision of the Enlightenment (they identify these as *high modernism* and name Habermas as the most recent executor of this estate) and those that are primarily aesthetic, popular, and carnivalesque (they distinguish these as *low modernism* and name Walter Benjamin as perhaps most representative of this discursive realm). "The meta-narratives that postmodernists decry (Marx, Freud, and even later figures like Althusser)," David Harvey (1989) suggests, "were much more open, nuanced, and sophisticated than critics admit" (p. 115). Given that *low modernism* already expresses what postmodernism claims to represent, Berman asks, why it is necessary to put a "post" on a term that was, for all intents and purposes, "post" already?

Despite these difficulties, however, many theorists still believe postmodernism is an important and useful concept. Jameson (1991), for instance, contends that it is precisely because it is so loosely specified that postmodernism can "occupy the mediatory position within the various specialized dimensions of postcontemporary

life" (p. xiv). While it may be true that postmodernism occupies a theoretical space very similar to important variants of modernism, the semantic power and multiplexity of the word "postmodernism" now far outstrips any of its older relatives. "Despite the confusion, uncertainty and intrinsic disagreement, which might well characterize postmodernity itself," writes Kuan-Hsing Chen (1987), "postmodernism does gesture an attempt to extend the limits of modernism, to challenge the 'modern' ways of seeing, living, and guiding the world of everyday life" (p. 71). Following Raymond Williams, (1976) who suggests that the more tangled and contradictory a word is, the more likely it rests at the center of significant discursive struggles, Hebdige (1988) argues in a vein similar to Jameson that "the degree of semantic complexity and overload surrounding the term 'postmodernism' at the moment signals that a significant number of people with conflicting interests and opinions feel that there is something sufficiently important at stake here to be worth struggling and arguing over" (p. 182). This may be true, Lash (1990) suggests, especially for thinkers schooled in the 1970's and 1980's, for whom "postmodernism in some form is arguably as central as Marxism was to a generation which reached intellectual maturity at the end of the 1960's" (p. 2).

> Giroux and Aronowitz (1991) regard postmodernism as important, not because it represents any particular objective phenomena, but because it has the power to stimulate productive discourses. They contend that postmodernism constitutes a significant arena for political struggle and that "its various discourses have to be examined with great care if we are to benefit politically and pedagogically from its assumptions and analyses" (p. 59). Jameson (1991) essentially agrees with this and, in the following passage, relates what he holds to be the proper attitude to adopt towards postmodernism if it is to remain a serviceable term:...every time [postmodernism] is used, we are under the obligation to rehearse [its] inner contradictions and to stage [its] representational inconsistencies and dilemmas; we have to work all that through every time around. *Postmodernism* is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience. The concept, if there is one, has to come at the end, and not at the beginning, of our discussions of it. Those are the conditions —

> the only ones, I think, that prevent the mischief of premature clarification — under which this term can productively continue to be used. (p. xxii)

In the following presentation of postmodernism I proceed in just this spirit. I hold that postmodernism is a term that continues to warrant attention, particularly in discursive formations like critical adult education where it is just beginning to be thematized. I also agree with Jameson that it is necessary in any discussion of postmodernism to avoid the "mischief of premature clarification."[2] Rather than beginning by offering a closed definition of postmodernism, I begin, as Jameson is wont to do, by identifying it simply as a "structure of feeling."[3] My approach in the following pages is to narrate the adventures of this structure of feeling as it has manifests itself in different discursive realms. In the process, I aim to accomplish several things.

For one, I hope to dispel the dubious impression that postmodernism is an objective phenomenon open to systematic and definitive analysis. By refusing to represent postmodernism as something that can be understood apart from the many discourses that endeavor to speak of it, I intend to highlight its contingent, nebulous, and incomplete nature. Postmodernism, I maintain, can only be addressed within its concrete discursive contexts (no matter how contradictory, disjointed, nuanced these contexts might be). It can never finally be circumscribed but must always be approached and understood within the broader setting of ongoing, historically located, discursive struggles.

Because I wish to avoid offering a definitive and unambiguous definition of postmodernism, however, does not imply I believe the term can mean absolutely

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[2] Huyssen (1984) also believes that it is misguided to define postmodernism. "The term 'postmodernism' itself should guard us against such an approach as it positions the phenomena as relational" (p. 10).

[3] Bo Reimer follows a similar path in his "Postmodern Structures of Feeling: Values and Lifestyles in the Postmodern Age" (1989).

anything. My second interest in the following pages is, in fact, to leave the reader with some sense (even if it is a bit of a ramshackle sense) of what postmodernism is. Of course, gaining an understanding of a "structure of feeling" like postmodernism is a bit different than understanding a more objectifiable concept. One cannot understand it from the outside like a scientist but, like Gadamer's (1975) hermenuetician, one must allow oneself to be infected by it, to sense the world according to its different precepts, and, for a time at least, to open oneself to the questions it poses. Understanding postmodernism, to some extent, means taking the risk of becoming more postmodern.

Thirdly, I hope to relate some of the more salient ways postmodernism impacts other discursive realms. If I wish to argue that postmodernism has significant implications for critical adult education, then a good way of substantiating this claim is to recall its implications for other discourses. In the following, I discuss how postmodernism stimulates thinkers from very different disciplines to question the metanarratives underlying their cultural practices, particularly those they assumed are emancipatory. I also show how its theoretical conundrums impact the diverse practices of these discursive realms. Postmodernism, I demonstrate, has a solid history of disrupting taken-for-granted political agendas, particularly those of the Left. An awareness of its potential impact should place critical adult educators in a better position to address an assortment of political aporias.

The story I narrate about postmodernism is, unavoidably, rather autobiographical.[4] My own experience of postmodernism is coloured by my interest in particular problems which I believe are important to critical adult educators. The way I choose to relate the genealogy of postmodernism reflects this interest. I cannot claim that my presentation is the truth, that it maps the very wide terrain of what

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[4] In Michael Foucault's (1988b) words, "each of my works is part of my own biography" (p. 11).

Featherstone (1988) identifies as those discourses in opposition to modernism, nor even that I would tell the story of postmodernism the same way under different circumstances. Rather, my intent in the following is to open up a discursive space, both for myself and for others, in which a productive discourse about critical adult education in postmodern times can begin to develop.

Postmodern Precursors

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987a), Jürgen Habermas contends that the dark and daunting figure of Frederic Nietzsche stands at the entry point into postmodernity. Nietzsche's decision to renounce reason, to "bid farewell to the dialectic of the enlightenment" (p. 86), and to "call into question the achievements of modernity" (p. 83) establishes the trailhead along which a variety of thinkers transport the complex sensibilities of postmodernism deep into the 20th century. At the crux of Nietzsche's critique of modernity lies his reproach of traditional views of language and their accompanying notions of truth. The things we hold to be true are, for him, simply illusions produced when we forget that our language is not "a form of transaction between thoughts and things but a domain of human practices" (Shapiro, 1984, p. 8). As Tracy Strong (1984) points out, "since language works so well for men [sic] (or at least well enough), they tend to think of it as merely providing sign posts for 'naturally' valid concepts" (p. 85). For Nietzsche, however, this is a dangerous illusion. In actuality, truth is nothing but "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people" (Nietzsche, in Ormiston and Schrift, 1990, p. 43). Reason in modernity, Nietzsche maintains, is actually a form of domination in which a particular and linguistically bound portrayal of reality, established and maintained solely by

rhetorical guile, disguises its own humble foundations and asserts itself as absolutely and universally valid.

David Kolb (1990) suggests that Nietzsche's critique of reason and language revives a much older conflict that expresses the basic elements of the contemporary struggle between modernism and postmodernism. Western philosophy and the project of modernity get their start, Kolb suggests, from Plato's doctrine that emphasizes "the search for unities, foundations, and system in the constant presence of true reality" (philosophy) gets the upper hand over the open-ended and non-foundational criticism (rhetoric) of the sophists (p. 29). Nietzsche, skeptical of Plato's portrayal of Socrates as the successful champion of reason and of the sophists as verbally ingenuous, irrational, and ethically indifferent, argues that, in the end, Socrates could claim no firmer foundation for his arguments than that possessed by sophists whom he defeated with the force of his own rhetorical cunning. For Nietzsche, "*all* philosophies, whatever their claim to logic or reason, rested on a shifting texture of figurative language, the signs of which were systematically repressed under the sovereign order of truth" (Norris, 1991, p. 58).

Nietzsche's legacy for the 20th century is a freshly revived skepticism about the rational foundations of modern forms of life. His depiction of language suggests, moreover, no alternative means for humans to attain a secure and enduring knowledge of the world. As Strong (1984) relates, "for Nietzsche, humans are caught both *by* the phantasmic fetishes their language creates, and *in* that world which their language engenders, maintains, and is engendered by" (p. 83). Our fate is that, even if we recognize the limits of our reasoning powers, we can never get beyond language into a realm of truth. Unflinching in the face of his own dismal conclusions, Nietzsche leaves his intellectual descendants, the carriers of postmodernism, in the bleak landscape of epistemological nihilism.

Habermas's (1987a) next antecedent of postmodernism is the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger scorns the idea that modern science or rationalist philosophy discloses the truth of the world. Unlike Nietzsche, however, he does not insist that humans are left with no means of discerning truth. In an even more postmodern fashion than his predecessor, he specifically identifies the technical orientation of modern subjectivities and their desire to deny their own finitude and to control all aspects of the world as the things that denigrate deeper human possibilities. He agreed with Nietzsche that the root of modernity's problems lay in language. But for Heidegger, the difficulty is not that language *per se* is incapable of offering humanity truth (Nietzsche's position); rather, the specific logocentric forms of language that exist in the Occident, which focus obsessively on representing reality as if it is external to subjectivity in order to control it, occlude our understanding of important elements of the world. Terry Eagleton (1983) discusses Heidegger's position on language as follows:

> Language for Heidegger is not a mere instrument of communication, a secondary device for expressing 'ideas': it is the very dimension in which human life moves, that which brings the world to be in the first place. Only where there is language is there 'world', in the distinctively human sense. Heidegger does not think of language primarily in terms of what you or I might say: it has an existence of its own in which human beings come to participate, and only by participating in it do they come to be human at all. Language always pre-exists the individual subject, as the very realm in which he or she unfolds; and it contains 'truth' less in the sense that it is an instrument for exchanging accurate information than in the sense that it is the place where reality 'un-conceals' itself, gives itself up to our contemplation. (p. 63)

In his account of Heidegger's "ambiguous legacy for postmodernism," Steven White (1991) suggests that Heidegger's assessment of language expresses a postmodern sense of "responsibility to otherness" that differs significantly from the sense of "responsibility to act" that prevails in modernity. Modernity's obsession

with this latter sense of responsibility derives, Heidegger believes, from people's desire to escape the powerful feelings of finitude that occasionally jolts their awareness. Their rush to calculate, define, and master their world causes modern subjectivities, at some point, to limit and homogenize reality, to ignore and exclude the divergent and unexplainable, to treat other people as if they are all alike, for the sake of developing efficient, defensible courses of action. He privileges the *responsibility to otherness* to reintegrate these lost and forgotten pieces of existence. The qualities of *being* that the dominating power of technology subjugates can only be recovered with a renewed sensitivity and openness to the mysteries of the world. As Norris (1991) states, "for Heidegger this meant a questing back to the origins of thought and a gradual unveiling of the truth obscured by centuries of rationalist philosophy" (p. 68).

At the level of language, Heidegger's sense of *responsibility to others* manifests in his privileging what White identifies as the *world-disclosing* capacity of language contrary to the modernist privileging of its *action-coordinating* capacity (White offers Habermas as paradigmatic of the latter). Similar to Nietzsche Heidegger moves away from the scientific and logical uses of language that mirror an object reality, to the poetic, rhetorical, and metaphoric uses of language that illuminate a reality from which *beings* can never fully extract themselves (being-in-the-world). This move from representation to metaphor, from "mirror to lamp,"[5] has become an important element in the dispute between modernism and postmodernism. Heidegger plays an important role importing the sensibilities of postmodernism first thematized by Nietzsche into the spaces and times of our contemporary culture.

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[5] This transformation forms the focus of Richard Rorty's (1979), *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and of Meyer Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953).

It seems rather curious that as the third and final precursor to postmodernism Habermas discusses someone as obscure as Georges Bataille. Unlike Nietzsche and Heidegger, whose impact on contemporary thought is manifest (even outside discourses directly associated with postmodernism), Bataille is little known. He is important because of a peculiar postmodern comportment he and no one else picks up from Nietzsche and hands to key postmodern thinkers like Michael Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. Like Heidegger, Bataille wishes to break from the grasp of modernity and the limited world-view of Western rationalism. Unlike Heidegger, though, who disputes modernity's "cognitive rationality" and contests the "*ontological* presuppositions of objectifying science and technology" (Habermas, 1987a, p. 213) in the airy pantheon of philosophical reflection, Bataille chooses to battle modernity at an *ethical* level in the seamy streets of everyday life. Bataille proceeds like his associates, the surrealists, "who wanted shockingly to proclaim the ecstatic forces of intoxication, of dreamlife, of the instinctive and impulsive generally, against the imperatives of utility, normality, and sobriety, in order to shake up conventionally set modes of perception and experience" (p. 212). The other side of modernity for Bataille is a world of unbounded subjectivity, of waste, and of heterogeneity. Bataille offers his successors a sense of how existence (life energy) exceeds the bounds of "normal" economic and political constraints. This idea of excess and consumption has become an important part of postmodernism's structure of feeling.

Before moving to examine the role post-structuralism plays in catalyzing postmodernist discourses, it is important, I think, to make some initial comments on the political implications of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Bataille. Already a discernible and disturbing difference arises between the forms of politics that emerge in modernity and those that arise out of the postmodern sentiments of these thinkers. Recalling White's commentary on Heidegger, it is possible to see that *all* three

important thinkers are suspicious of the overinflated sense of "responsibility to act" that dominates modernity. All struggle to show how the foundation that people assume exists for their deliberate and regular actions is, in actuality, insubstantial and, in the case of people or things that do not conform to the restrictions of the foundation, oppressive. All three spurn the capacity of language to coordinate action in favour of its capacity to disclose the heterogeneity of the world.

The upshot of these beliefs is the erosion of any rational basis for political action. Thinkers of the enlightenment believed and hoped that reason could enable humanity to escape the arbitrariness and brutality of traditional forms of domination. Nietzsche's attack on the foundations of this Enlightenment belief raises the question of what might replace reason to govern political interactions. Not many modernists are comfortable with the options offered by any of the three theorists. Habermas, for instance, is disturbed with the unabashed admiration of each for the heroism of those who, through the sheer force of will, leap out of the mundanity of rational forms of life to boldly and creatively (and irrationally) confront their own finitude. And perhaps he warrants such discomfort. Both Bataille and Heidegger flirt with fascism. As a communist, Bataille recognizes that the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy is a manifestation of a deeper political economic crisis. This does not prevent him from admiring the ability of Germany's fascist Führer to fight his way into power through the regulations of modern society (Habermas, p. 218). Recent revelations of Heidegger's support of Nazism and the Führer highlight further Habermas's concern that the abandonment of rational political forms leads to (or at least is powerless to confront) authoritarian abuses of power.[6]

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[6] For very interesting discussions of Heidegger's association with Nazism see Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (1989) and Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (1990).

French Post-structuralism and Postmodernism

While Nietzsche might be cast as the sentinel at the entry point to postmodernity and Heidegger and Bataille as the voyageurs who transport postmodern sentiments into the 20th century, the French theorists of post-structuralism must be cast as the leading characters of this drama, as the first fully to inhabit the postmodern landscape, the first to 'go native,' so to speak, and, consequently, the first to threaten in unprecedented ways the secure horizons of modernity.[7] In saying this, however, it is important, straight away, to qualify exactly what or who the post-structuralists' radical transformations actually threaten. While the post-structuralist's critique was directed at "modernity" in a general way, it was fomented very specifically both within and in opposition to discourses of the European Left at the end of the 1960's. While it may have been commandeered subsequently by discourses on the Right, especially in America,[8] post-structuralism began and largely remains an auto-critique of the Left, a critique that coincidentally reflects and fosters the idea that, theoretically and practically, 'socialism' is in crisis.

The above depiction of French post-structuralism gains credibility when one examines the historical context within which it first appeared.[9] The mid-1960s was a tumultuous time in France. A powerful student movement, sparked by a growing

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[7] Post-structuralism has played such a prominent part in the discourses of postmodernism that some theorists assume they refer to the same thing. Rosenau (1992), for instance, assumes that what can be said about postmodernism "also applies to post-structuralism" (p. 3). This, I think, is an unfortunate notion that places debilitating limits on what postmodernism might mean. Post-structuralism refers to a specific *array* of discourses that drew their critical questions and intellectual sustenance from the French structuralist theorists. While it may be true, as I argue below, that post-structuralism played an important role in stimulating what I will repeatedly identify as a 'postmodern sensibility', one should be careful not to conflate the two. For an enlightening discussion of their differences see Huyssen (1984, pp. 36-47).

[8] Here I am thinking of Daniel Bell's, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1976) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976).

[9] For a more detailed account of these events see Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties* (1990), or, if a more succinct account is desired, Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). One of the best accounts of the activities and ambiance of the student movement in Europe can still be found in Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics* (1970).

disaffection with post-war modernization, established itself in universities throughout Europe. Initially its target was the authoritarianism and the irrelevance of the universities. Later with police suppression of student activities, and with the Vietnam war and other examples of American and European imperialism, students began to focus their attacks more directly on the state. By May, 1968, the collection of diverse and often contradictory interests comprising the student movement in France coalesced to the extent that they presented a real and dangerous threat to the French state and while the police and the military warred with them in the streets, the students struggled to form alliances with working class strikers. Plagued by bickering and infighting amongst themselves, and confronted by the tradition-bound and unenthusiastic Stalinist leaders of the French Communist Party, the students could not bring the common people to their sides. As a result, without the support of the masses, the students were incapable of resisting the disciplinary actions of the state and their tenuous coalition of oppositional movements quickly dissipated. Disheartened, the students returned to their places at the university while the state quickly shored up the means to control future social unrest.

As Terry Eagleton (1983) relates, "post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968" (p. 142). The students had contested the power of the establishment and had lost. According to Eagleton, they blamed their failure both on the inadequacies of the theories and practices of the Left (particularly the hide-bound totalizations of Stalinism, or variants of humanist Marxism, and Althusserian Marxism), and on the power of the system. Eagleton relates the consequences of disenchantment as follows:

> The student movement was flushed off the streets and driven underground into discourse. Its enemies...became coherent belief-systems of any kind — in particular all forms of political theory and organization which sought to analyze, and act upon, the structures of society as a whole. For it was

> precisely such politics which seemed to have failed: the system had proved too powerful for them, and the 'total' critique offered of it by a heavily Stalinized Marxism had been exposed as part of the problem, not as the solution. (p. 142)

Nietzsche's infuence is recognizable here. The events of May 1968 opened an unprecedented intellectual space for the Nietzschian ideas that had been fermenting quietly for several years in the works of theorists like Gilles Deleuze (1983). Within this new intellectual space, increasingly tempered by what I have called the structure of feeling of postmodernism, French theorists like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault turned a critical eye on the structuralist methods of analysis dominating the social sciences and Marxism of the day. As Ray (1988) relates, "for many like Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, or Lyotard,...the conceited rationalist, progressivist and meta-theoretical bases of Marxism could be swept clear by a return to Nietzsche or Heidegger" (p. 71). Ultimately their post-structuralist deliberations injected the notion of postmodernism deep into the soma of Western culture. Space allows only the barest consideration of post-structuralism's impressive contributions.

From the outset, post-structuralism's discourses were critical of the modernist assumption that logocentric language provides privileged access to truth by accurate representation of the objective world. In his efforts to develop the critical method of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida is most pernicious in undermining such a presumptuous understanding of language. Drawing on the linguistic analyses of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), Derrida advances and radicalizes Heidegger's critique of Occidental reasoning. Even a cursory presentation of his notion of deconstruction reveals the extent to which postmodernism pervades the reflections of the post-structuralists. It also provides a good basis for beginning to understand the disconcerting critique post-structuralism levels against the theoretical foundations of the Left.

Central to Derrida's concept of deconstruction is a modification he performs on Saussure's structuralist linguistic theory. Saussure holds that language comprises a collection of signs each of which comprises a *signifier* (in writing, the marks on paper) and a *signified* (the concept or the meaning the marks refer to). Saussure argues that no intrinsic relationship between the signifier and the signified exists. The letters comprising a word quite arbitrarily come to have a particular meaning. Thereafter the signifiers maintain their signifying capacity strictly to the extent that they are able to assert their difference from other signifiers. To draw on an example offered by Eagleton (1983), the signifier that comprises the letters c-a-t is able to signify the meaning of 'cat' only to the extent that it is different from other similar words — mat, cap, cut, etc. Saussure makes an even more important distinction, however, and contends that, just as no intrinsic correspondence between signifier and signified exists, no necessary correspondence exists between the signs that comprise a linguistic system and an objective reality somewhere outside of that system. The meaning of a sign is derived, not from its reference to an external object, but from the position it occupies in relation to all other signs comprising the language. Eagleton summarizes the upshot of Saussure's contentions:

> The structuralist emphasis on the 'constructedness' of human meaning represented a major advance....The confident bourgeois belief that the isolated individual subject was the fount and origin of all meaning took a sharp knock: language pre-dated the individual, and was much less his or her product than he or she was the product of it....It was impossible any longer to see reality simply as something 'out there', a fixed order of things that language merely reflected....Reality was not reflected by language but *produced* by it. (pp. 107-108)

One can see a convergence here between the ideas of Heidegger and those of Saussure and can understand why Derrida follows the path of the structuralists to get a better purchase on a critique of logocentric reason. Examining the attributes of language in more detail leaves us better prepared to assert more clearly what

Heidegger by and large presumed: that logocentric language does not offer guarantees of secure access to truth.

Derrida enhances this critique even further by challenging the few remaining shards of order left in Saussure's account. Saussure maintained that while an intrinsic relationship between linguistic signs and an objective reality may not exist, language forms a stable and comprehensible structure in which signs attain a relatively secure meaning. Further, with appropriate study of a language's structure, a linguist could discern the various meanings of its composite signs. Derrida questions this assumption. He argues that, if the meaning of a sign is derived according to its interaction with the meaning of other signs, which in turn derive their meaning in interaction with still other signs, and so on, it is quite impossible at any one time to say exactly what the meaning of a particular sign might be. As Abrams (1981) relates, "meaning can never come to rest on an absolute presence, its determinate specification is deferred, from one substitutive linguistic interpretation to another, in a movement without end" (p. 39). Within a linguistic system, the meaning of any of its elements is never settled but remains constantly susceptible to reinterpretation and change. Eagleton concludes that Derrida's formulation "is a challenge to the very idea of structure: for a structure always presumes a centre, a fixed principle, a hierarchy of meanings and a solid foundation, and it is just these notions which the endless differing and deferring of writing throws into question" (p. 134).

Derrida contends that all texts are susceptible to deconstruction, a form of analysis that seeks out the indeterminacy of the meanings that comprise the text. In literary analysis, deconstruction entails uncovering the marginal, the fragmented, the incongruent meanings in a written text in order to destabilize any possibility of unitary or monolithic interpretation. In Rosenau's (1992) words, "*deconstruction* involves demystifying a text, tearing it apart to reveal its internal, arbitrary

hierarchies and its presuppositions...to discover its ambivalence, blindness, and logocentricity" (p. 120) By expanding the meaning of the term 'text' to include any system of signs (including such diverse *texts* as philosophical systems, myths, religions, social institutions, sporting events), Derrida opens up much of what constitutes modernity to deconstructive analysis. As Sibel Irzik (1990) relates:

> Deconstruction...attacks the premise that there is one stable, objective text or reality which a knowing subject or an interpreter is obliged to represent as accurately as possible....According to political analyses sympathetic to deconstruction, such an objective text or reality is nothing but a myth, and debunking it amounts to subverting the authority, not only of the text or the real, but also of the individuals and the institutions that claim to have privileged access to them. If there is no truth, and thus no such privileged access to it, everyone is in principle free to act according to his or her interests and needs. (p. 5)

From this depiction of deconstruction one can see why Derrida constitutes a challenge for the Left. While deconstruction might be useful to contest the veracity of domination (and hence retains at least some critical potential for the Left), it does not provide any means for founding alternative social institutions (deconstruction is suspicious of any act of *founding*) or for developing a coherent basis for oppositional action. In Stephen White's terms, deconstruction repudiates the capacity of language to "coordinate action." In the end, deconstruction undermines all basis for positive politics. Derrida's critique of foundationalism, his resolute undermining of representational language, and, perhaps most of all, the postmodern structure of feeling that emanates from his writings stand as an uncomfortable challenge to the Left.

Michel Foucault does little to alleviate this discomfort. Like Derrida, Foucault offers a sophisticated critique of Western notions of representational language. Unlike Derrida, however, he does not embark on a grammatology to show the

incapacity of language to specify objective truth. Rather, in the manner of Bataille,[10] he moves to document the "micro-physics of power" that all discursive formations utilize to curtail or exclude the impulsive heterogeneity of the world and to assert the boundaries of what counts as valid knowledge (quoted in Ray, 1988, p. 94). Foucault's interest is "to write the history of the boundaries...by which a culture reprobates something that lies *outside* it" (quoted in Habermas, 1987a, p. 240). He relentlessly asserts that knowledge is always conditional upon the acts of power that create what he calls "true discourses" (Foucault, 1980, p. 90). "True discourses," he maintains, "function as 'regimes of truth' that 'induce regular effects of power' by virtue of the self-sacrifices they demand in the name of 'Truth' and the 'status [they grant to] those who are charged' with enunciating it" (Balbus, 1987, p. 111). In his paper, 'The Order of Discourse,' (1984) he writes:

> in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (p. 109)

His genealogies probe and expose the fiber of modern institutions, seeking ways the "other" of reason — criminals, racial and ethnic groups, deviants, the sick, women, the insane — have been marginalized and ignored. "Within its own limits," he claims, "each discipline recognized true and false propositions; but it pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge beyond its margins" (p. 119). He explores these very margins in an effort to discover those lost tracts of territory containing the beasts and monsters written off as "irrational" by modern discourses. Foucault desires to expose the varied technologies of power that maintain the borders of modern institutions against disruptive incursion.

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[10] Habermas (1987a) observes that, while he was not Bataille's students, "Foucault still calls Bataille one of his mentors" (p. 238).

Foucault allows no discourse a privileged position, including the discourse of the genealogist who tracks the emergence of a discursive formation as a successive application of constraints. Like Nietzsche, he contends that even those struggling to contest the dominant discourses of society, have no guaranteed access to truth. No objective viewpoint exists from which a theorist can grasp the structure of society in its totality and pass judgment on the veracity of one form of life or another. "The task of the genealogist is not to produce yet another, but rather to unmask all forms of, True Discourse by determining their conditions of existence and their political effects" (Balbus, 1984, p. 111).

In making this contention, Foucault takes a stand against the most prevalent elements of the Left. As Rabinow (1984) relates, "Foucault is resolutely and consistently anti-Hegelian and anti-Marxist....The search for a general theory of history is not on his agenda. In fact, it is, in Foucault's diagnosis, part of the problem" (p. 13).[11] While Foucault's genealogical method offers a sophisticated means to discern the nuanced workings of power in contemporary society, it offers no stance from which to assess which forms of power are legitimate and which are not. To draw on Stephen White's terminology again, it seems clear that Foucault is much more motivated from a sense of 'responsibility to otherness' than from a sense 'of responsibility to act'. White refers to the following passage in "The Masked Philosopher" (1988), where Foucault makes clearer his commitment to the 'other':

> Curiosity...I like the word....It evokes "care"; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way. (p. 328)

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[11] Ray (1988) offers a good account of Foucault's critical relationship with Marxism.

As Thomas McCarthy (1990) points out, however, without some normative basis for deciding what counts as "just and unjust social arrangements, legitimate and illegitimate uses of political power, strategic and cooperative interpersonal relations, coercive and consensual measures" it "becomes all too like the night in which all cows are black" (p. 446). What good is a caring attitude or a sense of responsibility to otherness without any capacity to formulate positive actions to foster their interests? The disconcerting response of Foucault might be: 'What good is it to have a responsibility to act when one's actions inevitably construct discursive realms which exclude and marginalize?' Like Derrida, Foucault's postmodern sensibilities catch in the throat of those who aspire to bring about a more just, legitimate, cooperative, and consensual world.

Derrida and Foucault are only two of a host of French intellectuals from a diversity of backgrounds and theoretical interests who begin to adopt an increasingly skeptical stance towards the totalizing, teleological, and utopic tendencies of contemporary social thought.[12] During the late 1960s and early 1970s, theorists like Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Roland Barthes, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Jean-François Lyotard, all began to write articles and books critical of the attitudes and beliefs prevailing in the European intellectual community, and, especially, in the discourses of the European Left.[13] The discursive formation they generated, marks the edge of a watershed in the history of

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[12] I adopt these three dimensions of post-structuralism's critique from Dick Hebdige's discussion of postmodernism in *Hiding in the Light* (1988, pp. 186-203).

[13] Good accounts of Lacan's reflections on psychoanalysis can be David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (1988) and Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (1991); Toril Moi provides a classic account of the French feminists, Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) and another good account is Claire Duchen's, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterand* (1986); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari seminal work, *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), is most accessible; Roland Barthes is best approached through Christopher Norris's account of his work in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (1982); and the ideas of Lyotard can be easily accessed in his readable text, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) or through Christa Bürger's lucid account "Modernity as Postmodernity: Jean François Lyotard" (1992).

postmodernism. While post-structuralism does not *produce* the cultural phenomena of postmodernism (the structure of feeling is already in evidence in many fields: architecture,[14] aesthetic theory, literary criticism, film studies), it does catalyze a sprawling proliferation of postmodernist discourses throughout the West. Slowly at first then in a torrent, Western intellectuals take seriously the challenges issued by the post-structuralists. In discipline after discipline, theorists sense and then explore the growing pervasiveness and importance of the structure of feeling Lyotard identifies as postmodernism. The early intervention of critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas, in the discourses of postmodernism is particularly notable, in this regard. Habermas's encounter with the aporias of post-structuralist thought illuminates the profundity of postmodernism's challenge to the idea of an emancipatory politics. Even the briefest review of this encounter provides a good basis for appreciating the disruptive impact postmodernism has had as it has worked its way into the discourses of the Left.

Habermas, Critical Theory, and Postmodernism

Habermas's experience of the European student uprisings in the late 1960s differs from the experiences of those French intellectuals who became post-structuralists.[15] The student movement in France rose meteorically and came close to threatening the state. The energy and breadth of this movement was so vast that when it failed, intellectuals caught in its euphoria attributed its end to the general inadequacy of totalizing Leftist analyses. Conversely, in Germany the movement was less

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[14] Space does not permit a review of postmodernism's ventures in contemporary architecture. Charles Jenkes' relatively early text, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), probably provides the clearest insight into the rather periodizing use of the word in this context. See Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (1984) in which he contends that Jenkes' postmodernism is actually a form of antimodernism. For a counter response see Margaret Rose, *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial: A Critical Analysis* (1991).

[15] Habermas speaks of his involvement in Germany's student revolt in a few revealing pages in *Autonomy and Solidarity* (1986, pp. 79-83).

explosive and more contained, more local—it shape far less swirling than that of France. As a consequence, intellectuals like Habermas, who, as a young professor, inspired and supported the student revolts in favour of university reform, were apt to attribute the failure of the movement to the psychological characteristics of the student protesters, themselves (1970, pp. 43-46). Unlike his French counterparts — and probably many of the young German students who felt betrayed by his disapproval of several protest activities (1986, p. 79), Habermas was dismayed with the dogmatism of most student activists (Habermas, 1986, p. 79) and the shallowness of their justifications for protest (1970, p. 40). The contradictory emotions of euphoria and disillusionment that washed over the French Left intelligentcia after 1968 and that opened them to the structure of feeling of postmodernism, did not prompt Habermas to turn his back on reason or modernity. This is not to say that he was unaffected by these new postmodern sentiments. In 1980, after Lyotard (1984, p. 65-66) complained that Habermas' notions of consensus formation[16] promulgated yet another modernist grand narrative, Habermas (1981) initiated a prolonged and critical investigation of postmodernism. Unlike the French post-structuralists, however, Habermas' discourse on postmodernism would turn out to be far less enthusiastic about the potentialities of this new structure of feeling.

Habermas' experiences with the Frankfurt school attunes him to the emergence of a new cultural sensibility like postmodernism. A principle theoretical disposition of the Frankfurt School, and especially of his mentor, Theodore Adorno, is a skepticism towards the accomplishments of modernity. In their book *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1972), Adorno and Max Horkheimer contend that the instrumental notion of reason enlisted by enlightenment thinkers to emancipate humanity from the domination of tradition , is a new and even more pernicious form

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[16] Lyotard was referring to Habermas' argument in *Legitimation Crisis*, (1975).

of domination than tradition itself. Adorno especially is pessimistic about the capacity of reason to release humanity from domination. In Habermas' view, Adorno's "implacable critique of reason...paints him into the corner of irrationalism and leaves him no implicit recourse but the now familiar poststructural one of *l'acéphale*, cutting off the intolerable, hyperintellectual head of the formerly rational being" (Jameson, 1990, p. 24). Further, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas argues that Horkheimer and Adorno open up a third path (Heidegger and Bataille opening the other two) along which to pass Nietzsche's influence into this century. "Horkheimer and Adorno perceive cultural modernity from a similar experiential horizon [as that of Nietzsche]," he argues, and "with the same heightened sensibility" (Habermas, 1987a, p. 129). Habermas' constant exposure to such powerful intellectual influences left him conscious of the changing mood of Europe's intelligentsia:

> Habermas repeatedly demonstrates his understanding of post-structuralism and opens himself, again and again, to the postmodern skepticism that nourishes it. And yet, he remains firm in rejecting the pessimistic outlook of Nietzsche and Adorno and other postmodernists, insisting that, despite the turmoil of contemporary society, the project of the Enlightenment should not be abandoned. Bernstein (1985) observes that:...we live in an era when there is a suspicion of reason, and of the very idea of universal validity claims that can be justified through argument....Any attempt to gain a comprehensive understanding of modernity and its discontents is immediately condemned as a "metanarrative"....Habermas is aware of this present mood. No one can accuse him of naiveté. Yet he constantly and persistently argues against the facile (and sophisticated) attempts to dismiss the legacy of Western rationality. (p. 25).

At the center of Habermas's massive theoretical oeuvre lies his contention that caution must temper any assessment of the 'project of modernity'. While he agrees that the form of reason which prevails throughout the history of modernization indeed produces negative effects (including the loss of meaning, the erosion of values, the undermining of social solidarity, and the production of

psychopathologies), he does not agree that we should precipitously abandon the Enlightenment idea that reason can serve humanity to bring about a better world. Habermas maintains that the logocentric form of reason rightfully rejected by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the post-structuralists (identified variously by Weber as *Zwechrationaliität* — means/ends rationality, by Horkheimer and Adorno as *instrumental rationality*, and by Heidegger as *calculative thinking*) is in actuality a truncated variant of a broader, more comprehensive form of reason that he calls *communicative rationality*. Logocentric reason is, according to Habermas, the product of a suppression and distortion of communicative rationality that took place within the specific historical context of capitalist society.

Habermas believes it is possible to develop a critical perspective (he calls it a normative foundation) from which to assess "the magnificent 'one-sidednesses,' which are the signature of modernity" (Habermas, 1987b, p. 397), particularly the one-sided development of reason. Drawing on the reconstructive science of formal pragmatics, he suggests that his *theory of communicative action* discerns the dimensions of the broader notion of communicative rationality within the suppressed and embattled communicative practices of everyday life. He anchors this notion of communicative rationality in the concept of the lifeworld and then, at a theoretical level, specifies the ideal conditions whereby the rationality potential of the lifeworld can be maximized. He goes on to describe the ways the historical emergence of what he identifies as the *system*, comprised of two semi-autonomous action spheres, the economy and the state, curtails the rationality potential of the lifeworld. With all of this in hand, Habermas claims to discriminate universalistic processes of "social evolution" from more contingent and often distorting processes of "social history" (the development of the lifeworld within the distorting context of capitalism) in order to provide a critical basis for social action leading towards a more reasonable, just, and humane society (Habermas, 1987a, p. 300).

The difficulty with this endeavor, of course, is that the perspective Habermas believes he can offer with his critical theory is exactly what post-structuralists deny is possible to achieve. The idea that it is possible somehow to attain an objective or universalistic position from which to discern the "true" and "undistorted" nature of the lifeworld (in Habermas' terms its "formal structure" (p. 299)) is extremely unpalatable to post-structuralists. Lyotard (1984) is most blistering in his critique of Habermas' aspiration to develop a critical theory of society that can distinguish between "true consensus" and "false consensus," and between "validity" and "power."[17] In veritable postmodern fashion Lyotard rejects the idea that we can distinguish any universalistic structures of contemporary life. He prefers resting satisfied with the partiality of all theoretical perspectives rather than taking the path followed by Habermas and promulgating what Lyotard claims to be yet another universalizing "narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard, p. 60).

Habermas counters Lyotard's condemnation of his critical theory arguing that Lyotard along with other post-structuralists like Derrida and Foucault develop their radical critique of reason (and of all impulses to preserve or promote modernity—including Habermas') without giving any account of their own position.[18] To reflect on the grounds of their own critique, he contends, would be to realize that their denunciation of modernity takes place within the theoretical confines of Western logocentric rationality, itself a product of the specific social history of capitalist modernization. Habermas argues that the philosophical discourse of modernity has been waged within what he identifies as the "paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness" (1984, p. 386) from which post-structuralists fail to escape. Within this paradigm, thinkers conceptualize the human subject as a solitary agent set

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[17] For a concise summary of Lyotard's critique of Habermas see Rorty (1985).
[18] Habermas develops this critique most fully in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 336-341.

against the objective world. From the perspective of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, though, the human subject is saddled with the task of forming cognitions of the objective world. The rationality of a subject's cognitions can be assessed according to the degree that they "fit" with what actually exists in the world. If a subject *represents* the world in a way that accurately depicts reality, they are said to be rational (Habermas, 1984, p. 87).

This depiction of rationality (Western logocentric rationality) is precisely what post-structuralists reject. Because of their indebtedness to this form of rationality, however, post-structuralists view their rejection of logocentric rationality as the rejection of rationality *in toto*. Habermas objects to their strategy because it does not take stock of the ways the concrete historical processes of capitalist modernization impact reason itself. Post-structuralists assume that the form of reason they reject is the only form of reason potentially available in modernity which, according to Habermas, is a hasty and dangerous assumption (1983, p. 12). He posits his notion of communicative rationality as a standard that escapes the aporias of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. As well, he offers his theory of communicative action as a way of disclosing the destructive impact of capitalist modernization on the emergence of communicative rationality. Caught in the web of distorted reason, post-structuralists have little option but to denounce the project of modernity in its entirety. And because they are unwilling to posit Habermas' theoretical abstractions, they are incapable of attaining a perspective that enables them to discern the selective nature of contemporary social history.

But the structure of feeling of postmodernism does influence Habermas' theories, but to what extent? Habermas is aware and critical of the notion that it is possible to develop vast narratives to explain all contingencies. Accordingly, he sets himself against the positivists and their contemporary incarnations, the systems theorists, and claims that they remain unaware that their schemas which explain social reality

and which are assumed to be objective and scientific are in actuality outgrowths of their own historically contingent lifeworld contexts.[19] When he constructs his own critical theoretical perspective, he struggles to identify the extent to which the theory of communicative action legitimately can claim a universal status. He takes care to posit his theory of communicative action as a working hypothesis that seeks no transcendental justification. Rather, he asserts its plausibility by offering empirically satisfying accounts of past and present historical phenomena (Habermas, 1984, p. 138). At the same time, to avoid both the blindness of the systems theorists to the deformations capitalism has wreaked on the lifeworld and the blindness of the hermeneuticists to the external origin of many distortions in the lifeworld, he dialectically blends a systems perspective on the global processes of capitalist modernization with a hermeneutic perspective sensitive to the cultural contents and social accomplishments of the lifeworld. As Bernstein agrees, "we cannot understand the character of the life-world unless we understand the social systems that shape it, and we cannot understand social systems unless we see how they arise out of activities of social agents" (1985, p. 22). And finally, Habermas acknowledges that the final testing ground for his critical theory does not rest on the accuracy with which it captures social reality but on the extent to which it can form the basis for transformative and emancipatory social action.

Unlike the post-structuralists who seem to float easily in the current of postmodernism regardless, it seems, of the ultimate political backwater it washes them into, Habermas struggles to avoid being swept along and away from the potentially fruitful eddies and currents of modernity. I believe it remains to be seen whether he goes too far and simply perpetuates a sad and dying metanarrative of

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[19] Habermas develops this critique in several contexts. See, for example, his critique of Talcott Parsons in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two* (1987a) pp. 199-299, and his discussion of Niklas Luhmann in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) pp. 368-385.

emancipation that ultimately sucks humanity deeper in the oppressive depths of capitalist society, or whether he succeeds in offering a theory of society that can form the basis for palpable and positive social development.

For our present purposes, however, the ultimate fate of Habermas' theory of communicative action does not, in the end, really matter. What is important, I think, is to recognize the extent to which the structure of feeling of postmodernism challenges Habermas. He is infected enough by postmodernism to realize that we can never attain an ultimate and unquestionable foundation for an emancipatory cultural politics. Critical theory must henceforth struggle to assert a normative basis for social critique in an environment entirely suspect of narratives that claim to be universal but which actually draw their sustenance from specific and often highly inequitable and unjust lifeworlds. Returning to Stephen White's analysis of the two senses of responsibility to action and to the other, we can see how Habermas ultimately takes his stand on the side of action. One must hasten to add, however, that he does not take this position with ease or without exhibiting substantive concern for the "other." Habermas' obvious discomfort with the political conundrums delivered by the structure of feeling of postmodernism and his desire to develop a basis for acting without excluding the perspective of the marginalized other reveals his willingness to exist in the tension-filled landscape where one must act on the basis of a consensus that can claim no ultimate foundation. Habermas' courageous reception of postmodernism, his willingness to let it challenge him, and his equally strong refusal to yield his beliefs in modernity stand as a model for those of us working through the challenges of postmodernism for the first time.

Marxism , Post-Marxism , and Postmodernism

Habermas reminds us that to understand contemporary culture one must understand the nature of the capitalist system that shapes it.[20] Habermas' own account of the contemporary capitalist system is problematic because it remains largely oblivious to the massive transformations of capitalism over the past two decades. His basic thesis that the capitalist subsystems of the economy and the state are colonizing the lifeworld in a way that destroys its capacity to reproduce itself may still be generally true, but his depiction of the specific nature of the late capitalist system and its interactions with the lifeworld are not nearly detailed enough. For example, to date he provides neither a clear account of the particular ways late capitalist systems destroy the lifeworld, nor the practical cultural and social manifestations of this destruction. While he is adept at picking up on the methodological issues postmodernism leaves for critical theory, he is less convincing with his critical theory of society which fails to offer a comprehensive, empirically rich account of *late* capitalism's impact on contemporary culture.

The situation is quite the opposite for many Marxist theorists of postmodernism like Fredric Jameson (1991), David Harvey (1989), Edward Soja (1989), and Scott Lash (1990). While less obsessed than Habermas with the methodological challenges issued by post-structuralism[21] (and, accordingly, less interesting in terms of their sensitivity to the political paradoxes postmodernism poses for the Left), these theorists nevertheless succeed in providing fine analyses of the dramatic changes taking place in contemporary capitalism as well as insightfully investigating the relationship of these changes to contemporary culture.

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[20] Keeping in mind, of course, his corollary claim that a systems perspective can never claim complete detachment from the concrete contents of the lifeworld.

[21] As will be seen below, this has left them vulnerable to trenchant critiques from post-structuralists and feminists.

To forestall confusion, it is important to note that, for the most part, the Marxist response to the structure of feeling of postmodernism is radically different from the response of the post-structuralists. Risking oversimplification one might say that while post-structuralists view the emergent sensibility of postmodernism positively and draw on it to undergird their deconstruction of the metanarratives of modernity, the Marxist theorists approach postmodernism as a "pathology" requiring analysis and explanation. Post-structuralists endeavor as much as possible to enhance the sense of fragmentation, heterogeneity, partiality, and contingency that flows through Western culture. (For post-structurlists, the demise of the stories of progress, of justice, and of emancipation seem an opportunity for the outriders of society to finally move in from their dusty guerrilla camps.) Contrarily, Marxist theorists of postmodernism view the upsurge of fragmentation, diversity, and dislocation in contemporary society as a sign that capitalism is entering a new phase in which new relations are emerging between the capitalist political economy and the lifeworld. Beginning with Marx's insight that cultural forms arise in conjunction with particular modes of production, Marxist theorists engage in a sustained investigation of how the emergence and growth of postmodernism might be related to vast changes taking place in late capitalism. Although few theorists so crassly contend that transformations in the political-economy of late capitalism *causes* postmodernism, they do see a distinct relationship between the two developments. In Harvey's (1989) words, "strong a priori grounds can be adduced for the proposition that there is some kind of necessary relation between the rise of postmodernist cultural forms [and] the emergence of more flexible modes of capital accumulation" (p. vii). By in large, Marxist theorists are far more pessimistic about the benefits of postmodernism than are post-structuralists. To quote Harvey again, "these changes...appear more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new post-capitalist or even postindustrial society"

(p. vii). Marxists like Harvey and Jameson are impatient with the unwillingness of the post-structuralists to look behind the veil of appearances to discern the systemic patterns of exploitation that capitalism continues to perpetrate. While Jameson exhorts that "we have to name the system" (1990, p. 20), Harvey writes how:

> Marx's meta-theory seeks to tear away that fetishistic mask, and to understand the social relations that lie behind it. He would surely accuse those post-modernists who proclaim the 'impenetrability of the other' as their creed, of overt complicity with the fact of fetishism and of indifference towards underlying social meanings. (p. 101)

The space available here, allows only a hint at the complex Marxist accounts of postmodernism. For the sake of brevity, I draw principally on the works of David Harvey and Fredric Jameson not only because they offer focused and sustained accounts of postmodernity amongst Marxist scholars but because they are fairly representative of the "Marxist" voice in the postmodern debate.[22] (I provide a fuller depiction of Harvey's, Jameson's and other Marxist's ideas in succeeding chapters.)

A key text in the emergent Marxist discourse on postmodernism is Ernest Mandel's, *Late Capitalism* (1975). Mandel contends that, during the 1960s, capitalism embarked on a third great stage of development (Marx's mercantile stage and Lenin's imperialist stage[23] being the first two) and that a key feature of this stage is the integration of cultural production into the commodity production processes of capitalism. Where at one time cultural production was restricted to the commodification of products destined for *high culture*, the proliferation of cultural

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[22] I make this delineation with trepidation having myself acquired a postmodern suspicion of any assertion that claims it can represent any one position. The Marxist debate about postmodernism is, of course, far more complex than can be captured in any book-length presentation, let alone a short review. I would feel far less secure making this particular cut, however, were Harvey's discussion of postmodernism in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, and were Jameson's long-standing engagement with the term any less masterful than they are.

[23] See V.I. Lenin (1930), *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and A. Brewer (1990), *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* for a presentation of Marx's and Lenin's periodizations.

needs and desires created by the cultural revolution of the 1960s opened up new markets for the mass production of cultural goods. Mandel's theorization of a third phase in capitalism's development provided the impetus for Jameson's analyses of postmodernism. As Jameson relates, it "is what made my thoughts on 'postmodernism' possible, which are therefore to be understood as an attempt to theorize the specific logic of the cultural production of that third stage, and not as yet another disembodied culture critique or diagnosis of the spirit of the age" (Jameson, 1991, p. 105). Harvey (1989) too acknowledges a debt to Mandel except that Harvey posits 1973 as the point of transition, when global capitalism experienced the jolt of the oil crisis and a sharp decline in profits, and Western society embarked earnestly on the changes that would culminate in late capitalism (p. 63).

Harvey suggests that the development of late capitalism brings about a dramatic change in the way commodities are produced and consumed. He characterizes this change as a move from a Fordist regime of accumulation to a post-Fordist regime of accumulation. Instead of concentrating production in large factories that produce vast quantities of standardized industrial products destined for mass markets, post-Fordist manufacturers employ "just-in-time" production techniques that rely on computers, telecommunications, and modern transportation systems to exploit nuanced market niches and to react quickly to changes in demand. The advent of post-Fordism prompts a shift from organized to disorganized forms of capitalism, from national to transnational economic organizations, from industrial economies to service economies, from resource driven production to demand driven production, from mass consumption to individualized consumption, and much, much more. Simultaneously, a rapid and pervasive change in the kinds of commodities being

produced facilitates post-Fordist activity. Instead of focusing on the industrial production of material commodities (toasters, cars, hoola-hoops[24]), capitalist enterprise increasingly produces the immaterial signs and meanings of culture.[25] As Donna Haraway so poignantly writes:

> Modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible....Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile....The new machines are so clean and light. Their engineers are sun-worshippers mediating a new scientific revolution associated with the night dream of post-industrial society. (p. 153-154)

The growing predominance of post-Fordist production processes and of nimble, fleeting commodities coincides with rapidly changing cultural forms. Stuart Hall lists these as a "greater fragmentation and pluralism, the weakening of older collective solidarities and block identities and the emergence of new identities associated with greater work flexibility, and the maximization of individual choices through personal consumption." Quoting Marshall Berman, Hall writes that these "'modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology'— not destroying them entirely, but weakening and subverting them, eroding the lines of continuity which hitherto stabilized our social identities" (1991, p. 58). Harvey suggests this is not a positive development. Capitalism, in its recent transnational and cybernetic incarnation, acquires the capacity to profit greatly from the fragmentation and

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[24] These products were not consumed simply as use values. All existed also as signs that could be positioned within the meaning frames of existing cultures (See Dick Hebdige's discussion of Italian scooters as carriers of meanings in *Hiding in the Light*, pp. 77-115). It may be more accurate to characterize the transition as one in which the material component of commodities has gradually been reduced to the point that signs no longer require the physical packaging of a car or a toaster. Signs and meanings are delivered directly up to the consumer in the slimmed down, easily transported packaging of the TV image, the sound byte, and the fad.

[25] Chapter Four deals more extensively with the implications of cultural commodification for critical adult education.

pluralization of cultural contexts. With their new-found capacities to monitor, to calculate, and even to stimulate heterogeneous markets for an increasingly diverse array of commodities, multinational corporations no longer require a homogenous cultural context in which to operate profitably. To quote Zygmunt Bauman, in postmodernity, "diversity thrives, and the market thrives with it" (1991, p. 289).

David Tetzlaff (1991) is even more foreboding in his assessment of the oppressive potentials of postmodernity. Drawing on the work of Jameson, he makes the following assertion:

> The global spread and penetration of multinational capital, with its displacement of productive technology by reproductive technology (media, computers, etc.), has been so thorough that no geographical or critical distance from it can be established. The disorientation in culture reflects our inability to orient ourselves towards the centers of power that affect our lives. (p. 12)

Further, for Tetzlaff, postmodernity provides better avenues for social control than those available in an ideological, unifying culture:

> ...control through postmodern fragmentation presents fewer liabilities [than ideology]. The form of cultural literacy necessary to appreciate deindividualization and *deja lu* requires only a recognition of familiarity of the image as an image. Postmodern culture asks for no connection to be made between the text and the world outside the media. Being self-enclosed, it avoids the issue of social relations entirely. Its language, if it has one, is apolitical. Time that might otherwise be occupied by subjects attempting to understand their position in the social system is taken up by fascination with depthless image fragments. (p. 15)

Tetzlaff, like Harvey and most Marxists, is determined to understand postmodernism from the abstracted and objective perspective "outside" the hurly burly of his own cultural contexts. While Jameson (1991) shares much of Tetzlaff's concern for the oppressive potentials of postmodernism and his desire to be objective in assessing these potentials, he expresses a disconcerted awareness that

representing postmodernism may not be as easy as some Marxists assume. He reveals this awareness in the following passage where he assesses the potentials for a new "cognitive mapping" of global capitalism cognizant of the representational challenges of post-structuralism:

> ...a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system...will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice. This is not then, clearly, a call for a return to some older kind of machinery, some older and more transparent national space, or some more traditional and reassuring perspectival or mimetic enclave: the new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object—the world space of multinational capital—at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale. (p. 54)

Jameson senses the paradoxical task of representing postmodern culture in a world that has lost the secure footing of universal explanatory schemas. The paradoxical nature of the Marxists' project to illuminate the underpinnings of postmodern culture becomes even more apparent when one examines some of the more vocal criticisms of their work. In an excellent review of David Harvey's, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, for instance, R. Deutsche (1991) contends that Harvey's schema for understanding postmodernity is not as objective or as comprehensive as he would like it to appear. According to Deutsche:

> Totalizing visions of society such as Harvey's are precisely, to borrow Bruno's phrase, "dreams of unity". Claiming to discover, rather than construct, a reality that forms the absolute foundation of social unity, the subject of Harvey's discourse generates the illusion that he stands outside, not in, the world. His identity then owes nothing either to his real situation or to the objects he studies. In the act of denying the discursive character of those

> objects, such depictions also disavow the condition of subjectivity as a partial and situated *position*, positing instead an autonomous subject who observes social conflicts from a privileged and unconflicted place. (p. 17)

Deutsch is not objecting to Harvey's specific analysis of contemporary society but to his arrogant assumption that he can totally explain postmodernism from within the horizon of his narrative. Deutsche rejects Harvey's conflation of the complex array of postmodern discourses, his claim, for instance, that the disintegrating effects of economic restructuring may be only one factor in the fragmentation of contemporary society. Deutsche wonders if there might be other explanations for cultural fragmentation that Harvey overlooks. Harvey "appears, for one thing, to minimize the fragmenting effects of political voices (feminist, gay, anti-racist, post-colonial) which, by insisting that social subjects occupy situated rather than universal positions, challenge universalizing discourses" (p. 26). He also undervalues or ignores the critical contributions that "cultural studies, art criticism, film and feminist theory" (and we might add to this list: critical theory, theories of race, and critical educational theory) have made to our understanding of cultural fragmentation (p. 26). His political economic and geographic focus, Deutsche claims, "is especially disappointing in the context of current efforts to forge new interdisciplinary intersections between urban and aesthetic discourses," to mention two (p. 27).

The ultimate problem with Harvey's analysis, Deutsche concludes, is that by endeavoring to develop a large and unifying framework to explain the emergence of postmodernism, Harvey imposes a metanarrative that denies the different ways people perceive the world. Hence, his analysis is exclusive and ultimately oppressive. "Once it is recognized that meaning emerges discursively *through* the construction of relations, equivalences, and exclusions in the absence of a

foundational presence, then we know that every totality is incomplete and is 'completed' by denying this process" (p. 30).

To support her analysis, Deutsche points to the emerging body of post-Marxist writings which she argues challenges the totalizing pretenses of more "objectifying" Marxist studies. The writings of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), the principle proponents of post-Marxism, reveal that the structure of feeling of postmodernism stirs in them a very different reaction than that for their more traditional Marxist counterparts. Rather than trying to force the diverse array of new social phenomena into the unifying framework of political-economic analysis, Laclau and Mouffe submit that "the plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggles has finally dissolved the last foundation for that political imaginary" (p. 2). The Marxist presumption that society comprises a sutured totality must now be abandoned (Laclau, 1990, p. 89). Postmodernism confronts us with the fact that the world is irrevocably heterogeneous and that Marxism must transform itself rather than try to transform everything else.[26]

Laclau and Mouffe, as well as Deutsche, are careful to point out that this transformation need not mean abandoning the emancipatory intentions of Marxism altogether. They avoid being dragged into the dangerous political quagmire of post-structuralism. Instead, they endeavor to steer between absolute totalization of classical Marxism and absolute fragmentation (essentialism and nominalism) by proposing what they call "radical democracy." In Laclau and Mouffe's words:

> While there is no doubt that one of the dangers which threatens democracy is the totalitarian attempt to pass beyond the constitutive character of antagonism and deny plurality in order to restore unity, there is also a symmetrically opposite danger of a lack of all reference to this unity. For,

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[26] The debate over post-Marxism has raged in socialist journals. See for example an exchange between Laclau and Mouffe and Norman Geras in *New Left Review* issues 163 and 166 (1987), a debate initiated by Richard Peet and carried on by Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff as well as Julie Graham in *Antipode*, 24,2, (1992).

> even though impossible, this remains a horizon which, given the absence of articulation between social relations, is necessary in order to prevent an implosion of the social and an absence of any common point of reference....Between the logic of complete identity and that of pure difference, the experience of democracy should consist of the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of their articulation. But this articulation should be constantly re-created and renegotiated, and there is no final point at which a balance will be definitively achieved. (p. 188)

In another essay Laclau (1988) counters post-structuralists by contending that postmodernity does not constitute the disappearance of "grand narratives" so much as a "weakening of their absolutist character" (p. 67). Postmodernism, Deutsche suggests, "is characterized by a new metanarrative of the *absence* of foundational guarantees and the need to *construct* new bases for unity" (p. 29). Rather than assuming, as does Harvey, that a basis for unifying social struggles underlies the fragmentation of postmodern society, post-Marxists argue that links between different social struggles must be worked out from historical moment to historical moment. Nothing guarantees their articulation. No basis exists to say that feminists, gay rights activists, and workers must, in the end, come together to struggle against oppressive forces in society. The articulations amongst these different groups must be derived in concrete contexts where no one group endeavors to exclude or denounce the perspective of the other.

Casting back to our discussion of Habermas for a moment, it is possible to see that his realization that we can never attain an ultimate and unquestionable foundation for an emancipatory cultural politics reflects the ideas of post-Marxists. Like Habermas, post-Marxists prefer to live in the uncomfortable terrain of dialogical/democratic action rather than to control the proliferating perspectives of postmodern society as do scientific Marxists, or to spin off in the vortex of difference as do many post-structuralists. Despite the power and necessity of Harvey's and Jameson's analyses, the challenge of postmodernism overwhelms their desire to

explain it away. As Habermas so poignantly recognizes, postmodernism's structure of feeling stands as a profound, perhaps irresolvable, challenge for the Left.

The "Ex-Centric" and Postmodernism

To narrate postmodernism is difficult because the very nature of the concept makes the task of deciding what to include as central to the story and what to leave out very problematic. For example, in the preceding paragraphs detailing Deutsche's critique of David Harvey, I construct my narrative to highlight the different ways postmodernism works its way into Marxist discourse. In the process of telling of this particular story, however, I omitted mentioning that Deutsche's critique of Harvey is largely motivated by her concern that Harvey's political economic analysis ignores *feminist* theories of postmodernism. I myself was prompted to downplay the feminist perspective informing her paper so that I could construct an uncluttered presentation of postmodernism's paradoxes for Marxism. The experience of a multitude of exclusions such as the aforementioned renders feminists and other "ex-centrics"[27] particularly sensitive to the structure of feeling of postmodernism. Postmodernism receives its closest scrutiny, and displays its most profound conundrums, in the complex and variegated discursive formations of people on the fringes.

While it may be true for feminism that postmodernism persists as a vague, yet nagging structure of feeling, it is equally true that feminism, for the most part, has until very recently largely kept a distance from the ideas of postmodernism's principle theorists. In their essay "Social Criticism Without Philosophy," Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson (1990) observe how, while feminists and postmodernists historically orient themselves towards the same general project of developing forms

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[27] I borrow Linda Hutcheon's (1988) term.

of social criticism "which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings" (p. 19), very deep differences keep them apart. According to Fraser and Nicholson, "postmodernists offer sophisticated and persuasive criticisms of foundationalism and essentialism, but their conceptions of social criticism tend to be anemic. Feminists offer robust conceptions of social criticism, but they tend at times to lapse into foundationalism and essentialism" (p. 20).

The power of feminist critique over the past few decades is its ability to formulate a paradigm of social criticism capable of addressing patriarchy and sexism. The demands of practical political action encourage feminists to develop clear and solid social theories to explain the history, causes, and constitution of sexism. The 1960's and 1970's, however, see feminists proposing highly foundationalist, on occasion biologistic, conceptions of gender which essentialize the traits of women and men cross-culturally and trans-historically. As Fraser and Nicholson observe, these essentializing tendencies in feminism extend from Shulamith Firestone's (1970) claim that the struggle between genders is the most primal of all social struggles, to Carol Gilligan's (1983) construction of a female counter-model to Kohlberg's model of moral development. According to Fraser and Nicholson, the continuing "vestiges of essentialism" which "continued to plague feminist scholarship...represents the continuing subterranean influence of those very mainstream modes of thought and inquiry with which feminists have wished to break" (p. 33).

Fraser and Nicholson speak from hindsight, of course. Their awareness that essentialism continues to plague feminism is itself a consequence of dramatic political changes and challenges within feminism itself. As Donna Haraway (1991) so sardonically writes, "[w]hite women...were forced kicking and screaming to notice...the non-innocence of the category 'woman'" (p. 115). The 1980's saw women of color, from the Third-World, from lower social classes, and lesbian women begin

to contest the representations of "woman" presented by white, middle-class, academic, feminists. They argue that, in developing their essentialized notions of "woman," white, middle class, heterosexual feminists simply repeat the same acts of exclusion practiced by patriarchy.[28]

These internal contradictions and conflicts in feminism create a context conducive to the proliferation of a postmodern sensibility. As Elizabeth Weed (1989) writes: "The critical advantage of the feminist project has been that when one area of feminism has settled on a truth, another has emerged to disrupt that truth, to keep at bay truths too easily produced by cultural and political formations" (p. xxxi). It is their desire to break with "too easily produced truths" which encourage some feminists to engage more fully with the anti-essentialist currents of postmodernism. One attraction of ratifying postmodernist critical strategies, of course, is that it enhances the power of deconstructive approaches to criticism that feminists have long used to contest gender-based relations of power. In her criticism of Harvey, for instance, Deutsche deploys a deconstructive approach to show how his political economy of postmodernism asserts its validity by systematically excluding all perspectives that cannot be accommodated by his class-based analysis.

The difficulty with succumbing to the structure of feeling of postmodernism, however, is that it demands that one open up one's own perspective to the same radical questioning that it allows one to direct at other perspectives. The magnitude of this questioning is revealed in Judith Butler's (1992) comment that, "any effort to give universal or specific content to the category of women, presuming that

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[28] Chandra Mohanty (1991a) relates how North American feminists construct "'third world woman' as a homogeneous 'powerless' group often located as implicit 'victims' of particular socioeconomic systems" (p. 57). This universalizing tendency suggests some "disconcerting similarities between the typically authorizing signature of such Western feminist writings on women in the third world, and the authorizing signature of the project of humanism in general—humanism as a Western ideological and political project which involves the necessary recuperation of the 'East' and 'Woman' as others" (p. 73).

guarantee of solidarity is required *in advance*, will necessarily produce factionalization and that 'identity' as a point of departure can never hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement" (p. 15). The impact of postmodernism on feminism is, therefore, double-edged: it offers a gain in its critical capacities and it challenges the very cohesiveness and self-understanding of feminism itself.

Feminists debate the benefits and drawbacks of postmodernism. Some theorists, like Jane Flax (1990), stand out as most unremittingly enthusiastic about the convergences of feminism and postmodernism. She argues that postmodernism guards against the reinstitution of dogmatic gender metatheories that can turn feminism into new forms of oppression. She insists that "feminism, like other forms of postmodernism, should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs be" (1990, p. 56). Other feminists are more cautious. Can women in a relatively precarious political situation really afford to doubt the efficacy of their formulations? Christine DiStephano (1990) contends, for instance, that, while men can afford to be humbled at the altar of postmodernism, women, whose oppression is still palpable and who are only beginning to gain a positive sense of who they are, cannot benefit from the postmodern impulses that threaten to relativize historical gains. Similarly, Nancy Fraser (1991) is concerned that an over-identification with the theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva leads on the one hand to "a regressive version of gynocentric-materialist essentialism" or on the other hand to "a postfeminist anti-essentialism" (p. 113). The second option is particularly dangerous because it "*underfeminizes* [women] by insisting that 'women' do not exist and by dismissing the feminist movement as a proto-totalitarian fiction" (p. 113).

Not only mainstream feminists feel the impact of the structure of feeling of postmodernism. Challenging the essentialism of mainstream feminism generates self questioning amongst many feminists from "ex-centric" contexts. Chandra Mohanty (1991), for example, believes that it is impossible to define, in a "noncontradictory or 'pure'" way, *a* Third-World feminism (p. 20). And bell hooks (1990) observes that the differences between women of colour from the Third World and Afro-American women make it impossible to essentialize a notion of black feminism (p. 93). As the structure of feeling of postmodernism works its way into ever broader discursive realms of the ex-centric, similar questioning arises. It challenges activists like Cornell West (1992) to question the representations of blackness promoted by Afro-American intellectuals like himself (p. 690); it reveals itself in the different ways Afro-American feminists of the Black Panther generation like Angela Davis and young L.A. rappers like Ice Cube (1992) view racism and resistance; it is in the background of Edward Said's (1978) discussion of the West's representation of the Orient; and it forms the basis of John Tomlinson's (1991) discussion of the tremendous paradoxes involved in identifying "cultural imperialism." These and many other thinkers recognize the tremendous attractions and risks of postmodernism. On the one hand, they realize that no foundational basis for identifying or unifying or representing a social phenomenon exists and that to think so simply perpetrates, in one way or another, the violent suppression of difference and non-identity. With caution they are beginning to absorb Nietzsche's and the post-structuralist's lessons on anti-essentialism. On the other hand, they recognize that without a secure foundational basis, the cohesion of social movements is no longer guaranteed: the fragmenting power of postmodernism creates a centrifugal force that threatens to spray the composite atoms of social resistance into the lonely vortex of consumerism and hedonism.

While the Pandora's box of postmodernism frightens many thinkers back into hard-line positions and coaxes others into a passive if rather vertiginous cynicism, it also motivates others to re-think the basis for forming relationships of solidarity with other people. As bell hooks (1990) writes:

> Coming to terms with the impact of postmodernism for black experience, particularly as it changes our sense of identity, means that we must and can rearticulate the basis for collective bonding. Given the various crises facing African-Americans (economic, spiritual, escalating racial violence, etc.), we are compelled by circumstance to reassess our relationship to popular culture and resistance struggle. Many of us are as reluctant to face this task as many non-black postmodern thinkers who focus theoretically in the issue of "difference" are to confront the issue of race and racism. (p. 29)

Fraser and Nicholson (1990) speak similarly. A postmodern feminism, they relate:

> is increasingly a matter of alliances rather than one on unity around a universally shared interest or identity. It recognizes that the diversity of women's needs and experiences means that no single solution...can be adequate for all. Thus, the underlying premise of this practice is that, while some women share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal; rather, they are interlaced with differences, even with conflicts. This, then, is a practice made up of a patchwork of overlapping alliances, not one circumscribable by an essential definition. (p. 35)

The overtly political orientation of feminist, anti-racist, post-colonial, gay, and the vast multitude of other social movements proliferating in today's society leads to a different experience of the paradoxes of postmodernism than prevails in the more detached context of the academe. Here people feel the bite of uncertain foundations with a surge of real panic. Here people confront the complexity of the multiple axes of power—class, gender, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and so on—as they interact with one another, sometimes subordinating, sometimes subordinated, always intertwined and never clear. Here the intellectual must embrace the task of forging points of articulation, resolving conflicts, establishing ever fragile coalitions.

Here the practice of "radical democracy" looses its idealistic and hypothetical character and becomes something to be learned and taught, taught and learned in the to and fro of dialogical exchange. Here, finally, in this terrible landscape of uncertainty and courage, criticism and concern, is the place where critical adult educators must encounter the challenge of postmodernism.

Cultural Studies and Postmodernism

We can gain additional insight into the potential impact of postmodernism for critical adult education by observing its intrusion into the emergent discursive formation of cultural studies. In his essay, "The Future of Cultural Studies," Raymond Williams (1989) traces the roots of the now burgeoning field of cultural studies to the early adult education movement in Britain.[29] The ideas and practices that now prevail in cultural studies, he contends, originate in the struggles of educators and students in organizations like the British *Workers Education Association*, the *National Council of Labour Colleges*, and the many socialist and communist leagues involved in adult education as far back as the 1820's.[30] With these historical links between cultural studies and critical adult education in mind, it is perhaps not as surprising that one of the best depictions of the potential impact of postmodernism on critical adult education is provided by a contemporary cultural studies theorist, Stuart Hall (1992), in his paper, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies."

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[29]For an excellent account of Raymond Williams' activities as an adult educator see John McIlroy's (1990-1991) two part article, "Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education."

[30]For a good and concise history of the adult education movement in Britain in this century, see John McIlroy and Bruce Spencer's (1989), "Waves in British Worker Education." An account of worker education in the first half of the19th century is provided in Richard Johnson's (1988), "'Really Useful Knowledge' 1790-1850: Memories for Education in the 1980s." Paul Armstrong (1988) provides an account of British worker education in the last half of the 19th century in "The Long Search for the Working Class: Socialism and the Education of Adults, 1850-1930." Brian Simon's (1990) recent book, *The Search for Enlightenment: The Working Class and Adult Education in the Twentieth Century*, contains contributions examining adult education and the working class since the publication of the "Oxford and Working-Class Education" report in 1909.

Hall's primary purpose in this paper is to trace the sources of cultural studies' "worldliness." By "worldliness" he does not mean that cultural studies is worldly in a secular sense, but more in a streetwise sense. Hall wants to dwell on the "dirtiness" of cultural studies. He wants to "return the project of cultural studies from the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory to the something nasty down below" (p. 278).

Hall relates how the source of cultural studies' worldliness is a schism that divides its heart. On the one side of the schism stands the fact that the discursive foundation of cultural studies is one that "refuses to be a master discourse or meta-discourse of any kind" (p. 278). Its long standing uneasy relations with Marxism, Hall observes, are a case in point. From the beginning, cultural studies, particularly in the British context, questions "the great inadequacies, theoretically and politically, the resounding silences, the great evasions of Marxism" (p. 279). It is dismayed by Marxism's dogmatism, its economism, its attempt to totalize, its impatience with heterogeneity and disjunction. While cultural studies remains open to Marxism's insights, it refuses to follow it to the point of providing totalizing explanations or to closing off to that which it does not yet know. Perhaps because of its focus on the nebulous concept of culture, or perhaps because of the many different, often conflicting discourses that comprise it, cultural studies expresses a sensitivity to postmodernism almost from the outset. Hall identifies several events, however, that were key to opening cultural studies to postmodernism's influence.

The first event was cultural studies' turn to Gramsci during the 1970s. Hall contends that "while Gramsci belonged and belongs to the problematic of Marxism, his importance for this moment of British cultural studies is precisely the degree to which he radically *displaced* some of the inheritances of Marxism's cultural studies" (p. 281). Graham Turner (1990) relates the importance of Gramsci for cultural studies as follows:

> The turn to Gramsci reaffirms the importance of understanding ideology, but categorically withdraws from the installation of a monolithic or mechanical explanation of its workings. This more historically contingent and negotiated view reinforces claims for concrete practical analysis of ideological formations within cultures, as against a mechanical "reading off" of ideological meanings from cultural forms. Hegemony describes the attempt to produce uniformity and coherence, but it also implies that such attempts must always, eventually and necessarily, fail. (pp. 214-215)

A second 'theoretical' event that stirred the structure of feeling of postmodernism amongst cultural studies theorists was their encounters with post-structuralism. Hall lists the things he learned from this encounter as:

> the crucial importance of language and of the linguistic metaphor to *any* study of culture; the expansion of the notion of text and textuality, both as a source of meaning, and as that which escapes and postpones meaning; the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis beyond meaning; the acknowledgment of textuality and cultural power, or representation itself, as a site of power and regulation; of the symbolic as a source of identity. (p. 283)

These *theoretical* events combined with *political* events. The emergence of feminism and its challenges to the essentialisms and exclusionary practices of cultural studies and the upsurge of the question of race which sparked a "long and bitter struggle" within cultural studies forced open its discursive horizons.

On the other side of the schism that divides the heart of cultural studies resides the notion that cultural studies is not open to the point that it is whimsical or relativistic. It is, Hall observes, "a serious enterprise" that stakes out positions and struggles for them. This staking out is what gives cultural studies its reputation as a political field of practice. According to Hall, however, "politics is impossible without what [he has] called 'the arbitrary closure'; without what Homi Bhabha called social agency as an arbitrary closure" (p. 278). It is difficult to imagine a political practice

which aims to make real changes in the world which does not, at some point, draw distinctions, make choices, and carry out plans of action.

A tension exists, however, between cultural studies' postmodern sensitivity—its refusal to close itself off to any discourse—and its desire to remain politically engaged with real and practical problems. How is it possible, Hall asks, for a discipline that refuses to define a theoretical center for itself and that insists on the openness of its discursive boundaries to develop the theoretical basis for coherent political intervention? And, conversely, how can political practice committed to real and practical change develop and carry out plans of action without closing itself off to the questions, criticisms, and dissentions of other discourses? What this amounts to, Hall observes, is being asked "to say 'yes' and 'no' at one and the same time" (p. 284). It not only asks the person in cultural studies to remain open to the indeterminacy of knowledge, to the impossibility of final discursive closure, but also not to let that indeterminacy paralyze action. While Hall acknowledges the terrible nature of the terrain of dialogical practice, he contends, that "unless those fronts are operating at the same time, or at least unless those two ambitions are part of the project of cultural studies, you can get enormous theoretical advance without any engagement at the level of the political project" (p. 281) or, in the reverse, achieve clear political gains without positing their theoretical implications. Hall insists that "until and unless cultural studies learns to live with this tension,...it will have renounced its 'worldly' vocation" (p. 284). He summarizes his keen insights in the following passage:

> I come back to the deadly seriousness of intellectual work. It is a deadly serious matter....I come back to the difficulty of instituting a genuine cultural and critical practice, which is intended to produce some kind of organic intellectual political work, which does not try to inscribe itself in the overarching metanarrative of achieved knowledges, within the institutions. I come back to theory and politics, the politics of theory. Not theory as the will to truth, but theory as a site of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges,

Radical Education and Postmodernism

For me, the challenge of postmodernism is, in the deepest sense, a challenge to humanity's ability to learn new ways of interacting with one another and their world. Education, I believe, is a crucial cultural practice in this context. It has the potential to offer important new strategies to people struggling to think and to act in new ways. In few other realms do intellectuals need to be more cognizant of the transformations transpiring in postmodernity. Fortunately, even though postmodernism is just beginning to be thematized in education, there is already a substantial debate about its potential implications for the field.

In their paper, "Postmodern Conditions: Rethinking Public Education," Mustafa Kiziltan, William Bain, and Anita Cañizares (1990) point out that education's complicity in the twentieth century project to "replace the moral certainty of the last century with the scientific certainty of this one" places it inextricably in league with the very forms of knowing most rejected by postmodernism:

> Given the extent to which education thought and practice are so inextricably connected with the "scientific," the postmodern critique of the foundations, the function, and the status of scientific knowledge (and of reason) is certain to have profound and unsettling effects upon the practices, rationalization, and the legitimation of education. (p. 353)

While they may be being a bit over-exuberant in their contention that postmodernism will unsettle mainstream forms of education, Kiziltan, Bain, and Cañizares are quite right to identify the status of knowledge as the point where postmodernism most impacts education. Over the past century and a half, school-based education has been utilized as a principle means of reproducing culture. Through disseminating or fostering particular forms of knowledge, education helps maintain social relations beneficial to dominant social interests. In Giroux's words: "Pedagogy is, in part, a technology of power, language, and practice that produces and legitimates forms of moral and political regulation, that construct and offer

human beings particular views of themselves and the world" (1992, p. 81). For the most part, the knowledge education transmits sustains the grand narratives that serve to unify and homogenize culture. Postmodernism's rejection of grand narratives and its questioning of all forms of representational knowledge profoundly jeopardizes education's rational social purpose.

In practical terms, it is unlikely that the postmodern critique of mainstream forms of education will amount to much. The power of dominant social forces to create and legislate metanarratives far outstrips any existent power to disassemble them. The situation is very different for radical forms of education, however. Recall that, until very recently, radical forms of education countered the metanarratives of dominant society by generating and then teaching their own. Education was viewed by radical educators not just as a means for maintaining social relations, but for changing them. The gradual intrusion of the structure of feeling of postmodernism into the discourses of radical education has been and continues to be unsettling for this discursive realm.

In his account of the theoretical legacies of cultural studies, Stuart Hall identifies several vectors along which postmodernism insinuates its way into British cultural studies. He differentiates between theoretical sources and political sources and contends that they all combine to open wide the discursive boundaries of cultural studies to the paradoxes of postmodernism. The briefest look at radical pedagogical literature reveals that the structure of feeling of postmodernism is rapidly making its way into education in a similar multi-pronged fashion.

In recent years a number of disruptive and deconstructing theoretical influences inform the ideas of radical educators. Post-structuralism (Nicholson, 1989; Pritzman, 1990; Lather, 1991a; Lather, 1991b; Burbules and Rice, 1991; Peters, 1989), post-Marxism (Giroux and McLaren, 1987; Giroux and Aronowitz, 1991; Giroux, 1992; Giroux, 1993), critical theory (Kemmis and Carr, 1985; Young, 1989), and cultural

studies (Giroux, 1992; Giroux and Trend, 1992; McLaren, 1993)) all play an important role calling into question the essentialist practices not only of traditional purveyors of education but of radical pedagogues, themselves.[31] In the realm of cultural and political practices, feminism, race discourses, post-colonial discourses constitute other vectors along which the structure of feeling of postmodernism makes its way into the discourses of radical education.

In addition to the above, another important vector along which postmodernism flows into radical education is the very process of practicing as educators concerned with issues like justice and equality, a practice that challenges the whole idea of privileged knowledge. For instance, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Paulo Freire criticizes banking education, in which the metanarratives of the oppressor are deposited in the oppressed. He exhorts radical educators not simply to replace one kind of essentialized knowledge with another but to let the learner engage in producing their own knowledges (note the plural). Freire's claims inject the structure of feeling of postmodernism into radical education.

The upshot of postmodern influences is that the emancipatory mission of radical education is now no longer secure. The customary role of the teacher as the legislator of a particular metanarrative is no longer viewed as acceptable. It follows, then, that if there is no such thing as representative knowledge, what function remains for the educator? In the context of the postmodern world what is the purpose of education?

The perniciousness of these questions is revealed in "Dialogue Across Differences: Continuing the Conversation," a paper by Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice (1991). The authors suggest that there seems to be an inconsistency in the ideas of radical educators like Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren. On the one

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[31] One should note here that Henry Giroux and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Peter McLaren and Patti Lather stand out as the preeminent contributors to the discourse of postmodernism in education. Henry Giroux, himself, has written dozens of articles on the topic (too many to list at this time).

hand, Giroux and McClaren push the contention that pedagogues no longer can secure the foundations of their practices on the unified and totalizing metanarratives of modernity. On the other hand, they contend that positive aspects of modernity like "democracy, liberty, rights, citizenship, and so forth" must be reappropriated and expanded. Burbules and Rice wonder, if its true that we can no longer rely on the metanarratives of modernity, what it is that Giroux bases his assertion that we must retain essential modernist values? They observe that:

> reflected in [Giroux and McLaren's] work is the difficulty postmodernism encounters in providing principled arguments to support positive positions; in place of such arguments we often find a highly charged rhetorical style that *asserts* the primacy of certain values or *condemns* their suppression without articulating why anyone not already sympathetic with their position ought to be so. This endeavor is made even more difficult when postmodern skepticism about modernist values and metanarratives blurs into an antimodern rejection of them. (p. 98)

While I do not think Burbules and Rice are completely fair in their criticism of Giroux and McClaren (in the sense that these two theorists are not, to my mind, any more strident than Burbules and Rice, themselves), I do think that they are basically correct in their assessment of the difficult position postmodernism places radical educators. Just as postmodernism deprives feminists of the firm basis for securing solidarity, and just as it denies critical theorists of the transcendental normative foundations for generating a critique of society, it also deprives educators of a unified and unambiguous position on which to base their pedagogical practices.

Because radical educators no longer possess an essentialized body of knowledge to teach or a coherent position to teach from does not mean that we need to abandon the idea of radical education altogether. I think theorists like Giroux offer very interesting escape routes from the dilemma of postmodernism that, in many ways, advance the discourse of postmodernism as a whole. Giroux believes that part of the problem that radical educators have with postmodernism arises from the way they

persist on defining their activities as educators. If they persist in viewing themselves as people who transmit knowledge, then the anti-essentialism of postmodernism presents difficulties that are very difficult to overcome. If on the other hand they reconceptualize what they do as border pedagogy, then postmodernism does not present the same difficulties.

Giroux (1992) outlines the principle characteristics of border pedagogy as follows:

> 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 acknowledgment of the shifting borders that both undermine and reterritorialize different configurations of culture, power, and knowledge. It also links the notion of schooling and the broader category of education to a more substantive struggle for a radical democratic society....As part of a radical pedagogical practice, border pedagogy points to the need for conditions that allow students to write, speak, and listen in a language in which meaning becomes multiaccentual and dispersed and resists permanent closure....Within this discourse, students should engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power. (pp. 28-29)

Giroux's boarder pedagogy takes on the difficult task of fostering people's capacity to articulate differences in a radically democratic and communicative context. His desire is to offer a pedagogy that does not impose knowledge but that makes it possible for people collectively to negotiate knowledge in the same way and at the same time as they negotiate alliances and coalitions which respect differences and which are not impositional or exclusive.

Critical Adult Education and Postmodernism

It is quite surprising that discursive realms as close as critical adult education and radical education can be so radically different. Unlike radical education, where a highly sophisticated discourse about the implications of postmodernism has

developed, in critical adult education, discourse about postmodernism is all but absent. The very few references made to postmodernism do more to confirm the absence of this important phenomenon in critical adult education discourses than to provide us with a sense of what postmodernism is or what its implications are for critical adult education. A large piece of the entire discourse on postmodernism in critical adult education can be summarized as follows: Usher (1989) draws on a post-structuralist conception of language to offer another way of theorizing experience (but provides only a brief account of Derridian thought that does little to indicate the broader implications for post-structuralism for critical adult education); Finger (1991) argues that Habermas's critical theory does not form a secure basis for critical adult education because it offers no theory of postmodernity (but he, himself, does not provide a very clear or very sustained account of what postmodernity might be); and Westwood (1992), makes cursory reference to postmodernism when she examines the power/knowledge relationships in a black mental health group in Leicester, England.

The absence of overt theorizing about postmodernism in critical adult education is, in some respects, quite surprising. Critical adult education is subjected to many of the same influences that Hall argues propels cultural studies into the uncomfortable terrain of postmodernism. Some influences are absent, though, and these I think are key to understanding the weakness of postmodernist discourse in critical adult education. I will discuss these in a moment. First let us consider the similarities between critical adult education and cultural studies.

Critical adult education is comparable to cultural studies on several points. For one, like cultural studies, critical adult education historically has constituted itself as an open discursive formation, partially because, unlike other sciences or specialized practices like medicine, economics, or grammar, critical adult education has never been a very unified discursive formation. Since its first manifestations, sometime in

the 19th century, critical adult education has been torn by the heterogeneity of its discourses. Banished to the margins of mainstream adult education, it has existed only in a fragmented way. It has had not one, but many histories; has embraced the work of very different people; and has encompassed a diversity of contradictory, often competing, theories, methodologies, and strategies.

It would be a mistake, though, to attribute the openness and diffuseness of critical adult education solely to its position on the fringes of mainstream adult education . It also has much to do with the prevailing view in critical adult education that knowledge is a product of dialogue. By in large, critical adult educators reject the idea of expert knowledge in favour of knowledges derived in discourse with their students. The early *Workers Education Association* (WEA) in Britain, for instance, believed in the capacities of its students to critically discern the truth and it implemented a discussion-based teaching strategy that allowed students "to make up their own minds after an examination of a wide range of conflicting evidence and interpretations" (Brown, 1980, p. 116). Similar sentiments were held in 1944 by radical adult educator Watson Thomson of Saskatchewan's newly elected Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party. As the first Director of Saskatchewan's Division of Adult Education, Thomson rejected the transmission of "knowledge for its own sake" and, instead, "saw his task as catalytic: helping people to clarify their goals and achieve their ends through dialogue" (Welton, 1987, p. 155). Paulo Freire (1972) is equally clear in his rejection of closed knowledge in favour of knowledges created through dialogical encounter. He advises that "those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly....The man [sic] who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into *communion* with the people, whom he continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived" (p. 47). For Freire, "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue

with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 67). The refusal of these and other critical adult educators to vigorously police the boundaries of their discipline is, to a large extent, the result of their refusal to close themselves to the discourses of their students or to the indeterminacy of knowledge.

Critical adult education is also similar to cultural studies to the extent that it experiences the challenges issued by feminists, anti-racists, and other marginalized groups. But, while the challenges of these groups acts to thrust cultural studies into the difficult terrain of postmodernism and seems to stimulate reflection on the difficulties postmodernism creates for a cultural politics, their challenges in critical adult education provoke discomfort and confusion without a real discursive basis for either perceiving their deeper implications for working through their paradoxes.

I would like to contend that the key reason adult education has failed to develop an extensive discourse on postmodernism is not so much that it has not been impacted by it as a structure of feeling, but because it has remained largely isolated from almost all of the discursive realms I have treated above, even its historical cousin, cultural studies, and its estranged sibling, radical adult education. Cultural studies was not only disturbed at a political level but also at a theoretical level by the discourses of post-structuralists and post-Marxists. Critical adult education's theoretical trajectory, influenced as it has been by the behavioristic paradigm that has dominated mainstream adult education (Collins, 1991), has not provided a basis for developing a discourse on the implications of postmodernism for the field.

Perhaps one reason for is inability to work up even a basic understanding of postmodernism, is that critical adult education, even more strongly than cultural studies, constitutes itself as a political field of practice. Critical adult education is not overly theoretical: it aims to effect definite political changes. It stakes out positions and commits itself to particular struggles. It draws distinctions, makes choices, and carries out plans of action in order to bring about real changes in the world. The

WEA, Watson Thomson, Paulo Freire, all devoted themselves to emancipatory political action. Thomson articulates the commitment to action shared by most critical adult educators as follows: "Education for the People — all the People. Education for action — cooperative, responsible action. Education for change — inevitable and desirable change. Power to the People" (Quoted in Welton, 1987, p. 156).

Even its resolutely practical and, at times, even anti-theoretical focus does not protect critical adult education from the structure of feeling of postmodernism, however. I am convinced that, even though it has not been able to theorize it, critical adult education has long experienced the effects of this structure of feeling, as revealed in the tension that exists in critical adult education between its commitment to remain an open discursive formation and its commitment to engage in meaningful political action. Critical adult educators have long been aware that the relationship between these two commitments is problematic. Early on, tutors of the WEA worried that the non-directive, "on one hand this, on the other hand that" teaching methods that they were supposed to employ in their classes would undermine rather than foster any basis for transformative action (Brown, 1980, p. 116). Educators in Nova Scotia's Antigonish movement were also aware of the contradiction. While committed to a vision of participatory democracy and to a pedagogical approach open to their student's needs, they realized that undirected discussion rarely yielded decisive actions. In 1939, Father Moses Coady (1967), charismatic leader of the movement, wrote about the resulting relationship between Antigonish and "the masses" as follows:

> We do not ask them to theorize too much. We prefer to have them see and do the things that anyone can understand and that need to be done, here and now, the things that do not call for expert knowledge of the intricacies of sociology and economics....Then we need not have any fears for the result nor dread of superficial criticism. (p. 155)

Similar insight into the contradiction between discursive openness and practical action existed in the 1950s and 1960s amongst the staff at Highlander, the Tennessee center for union and civil rights education, founded by critical adult educator, Myles Horton. An observer of the pedagogy of Highlander writes:

> Without violating the principle of *starting where the people are*, the workshop discussion leaders...deliberately reinforce talk in the group that points to united action. At the same time, free discussion is mandatory. Views opposing collective action must be examined. Otherwise, Highlander would fall into the trap of telling people what is good for them. (Adams, 1975, p. 213)

Perhaps one of the keenest observers of this contradiction, however, is Paulo Freire. He contends that, while they may seem contradictory, discourse and politics are actually inseparable moments of a dialectical unity he identifies as *praxis*. Any attempt to privilege one element of this dialectical unity over the other (be it theory or practice, reflection or action, discourse or politics) undermines the integrity of the emancipatory pedagogical enterprise. Privileging theory results in "a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity" (p. 57), an "alienated and alienating 'blah'...which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action" (p. 76), whereas, privileging action results in an activism that "negates true praxis and makes dialogue impossible" (p. 76).

While much is similar between critical adult education's experience of the contradictory elements inhabiting the heart of critical adult education and Hall's account of the schism in cultural studies, an essential difference exists. It is true that both understand that discourse and politics, theory and practice, reflection and action are inseparable ingredients of an emancipatory practice, and both are keenly aware that the relationship between these twin elements is an uneasy one. However, whereas critical adult education has not possessed the theoretical tools to muster a

discourse on postmodernism and has continued wishing that the tension that figures their field would go away, cultural studies acquired the theoretical capacity to understand that such a resolution is impossible and that the tension between discourse and politics is an inevitable feature of living and learning in postmodern times.

While critical adult education has experienced the structure of feeling of postmodernity, it has to this point been theoretically unprepared to engage in the intense and disturbing introspection that we see in other discursive realms. Rather than being relieved that they have escaped the scourge of postmodernism, however, adult educators should worry. As I document in the following chapters, the challenges postmodernism present for critical adult education are immense. Only a great deal of introspection and committed intellectual and political work will permit it to emerge from postmodern times stronger and better able to address contemporary issues. Hopefully, the ideas I present in the remainder of the thesis will help critical adult educators achieve this goal.

The advantage of confronting postmodernism is that it accepts the immense difficulty of being an organic intellectual/critical adult educator.[32] For me, the "worldliness" of critical adult education can be retained only if adult educators give up hope of *escaping* the terrible terrain of dialogical practice (a hope never quite abandoned by Freire, Coady, Horton, and many others throughout the history of critical adult education, and, incidentally, a hope that reveals their complicity with what I identify in the next chapter as "the project of modernity"). Being worldly means that critical adult educators must relentlessly face the vortex of

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[32]My conflation of the terms "organic intellectual" and "critical adult educator" is even more audacious than might appear here because, rather than claiming that critical adult educators are organic intellectuals, I go even farther and claim that organic intellectuals are necessarily critical adult educators. In making this contention, I stake out far more discursive territory for critical adult education than is usually assumed.

postmodernism, refuse to constitute their vocation as a meta-narrative, and remain open to the strain of alternate discourses. It means, at the same time, developing positions and committing to struggles on the basis of a discursive closure that is disturbingly arbitrary.

Chapter Three

CRITICAL ADULT EDUCATION AND THE PROJECT OF MODERNITY

The claim that postmodernism has important implications for critical adult education rests on a fairly contentious assumption. It presumes the existence of a discursive formation called *critical adult education* which is identifiable and more or less circumscribable. If one examines the heterogeneous discourses that have accumulated around the composite term 'critical adult education,' however, one has good reason to doubt it specifies anything so neat as the previous chapters seem to assume. For one thing, the term has been used to designate very different adult education initiatives and approaches spanning well over a century. Denmark's folk schools, Great Britain's Mechanics' Institutes, Nova Scotia's Antigonish Movement, and Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign have all been granted the appellation at one time or another.[1] In Canada, initiatives as varied as the Frontier College, the

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[1] For an account of Denmark's folk schools as a form of critical adult education see Jindra Kulich (1984), "Grundtvig: Education for Life." Michael Collins (1972) provides an interesting account of the demise of the Mechanics' Institutes as a form of critical adult education in, "The Mechanics' Institutes—Education for the Working Man?" (1972). Edward Royle (1971) offers a similar critical overview of the function of the Mechanics' Institutes in his paper, "Mechanics Institutes and the Working Classes, 1840-1860." A thoroughgoing account of Nova Scotia's critical adult education experiment, the Antigonish Movement, is offered by Jim Lotz and Michael Welton (1987) in their essay, "'Knowledge for the People': The Origins and Development of the Antigonish Movement." For an interesting account of critical adult education in Nicaragua see Martin Carnoy and Carlos Alberto Torres's (1990), "Education and Social Transformation in Nicaragua, 1979-1989."

Women's Institutes, The Worker's Education Association, and the Co-operative College all claim to exemplify critical adult education.[2] Exactly what earns these very different examples the designation critical adult education remains nebulous, however. Efforts to establish a clearer definition for the term, to establish a firmer basis for identifying what counts as critical adult education, inevitably stir dissension. Attempts to draw a border around what constitutes critical adult education either exclude initiatives that claim to be critical or include theories and practices whose critical nature is dubious.[3]

The whole idea that it is possible to stake out a territory called critical adult education becomes even more suspect considering postmodernism's critique of essentialism and foundationalism discussed in the previous chapter. From a postmodernist perspective, one cannot represent critical adult education as if it is an object that can be observed and explained. Constituting critical adult education inevitably is an act of power that suppresses heterogeneity, contingency, and incongruence. The violence required to exclude the 'other' of critical adult education that is a necessary part of the border making process renders the whole impulse to define critical adult education most unpalatable. Rather than contending that postmodernism has implications for critical adult education (conceived, in some way, as a unified entity), a more postmodern approach would be to explore the differential effects of the varied discourses of postmodernism on different, contextually located adult education practices.

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[2] For papers on many Canadian examples of critical adult education, see Michael Welton's (1987) edited collection, *Knowledge for the People*.

[3] A recent debate in adult education that exemplifies the difficulty of circumscribing critical adult education was sparked by Jack Mezirow's (1981; 1989; 1991) attempt to utilize Jürgen Habermas' notion of knowledge constituting interests to differentiate critical adult education from non-critical forms. Mezirow's schema was criticized as psychologistic and individualistic by a host of writers including, most notably, by Sue Collard and Michael Law (1989), in "The Limits of Perspective Transformation: A Critique of Mezirow's Theory."

This, however, is not the approach I will take. Rather, in the following pages I draw on the ideas of Jürgen Habermas and of Antonio Gramsci to offer a theory of critical adult education. I argue that critical adult education has, from the outset, been inextricably implicated in what Habermas calls the 'project of modernity'. More specifically, to use Habermas's terms, I suggest that critical adult education, in its diverse manifestations, has emerged as part of a larger defensive reaction on behalf of the 'lifeworld' against colonization by the 'system'. Expanding my argument to include Gramscian elements, I contend that critical adult education wages its struggle as a *counterhegemonic cultural practice* that resists the cultural forms conducive to unbridled capitalist growth and that attempts to establish what Habermas identifies as a 'fully rationalized lifeworld'.

At the same time as I recognize the problems with delineating critical adult education in this fashion, I believe there are strong reasons for eschewing the concerns of postmodernists and continuing this endeavor. The first reason is that a theory of critical adult education developed in Habermasian and Gramscian terms does provide an enlightening view of the complex of discourses that gather under the banner of critical adult education. It provides sophisticated and defensible criteria for marking off critical adult education theories and practices; it provides a strong normative basis for legitimating these theories and practices; it provides a basis for saying why very different adult education enterprises are all examples of critical adult education; and it illuminates the ways other attempts to define critical adult education fail to develop sufficient delineating criteria. While I would be unwilling to claim this representation of critical adult education as *the* true representation or that under different circumstances it would even be the most desirable, I do hold that, at the current juncture, Habermas' and Gramsci's critical theories permit critical adult educators to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the way a wide array of disconnected discourses constitute a

discursive formation than has previously been available to them. The purpose of this chapter, then, is not simply to detail an objective notion of critical adult education. Rather, it is to offer a provisional conception of critical adult education that, while it does not claim to be all inclusive, still asserts a clear and convincing picture of what critical adult education is and should be.

Besides the overall theoretical gains it offers, the second reason I advance the following account is that it builds upon a tradition of thinking about critical adult education that has emerged with particular strength in the past decade.[4] Numerous theorists now draw upon the work of Habermas and Gramsci to understand the theory and practice of critical adult education. The borders of critical adult education are, as a result, far clearer than they have been previously. While I accept that many problems remain with the contemporary status of critical adult education and with many 'Habermasian' efforts to circumscribe it, I view recent developments in the field positively, as an important renewed effort to come to terms with theoretical and practical problems beleaguering critical adult education.

A third reason is that a Habermasian and Gramscian analysis provides a particularly good backdrop against which to explore the implications of postmodernism for critical adult education. Because it is self-conscious about the implications of postmodernism, Habermas's theory in particular enables us to see clearly the many ways critical adult education is entwined with the project of

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[4] I can provide only a brief list of the contributions to this important development. Jack Mezirow (1981; 1985; 1991) was one of the first to consider the importance of Habermas and, despite the many problems with his handling of Habermas, has done a great service in introducing him to the field. Michael Collins (1985, 1991), Michael Welton (1991a), David Little (1991) and especially Mechtild Hart (1984; 1985; 1990, 1992) offer more substantive and balanced analyses of Habermas from a critical adult education perspective. Gramsci has as yet to excite the same amount of research. Early on, Sallie Westwood (1980) discussed Gramsci's relevance for adult education. More recently Paula Allman (1988) has offered an analysis of Gramsci's educational theory in relation to the pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

modernity. It helps us to appreciate the extent to which critical adult education's self-understanding has developed within discourses that trace their origins to the Enlightenment. Moreover, it brings to the fore a litany of modernist notions undergirding many critical adult education practices. This deep association with the project of modernity, I contend, is what makes critical adult education susceptible to the intrusions of postmodernism. The full measure of postmodernism's implications for critical adult education can only be realized when we understand the extent to which the discursive formation of critical adult education is engendered within all encompassing modernist metanarratives.

Specifying Critical Adult Education

The conceptual advantages gained by using critical theories like Habermas's and Gramsci's can best be shown by considering for a moment other discourses that attempt to stake out a territory for critical adult education. In the following, I relate how, while many of these discourses highlight important aspects of what might constitute critical adult education, none succeed in providing a satisfactory account of what differentiates critical adult education from other forms of adult education. Discourses that identify critical adult education with one element of a specific social struggle are incapable of accounting for examples of critical adult education that emerge outside of that struggle. Marxist discourses that position critical adult education within a totalizing account of capitalism and class struggle provide limited accounts of the unique characteristics of critical adult education. Liberal or humanist discourses that differentiate critical forms of adult education according to an ideal of democracy, by means of an abstract and universalized conception of human nature, or by way of an individualized learning theory, fail to emphasize the ways critical adult education acts to resist concrete forms of economic and political oppression. Drawing on Habermas' and Gramsci's critical theories enables us to

draw boundaries for critical adult education without succumbing to any of these drawbacks.

Prior to the First World War, adult education practices were, for the most part, disparate and unorganized. Adult educators developed knowledge and practices specific to the interests of the locales and regions in which they practiced.[5] The institutionalization of adult education was in its infancy and adult educators in the academy had yet to define an object of study, a body of knowledge, and a range of practices that would legitimate adult education as a viable and distinct enterprise. In this early context, there was little concern to delineate *critical* forms of adult education. Adult education was by definition critical. The context in which it typically emerged was as part of larger social movements whose intention was to disrupt tradition or to foment social change.[6]

The Danish folk school movement constitutes as example of this disruptive form of adult education.[7] Hailed by many as a preeminent example of critical adult education, the Danish folk schools emerged in the mid-19th century as part of a

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[5] The parochial concerns of early adult educators, Wilson (1991) argues, is evident in the submissions to the 1934 *Adult Education Handbook*, the first of many such handbooks orchestrated by the North American Commission of Professors. The local and disparate concerns of this earlier edition is all the more obvious if compared to the most recent edition of the handbook edited by Sharan Merriam and Phyllis Cunningham (1989), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. C.J. Titmus provides a good sense of the sporadic and local nature of adult education prior to the First World War in his introduction to *Lifelong Education for Adults: An International Handbook* (1989).

[6] In a famous address to the extra-mural department at London University, R.H. Tawney (1964) observed that: "All serious educational movements have, in England, been also social movements" (p. 84). A perusal of the history of adult education in other countries (especially Canada) suggests that, at least until the 1950's, Tawney's observation might well have applied over much of the globe.

[7] One of the first accounts of the Danish folk schools was provided by Joseph K. Hart (1926) in his *Light from the North: The Danish Folk High Schools—Their Meanings for America*. Largely because of Hart's book, the Danish folk schools were to have a large impact on several adult education initiatives in North America. In particular, Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander school in Tennessee, drew his initial inspiration for educating miners in the Appalachia's from Denmark's folk schools (Adams, 1975). For a good full length history of the folk schools see R. Paulston (1980), *Other Dreams, Other Schools: Folk Schools in Social and Ethnic Movements*. For a more concise review of the impact of Danish folk schools in Canada see Gordon Selman and Paul Dampier (1991), *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*.

larger nationalistic struggle waged by the Danish people. In 1864 Prussia defeated Denmark for the second time in the century. Confronted by a nation far more powerful than their own, Danes began forsaking their customs and language to adopt German ways. Many traditional Danes were alarmed at the threat to their heritage. Scandinavian scholar, Bishop N.S.F. Grundtvig, believed that Danes needed to make deliberate efforts to preserve their culture. He devised a kind of school where farmers could come to learn about their history, preserve their language, recover traditional forms of self-governance, and enjoy and revive Danish literature and art. By 1925, 300,000 young Danes attended a network of folk schools that spanned the country (Hart, p. 85).

While some of the educational methods that prevailed in the Danish folk schools were unique (books, grades, and tests were largely absent), there was no real need to distinguish the folk schools as a *critical* form of adult education. The fact that they furthered the cause of the peasants in their struggles with landlords, clergy, and nobility made them easily recognizable as critical. Not until late in the 19th century did questions begin to emerge as to whether all folk schools actually constituted a critical form of adult education. By then the worker's movement had advanced across Europe and into Scandinavia. Several folk schools, especially those in Scandinavian countries other than Denmark, began to shift the focus of their educational activities from the narrow nationalistic concerns of the earlier folk schools to concerns arising out of the worker's movement. The critique leveled at the more traditional folk schools was simple. Detractors insisted that Danish folk schools's alliance with the peasantry in a nationalistic struggle did not automatically render them an example of critical adult education (Lovett, 1988, p. xvii). With the emergence of working class movements, a more inclusive basis had to be determined for discerning critical forms of adult education.

The development of Marxist social analyses provided a powerful and pervasive means for distinguishing different forms of adult education. Socialist educators began to insist that forms of adult education that fostered social changes favouring the bourgeoisie could not be called 'critical'.[8] This label should be reserved for forms of adult education that helped generate social changes to aid workers. Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, for example, reflects this view in a criticism he levels at the Italian Popular Universities started by the Società Umanitaria of Milan, founded in 1893. Gramsci (1971) contends that the universities' attempt to extend education to foster Italian culture was essentially misguided. He compares the universities to English merchants "handing out trashy baubles" to native people "in exchange for gold" (p. 330) and suggests that they do not count as examples of critical adult education because they failed to form relationships with the masses that could enable them to genuinely meet their needs. Once again, no specific quality differentiates critical adult education enterprises from what Gramsci identifies as idealist forms (in fact, he acknowledges that the methods used by the Popular Universities were radical and worthy of examination (p. 329)). Rather, the extent to which an adult education enterprise serves the needs of the working people establishes it as critical adult education.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, British adult educators acquired a growing sense of the need to provide firmer criteria for differentiating critical forms of adult education. In 1899, university educators (primarily based in Oxford) established the Ruskin College and then the Workers Education Association (1903)

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[8] In France, for example, the *Universités Populaires*, which were initiated in 1896 and then dominated by bourgeois intellectuals until 1900, gradually were taken over by working-class militants. In the words of one such militant, the *Universités Populaires* should become "A working-class association which sets out to determine the instruction suitable to free workers, which pursues the education of the working-class in order to make it capable of conceiving and realizing freedom" (Quoted in Tilman, 1967, p. 25).

to "provide an economic and political education which would enable workers to understand and change society" (McIlroy and Spencer, 1989, p. 35). From the beginning, the impulse for this initiative was reformist. As McIlroy and Spencer relate: "Its emphasis was liberal and a central impetus was a desire to control, civilize and incorporate the leaders of 'the great unrest'" (pp. 35-36).[9] By 1909, however, radical socialist intellectuals within the ranks of the WEA had established the Central Labour College (CLC) devoted to the development of independent working class education. For the next three decades, the CLC competed directly with the WEA to provide working class education. In the context of this competition adult educators began to advance new ways of distinguishing critical adult education.

The CLC's principal criticism of the WEA was that its association with the university and its reliance on state funding rendered it inimical to working class interests.[10] Rather than directly informing workers of the basis of their exploitation based on sound Marxist analysis as did the CLC, the WEA believed strongly that its students should make up their own minds on the state of world affairs after discussing a wide range of conflicting interpretations (Brown, 1980, p. 120). This left the WEA open to condemnation as weak-kneed and prevaricating. As Brown (1980) relates, "the WEA was accused by the Labour College movement of teaching 'bourgeois social science', and of being incorporated into the status quo" (p. 109).[11] The CLC took a more direct and in many ways more traditional approach to

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[9] For confirmation of this, see Roger Fieldhouse (1987), "The 1908 Report: Antidote to Class Struggle," who observes that the 1908 *Oxford and Working-Class Education* Report was a written reassertion of the Oxford educator's belief that the working-class was in need of intellectual guidance and that they were the one's to provide it. One can peruse the text of the Oxford report in the same book, Sylvia Harrop, ed. (1987), *Oxford and Working-Class Education*.

[10] Brian Simon (1990) in his paper "The Struggle for Hegemony, 1920-1926," documents the struggle between the WEA and the National Council of Labour Colleges, the Plebs League, and the Communist Party in the years after World War I.

[11] This claim may have been a bit of an over-generalization. In some locales, like in Yorkshire, the WEA was very Marxist in orientation (McIlroy and Spencer, 1989).

teaching. Classes were conducted in a lecture format and little allowance was made either for discussion or the entertainment of other points of view (p. 122).

Unable to doubt the CLC's allegiance to the working class, intellectuals in the WEA began to seek alternate grounds for discriminating critical forms of adult education other than the usual notion that adult education is critical when it serves the interests of the working class.[12] They contended that, while it might be true that critical adult education must fairly consider Marx and the materialist conception of history, it must also demonstrate particular characteristics consistent with some notion of democracy. Conceptions of critical adult education defended by the CLC revealed little awareness of the unique characteristics of critical adult education. How could it be claimed, for instance, that an adult education initiative is critical when all it does is dogmatically teach a predigested party line? The WEA contended that, as well as teaching Marxist analyses, critical adult education must also avoid dogmatism, promote open-mindedness, foster a spirit of independent inquiry, and arouse a democratic sensibility.[13] Based on these criteria, the WEA claimed that its discussion-based approach to adult education comprised a better example of critical adult education than the lecture-based approach of the CLC.

In a very different context, Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire, carefully developed still another means of discriminating critical forms of adult education from non-critical forms.[14] Freire commenced his career as an adult educator in the

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[12] Brown (1980) identifies G.D.H. Cole as a key figure in the development of WEA educational philosophy.

[13] While this belief originated in Britain, it quickly spread to wherever the WEA operated. In his historical account of the WEA in New Zealand, Roy Shukur (1984) relates how the WEA held to its philosophical commitment to democracy even when it was attacked as insufficiently critical of the status quo.

[14] I summarize Freire's attempts to delineate critical forms of adult education in "The Significance of Jürgen Habermas for the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the Practice of Adult Education" (1989). For a good review of Freire's ideas see R. Mackie (1981), *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*.

late-1950's in the impoverished center of Recife, Brazil.[15] Working in university extension, he developed a pedagogical method for fostering literacy amongst the peasantry. Like many liberal intellectuals caught up in the possibilities of modernization, Freire believed that Brazilians were finally in the position to shake off the chains of an oppressive colonial past and to develop a truly democratic society. He believed his pedagogical method could help create the conditions for democracy by fostering the capacity of peasants to participate actively in the affairs of their nation.[16] In the progressivist heyday of Brazil of the early 1960's, neither Freire nor anyone else had reason to doubt the critical nature of his adult pedagogy.

In 1964, Brazil experienced a military coup and Freire was forced into exile. Whereas, his pedagogical method once won easy support, in the hostile context of military dictatorship, Freire experienced increasing pressure to justify the ways in which his pedagogy was critical. Much like the WEA, he experienced attacks from the Left who believed that his dialogical pedagogical method was essentially reformist and regressive and that it did not deal adequately with the concrete social circumstances of oppression. Freire's response to these criticisms came in the form of his well known treatise, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972).

Unlike the WEA intellectuals, Freire did not have the luxury of simply asserting the value of democracy as a distinguishing feature of critical adult education. Whereas, in the largely liberal British context, the notion of democracy retained enough emotive force to stand as a reasonable educational ideal without much further explanation or justification, in the Latin American context, the notion of democracy did not inspire a lot of interest. Military force maintained extreme levels

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[15] Denis Collins (1977) provides a readable biography of Freire in his early years in *Paulo Freire: His Life, Works, and Thought.*

[16] See, especially, his early text, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, (1973).

of poverty and exploitation. The idea that any form of democracy could manage the vast changes required to make the societies more equitable seemed far-fetched. The peasantry did not require critical consciousness; they required someone to direct them in a revolution.

While he agreed that revolution was required, Freire refused to believe that any authentic change could transpire unless all people were involved as equals in the revolutionary process. Like the WEA intellectuals, he held that the measure of a truly critical form of adult education was not the extent to which it brings about social reform, but to the extent to which it engages all people as equals in the process of social transformation. To sustain his point, however, Freire did something the WEA intellectuals felt no compunction to do. He further grounded his notion of critical adult education saying that it is consistent with people's true human nature as "beings of praxis" (Freire, 1972, p. 90).

Freire argues that, unlike animals which simply live *in* the world, people exist as active subjects who interact *with* the world in order to understand it and change it (Freire, 1973, p. 4). He relates the basic premises of his conception of the human being as follows:

> Whereas the being which merely lives is not capable of reflecting upon itself and knowing itself living *in* the world, the existent subject reflects upon his (sic) life within the very domain of existence, and questions his relationship to the world. His domain of existence is the domain of work, of history, of culture, of values—the domain in which [people] experience the dialectic between determinism and freedom. (Freire, 1972, p. 28)

The capacity to reflect on their world enables humans to act on it to change it:

> The difference between animals—who cannot create products detached from themselves—and [people]—who through their action upon the world create the realm of culture and history—is that only the latter are beings of praxis. Only [people] are praxis—the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is the source of knowledge and creation. Animal

> activity, which occurs without a praxis, is not creative; [people's] transforming activity is. (Freire, pp. 90-91)

For Freire, non-critical modes of adult education separate humans from their authentic nature as beings of praxis. Critical modes of adult education, on the other hand, reaffirm and foster this nature.

Freire, it must be emphasized, stakes out the territory of critical adult education using very different means than that of theorists of the Danish folk school, Gramsci, the CLC, the WEA, or his own Leftist opponents. Rather than assuming that a form of adult education is critical simply because it is associated with a social movement, because it works in the interest of the working class, or because it fosters democracy, Freire pursues firmer and more universal criteria. He identifies the essential nature of the human being and contends that adult education is critical only when it does not distort this nature. Only when adult education allows people to actualize their potential as subjects capable of praxis, only when it fosters people's liberation from oppressive social forms that inhibit their natural capacity to control of their own destiny, only when it fosters the equitable participation of all people in the essential human vocation of history making does it warrant the label 'critical adult education'.

The advantage of Freire's approach to circumscribing critical adult education is that it offers clear normative criteria for assessing the status of adult education initiatives in a multitude of contexts and associated with diverse social movements. A social movement seeking justice and deploying adult education to help it achieve its ends does not qualify that form of adult education as 'critical'. As in the case of the CLC, it may be that forms of adult education actually discourage critical reflection. Likewise, being associated with a dubious political enterprise does not qualify adult education as 'critical'. The WEA, for instance, may have garnered state funding, but it utilized an adult education method that Freire would probably condone as critical.

The disadvantage of Freire's demarcation of critical adult education is that, at the same time it emphasizes necessary universalistic criteria, it tends to devalue or obscure the concrete historical struggles in which critical forms of adult education have historically been intertwined. This is not so much a problem with Freire himself who has remained engaged with and committed to oppressed people. The problem with a universalized foundation for critical adult education becomes manifest, however, in the context of North American academic adult education where theoreticians and practitioners typically avoid committing to specific social struggles.

North American adult education has not enjoyed the same long and prolific association with social movements—particularly the working class movement—as it has in Britain and Latin America.[17] In a cross-cultural analysis of adult education in Britain and the United States, Stephen Brookfield (1989) observes how, while, in Britain, people view adult education either as "inextricably bound up with the emergence of working-class movements, collective organizations, and structural forms such as trade unions, worker education, and the Labour Party" or as "concerned with the development of aesthetic judgments and intellectual capacities," in the Unites States, adult education is "cast firmly within the liberal democratic framework which informs the culture and political system of the country" and is "seen as existing to enhance the individual's creative powers, aesthetic capacities, and economic opportunities" (pp. 148-149). Brookfield notes Rockhill's (1985) contention that, "the systematic denial of class in the USA" has ended up excluding radical points of view from American adult education and has

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[17] This is much more true of the United States than it is for Canada which, as Michael Welton's (1987) book, *Knowledge for the People*, makes clear, has enjoyed a fairly rich heritage of socially situated adult education initiatives.

largely inhibited the emergence of a working class adult education movement in America (p. 187). Without the political backing of a distinct social movement, American academic adult educators elected to legitimize their field by other means. By developing scientific learning theories distinguishing adult learning from child learning, theorists like J.R. (Robi) Kidd (1973), Malcolm Knowles (1977; 1980), Alan Knox (1977) and others carved out a small but secure place in the academe for their discipline.[18] Like a thin veil, though, the legacy of their efforts, a handful of highly problematic notions like self-directed learning and andragogy, hides the theoretical precariousness of their discipline.

Paulo Freire's fairly radical endeavor to differentiate critical from non-critical forms of adult education received a surprisingly warm reception from American adult educators throughout the 1970s.[19] Theorists deeply imbued with the psychologism pervading their discipline appreciated Freire's efforts to identify the essential qualities of the adult learner. Many of his notions—that humans should direct their own learning and not have knowledge imposed on them, that adults learn from experience, that action should not be divorced from reflection—accord well with basic elements of adult learning theory developed in the North American context. Moreover, because it is possible to abstract Freire's universalistic criteria for distinguishing critical forms of adult education from concrete social struggles, it is possible for American adult educators to evaluate various kinds of adult education enterprises as 'critical' and 'emancipatory' solely on the basis that they enhance what Freire identifies as the essential characteristics of human beings. In many instances,

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[18] For an interesting "who's who" in North American (i.e., United States) adult education, see William Griffith's (1991) "The Impact of Intellectual Leadership."

[19] This is evident to an almost painful extent in a collection of essays edited by Stanley Grabowski (1972), *Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator*.

adult education enterprises inimical to the interests of oppressed people are tagged as examples of 'critical' adult education.[20]

Freire's theory of critical adult education was not the only set of ideas to run afoul in the depoliticized context of North America. The ideas of Jürgen Habermas, too, were misappropriated in another effort to draw the boarders of critical adult education. Working within the heavily psychologized horizons of adult learning theory, Jack Mezirow (1981; 1985) argues that Habermas' early theory of cognitive interests provides a basis for discerning critical forms of adult education.

For Mezirow, critical adult education is distinguished by its capacity to bring about a particular kind of learning which he calls "perspective transformation" (1981, p. 6). Reworking a thinly guised Piagetian notion of cognitive schemas, Mezirow explains that a "meaning perspective" is the structure of "cultural and psychological assumptions that have influenced the way we see ourselves and our relationships, and the way we pattern our lives" (1978, p. 101). Usually our meaning perspectives serve us well. They provide us with a ready means for making sense of our day to day lives. Occasionally, however, events occur that overload the capacity of our meaning perspective to accommodate the dilemmas of adult life. In instances like these adults must radically transform the very base assumptions they have about the world. Mezirow identifies this event as a perspective transformation and describes it as follows:

> Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1981, p. 6)

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[20] See Ross Kidd and Krishna Kumar (1981), "Co-Opting Freire: a Critical Analysis of Pseudo-Freirian Adult Education."

Mezirow argues that Habermas' delineation of three knowledge constitutive interests provides the basis for distinguishing perspective transformation from other forms of adult learning and critical adult education from other non-critical forms.

In an early book, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), Habermas suggests that three "quasi-transcendental" cognitive interests shape all human inquiry. The first of these, the technical cognitive interest, aims to control the world through instrumental and strategic action. It has given rise to empirical and analytical forms of inquiry and has been institutionalized in the sciences. The second, the practical cognitive interest, endeavors to understand the social world through a consensual process of understanding meaning. It has given rise to hermeneutic forms of inquiry. The third, the emancipatory cognitive interest, is reason's interest in attaining its fullest expression. This cognitive interest has given rise to critical modes of inquiry which reflect on and attempt to establish optimal conditions for all forms of inquiry. Perspective transformation, Mezirow contends, is the kind of learning that results from this last form of inquiry.

Mezirow is able to discriminate different types of adult education based on the kinds of cognitive interests they represent and, subsequently, the types of learning they foster. Whereas traditional forms of adult education attempt either to foster a scientific/analytical grasp of the world or a hermeneutic understanding of the world, critical forms of adult education foster perspective transformation. But, while Habermas conceptualizes the emancipatory cognitive interest as a social phenomena and the learning it fosters as collective learning, Mezirow resolutely chops away the social theoretical aspects of Habermas' formulations and views perspective transformation as an individualistic, psychologized phenomena. For him, individuals gain an understanding into misguided assumptions they have about themselves or their world through critical self-reflection. For Habermas, critical reflection does not remain at the level of the individual. Rather, it is a collective

learning process that identifies and rectifies real social injustices. As Hart (1984) relates:

> Mezirow speaks...about 'reintegration into society' as the result of emancipatory education. Emancipation is therefore a strictly individual process, and the institutions and structures which are (in a truncated way) recognized as lying behind learning needs and individual problems are left entirely intact. (p. 8)

Griffin (1988) is also critical of Mezirow's misappropriation of Habermas and notes that Mezirow' concept of perspective transformation and his delineation of critical adult education:

> reflects no problematic analysis of economic or political social relations, and the claim that it is connected with democracy through critical social science analysis should be viewed with considerable scepticism....It is difficult, in other words, to be a critical theorist without engaging in some critical analysis of economic relations, the distribution of power, the role of the state, and the different historical forms in which these have been expressed. (p. 177)

Mezirow's attempt to position the boundaries of critical adult education based on an essentialized notion of the adult learning ignores that adult learning always takes place within concrete social circumstances from which it can never be abstracted and then analyzed and schematized. North American adult education, steeped in the larger liberal democratic research tradition, turns a blind eye to the social forces that shape its central concepts. Conceptions of critical adult education that emerge out of this context are inevitably abstract and depoliticized. They provide little sense of the ways in which the great historical movements of adult education for emancipatory social change stand as examples of critical adult education. Unfortunately, without some overarching criteria at hand, it is also difficult to gain a sense of how the many varied instances of adult education can be gathered under the banner of critical adult education. The advantage of Habermas' theory of communicative action is that, while it provides clear criteria for understanding what counts as critical adult

education, it does so in a way sensitive to the concrete historical circumstances in which the many varied examples of critical adult education have had to make their way.

Habermas and Modernity

To provide a basis for constructing a theory of critical adult education, it is necessary, at this point, to sketch out the main tenets of Habermas' critical theory of modernity. In this context it is possible to provide but the briefest account of the massive theoretical edifice crafted by this wide-ranging theorist.

Modernity is not something to be viewed from the outside. The way we think about it, the way we represent it, the rationality we deploy to explain and understand it have all been shaped by modernity itself. Modernity forms the horizon that bounds all of our attempts to understand, including our attempts to understand modernity. While we cannot hope to escape modernity or to transcend the forms of reason that guide our reflections about it, Habermas believes we can gain a critical perspective on both reason and the modern world. Using the rationality available to us in modernity we can understand enough about modernity to see how it shapes the rationality we use to understand it. We can form a critical theory of modernity that is capable of validating its own rational standards (Habermas, 1984, p. xxxix).

Realizing that it is impossible to come to terms with modernity without at the same time coming to terms with the rationality of modernity, Habermas takes the first steps towards developing a critical theory of society by engaging in a critique of reason in the modern age (1984, p. 7). The way we view reason, he contends, is linked in an essential way to the way we view action. Habermas develops his critical perspective on reason by formulating his *theory of communicative action.*

Habermas begins his discussion of communicative action by arguing that "the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its

members" (Habermas, 1984, p. 397). Therefore, all theories of action are, at base, also theories of social action. To clarify the characteristics of his own theory of communicative action, Habermas compares it to three other prominent models of social action: the teleological model, the normative model, and the dramaturgical model. In the teleological model, the coordination of social action is achieved by the egocentric calculation of individualized and self-serving actors (p. 87); in the normative model, social action is coordinated through a textured array of guiding norms (p. 88); and, in the dramaturgical model, social action is coordinated "through a consensual relation between players and public" (p. 101). In the communicative model, quite distinctly, social action is seen to be coordinated through a "process of reaching understanding in the sense of a cooperative process of interpretation" (p. 101).

Each model of social action carries with it a corresponding notion of rationality. In the teleological model, social actions are considered rational when they bring about a desired end or effectively control objective reality; in the normative model, social actions are thought to be rational when they accord with guiding norms; and, in the dramaturgical model, social actions are held as rational when they accurately express the emotional state of the actor. Communicative action also offers a means for assessing the rationality of a statement or action. With every act of speech, a social actor takes a position in relation to each of three possible worlds: the objective world, the social world, and the subjective world. The validity of the speech act can be assessed along the axis of each of the three world relations. In relation to the objective world, the speech act is assessed according to the criteria of truth and efficiency; in relation to the social world a speech act can be validated according to whether it either conforms or legitimately challenges a social norm; in relation to the subjective world, a speech act can be assessed according to the criteria of truthfulness or sincerity (p.100). In the end, the rationality of the speech act is

decided by the degree to which it can motivate an action coordinating agreement amongst participants in a communicative situation. For Habermas, the "final court of appeal" for contestable claims is argumentation (p. 17). The goal of argumentation is to bring about a rationally motivated consensus about the validity of a speech act.

Habermas makes clear that certain conditions must exist before a consensus about the validity of a claim can be considered a true consensus. He outlines these conditions as follows:

1. Each subject who is capable of speech and action is allowed to participate in discourses.
2. a) Each is allowed to call into question any proposal.
   b) Each is allowed to introduce any proposal into the discourse.
3. Each is allowed to express his [or her] attitudes, wishes, and needs.
4. No speaker ought to be hindered by compulsion—whether arising from inside the discourse or outside of it —from making use of the rights secure under [1 and 2]. (White, 1988, p.56)

Obviously, these conditions are idealized and rarely, if ever, found in real-life. Habermas is adamant, however, that although they seem idealistic, these rules stand as the basic condition people must presume if they are to be willing to engage in rational discourse (Habermas, 1984, p. 25).

In order to make his analysis of communicative action serviceable to social theory, Habermas realizes he must connect it in a concrete way to some aspect of social life. He accomplishes this by linking his notion of communicative action to a conception of the lifeworld. Drawing on the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, Habermas relates how the lifeworld comprises an unthematized background of meaning that forms the horizons of everyday experience for the individual. Claiming that this account remains far to individualistic, Habermas draws out what he believes to be the essentially intersubjective nature of the lifeworld by pointing out that the lifeworld not only provides the context for the individual to make sense of their world but also provides commonly held, "culturally transmitted and

linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns" that all lifeworld participants can draw upon in their efforts to reach mutual understandings (Habermas, 1987a, p. 124). As he relates:

> The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. (p. 126)

The lifeworld forms the horizon within which all communicative acts takes place. People in communication draw on the fund of pre-interpreted knowledge, meanings, norms, values, rules, personalities, and explanations the lifeworld provides as they endeavor to reach agreements. Simultaneously, in the process of engaging with one another in reciprocal acts of understanding, people reproduce those very meanings and interpretations. The lifeworld provides the context for communicative action; communicative action reproduces the lifeworld.

Having demonstrated the links between communicative action and the lifeworld, Habermas is now in a position to show the links between communicative rationality and the lifeworld. He does this by contending that the lifeworld can be judged rationalized to the extent that it allows the "release of the rationality potential inherent in communicative action" (1987a, p. 146). In archaic societies, mutual understanding is not dependent on the communicative accomplishments of its members. Rather, action coordination is ensured by a common fund of interpretations (norms, values, myths) that covers all contingencies of life. Situations rarely arise where people are required to work out new interpretations and understandings communicatively.

In a rationalized lifeworld, on the other hand, action coordinating interpretations are not worked out ahead of time and must be worked out by actors in

communication. Interpretations, meanings, values, manners, and mores do not exist as a ready-made basis for action coordination but exist more as a backdrop which lifeworld participants can draw upon to achieve understandings and work out agreements. The legitimacy of social institutions is no longer taken for granted but becomes dependent upon "formal procedures for positing and justifying norms" (Habermas, 1987a, p. 146). Personal identity is no longer tightly bound to a group but emerges as a "highly abstract ego identity" that maintains its own integrity (p. 146). Culture becomes fluid, traditions are relativized, and norms are subjected to a process of continuous revision.

Habermas observes that the rationalization of the lifeworld greatly increases the burden on social actors directly to manage the process of action coordination. The rationalization process is attended by a weakening of traditional action coordinating structures. If this weakening advances too quickly, it can soon outpace the capacity of lifeworld participants to successfully coordinate actions. Pressure can mount to find alternate, non-communicative means for action coordination. As Habermas relates, "[w]hen the medium for coordinating action no longer has to be called upon for *all linguistic* functions at once, then there is a disburdening effect" (1987, p. 350). Aspects of the material reproduction of society are particularly open to action coordination by non-communicative means. While the reproduction of symbolic and interactional components of society must be carried out communicatively, material reproduction can be achieved using other action coordinating media. In our own society, two such media have emerged: money and power. Interactions steered by these media can be coordinated without anyone being responsible for them. For Habermas, "action coordination that has been detached from communicatively achieved consensus no longer requires responsible participants" (1987a, p. 263). When actions are coordinated by mechanisms freed from the relatively slow and insecure process of consensus formation, they become much more efficiently

coordinated. This was to be especially true in capitalist society where interactions mediated by money eventually solidified in a functionally specific sub-system for action coordination (the economic system). The emergence of the economic system was soon followed by the emergence of another sub-system (the administrative state) organized around the other non-linguistic steering media, power. Habermas (1987a) summarizes what he calls the "decoupling of system and lifeworld" in capitalist society as follows:

> The transfer of action coordination from language over to steering media means an uncoupling of interaction from lifeworld contexts. Media such as money and power attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive-rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while *bypassing* processes of consensus-oriented communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but *replace* it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favor of media-steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action. (p. 183)

Habermas suggests that, even though the rationalization of the lifeworld enables the functional separation of sub-systems of purposive activity, these sub-systems remain reliant on the accomplishments of the lifeworld. The economic system, for instance, remains tied to the lifeworld in its requirement for labour and consumer demand. In exchange, it provides members of the lifeworld with income, goods, and services. The administrative system remains linked to the lifeworld in its need for loyalty and taxes. In exchange, lifeworld members receive effective political decisions and organizational accomplishments (a safe and secure political environment). Relations are mediated by institutions that emerge at the border that divides lifeworld and system, such as schools, corporations, legal institutions, social w lfare agencies, and so on.

The separation of media-steered mechanisms of social reproduction from the lifeworld has vastly increased the productive capacity of modern society. At no time in history have humans been capable of so dramatically exploiting the resources of the natural world. As Habermas points out, however, the decoupling of system and lifeworld has also left us vulnerable to great perils which arise when the media-steered sub-systems of the economy and state (which the rationalization of the lifeworld made possible in the first place) become powerful enough to take on a life of their own and begin to subject the lifeworld to the imperatives of unfettered capitalist production.

The growth of capitalism has resulted in the expansion of the sub-systems of the economy and the administrative state to the extent that they now turn back on the lifeworld. Social actions once coordinated by the process of mutual understanding (and subjected to the rationality criteria of communicative action) are now coordinated by the system to the point that they begin to impair the lifeworld's capacity to reproduce itself symbolically. Disrupted by the demands of the system, the lifeworld now experiences difficulty reproducing itself. The communicative basis of the lifeworld is impaired so greatly that cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization become disrupted. Symbolic reproduction can only be achieved communicatively. The destruction of the lifeworld's communicative capacities that results from the disruptive intrusion of the system has devastating effects, including a general sense of meaninglessness, a growing prevalence of anomie, and an inadequate socialization of young people. Habermas attributes these contemporary problems to the "colonization of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987a, p. 196).

The colonization of the lifeworld not only impairs the reproductive capacity of the lifeworld, but also destroys the communicative institutions that enable people to collaborate in discursive and collective will formation. Social decisions are increasingly turned over to technicians, professionals, and bureaucrats who

"rationally" deploy standardized decision-making procedures to develop action plans to bring about narrowly conceived and instrumentalized goals. Decisions in modernity are made more in accordance with well-oiled technical procedures than in a context of uninhibited discourse. Questions about the ethics or aesthetics of a course of action are systematically ignored or depreciated. The only concerns admitted are those which instrumentally explore the capacity of an action to bring about a desired end. In giving rise to "an economic and administrative system that, in assuming a virtual life of its own, not only denies real political participation but ravages the natural and cultural environment" (Buchwalter, 1984, p. xxxiii), modernity places humanity at the brink of disaster.

While he acknowledges the precarious nature of society's present course, Habermas is not totally pessimistic. He contends that the continued rationalization of the lifeworld conceived not in terms of instrumental rationalization, but in terms of communicative rationalization offers the possibility of a much brighter future. By engaging in a *social learning process* aimed at developing their collective capacity for communicative action, human beings may be able to generate a lifeworld which is increasingly capable of governing the excessive imperatives of the system.

The dangers of modernization, Habermas maintains, can only be avoided if we press on with the project of modernity initiated by our forbears centuries ago. It is folly to think that we can somehow synthetically regenerate a taken-for-granted bulwark of norms to protect us from the uncertainties of a world ravaged by capitalism (Habermas, 1984, p. xli). Further, it is folly to imagine that the continued instrumentalization of life, fueled by new-found technical capacities for action coordination like computers and telecommunications, can somehow produce a world of meaning and joy. In Habermas' words, in a world in which the lifeworld no longer functioned, "men (sic) would make their history with will, but without consciousness" (Habermas, 1970, p. 118). It is equal folly to imagine that giving up

the project of modernity altogether in favour of a return to simpler times will solve current problems. Habermas is careful to point out that "restricting the growth of monetary-administrative complexity is by no means synonymous with surrendering modern forms or life" (1984, p. xlii). Only by fostering the rationalization of the lifeworld to the point that public-sphere institutions can develop "the prudent combination of power and intelligent self-restraint that is needed to sensitize the self-steering mechanisms of the state and the economy to the goal-oriented outcomes of democratic will formation" can human beings guard against the tremendous dangers of modernity (Habermas, 1987, p. 365).

Critical Adult Education and Modernity

Now, with the preceding account of Habermas' critical theory of modernity at hand, it is possible to outline a theory of critical adult education that does not suffer the drawbacks of other theories. My principle contention in the following is that critical forms of adult education are those that foster the communicative rationalization of the lifeworld and the capacity of the lifeworld to resist colonization by the system. Non-critical adult education, on the other hand, furthers the instrumentalization of the lifeworld and promotes means and mechanisms for its colonization and, ultimately, its destruction.

Drawing on Habermas' account of the historical evolution of modernity as a two-tiered society, it is possible to describe the emergence and development of adult education and to discern its fundamentally different forms. It is possible to see, for instance, why, in archaic societies, adult education is not recognizable as a distinct social institution. Societies in which social action is coordinated by a fund of commonly held and taken-for-granted interpretations do not require special institutions for adult learning. By adulthood, socialization and enculturation processes are largely complete and the explanatory frameworks (myths) and

deposits of knowledge, skills, and norms required to see a social member through the varied stages and events of life are well internalized. Only occasionally are members confronted with contingencies for which their culture leaves them unprepared and for which they must learn new interpretations. When social learning does occur, it is in pace with the long and gradual process of social evolution. Adult education historians have remained virtually silent on the forms of social learning that transpired in pre-modern times.

In societies experiencing the early stages of lifeworld rationalization, social learning processes accelerate. With the "linguistification of the sacred" and the accompanying erosion of the taken-for-granted stock of cultural interpretations, new competencies must be learned so that action coordinating agreements can be worked out in processes of discursive will-formation. Even at this stage, however, societies do not require distinct institutions of adult education. For a time, at least, the inborn capacity of all lifeworld institutions to foster social learning is sufficient to meet more intense learning needs.[21] It is only later in the process of lifeworld rationalization that the learning requirements of the lifeworld overrun the capacity of traditional lifeworld institutions to foster social learning. In Habermas' theory, this is the point at which alternate means of action coordination, the steering-media of money and power arise to relieve the pressure. It must be observed that, as

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[21] Only recently have adult education historians attended to the lifeworld institutions within which much of the social learning of the 18th and 19th centuries took place. In his *Learning in Social Context: Workers and Adult Education in Nineteenth Century Chicago*, Fred Schied (1993) illuminates how the numerous working-class institutions (workers' clubs, newspapers, performing arts societies, saloons, etc.) not normally considered to be sites of adult learning played an important role in fostering the emergence and consolidation of working-class organizations in Chicago's German community in the mid to late 19th century. Michael Welton (1987) draws on the work of H. Clare Pentland (1981) to remind us that "If...we project our professionalised perceptions back on the past, we will discover very little adult education....The picture changes, however, when we examine the deep educative process at work in the transition from an agrarian to early factory capitalist social order....This process, says Pentland, is a complex process 'conducted largely in the school of experience'" (p. 61).

efficient as these media are at coordinating action, they require substantial social learning both to get them running and to sustain them. As Corrigan and Sayer (1985) so clearly demonstrate, the learning required for the final coagulation of the media of money and power into the coherent economic and state systems of capitalist modernity actually spanned hundreds of years.

The emergence of capitalist modernity generated a vast acceleration in social change. During the first half of the 19th century, the industrial revolution transformed the whole of Europe; during the last half, the imperialist expansion of capitalism transformed the remainder of the globe. Unlike previous centuries, these changes were not driven by a process of lifeworld rationalization. Rather, they were spurred by the spectacular and intrusive growth of the capitalist economy and state. The rapid destruction of traditional ways of life that accompanied these social changes quickly drained away cultural resources for handling the stresses of modernization. Moreover, at precisely the time when the lifeworld experienced a dramatic surge in the need for social learning, the modernization process largely undermined the capacity of traditional institutions to sustain this learning. The lifeworld was not left totally without resources, however. The communicative rationalization of its structures had advanced enough to allow the emergence of a whole new kind of lifeworld institution devoted to the task of fostering social learning. This new institution was adult education.

The last half of the 19th century saw a dramatic increase in incidence of adult education throughout Europe invariably associated with the great social movements of the age. Habermas observes how social protest tends to emerge at the points of most intense contact between system and lifeworld and at these points of contact that the system sucks its sustenance from the lifeworld, eventually impairing the latter's capacity to carry out its functions of enculturation, social integration, and personality formation. At these points, therefore, people most acutely experience the

negative effects of lifeworld colonization and the most intense need to engage in social learning to make up for its deficits. In the 19th century, for instance, the prevailing point of contact was labour, the most significant social movements that emerged were labour movements, and the most important forms of social learning took place to offset the negative effects of wage labour. It is no accident that adult education has often been associated with social movements. Both are the result of the same socio-historical events.

Early forms of adult education very often emphasized discourse as an essential part of the social learning process. Adult education institutions emerge out of a rationalized lifeworld that favours communicative forms of action coordination. Unlike traditional institutions of social learning which endeavor to bring social actions into harmony with a taken-for-granted stock of social interpretations, many early examples of adult education endeavored to create the conditions for open and unhindered scrutiny of knowledge claims, apparent in a vast number of adult education enterprises. In the Antigonish Movement of Nova Scotia, for instance, adult educators utilized discussion groups to foster a sense of cooperation and group action amongst fishermen and coal miners of the region (Coady, 1946). Social learning is viewed less and less as the internalization of pre-given interpretations and increasingly as the successful achievement of action coordinating understandings. By fostering the capacity for communicative action, adult education aims to render the lifeworld better capable of staving off the worst effects of colonization by the system. I identify such forms of adult education as 'critical'.

While early forms of adult education typically were critical, by the late 19th and early 20th century, forms of adult education began to emerge to satisfy the learning needs of the system (henceforth, I shall identify these forms as "instrumental adult

education").[22] In early capitalist society, the relations between the system and the lifeworld were adequate to fulfill the needs of the sub-systems of economy and state. The vast storehouse of knowledge and skills acquired over eons by the lifeworld were sufficient to meet capitalism's accumulation needs for many decades.[23] The process of socialization equipped workers with a wealth of traditional skills (smithing, carpentry, masonry, weaving, manufacture) that formed a rich topsoil for the growth of early mills and factories. Only after decades did production processes become so complex and lifeworld institutions for skill acquisition so impoverished that new learning institutions were required to meet the accumulation needs of the economy. By the mid-1800's, the state offered schooling to children to enhance the socialization process to better meet these accumulation needs. Adult job training first became an institutionalized practice only with the advent of the First World War and with the emergence of Fordist production processes where the pace of technological developments far outstripped the traditional knowledge of workers. Not until the Second World War did adult education for skill acquisition became an important pre-occupation of the modern state.[24] Assuming a rather narrow view of adult education, Titmus (1988) observes that "most of the important developments and

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[22] I call these forms "instrumental" because, rather than fostering the communicative capacities of lifeworld these forms of adult education impose the instrumental rationality of the system. Mainstream adult education histories, Knowles's (1977) or Stubblefield's more recent (1988) account of adult education in North America, or Selman and Dampier's history of adult education in Canada, are, in actuality, histories of instrumental adult education. It is for this reason perhaps, that none of these accounts actually examine instances of adult education prior to World War I.

[23] One of the great strengths of capitalism is, in fact, its capacity to exploit the cultural accomplishments of whatever society it contacts. This was amply demonstrated in the variety of nuanced relationships it established with societies throughout the world during its imperialist phase at the end of the 19th century.

[24] Amy Rose notes that after World War II the state in the USA took unprecedented steps to continue educational services provided during the war for returning veterans. Veteran's services were a key stage in the development of a vast array of vocational and community college programming that was to proliferate in the 1950s and 1960s. Raj Pannu (1988) notes that adult education as a state funded activity only emerged with the consolidation of the welfare state after the end of WWII (p. 235).

significant writings have occurred only since the First World War, with the most noteworthy occurring only during the second half of the twentieth century, and the pace seems still to be quickening" (p. xxiii).

In addition to drawing on instrumental adult education to meet its accumulation needs, capitalism also used it to legitimize its social relations. Again, this function of adult education emerged rather late. Habermas observes how throughout the 19th century the fundamental strategy of the system was to withdraw decisions about material reproduction from lifeworld contexts so that they would no longer require discursive validation. The inequitable relations of capitalism did not need to be normatively justified because they appeared as the product of a natural and neutral process of exchange. Only when accumulation problems mounted to the point where the state began to be directly involved in the reproduction of normative contexts conducive to economic growth were the operations of the economy and state once again opened to discursive assessment. According to Habermas, the problem of legitimation was exacerbated with the consolidation of the welfare state.

Child schooling was the first site where the state pursued its legitimation efforts. By manipulating child socialization, the state endeavored to instill values and beliefs justifying the destructive intrusions of the economic and state sub-systems into the lifeworld of students. Over the past two decades, a rich body of literature tracks the convoluted history of this difficult and conflict ridden venture.[25] While one can find numerous incidents of the state's early use of adult education for legitimation, it was not until the 20th century that significant adult education institutions emerged to fulfill this function.

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[25] Seminal texts and contributors to this discourse are Bowles and Gintis (1976), *Schooling in Capitalist America;* Michael Apple (1990), *Ideology and Curriculum;* and Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin (1985), *Schooling and Work in the Democratic State*..

Even though later examples of adult education intend to meet the accumulation and legitimation needs of the system, they must carry out the task within the discursive horizons of the lifeworld. Unlike critical forms of adult education, early forms of adult education do not endeavor to enhance conditions most favourable to discursive will-formation. Rather, they endeavor to inhibit or manipulate discourse to produce social learning that favours the interest of the system. The liberal approach to education, which has long dominated many state sponsored and philanthropic adult education institutions, is a case in point. As Jane Thompson (1980) relates "the liberal view of education creates a belief that education provides the means of furthering personal benefit and fulfillment" (p. 93). It "central weakness," however, "is that it leaves unquestioned the economic and political structure in society, in which the creation of disadvantage occurs, and in which educational reforms are expected to operate" (p. 95). Of course, as soon as Liberal and other legitimizing forms of adult education enter the arena of the lifeworld, they and the attitudes they promote become open to contestation. Theorists like Paul Willis (1977), Michael Apple (1982), and Henry Giroux (1983) point out that dominant educational discourses are seldom accepted without resistance.

Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony is an additional concept which helps draw out the nature of the struggle that takes place in the lifeworld for control of the social learning process. For Gramsci, one of the great successes of capitalism is its ability to maintain its dominance, not through the overt use of force or coercion (although it does not hesitate to use direct force if it finds itself threatened), but through its capacity to secure consent for its social relations. It does this, he contends, through establishing the process of hegemony.[26]

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[26] Of the many commentaries dealing with Gramsci's work, Joseph Femia's (1981), *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* is very adequate. For a more critical

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Gramsci offers that the capitalist social formation comprises very different groups held together in an interacting totality, an historic bloc, which is the uneasy achievement of one group in society, the leadership of the bourgeoisie (Laclau and Mouffe, p. 69). The dominant group maintains its privileged status in society by articulating its interests with the interests of all other social groups in a way that garners their consent for the social relations that prevail in capitalism. But the process of articulation is never complete. The needs and interests of the many composite groups are never stable and the dominant group must continuously find new ways of asserting the desirability of its version of society. Gramsci calls the ongoing and conflict ridden process of articulating interests, hegemony. According to Femia (1981), hegemony "refers to an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behavior" (p. 24).

The chief way by which the dominant group of the social formation manages to articulate its interests with the interests of other groups is through ideology. Ideology is the cement of hegemony. For Gramsci, it has a special meaning in that it extends beyond merely a set of ideas to include material forces of social representation. The dominant group fosters hegemony by establishing ideological conditions within which articulating discourses must take place, providing not only the ideas for the discourse but its material circumstances. From the perspective of the present discussion, the most interesting feature of hegemony is that Gramsci considers it to be essentially pedagogical (Giroux, 1988). The dominant group establishes its hegemony by fostering particular kinds of social learning which

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account, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*. For the customary account of Gramsci's ideas about education see Harold Entwistle (1979), *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Politics for Radical Schooling*. Henry Giroux (1988) provides a more up to date analysis in "Antonio Gramsci: Schooling for Radical Politics."

benefits its own interests at the expense of other social groups. Moreover, the pedagogical terrain that the dominant group endeavors to control is open to contestation by other groups. Counter-hegemonic endeavors are those which dispute the kinds of social learning taking place and which attempt to develop new discursive conditions and put forward new ideas to rearticulate the prevailing social totality. From a Habermasian point of view, this new articulation ideally would be achieved through an undistorted process of discursive will formation.

This brief description of hegemony allows us to appreciate how the distinctions between critical adult education (an example of a counterhegemonic enterprise) and instrumental adult education (an example of a hegemonic enterprise) are not nearly so tidy in historical examples of adult education. All adult education initiatives are sites of contestation—of political struggle—where groups that benefit most from the productive accomplishments of the system battle groups that desire the integrity of the lifeworld. Both fight to control processes of social learning. Pure critical or pure instrumental adult education are non-existent. Historical instances of adult education are always hybrid.

This does not mean, however, that the distinctions offered by Habermas' theory are unimportant. While it may be impossible to find pure examples of critical adult education, his formulations still help us to track (and, if we are so inclined, to foster) the qualities of critical adult education. Armed with a clearer sense of what constitutes critical adult education, we can discern ways in which historical instances of adult education are critical, can see, perhaps, how they succeeded or failed in their critical ventures, and can illuminate forces that helped or hindered their unfolding.

Two Examples

I would like briefly to examine two examples of what some have identified as critical adult education to show how the formulations of the previous section can

help us gain a critical perspective on historical examples of adult education. I summarize the advantages of a Habermasian/Gramscian theory of critical adult education more systematically in the following section.

It is possible to see ways in which Danish folk schools can be considered examples of critical adult education. To some extent, the folk schools did emerge as a way of defending the lifeworld of the Danish people. The intrusions of the nationalist Prussian state not only undermined important elements of Danish culture but impaired the capacity of that culture to reproduce itself. However, even though collective action was promoted, the folk schools' primary intent was not to foster the development of a rationalized lifeworld in which action coordination is carried out through communicative action. Instead, their task was to recover and revitalize lost traditions that could once again be relied upon to smoothly coordinate the actions of social members. The increasing presence of Liberal elites in the leadership of the folk school movement (to the point that the folk-schools received state funding after 1877 (Fleisher, 1968, p. 32)), ultimately meant that efforts to rekindle allegiance to old traditions ended serving the legitimation needs of the developing Danish state more than they did the rationalization needs of the lifeworld.

With Habermas in mind, it is also possible to assess the varied success of adult education initiatives associated with the workers's movement. This movement erupted at another point of contact between the system and the lifeworld and provided another important site for the emergence of an array of adult education institutions.[27] In an analysis of Marx's labour theory of value, Habermas points out that what Marx calls real abstraction can be reconceptualized as:

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[27] Working class adult education institutions emerged throughout Europe late in the 19th century. In France, the *Universités Populaires* began with bourgeoisie input but gradually evolved to serve working class interests by the turn of the century (Titmus, 1967, pp. 22-29). By 1912, The Workers's Education Association (ABF) was established in Sweden to carry out the educational activities of

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> the objectification of socially integrated contexts of action, which takes place when interactions are no longer coordinated via norms and values, or via processes of reaching understanding, but via the medium of exchange value....The labour theory of value...specifies rules for the fundamental exchange relations between the economic system and the lifeworld, that is, for market-regulated appropriation of labour power. (1987a, p. 336)

The workers' movement arose to resist the corrosive effects of lifeworld colonization by the economic system (which includes as its side effects, the reification of communal and individual life). Rather than allowing all social interactions to be swept into the buzzing machinery of exchange relations, this social movement endeavored to reconstitute lifeworld relations based on communication and collective decision making. Adult education emerged as a central means for fostering the kinds of social learning required to resist the imperatives of capitalism. On the one hand, adult education could help workers understand how selling their labour on the market involved them in exchange relations that instrumentalized vast portions of their lives. On the other hand, it could also help them develop new capacities for socialization, including the capacity for non-instrumental, communicative action that might eventually enable them to withstand the alienating imperatives of the economic system.

These two kinds of learning were seldom harmoniously fostered in worker education initiatives. Those institutions which focused on helping workers

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numerous workers' associations (Lund and Ohlsson, 1970, p. 234-235). The writings of Karl Marx had a direct impact on the evolution of German working class adult education institutions. In 1891, workers in Berlin had founded a school for workers education; in 1907, a workers school and library were established in Leipzig; by the late 1920's the German Communist Party had established very successful "Marxist Workers' Schools," "which offered workers and other working people the possibility of getting a theoretical and political education and acquiring knowledge of the natural sciences and of the arts on the basis of the philosophy of dialectic materialism" (Schmeiser, 1978, p. 11). The Workers' Education Association (WEA) was also active in Australia where workers' organizations (particularly those of New South Wales) were able to establish considerable dominance in the operations of adult education classes (Whitelock, 1974, p. 174-213), in New Zealand (Shuker, 1984), and in Ontario, Canada (Radforth and Sangster, 1987).

understand the basis of their exploitation often underplayed the importance of developing new capacities for discursive will formation. Rather than fostering the ability of the lifeworld to reproduce itself through communicative action, the pedantic pedagogical methods of these forms of socialist education actually exacerbated the intrusion of instrumental forms of decision making into the workers' lifeworlds. Organizations like the Council of Labour Colleges (and a host of other vanguardist adult education movements of the Left), failed to realize the full potential of critical adult education because they neglected to promote the continued rationalization of the lifeworld.

On the other hand, those adult education institutions which attempted to foster the workers' capacity for communicative action often underplayed the importance of understanding the concrete causes of political and economic oppression. Susceptible to invasion by Liberal ideologies which also promoted democratic forms of learning, these worker education initiatives hampered the capacity of workers to form clear perceptions of the way the system colonizes their lifeworld. Institutions like the WEA (worldwide) and other democratic-socialist adult education organizations did not succeed in realizing the full potential of critical adult education because they failed to help learners engage in concrete analyses of their oppressive social contexts.

The theory of critical adult education outlined above provides fresh insight into the ways adult education initiatives like the folk schools and workers' education succeed or fail as instances of critical adult education. Contemporary critical adult education practices continue a long and illustrious history of initiatives to foster lifeworld rationalization and to protect the lifeworld from colonization by the economy and state. Drawing on Habermas and Gramsci, it is possible to develop an understanding of critical adult education that enables us to appreciate the important contribution of these historical initiatives.

Critical Adult Education, Modernity, and Postmodernity

I will conclude this chapter by recounting several advantages of using Habermas and Gramsci to mark out the terrain of critical adult education:

1. Unlike those discourses that deem an adult education initiative critical because it is associated with a specific social movement, the preceding discourse claims that critical adult education emerges at the multiple points of contact between system and lifeworld and can be found associated with a wide range of social movements that struggle against lifeworld colonization. At the same time as this new discourse is able to broaden the scope of what constitutes critical adult education, it clearly demarcates territory not included by the term. Adult education initiatives that serve the interests of the sub-systems of the economy and state, that exacerbate the colonization of the lifeworld, and that undermine the development of competencies for communicative action are carefully excluded from the terrain of critical adult education.

2. Unlike Marxist discourses that position critical adult education within a totalizing account of capitalism and class struggle and that pay inadequate attention to the unique discursive characteristics of critical adult education, the above discourse discerns it as an activity with particular discursive attributes. The process of critical adult education endeavors to promote the capacities of discursive will formation and expresses the distinct characteristics of communicative action. As much as possible it tries to establish the conditions for unhindered discourse.

3. Liberal or humanist discourses attempt to differentiate critical forms of adult education using abstract and universalized conceptions of human nature (Freire), of learning (Mezirow), or of democracy (WEA) that obscure the concrete forms of social domination that exist in our society. The above discourse offers a perspective where

we can see the links between concrete social forces and communicative action. The capacity of the lifeworld to activate discursive forms of action coordination is inseparably related to the concrete and historically specific relationships that exist between it and the economy and state. Critical adult education is distinguished by its simultaneous concern for fostering communicative action, on the one hand, and analyzing and resisting the distorting influence of purposive-rational action systems, on the other hand. As a counterhegemonic cultural practice, critical adult education is never politically neutral. It has no choice but to engage in real struggles with interests inimical to the interests of the lifeworld. The social learning process for lifeworld rationalization can never be waged in the abstract.

4. In addition to conceptual advantages, the above discourse also has the advantage of appealing to intuitions we have about critical adult education. For Habermas, all discourse participants possess an intuitive comprehension of the fundamental requirements of communicative action. In spelling out these intuitions he not only provides a basis for clarifying the boundaries of critical adult education but helps us say what we already sense is implicit in our practices. Habermas' story of modernity is one that we easily recognize. His theory is meaningful because it provides new and critical insight into the social maelstrom within which critical adult education must make its way.

5. The preceding discourse reveals the profound extent to which critical adult education is intertwined with the project of modernity. It reveals how it emerged with the dawn of modernity, how it developed in accordance with modernity's most fundamental problematics, and how it forged its basic goals, concepts, and strategies out of modernity's deepest precepts.

6. Habermas and Gramsci provide the basis for a sophisticated and nuanced account of critical adult education. The power of their formulations provides fresh reason to think that it is possible to define, once and for all, the discursive formation of critical adult education. It provides hope that, armed with this clearer view of social reality, critical adult educators can make more headway combating the multiple instances of domination that characterize contemporary life. Even if we do not ascribe to the details of their analyses or submit to their suggestions for action, we are left with the sense that modernity is not yet finished and that continued struggle can bring its deepest potentials to fruition.

Postmodernism enters this triumphant scene like a court jester and makes light of all of the hopes critical adult educators have of persisting with the emancipatory project of modernity. In the process, it calls into question a litany of modernist notions—of culture, of time and space, of identity, of domination and resistance. It would be nice to ignore these challenges and persist with the hopeful project of critical adult education without further ado. Like most clever jesters, however, postmodernism is not so easily dismissed. As outwardly frivolous as its challenges may seem, with considerable discomfort, we recognize them as important.

The challenges of postmodernism do not invade the corpus of critical adult education at a single point. Rather they break out within adult education in a diffuse way. The next four chapters explore the nature of some of these challenges. Each chapter takes a different tack, explores a different nuance. Neither separately nor together do they constitute a comprehensive account of postmodernism's implications for critical adult education. Their intent is to help create a discursive space where adult educators can begin to confront, to thematize and to work through the important challenges of postmodernism.

Chapter Four

DECLINING OPPORTUNITIES: CULTURAL PRACTICES IN POSTMODERNITY[1]

Few concepts are as central to critical adult education as is culture. Critical adult education positions itself in society as a cultural practice and depicts its practitioners as "cultural workers" (Sally Westwood, 1980, p. 44). The tools it uses are cultural and the goal it aspires to is "cultural freedom" (Freire, 1985). For all of this, the concept of culture that critical adult education assumes is one forged in the discourses of modernity. Critical adult education's understanding of what culture is and of what role it plays in society is a modernist understanding. Its representation of its own relationship with culture and its depiction of itself as a cultural field are modernist representations. For many postmodernists, however, the concept of culture, which critical adult educators seem to take for granted, is highly problematic. Postmodernist discourses suggest that rapid social changes are transforming what constitutes culture and are refashioning its place in contemporary society. Not only is culture being commodified to an unprecedented degree, its form is changing from one that is essentially discursive to one that is increasingly figural which, in turn, transforms its social role. While some postmodern discourses, particularly those

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[1] Derek Briton and I have published a paper on this theme in the *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings* with the title, "The Commodification of Adult Education" (1993).

tracing their heritage to post-structuralism, celebrate this change as a final end to the oppressive emancipatory hopes of modernity, others, especially Marxist discourses, despair over the bleak options it leaves for an emancipatory politics. Whichever way one views it, however, the cultural changes transpiring in postmodernity represent a disconcerting challenge for the modernist and emancipatory discursive formation of critical adult education.

Culture in Modernity

In the previous chapter, I related the principle tenets of Habermas' theory of modernity. With his theory as a basic framework (elaborated as need be with other perspectives), it is possible to sketch a modernist conception of culture. Once again, we must keep in mind that complex and heavily used concepts like culture cannot be finally circumscribed. The term gains its salience not so much from the clarity with which its represents reality but from its ability to attract discourse. Only through mining the varied discourses that thematize culture can we gain a sense of how its "meaning is embedded in actual relations as well as processes of social and historical change" (Easthope and McGowan, 1992, p. 258).

To my mind, Raymond Williams provides a fairly serviceable depiction of culture when he contends that culture is "a whole way of life...which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary language" (Williams, cited in Hebdige, 1976, p. 6). Williams' definition is struck very broadly and corresponds more with the anthropological sense of the word than it does with any more narrow sense like those which arise when we use terms like 'high culture' or 'popular culture'. Culture is not a particular set of manners or habits or, as Williams writes in relation to 'working-class culture', "proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language" (Williams, 1992, p. 229). Rather, it refers to a broad fabric of meanings and interpretations that

members of a social group can draw upon to make sense of and share their lived experiences.

Concurring with William's definition, Habermas agrees that culture is "the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world" (1987a, p. 138). In traditional societies, culture provides a vast and complete framework of interpretations (a worldview) that "secures...the unity of the collectivity and largely suppresses conflicts that might arise from power relations and economic interests" (p. 87). In modern societies, however, culture loses its taken-for-granted status. Individual cultural elements—knowledge, representations, symbols—no longer hold a sacred, binding power on individuals and no longer smoothly coordinates action (Lash, 1990, p. 45). Instead, as a result of a general evolutionary process that Habermas (1987a) identifies as the "linguistification of the sacred," cultural elements assume the status of validity claims and, for the first time, become susceptible to critique (pp. 77-111). Instead of being an all-powerful and all-inclusive force for action coordination, in modernity, culture assumes the new role of providing a background of interpretations that discourse participants can draw upon to work out action coordinating understandings.

In modernity, culture undergoes other changes. Whereas, in traditional societies, culture is undifferentiated, in modern society three different cultural spheres emerge and gradually gain autonomy from one another. Following Kant we can identify these as the theoretical, the ethical, and the aesthetic cultural spheres. In each sphere, people evaluate cultural elements according to how well they meet discursive criteria specific to that sphere. In the theoretical sphere, people assess cultural elements according to the accurateness of their representations. Institutions of science emerge to produce their cultural products— representations. In the ethical sphere, people assess cultural elements according to their congruence with

legitimate moral codes. Legal institutions emerge to produce their products—laws and judgments. Finally, in the aesthetic sphere, people evaluate cultural elements according to their expressiveness and beauty. Institutions of art and art criticism emerge to produce art objects and art critique (Habermas, 1990, p. 17-18).

Despite these changes, one aspect of culture stays the same: it remains the backdrop for the symbolic reproduction of society. As they draw upon the cultural stock of interpretations to work out common situation definitions, to affirm the norms governing social integration, and to socialize their young, lifeworld members refresh and reproduce that stock of interpretations. "*Cultural reproduction* ensures that (in the semantic dimension) newly arising situations can be connected up with existing conditions in the world; it secures the continuity of tradition and a coherency of knowledge sufficient for the consensus needs of everyday practice" (Habermas, 1987, p. 343).

As important as it is to appreciate the above evolutionary characteristics of modern culture, our understanding of it remains incomplete if we do not, at the same time, understand the more historically contingent characteristics culture assumes when considered in light of the dramatic relationship between system and lifeworld that distinguishes modernity.[2] Recall from the previous chapter that the process of lifeworld rationalization increasingly burdens people with working out action coordinating agreements through communication and creates pressure to find other, less risk-prone means of action coordination, particularly in the area of *material reproduction*. The emergence of alternate steering-media like money and power disburden the lifeworld of the need to coordinate select actions. Unlike communicative action, these media do not require culture to coordinate actions for

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[2] Habermas has long been concerned to differentiate *universal* lifeworld structures from those specific to the historical emergence of capitalism. For a discussion of this difference see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Habermas, 1987, p. 344-345).

material production. Their emergence and their subsequent organization as sub-systems of action coordination initiates a long and complicated interaction between system and lifeworld. Within this interaction, culture assumes an important if somewhat peculiar role.

Habermas notes how Marx's analysis of the commodity recounts how the economic sub-system removes the process of action coordination from the worker's lifeworld. Marx's analysis provides the basis for clarifying the role culture plays in modernity.

Marx begins his account of the commodity by distinguishing two different ways the value of products are assessed.[3] The use-value of a product, he contends, is derived from the utility it has for its consumer. The use-value of a coat, for instance, is assessed according to the way it satisfies the complex needs of its wearer—it may provide warmth, draw glances, become a good pillow. According to Marx, "this usefulness doesn't dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter" (1977, Vol 1, p. 126). Marx's statement does not imply that a thing can only be considered to have use-value if it satisfies a *physical* need. It does not matter from where the needs arise, Marx insists, "whether they arise, for example, from the stomach or the imagination, makes no difference" (p. 125). Marx is aware that, whatever the need, it is always the result of a complex process of social interaction (Vol 3, p. 282). On the other hand, however, as the following passage discloses, he is also convinced that use-value emerges in relation to biological, if not primordial, human needs:

> The labour-process, resolved as above into its simple elementary factors...is human action with a view to the production of use-values, appropriation of natural substances to human requirements; it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange matter between man (sic) and nature; it is the everlasting

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[3] He conducts this famous analysis in the opening chapter of *Capital Vol. 1*.

> Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every social phase. (Marx in Sayer, 1989, p. 43)

Marx believes that the value of a thing exchanged in the market (a commodity) is assessed very differently from its use-value. The exchange-value of a commodity has nothing to do with its utility or with any needs it might satisfy. When the exchange-value of a commodity is assessed, "all its sensuous characteristics are extinguished" (Vol 1, p. 128), including any knowledge of who made it, under which conditions, who might consume it, and why. Instead its value is assessed solely on what it can be exchanged for on the market, which Marx analyses as equal to the amount of abstract labour power it takes to produce the commodity. Even though the product is the result of concrete social relations which govern its production and consumption, these social relations are made abstract and mystified by the process of commodification. As Marx writes:

> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's (sic) own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. (Vol 1. p. 165)

Marx realizes that the capitalist system does not employ abstract labour power but complete human beings who are born and raised within a cultural context. Labour power, a fundamental and inseparable part of every human being, is abstracted in the capitalist labour process and transformed into a commodity to be sold on the marketplace. Marx's primary concern, however, is to reveal how the commodification of labour is, in itself, sufficient to mystify the inequitable relations that lie at the base of capitalism.

The limitations of Marx's analysis of the relationship between exchange-value and use-value begin to become apparent if we reinterpret this relationship in Habermasian terms. For Habermas, the emergence of money provides a new basis for organizing people's actions for material production. The valuation of objects is abstracted by means of commodification from the cultural contexts of workers and carried out within the restricted and objectifying value sphere of the economy and according to the cold and passionless calculations of mean-ends rationality.

A very different process is used for the valuation of objects within the lifeworld. The use-value of a thing and the actions required to produce it are not determined abstractly outside of the cultural context. Rather the use-value of a thing is determined through a process in which social actors either position it in an existing interpretive framework (culture)—Marx identifies this framework as "social needs"—or, drawing on this interpretive framework, communicatively work out new agreements about its value. From this perspective, the label, 'use-value' appears to be somewhat of a misnomer. Its utility does not determine the value of a thing in the lifeworld, but value is determined by the meaning that accrues to it within a cultural context. Something may not have much utility (in the sense that its physical presence does not gratify any concrete needs) but still be valued highly because within that cultural context it is an item of great meaning.

Jean Baudrillard makes this difference clear in his critique of Marx's concept of use-value. In his essay, "Beyond Use Value," Baudrillard (1981) states that the same critique that Marx levels at exchange-value, that it is an abstraction that fetishizes the commodity as an object independent of social relations, can also be applied to Marx's own notion of use-value (p. 130-132). Marx posits use-values as derivable from the simple relationship of a product to primordial human needs, "a universal and immediately transparent relation that expresses the true being of productive labour beyond all historical or cultural determinants" (Bogard, 1988, p. 230). Then,

with use-value as his benchmark, Marx argues that exchange-value is a synthetic way of assessing value that has less to do with 'true human needs' than it does with the desire of capitalists to make money from commodity exchange. What Marx fails to do in this critique, however, is to subject the notion of use-value (and especially his assumptions about true human needs) to the same critique he applies to exchange-value.

Baudrillard, however, makes such a critique. He begins with needs, contending that they are not natural and ahistorical. In the words of Pefanis (1991), "[f]ar from being the objective and natural effect of the commodity system (or any system for that matter), needs themselves are the product of a system that inscribes utility at the heart of the object and a productivist mentality in the individual" (p. 74). What Marx overlooks is that his assertion that utility is the basis of product valuation is itself the outcome of a particular social and historical context: namely, a point in the development of capitalism when basic physiological requirements are only barely being met, and where the commodities produced are very basic (food, clothing, shelter, fuel, transportation). Baudrillard points out, however, that people "need" objects for many reasons other than their usefulness. Following Thorstein Veblen, he observes that very often people consume objects not because they need them but because they *do not* need them. They consume them, in other words, to distinguish themselves as possessing certain characteristics or to exhibit social status.[4] This is only possible because, in addition to having a material presence, objects have the capacity to signify and to communicate meaning. Applying a structuralist analysis, Baudrillard says that an object's meaning results from the same semiotic process that provides other signs with meaning: the meaning of the object/sign is derived from

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[4] See Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) for a similar analysis.

the relationship it has to other signs, and, ultimately, from its position within large sign systems that comprise our culture.[5] Thus he writes that "[a]n accurate theory of objects will not be established upon a theory of needs and their satisfaction, but upon a theory of social prestations and signification" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 30).

Baudrillard's contention that Marx's utility notion of social need obscures other reasons people might consume commodities (consumption of commodities as "terms within a complex social code" (Bogart, 1988, p. 231)) overlaps, in interesting ways, with Habermas' contention that 'social needs' are worked out in processes of discursive will formation. In his theory of communicative action, Habermas posits that, when people assert the validity of a claim (a claim about the value of an object, in this instance), they can expect to defend not only why they think their claim is true, but also why they believe it to be morally right (i.e., accords with a cultural code regulating intersubjective interactions) and sincere (Habermas, 1984, p. 307). Baudrillard's criticism that Marx mistakenly interprets the socio-historically privileged term "utility" in his depiction of use-value can be rewritten in Habermasian terms as follows: Marx is duped by the very form of rationality he is trying to escape (means-ends rationality of the system) when, in his analysis of use-value, he imputes this same form of instrumental rationality to the lifeworld (value as utility) (Habermas, 1987a, p. 342).[6] The process of valuation that would take place in contexts of communicative action does not restrict itself to questions (claims) of

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[5] With this move, Baudrillard shifts the discussion from one that is political-economic to one that is post-structuralist. Eventually, this leads him to reject Marxism as naturalistic and fetishizing. Charles Levin (1991) relates the implications of Baudrillard's post-structuralism as follows: "The problem with Baudrillard's later work...is that what began as a critique of naturalistic categories has grown steadily into an obsession, a kind of desire to expunge nature itself, or more precisely, to convert it into an enormous and meaningless cycle of collapsing culture" (p. 180). I have already discussed the implications of this move in Chapter 2 in relation to post-structuralism.

[6] David Frisby and Derek Sayer (1986) argue likewise and relate that, "there is an inconsistency in Marx himself...testimony to a 'capturing', perhaps, of his own analytic framework by dominant, self-understood forms of social life akin to the ideological distortions he himself analyzed in others" (p. 104).

whether an object has utility. It also is open to claims about the place the object holds in the complex system of norms and values.

In the end, Marx's analysis of the commodity as the basic social form through which capitalists exploit living labour obscures culture's continued role in modern society. Marx wants to find positive grounds for critiquing the social relations of capitalism and, rather than offering a conception of culture that continuously reproduces itself in an ongoing process of signification, posits a naturalistic representation of human needs which he can then condemn the market for ignoring. While Marx's vision of capitalist society is two-leveled,[7] dead and abstract labour on one side and living and concrete labour on the other, his representation of living labour is not a cultural but a naturalistic representation.

In Habermas' estimation, Marx's chief failing is his inadequate differentiation of *material reproduction* and *symbolic reproduction*.[8] While the systems of money and power are well able to take over the task of coordinating action for the material reproduction of society, only communicative action can reproduce the cultural elements—information, representations, symbols—necessary for the continued integration of the lifeworld. In failing to make this distinction, Marx finds himself forced to locate the normative foundation for his critique of capitalism in the idea that, in depriving people of the fruits of their labour, capitalism cuts people off from their true nature as beings of praxis. In making this move, however, Marx not only leaves himself open to the constructivist critique that he is simply erecting another

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[7] Habermas (1987) identifies the two-level structure of Marx's theory as perhaps its greatest contribution (p. 342).

[8] Priebey and Sayer (1986) make a similar contention when they write that, "Marx's concept of production effectively reduces to that of production of material goods alone....Yet in reality, production of *people* is as fundamental to the possibility of social existence as production of their means of subsistence. They have to be produced, moreover, as *social* individuals....Marx recognized this in general terms, but this recognition did not extend to how he actually analyzed modes and relations of production" (p. 104).

abstracted and naturalistic representation of true human nature (Baudrillard) but also fails to do justice to the complex *symbiotic* relationship that develops in modernity between system and lifeworld. Whereas the lifeworld becomes reliant on the economic sub-system for material reproduction, the economy also remains dependent on the capacities of the lifeworld for symbolic reproduction. Marx neither focuses on the symbiotic relationship between system and lifeworld, nor the degree to which the system might be compelled to intervene in the lifeworld's culture in order to guarantee its own continued existence.[9]

Not until the 1920's and 30's did the economistically foreshortened analyses of Marx (warped even more drastically in this direction by the Second International) come under fire by a cluster of theoreticians like Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Max Horkheimer, and Antonio Gramsci.[10] Gramsci, in particular, provided a much needed elaboration of Marx's sketchy analysis of the relationship between capitalism and culture. He understood very clearly that the abstract relations that emerged with commodification were insufficient to guarantee an unproblematic regulation of the labour force. While many aspects of the worker's life had been sucked into the objectifying relations of the market, working class cultures were still intact enough to pose a serious threat to bourgeois domination. Incapable of operating independently of or even finally disposing of working class cultures, leading factions of the bourgeoisie were forced to invest considerable resources producing ideology to achieve a hegemony most conducive to capital accumulation.

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[9] As Habermas notes in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), Marx is much more guilty of this in his analysis of development of economic formations of society than he is in his concrete historical analyses. *"At the level of his material investigations, ...*Marx always takes account of social practice that encompasses both work and interaction" (p. 53). See in particular *The German Ideology* (1968) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1963).

[10] Albrect Wellmer (1985) provides a good account of summary of this critical movement in "Reason, Utopia, and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*." For another interesting account, see Scott Warren (1984), *The Emergence of Dialectical Theory*.

Drawing on the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, Sut Jhally (1989) reconceptualizes Gramsci's notion of hegemony as the *formal* subsumption of culture. Extending Marx's concept of the 'formal subsumption of labour,' Jhally relates how, "the *formal* subsumption [of culture] refers to a situation where an area of society becomes vital for the functioning of the economic system without actually taking on the structures of the economic system" (p. 72).[11] In this situation, capitalism invests in producing cultural goods (information, representations, symbols) not as commodities for exchange but to create a cultural climate (legitimations, norms, values, personalities, motivations) conducive to capitalist enterprise.

I should take a moment, at this point, to clarify the difference between 'cultural goods' and 'material goods'. Both cultural goods and material goods possess a use-value (Marx) and a sign-value (Baudrillard). The use-value refers to the goods' capacity to meet a need; the sign-value refers to the goods' position in a system of semiotically evolving signs. Thus:

> In material goods, the use-value lies in the material properties of the good, and the sign-value in its signifying properties. In cultural goods both use-value and sign-value are inherent in the objects's signifying properties. (Lash, 1990, p. 43-44)

The relative strength of the use-value component or the sign-value component of a good varies from context to context. In Marx's time, for example, material needs were so great and physical goods so simple (limited signifying properties) that much

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[11] Marx distinguishes the formal subsumption of labour as follows: "The form based on absolute surplus-value is what I call the *formal subsumption of labour under capital*. I do so because it is only formally distinct from earlier modes of production on whose foundations it arises spontaneously (or is introduced), either when the producer is self-employing or when the immediate producers are forced to deliver surplus labour to others. All that changes is the compulsion is applied, i.e. the method by which surplus labour is extorted." (1977, p. 1025).

more emphasis was placed on a good's use-value than its sign-value (to the point that Marx could not even discern that material goods have sign-value).

With this distinction in mind and drawing on Habermas again, it is possible to augment Jhally's presentation of the formal subsumption of culture. Habermas argues that the media of money and power originally emerged to coordinate actions required for material reproduction. Material production and not symbolic production constituted the domain of the early capitalist economy for several reasons. For one, "functions of material reproduction...do not per se need to be fulfilled by communicative action" (Habermas, 1987, p. 350). The media of money could successfully interweave the teleological actions of workers to produce material goods. Symbolic reproduction, on the other hand, can only be accomplished by communicative action. Another reason the economy focused on material reproduction was because at the end of the 18th century, traditional cultures were still relatively intact and there was very little market for cultural goods. The cultures themselves were able to produce a plethora of interpretations sufficient to guarantee enculturation, social integration, and adequate socialization. The same cannot be said for material reproduction. The massive dislocations leading up to the industrial revolution forced people from the land and deprived them of their traditional means of material reproduction. During the eighteenth-century, for instance, capitalists initiated a conscious political struggle to dismantle the medieval institutions that impeded increased productivity in Britain's fledgling manufacturing industries (Larrain, 1989). They challenged and overturned feudal restrictions, such as those on free trade, personal freedom of workers, practices of guilds, and usury, initiating in the process a capitalist revolution that spawned an era of unprecedented economic growth. In less than a century, radical political reforms "freed" rural populations from their feudal ties with the land, while fundamental economic reforms that fostered mass production rapidly transformed Britain from an agrarian to an

industrial society. The result was massive social upheaval as rural populations, stripped of the means of providing their own sustenance—the land—converged on the industrialized centres to "freely" exchange their only remaining possession—their labour—for wages. In this regard, the bourgeoisie and their allies were able to create the social conditions where material reproduction required the services of the economy.

No *market* for cultural goods, however, did not mean that the bourgeois was spared the task of producing these goods. On the contrary, the relative health of traditional cultures and the emerging more communicative cultures of the working class meant that the bourgeois had to expend considerable resources producing ideology to contest cultural norms and values not in their best interests. It must be recalled, moreover, that ideology comprises, not only a set of ideas, but also a range of cultural goods and services that require real resources (materials and labour) to produce. Bourgeois law, parliamentary governments, educational systems, museums and libraries and so on, as well as the cultural goods they produce (knowledge, representations, symbols), are the result of deliberate and costly productive activities.

Although the bourgeois became involved in the production of cultural goods and services to foster cultural forms conducive to capital accumulation, they did not produce cultural *commodities*. A commodity, it must be remembered, is a good that is produced for exchange on the market and valued in relation to the criteria of exchange. People produce and exchange commodities, in other words, to make money. This was not the motive that drove the bourgeois to produce cultural goods. In Marxian terms, the bourgeois investment in cultural products was done with their use-value in mind, not their exchange value. The motive was to create the kind of interface between system and lifeworld wherein, at the same time as they could draw upon the reproductive accomplishments of the lifeworld, the media of

economy and state could effectively coordinate action free from the unruly demands of traditional or modern normative codes. This interface, itself, needed to be constructed of norms and, therefore, could only be located in the lifeworld. As with all norms, though, it was subject to the critical power of communicative action.

Jhally states that, as long as the bourgeois resorts to the manipulation of culture to ensure its perpetuation, it risks being challenged. The attempts by the bourgeoisie to foment a hegemony are actions that are perceivable as *political* actions. Alternate groups and classes can create interpretations, norms, roles, or institutions to oppose the social relations these actions perpetuate. The history of capitalist modernity has, in fact, been one in which anti-capitalist forces have occasionally mustered powerful ideological campaigns to contest capitalist hegemony.

To summarize, the modernist notion of culture that prevails in critical adult education cannot be completely grasped if one ignores the historical interaction between the system and the lifeworld. Certainly, one need understand the modernist view of culture as a body of interpretations open to linguistic appraisal within differentiated cultural spheres. In addition, though, the modernist view of culture is an essentially contested terrain where the drama of hegemony is played out. An important part of understanding the modernist concept of culture is understanding the central role modernists believe culture has in contemporary society.

Before moving on, I would like to make one more set of observations about the nature of culture in modernity. In his *Sociology of Postmodernism*, Scott Lash (1990) claims in 'ideal-typical' fashion, that cultural forms in modernity tend to be 'discursive'. He lists the basic characteristics of what he means by discursive in the following passage:

> [T]he discursive (1) gives priority to words over images; (2) valuates the formal qualities of cultural objects; (3) promulgates a rationalist view of culture; (4) attributes crucial importance to the *meanings* of cultural texts; (5) is

> a sensibility of the ego rather than of the id; (6) operates through a distancing of the spectator from the cultural object. (p. 175)

While Lash's first characteristic is fairly clear (words are linguistic utterance that privilege speaking and hearing; images are pictures that privilege seeing), others require elaboration. His claim that discursive cultural forms evaluate the formal qualities of cultural objects means that people in these cultures approach cultural objects as representations of reality and they assess the formal characteristics of that representation be it theoretically, ethically, or aesthetically. His claim that discursive cultural forms are rationalist suggests that people settle disputes about the formal characteristics of a cultural object through the process of argumentative discourse. Lash's suggestion that discursive cultural forms emphasize the meanings of cultural objects means that people do not take the surface presentation of a cultural object for granted but endeavor to seek out its underlying meaning through processes of interpretation. His argument that discursive cultural forms are ego-oriented refers to the capacity of language to discharge id energy (frustrated by constraints of social reality) through a secondary process of transformation and verbalization. The ego emerges as a feature of the personality to manage this socially acceptable process of id gratification. Drawing on Lyotard (1984), Lash describes the ego's reliance on language as follows:

> Discourse...must proceed according to a set of obstacles, a set of rules, that is , through a 'process of selection and combination of language', which itself is more bound than mobile in language's articulated and differential nature. Similarly, in the secondary process the investment of energy is canalized by rules, by obstacles, that the defense mechanisms of the ego construct, which subordinate the possibility of energy discharge to the 'transformation of the relationship between the psychic apparatus and the external world'. (Lash, 1990, p. 178)

The ego mediates between the id and reality. It sets the human subject back from direct contact with reality from where s/he objectively and rationally can work out

appropriate forms of intervention with the world. Thus, as Lash relates in his final point, discursive culture is characterized by the psychic distance it generates between spectator and cultural objects.

All of these characteristics of discursive culture are consistent with our account of culture in modernity. The linguistification of the sacred, the differentiation of cultural realms, the linguistic reproduction of culture, the overburdening of communication as a form of action coordination, the reliance of the system on the communicative capacities of the lifeworld, and the ideological battle for cultural control all presuppose that culture possesses the six discursive characteristics outlined by Lash. As will be seen below, it is these very presuppositions that postmodernism calls into question.

Critical Adult Education and Culture in Modernity

While, by now, the suggestion that critical adult education presumes a modernist notion of culture may seem rather obvious, for the sake of clarity, I will run though the ways this is so. While a detailed analysis of critical adult education's presumptions about culture would be a worthy study, a few general observations are all that is required in this context to lay a basis for exploring the consequences of postmodernism's position on culture for critical adult education.[12]

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[12] While one might think that culture would be commonly discussed in critical adult education literature, it is, in fact, barely thematized. It is true, of course, that many critical adult educators are aware that culture is important to their field. As early as 1970, for instance, Paulo Freire identified critical adult education as "Cultural Action for Freedom" (in Freire, 1985). Even earlier, in the mid-1950's, Raymond Williams, although never part of the adult education establishment, noted the importance of cultural struggle for critical adult education (John McIlroy [1991] makes this observation in his assessment of Williams' contribution to critical adult education). More recently, Tom Lovett (1988) speaks of critical adult education struggling for "cultural democracy" (p. 143), and Wendy Hall (1992), garnering an insight from Alain Touraine, argues that culture is important to adult education because "political struggle to transform society takes place at the cultural level" (p. 6). While these scattered references to culture indicate its underlying importance, to date, critical adult educators have been rather quiet on the topic. To my knowledge, a systematic exploration of the important place of modern culture in critical adult education has yet to be done.

From the outset, critical adult education holds a modernist view of itself as a cultural practice that pursues symbolic reproduction through the process of communicative action. Its prime referent is the stock of interpretations (primarily knowledge, but including representations, and symbols) that comprise our culture and its prime task is to reproduce culture to ensure people continue to have a basis for coordinating actions. However, unlike traditional practices of symbolic reproduction, which do not question the sacred, binding power of traditions, critical adult education holds a modern view of culture as a background of interpretations that people in communication can draw upon to achieve action coordinating understandings. Individual cultural elements are not held as sacred but are understood as validity claims open to assessment.

Critical adult education also presumes the modernist differentiation of culture into three specialized realms and understands that the forms of knowledge developed in each realm is distinct. Critical adult education has resisted the contention that the only legitimate cultural realm in which social learning can take place is the theoretical realm where all things are evaluated according the criteria of truth. It has insisted that the ethical realm is also a sphere of social learning in which critical adult education should be involved. Long-standing debates between adult educators who insist that adult education should be value free and those who insist on its political nature reveal the modern awareness of different cultural realms.[13]

Perhaps one key aspect of critical adult education's modernist understanding of culture is its awareness of culture as an important site of struggle. Critical adult education has long construed itself as a critical practice that contests the cultural products of the bourgeois. With the emergence of Gramscian analytical tools, it

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[13] See R.W.K Patterson's (1989) paper "Philosophy in Adult Education" for a clear account of the need for neutrality in adult education. In the same collection of essays see Colin Griffin's "Cultural Studies, Critical Theory, and Adult Education" for an argument for adult education to be political.

increasingly understands itself as a counter-hegemonic enterprise that positions itself in the contested terrain of culture.[14]

Finally, critical adult education's view of culture is modernist in that it understands culture as discursive. Critical adult education upholds each of the characteristics of discursive culture outlined by Lash. From the outset, critical adult education has been oriented to language. Its ongoing focus on dialogue as a principle pedagogical device is a case in point. From Grundtvig and the Danish folk schools, to the Workers' Education Association, to Paulo Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed, critical dialogue has been the principle tool for social learning. Knowledge is not viewed as something to be passively consumed but actively examined and criticized before being accepted as valid.

For the most part, critical adult education's assumptions about the nature of culture have been unproblematic. Let us now turn and examine concerns postmodernism raises about the modern understanding of culture. The challenges postmodernism issues, it turns out, have dramatic implications for critical adult education.

Culture in Postmodernity

Once again, we must begin with a hesitant step. The very suggestion that postmodernism challenges the modernist notion of culture shoves us immediately into a methodological quagmire. How is it possible to understand the kinds of cultural changes transpiring in postmodernity if the conceptual tools with we wish to carry out the analysis are the very things most impacted by these cultural changes? It would be nice, somehow, to be able to get beyond the horizon of our

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[14] For a clear expressions of this awareness see Paula Allman (1988), "Gramsci, Freire, and Illich: Their Contributions to Education for Socialism" and Sally Westwood (1980), "Adult Education and the Sociology of Education: An Exploration."

culture (setting aside for a moment the whole question of understanding culture as a unified entity) and to locate those shady external forces that are guiding our entrance into postmodernity. If we heed the concerns of the postmodernists, however, we can no longer rest easy with this strategy. We are left with the uncomfortable suspicion that social theorists are no more than hucksters advertising their culture bound representations of society as something transcendental.

But, there is a difference, I think, between offering an explanation, as if it actually provides a true and objective representation of reality, and speaking a metanarrative, knowing it is just a story, but believing, at the same time, that it offers some kind of guiding insight into reality. The narrative approach does not maintain the pretense of eternal and universal validity that the postmodernists so virulently condemn. At the same time, though, neither does it give up altogether and wallow in the contingency of the particular as many postmodernists would have us do. Rather it imagines theory as a "guiding thread" (Marx in Sayer, 1987, p. 1) which can foster our understanding of our world. It is only when we forget that a theory is an imagining and begin hammering the world into it as if it is the truth that the "violence of abstraction," as Derek Sayer (1987) identifies it, is perpetrated.

This said, I would like in the following passages to begin my analysis by offering a 'guiding thread' for understanding culture change in postmodernity. The basic plot of this narrative is that the rapid and pervasive commodification of culture and the growing predominance of the image over discourse is producing a dramatic delinguistification, de-differentiation, and depoliticization of culture. I will end the story with an account of the varied postmodernist responses to this narrative.

Recall my above contention that one of the key reasons capitalism did not move immediately into the production of cultural commodities is that, until quite recently, the lifeworld was so capable of reproducing an ample supply of interpretations and meanings that there was simply no market for such products. The twentieth century,

and especially the past twenty years have changed all that. John Tomlinson (1991), in his discussion of Cornelius Castoriadis's critique of modernity, argues that the advance of capitalism has created a cultural void at the center of contemporary society, noting that "what Max Weber first called the 'disenchantment of the world'—the breaking of the spell of traditional belief and practices—leaves a hole at the centre of culture, which Castoriadis believes cannot be adequately filled with stories of growth or development" (p. 164). Similarly, Habermas (1987) argues that the gradual imposition of the imperatives of money and power on the lifeworld impair its capacity to reproduce the stock of cultural interpretations. This he argues is experienced by people as a growing sense of meaninglessness and detachedness (p. 327). Thus, while in the 19th century, capitalism had a limited market for cultural commodities, in the late 20th century, such a market abounds.

Capitalist enterprises are rushing to fill the cultural void created by the forces of late-capitalism. Jhally (1989) suggests this signals a *real* subsumption of culture. Once again expanding on Marx, he argues that, "real subsumption," "refers to a situation where the media [and other cultural institutions like adult education] become not ideological institutions but economic ones. That is, investment in the media is not for the purpose of ideological control but for the purpose of reaping the biggest return. Culture is produced first and foremost as a commodity rather than as ideology" (p. 73).[15]

It is important to think for a moment what the commodification of culture actually means and to tease out its various nuances. Previously, I noted that people consume material objects not only because of their utility but because through consumption people are able to display a particular social standing. Thus, material products not only meet people's physical needs but are a sign that people can

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[15] See Marx's discussion of the real subsumption of labour in *Capital, Vol. 1*, pp. 1034-1038.

display to communicate something about themselves, typically about their social status, to others, for example, a piece of clothing—a hat, for instance.[16] One of the reasons a person wears a hat is because its physical properties provide protection from the elements. Another reason is that a hat has the capacity to signify. What exactly the hat is meant to signify depends on the system of signs in which the hat as signifier is located. A hat is a police hat, for instance, because it is different from other signifiers: fire-fighter's hat, a cowboy hat, and so on. A person who wears a hat that looks like a police hat communicates that s/he is not a cowboy or a fire-fighter but a police officer. A thing like a hat can signify numerous and subtle differences depending upon the system of signs in which it is located. A police hat can signify on officers detachment, his or her name, and his or her rank. In this case, a person would value the hat for its capacity to signify the social role s/he plays. All material objects have a similar capacity for signification.

As I have noted, capitalism's early commodities were consumed primarily for their use-value. By the end of the 19th century, however, with the breakdown of traditional ways of life and of the semiotic landscape they prescribed, meanings unintended by the market began to accrue to commodities: they began to take their place as signs within the cultures of working class and bourgeois consumers. People in these cultures revealed themselves as very adept at attributing increasingly sophisticated layers of meaning to seemingly innocuous items. In a fascinating study of the Italian motor scooter, for instance, Dick Hebdige (1988) explores how the efforts of manufacturers to control the various meanings the scooter were constantly outflanked by meaning-giving capacities of varied sub-cultural groups (the Mods in Britain, for instance) who consumed the machines.[17] Scooters were just one of a

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[16] Recall another example of semiotic signification I offer in my discussion of Saussure in Chapter 2.

[17] John Fiske (1989) reasserts the meaning attributing power of popular culture when he writes: "Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also,

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proliferating number of products that were attributed ever finer layers of meaning by cultural groups who used them as signs to differentiate social standing.

Even though a commodity is consumed as a sign, culture has not yet been subjected to commodification. The meanings that cultural groups assign to commodities is derived either from the positioning of the commodity as sign within a traditional signification system or through the communicative achievements of cultural members themselves who together attribute a meaning to the commodity. In neither case is the meaning of the product a motive for their production. The commodification of culture only occurs when capitalists realize that money can be made producing signs and when they actually begin to produce them as commodities.

The first significant instances of cultural commodification took place at the end of the 19th century—in bourgeois culture with the end of the patron system of painting and architecture and in mass culture with the emergence of such phenomena as "music halls, popular spectator sports, the fish and chip shop in England, vaudeville, etc." (Lash, 1990, p. 51). Industrial designers did not focus on enhancing the signifying capacity of commodities through innovations like streamlining and decoration until the 1930's (Hebdige, 1988, p. 58-59). Simultaneously, a whole new focus in advertising on the sign-value of products, began to promote an increasingly differentiated sign-system that "detached the reproduced object from the dimension of tradition" (Benjamin in Hebdige, p. 72). The flood of new signifiers produced according to the logic of the market, quickly outstretches any culture's capacity to

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contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass cultural theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control, that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces" (p. 2). While he agrees in part with this perspective, Graham Turner (1990) also submits that one must be careful not to romanticize popular cultures. Today's mass media have tremendous power to "manufacture consent" (to use Noam Chomsky's phrase).

integrate these signs into meaningful systems of signification. As Baudrillard (1983) relates in his essay, "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," the proliferation of information and sign (largely produced by the various media) extinguishes meaning by trivializing and homogenizing all content. In the end, this results in not only a collapse in meaning but a blurring of the distinction between representations and reality. He writes:

> The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media....Information devours its own contents; it devours communication and the social....Instead of causing communication, *it exhausts itself in the act* of staging the communication; instead of producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning. It is a gigantic process of simulation with which we are very familiar. (pp. 96-98)

The new economy of the sign—"an economy of consumption, of the signifier, of endless replacement, supercession, drift and play" (Hebdige, p. 71)—replaces lost and damaged traditional cultures with a detached and fragmented collage of unrelated sign systems drawn from around the globe and transported by the sophisticated technologies of mass communication and transport. The new economy cannot replace the shared meaning frames that constitute the social realities that late-capitalism is destroying. Habermas (1987), for one, is emphatic in his insistence that a culture cannot be reproduced from outside the horizons of the lifeworld. A way of life can only be reproduced through the communicative accomplishments of the lifeworld's participants (p. 350). But as David Harvey (1989) notes, capitalist enterprises, in fact, have no real interest in creating integrated world views. They are concerned solely with the production of cultural commodities that can be rapidly and easily consumed in any context, that is, cultural products that are detached from any particular meaning frame (p. 286). Products that can be consumed in any cultural milieu dramatically increase the size of the market. As Jameson (1991) relates, however, when the chain of significations that comprise culture snaps, then

"we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (p. 26).

The proliferation of cultural commodities has occurred simultaneously with a drift from discourse to the image as the principle means of signification in our society. Discourse and image both represent reality. They are similar in that both require physical media for their expression (these media can be as simple as sound waves or beams of light) and hence require resources for their production (Harvey, p. 289). In many other ways, however, they are quite different. Scott Lash (1990) summarizes the characteristics of image as a form of signification. He suggests that this form of signification:

> (1) is a visual rather than a literary sensibility; (2) devalues formalisms and juxtaposes signifiers taken from the banalities of everyday life; (3) contests rationalist and/or 'didactic' views of culture; (4) asks not what a cultural text 'means', but what it 'does'; (5) in Freudian terms, advocates the extension of the primary process into the cultural realm; (6) operates through the spectator's immersion, the relatively unmediated investment of his/her desire in the cultural object. (p. 175)

As we found for Lash's corresponding depiction of discursive culture, the first of these characteristics is fairly straight-forward; the others require comment. When he contends that "figural" forms of signification devalue formalisms he is referring to the tendency of people to approach images aesthetically without feeling a requirement to assess its theoretical or ethical qualities using formal procedures. Images do not need to be presented sequentially or concurrently to make sense—powerful images can assembled out of juxtaposed signifiers from daily life piled together in a pastiche. Lash also relates how images do not appeal to reason: even though they are representations of reality, they do not present themselves as validity

claims open to rational appraisal.[18] Neither do they claim to be part of larger systems of meaning: they do not demand to be examined for the meaning that lies behind them but communicate through direct appeal to the observer's emotions. The fleeting images, infobytes, clichés, fashions, and sound effects that are flooding into the cultural void of late-capitalism are consumed, not because consumers find them meaningful, but because they appeal directly to the soma of the consumer. Consumers are motivated to watch TV, listen to CD's, change fashions simply because it feels good not because it makes sense. In this sense, mass images bypass the ego as the personality construct mediating between the id and reality Images present themselves to the person *as if the images are reality* and, rather than discharging id energy through a secondary process of transformation and verbalization, discharge it directly in an ecstatic outburst of gratification.[19] No distance is required between the spectator and the spectacle for the image to do its work. No contemplation or discussion is required in its presence. Rather, the image draws the spectator into itself, where his or her desire is directly assuaged.[20]

Images are now ubiquitous. As Angela McRobbie (1989) laments:

> Images push their way into the fabric of our social lives. They enter into how we look, what we earn, and they are still with us when we worry about bills, housing and bringing up children. They compete for attention through shock tactics, reassurance, sex, mystery and by inviting viewers to participate in series of visual puzzles. Billboard advertisements showing an image without

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[18] Although, as Michael Shapiro argues in his essay "Strategic Discourse/Discursive Strategy: The Representation of "Security Policy" in the Video Age," even the most high-tech video presentations of the US federal government still are subjected to a nuanced and reflective reception by a suspicious and "image-wise" public. In the closing paragraph of his paper he includes a letter from a nine year old boy to the Pentagon stating that they were mistaken in saying that the missile that shot down the Libyan war plane was a Sparrow missile when anyone could see from the battle video that it was a Phoenix missile! (p. 339). This point is also contested by numerous culture studies theorists who argue that the public is far more critical in its reception of media presentations than people like Baudrillard would ever admit. See, for instance, John Fiske's (1989) *Understanding Popular Culture*.
[19] Lyotard (1984a) explores how the ego is bypassed in postmodernity in *Driftworks*. Deleuze and Guattari (1977) develop the theme extensively in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.
[20] See Guy Debord (1990), *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*.

> a code, impose themselves, infuriatingly, on the most recalcitrant passerby. (p. 172)

The incorporation of the image into the exchange economy represents an increase in the power of capital to produce commodities that require no mediation by culture. Representations produced as images are consumed without making sense. With the emergence of vastly powerful technologies of representation, image commodities become so appealing that they eclipse all other forms of social reality. The fleeting romances of the "soaps" are of more importance to many viewers than their own lives, CNN's high-tech rendition of the Gulf War became, for the many who experienced it on TV, the "real" war,[21] Stephen Spellberg's (1993) *Jurassic Park* enables us to virtually experience tyrannosaurus rex, watch spellbound as it captures its prey, and shudder at the sound of his terrifying, CD generated roar. The power of the commodified image is now such that Jean Baudrillard, perhaps the most visionary of contemporary social theorists, goes so far as to suggest that reality no longer exists. We now all live in a virtual reality, a simulacrum of fleeting images.[22]

The swing to the image merges with rampant processes of cultural commodification to blast away at the ragged shards of tradition that still remain and to sunder people's capacity to use discourse to coordinate actions. Let us tally up the changes all of this entails for culture in modernity.

De-linguistification: Observers of culture note the growing inundation of non-discursive cultural products—image-driven advertising, spectacles like sporting events, MTV, tourism,[23] hi-tech movies, shopping malls, Nintendo games, rock

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[21] Baudrillard (1991) makes this point in the extreme in his controversial essay, "The Gulf War Has Not Taken Place." For one of many reactions to this essay see Christopher Norris (1991), "The 'End of Ideology' Revisited: The Gulf War, Postmodernism, and *Realpolitik*."

[22] Baudrillard develops this theme most fully in his book, *Simulations* (1983). Douglas Kellner offers an insightful analysis of this and many other of Baudrillard's ideas in his intellectual biography, *Jean Baudrillard* (1989).

[23] Jameson (1977) writes of travel as commodity as follows: "The American tourist no longer lets the landscape 'be in its being'...but takes a snapshot of it, thereby transforming space into its own

Continued on following page

music, comic books—that are displacing traditional and more discursive cultural elements.[24] Whereas in modernity, cultural products present themselves as validity claims open to discursive appraisal, in postmodernity, cultural products come to us not as claims, not even as representations, but as images that "seduce" us into a simulacrum more real than reality itself (Baudrillard, 1990).

De-differentiation: We noted how in modernity, culture increasingly differentiates into three separate cultural spheres, each with its own means of assessing the validity of cultural elements. Scott Lash (1990) contends that a primary feature of postmodernity is the de-differentiation that occurs amongst these realms (p. 11-12). Mike Featherstone (1991) understands this dedifferentiation as the result of an aestheticization of all features of life that accompanies the growing predominance of figural over discursive cultural elements. He notes five ways this de-differentiation proceeds. The first is the historic breakdown of the distinction between high and low art. This undermines the institutionalization of aesthetic discourse and blurs "the distinction between art and everyday life. In effect, art is everywhere: in the street, the refuse, the body, the happening" (p. 124). The second element in the aestheticization of life is the growing emphasis in contemporary society of an aesthetic of sensation, "an aesthetics of the body which emphasizes the immediacy and unreflexiveness of primary processes" (p. 124). The third element is the antifoundationalist critique of all meta-narratives and the critique of consensus

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material image. The concrete activity of looking at a landscape...is thus comfortably replaced by the act of taking possession of it and converting it into a form of personal property" (p. 131).

[24] Some worthwhile examples of the vast literature that examines these new cultural products includes: Henry Jenkins (1992), *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*; E. Ann Kaplan (1987), *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture*; Douglas Kellner (1990), *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*; Annette Kuhn (ed.) (1990), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*; Janice Radway (1992), "Mail-Order Culture and Its Critics: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Commodification and Consumption, and the Problem of Cultural Authority"; Maureen Turim (1991), "Cinemas of Modernity and Postmodernity"; and Andrew Wernick (1991), "Promotional Culture". For a panoply of analyses of different cultural products, from comics to magazines to popular music, see Dick Hebdige's (1988), *Hiding in the Light*.

(exemplified by Lyotard's critique of Habermas). "Knowledge henceforth should be nomadic and parodic. It should playfully emphasize the discontinuities, openness, randomness, ironies, reflexivity, incoherences and multiphenic qualities of texts which can no longer be read with the intention of extracting a systematic interpretation" (p. 124). Fourth, is the "transformation of reality into images, and the fragmentation of time into series of perpetual *presents*" (p. 124). Fifth, is the overall aestheticization of experience in which art becomes "the master paradigm for knowledge, experience and sense of life-meaning" (p. 124). The growth of aesthetic modes of experience breaches the boundaries between the artistic realm and the theoretical and moral realms eroding their normative bases for evaluation and action coordination.

Lash contends that, as this de-differentiation develops, the distinction between the cultural and the social becomes hazy (p. 11). What this may represent in Habermasian terms is that the lifeworld is becoming so impaired by the colonizing effects of the system that cultural reproduction is jeopardized. It may be, in effect, that the aestheticization of everyday life is equivalent to the annihilation of culture as a backdrop for the communicative coordination of actions.

Finally, Lash notes that another element of dedifferentiation is the blurring of distinctions between signifier, signified, and referent which was a key feature of the modern view of culture. In a world in which images are so pervasive, signifiers become referents for other signifiers which claim no meaning.[25] Reality loses its definition and there is an implosion of meaning. Society evaporates to leave a hyper-real simulacrum of society in its place.

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[25] In *Jurassic Park*, for instance, the dinosaurs are representations of artist's representations of paleontologist's representations of how they may have looked in the past. Our expostulations about how 'real' the dinosaurs look are to a large extent our affirmation that Spielberg's signifiers accurately represent other signifiers and not that they represent reality.

De-politicization (The annihilation of culture): All of these changes impact culture's position in contemporary society. Recall Habermas's contention that, while the systems of money and power are capable of coordinating the material reproduction of society, symbolic reproduction is a cultural activity that transpires within the horizons of the lifeworld. The symbiotic relationship that emerges between system and lifeworld is such that at the same time as the lifeworld is dependent on the system for the production of material forms of sustenance, the system is also dependent on the lifeworld for ensuring the reproduction of cultural forms conducive to capitalist accumulation. Thus, social factions who benefit from the relations of capitalism must struggle to contrive a social formation in which cultures, social relations, and personalities beneficial to capitalism prevail. As we noted above, the cultural terrain in which hegemony is waged is one of struggle and contestation.

As early as 1968, however, Habermas realized that there was no necessity that this arrangement to persist. Reflecting on the increasing number of techniques for behavioral and personality change, he suggests that they point:

> ...to an area of future possibilities of detaching human behavior from a normative system linked to the grammar of language-games and integrating it instead into self-regulated subsystems of the man-machine type by means of immediate physical or psychological control. Today the psychotechnic manipulation of behavior can already liquidate the old fashioned detour through norms that are internalized but capable of reflection. Behavioral control could be instituted at an even deeper level tomorrow through biotechnic intervention in the endocrine system, not to mention the even greater consequences of intervening in the genetic transmission of inherited information. If this occurred, old regions of consciousness developed in ordinary-language communication would of necessity completely dry up. At this stage of human engineering, if the end of psychological manipulation could be spoken of in the same sense as the end of ideology is today, the spontaneous alienation derived from the uncontrolled lag of the institutional framework would be overcome. (pp. 117-118)

While he anticipated the continued growth of biological and genetic engineering, Habermas did not anticipate how the growth of media technologies could achieve the same power to liquidate the "old fashioned detour through norms." The capacity of images to slip by the mediating presence of the ego and to directly slake the desires of the id offers new possibilities to the creators of these images to manage motivations. "At the technological level," writes Debord (1990),

> when images chosen and constructed by *someone else* have everywhere become the individual's principal connection to the world he [*sic*] formerly observed for himself, it has certainly not been forgotten that these images can tolerate anything and everything; because within the same image all things can be juxtaposed *without contradiction* [emphasis added]. The flow of images carries everything before it, and it is similarly someone else who controls at will this simplified summary of the sensible world; who decides where the flow will lead as well as the rhythm of what should be shown, like some perpetual, arbitrary surprise, leaving no time for reflection, and entirely independent of what the spectator might understand or think of it. (pp. 27–28)

The commodification of culture generates such a proliferation of signifiers that it undermines the capacity of individuals or groups to locate themselves in an action coordinating system of norms. The deterioration of discourse as a prime cultural element strips away people's capacities for communicative action. Fragmenting personalities and impoverished cultures provide ever less protection from the intrusive power of media-technic regulation. One might criticize this rather Baudrillardian vision of society as unrealistically pessimistic, and suggest, as does Zymunt Bauman (1992), that it can only be held by someone who watches entirely too much TV and who fails to get out enough into the fresher light of reality. Considering that the average adult in the United States now watches 32 hours of television per week,[26] not to mention the additional time spent shopping, listening to

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[26] Kellner (1990) details television consumption patterns in his book, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*.

the stereo, playing video games, going to movies, or the countless other hours spent consuming the images of postmodernity, one wonders, even if we did manage to get out into the light of 'reality,' who exactly we might find there.

At one time, culture represented a terrain of intense struggle, where different social factions fought over the governing norms of society, now it represents something quite different. It is true, of course, that culture is still a sight for struggle. Discourse as a means of action coordination still exists. It is just that, in light of all of the above changes, the struggle that transpires in culture is now less ferocious than it was before. Increasingly, even when people overcome distortions perpetrated by advanced ideological apparatuses and create norms to regulate the imperatives of capitalism, they discover that norms no longer are the only means for guaranteeing social harmony.

The symbiosis between system and lifeworld, which placed culture in such an important and contradictory position in modernity, is breaking down. The system no longer requires the lifeworld *to the extent it once did* to perform the tasks of social integration and motivation formation.[27] One can imagine, with Baudrillard, that a time might come when culture will lose its functionality for the system and when we might find ourselves in the fragmented and alienating cultural landscapes portrayed in Bladerunner (Perenchio, Yorkin, and Scott, 1982) or *Robocop* (Schmidt and Verhoeven, 1987) or by William Gibson (1984; 1986; 1988) in his cyberpunk novels.[28]

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[27] I would like to remain clear, here, that I am talking of tendencies and not, as Baudrillard and his followers often do, of a 'done deal'. However, just as in the case of the ozone layer, in which the CFC's already released into the atmosphere should, over the next few decades, be sufficient to seriously deplete ozone concentrations, it may be that tendencies towards cultural disintegration may already be in motion which, over the next few decades (that is, a short time) can deeply undermine the integrity of contemporary cultures.

[28] Disturbed by the inflationary language Baudrillard uses to characterize modernity, Douglas Kellner (1989) contends that it is much better to view Baudrillard as a science fiction writer rather than as a social theorist. Not only does this guard against taking some of his outlandish views as actually descriptive of reality, but it also makes us more willing to entertain his profound insight into trends in contemporary society (pp. 209-208).

I do not believe that this has happened yet (this dystopia is still in the realm of science fiction—we all still inhabit lifeworlds). What has happened, though, is that the role of culture in the drama of social struggle has weakened. As it turns out, the implications even of this are traumatic for critical adult education.

Sub-Plots

Before moving on to my final reflections on postmodern culture and critical adult education, I wish to issue a reminder that not all theorists of postmodernity would tell the same the story of postmodern culture as the one I just narrated. While I do not wish to consider them in detail, I think it is important to sketch a few alternative scenarios—introduce them as sub-plots, as it were—to enrichen, perhaps de-simplify, the previous narrative.

Some theorists, like John Fiske (1989; 1989a), would probably not agree that culture is threatened by commodification or by the turn to the image anywhere near to the extent indicated in the forgoing narrative. His studies of people's reception of cultural products convince him that "culture industries" have no more capacity now to *determine* forms of sociation than any time before. With a eye keen to the multitude of ways cultural groups attribute meaning to the varied cultural products of postmodernity and resist the attempts of commodity producers to dominate the process of signification, Fiske resolutely insists that postmodernity is not undermining culture as the arena in which our social forms emerge.

It is important to keep Fiske's perspective in mind. The extent and nature of lifeworld colonization and of the resultant destruction of culture varies tremendously. It is presumptuous to claim, like Baudrillard, that we now live in a pure simulacrum. As Manuel De Landa (1992) contends, if this were so, why is such a massive system of surveillance and police/military force still being deployed? Fiske's insistence on the capacity of cultures to resist domination and to appropriate

cultural commodities for their own uses stands as an important counterweight to Baudrillard's pessimistic prognosis.

On the other hand, though, Fiske's perspective downplays a host of social transformations that are hard to ignore. While it may be true that culture still stands as an important site of hegemonic struggle, it must be admitted that other mechanisms of domination—surveillance, simulation, and intimidation—that do not attempt to dispute meanings but that assert their force directly on people's bodies, have diminished the importance of culture as an arena of contestation. The sub-plot to our narrative offered by theorists like Fiske and other culture studies theorists like Dick Hebdige (1979), and Richard Dyer (1982; 1986), while restraining us from an over hasty pronouncement that culture is now terminal, provide little indication of the deeps wounds that have already been inflicted on its corpus.

Marxist theorists like Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and to some extent, Douglas Kellner are not quite so blasé. They believe that postmodernity is wreaking profound changes that threaten to destroy modern forms of culture. The sub-plot that they provide is that the complexity of late-capitalism is outstripping people's capacity to understand and hence to resist new forms of domination that capitalism is producing. The fragmentation of culture produced by commodification and by the turn to the image further undermines people's ability to trace their experiences of oppression to their root causes.

Just under the surface of their earnest warnings about the collapse of culture is a panicked realization that the metanarrative of Marxism, which has provided an uneasy but resilient interpretive framework for understanding capitalism, is now being overwhelmed by the vast transformations of contemporary society. Harvey's impulse is to refurbish the sagging structure of Marxism with a host of new explanations that can harden the resistive capacity of weakened cultures. Jameson is a little more circumspect of Marxism's ability to continue to carry the torch of

emancipation. He does argue, though, that people need to re-map the world of multinational capitalism with new totalizing schemas which can coordinate their resistances to its unruly imperatives (1991, p. 54).

The Marxist's contribution to the story of culture in postmodernity is their realization of the depth to which late-capitalism devastates culture. The panic they display reinforces the desperate difficulty of achieving a perspective on these changes that can assure continued and effective opposition to the imperatives of late-capitalism.

Post-structuralist theorists like Jean-François Lyotard offer a very different sub-plot. While Lyotard might agree that modern cultural forms are being transformed in postmodernity, he does not agree that this is such a bad thing. In Lyotard's (1984) view, the transformations accompanying the information age (in particular the proliferation of cultural forms) do not undermine the capacity of modern theories to adequately represent reality. Rather, these transformations reveal that modern theories *never did* possess this capacity. Lyotard is pleased with the postmodern turn because it represents the rapid delegitimation of the metanarratives of modernity which he contends obscured the relationship between knowledge and power (p. 37). This includes, not just the metanarratives perpetrated by capitalism, but the whole metanarrative project, including the shameful totalizations of Marxism which, in their Stalinist expression, caused so much grief for so many people (pp. 12-13). While Lyotard recognizes that dramatic changes in cultural production (including the commodification of knowledge (pp. 4-5)) are transforming the world, he is not as convinced as David Harvey, for instance, that postmodernity can simply be attributed to changes in capitalist forms of production (p. 38). Rather, he contends that the postmodern condition has emerged because scientific skepticism has undermined people's belief in metanarratives. According to Lyotard:

> That is what the postmodern world is all about. Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction. (p. 41)

Cultural vitality (including concepts like justice) emerges with the institution of genuinely communicative practices. Exactly what these practices are, however, depends on the language game (culture) in which a person finds themselves. Lyotard refuses to acknowledge Habermas' assertion that cultural differences can be resolved within communicative contexts oriented towards consensus. Consensus, for Lyotard, smuggles a disguised and unwarranted will to unity back into the situation. Postmodernity is positive because it offers no such pretenses. As Lyotard writes:

> A recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games is a first step in that direction. This obviously implies a renunciation of terror, which assumes that they are isomorphic and tries to make them so. The second step is the principle that any consensus on the rules defining a game and the "moves" playable within it *must* be local, in other words, agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation. The orientation then favors a multiplicity of finite meta-arguments, by which I mean argumentation that concerns metaprescriptives and is limited in space and time....This orientation corresponds to the course that the evolution of social interaction is currently taking.... (p. 66)

Lyotard contends that the oppressive metanarrative of modernity is in need of destruction (deconstruction) so that new, less rigid, more heterogeneous forms of sociation can emerge. Post-structuralist theorists celebrate the commodification of culture and the turn to the image as a new opportunity for humanity to escape the stultifying and oppressive conditions of modernity.

The contribution of Lyotard to our story, is two-fold. Firstly, it calls into question the impulse towards emancipation (my own admitted impulse) that persists throughout the other parts of the narrative. It challenges its half-spoken assumption

that the destruction of culture is a bad thing, that modernist forms of cultural resistance are all that beneficial, and that new totalizing visions must be developed to refurbish culture's lost vitality.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it introduces a level of skepticism towards the entire thrust of the main part of the narrative. It calls into question its seeming desire to explain away the complexities of postmodernity by locating their origin in the commodification of culture and the turn to the image. It has us wonder if, once again, the intent of the analysis is to repress the heterogeneity of contemporary social existence for the sake of another metanarrative. This, I think, is an important contribution. It refocuses our attention on the limits of reason and of totalizing discourse, it reminds us that the validity claims the narrative advances are not inscribable as transcendental truths, and it denies us the dangerous belief that we have escaped the narrow horizons of our specific language game.

Declining Opportunities: Critical Adult Education, Culture, and Postmodernity

Critical adult education's modernist view of culture is insufficiently flexible to disclose the full implications of cultural commodification for its cultural practices. While I would not go so far as to assert that culture has been destroyed by processes of commodification and that critical adult education, without being aware that it has even happened, has already ceased to exist as a meaningful enterprise, I do believe that, as a realm of symbolic reproduction, culture is now far less important and more questionable in postmodern society that it was previously. Postmodernity, I suggest, constitutes an environment of declining opportunities and increased uncertainties for counter-hegemonic cultural practices like critical adult education. As a result, critical adult education is confronted with the uncomfortable prospect of finding new ways to constitute itself as a viable cultural enterprise in postmodern times.

Critical adult education is deeply affected by cultural commodification. One of the most important reasons for this is that knowledge, the cultural element of central significance for critical adult education, is susceptible to commodification. Critical adult educators view knowledge as a body of interpretations that lifeworld members can draw upon in their efforts to reach communicative agreements. Specific interpretations are viewed as validity claims that are open to criticism by any concerned lifeworld member. For critical adult education, knowledge is valued according to its capacity to motivate communicative understandings. The assault of the system on the lifeworld and the subsequent erosion of the capacity of the lifeworld to reproduce itself through communicative action is what critical adult education emerges to oppose. It struggles to foster the rationalization of the lifeworld and its capacity to resist the deleterious intrusions of the system by fostering contexts of open and unhindered discursive will formation.

The view of knowledge prevailing in this schema is rendered problematic by commodification. Like other cultural products, knowledge can be incorporated by the system and exchanged on the market. And like other products, its consumption is motivated not just by its use-value but also by its sign-value. For example, postmodernism itself seems to be enjoying a fairly high sign-value right now. While the hippest 'theory consumers' now no longer like to associate with the term, in many contexts postmodernism still is quite fashionable. On the other hand, while Althussarian structuralism was once so popular that almost every self-respecting Marxist identified themselves as an Althussarian, its sign-value is now abysmally low. In less than twenty years, it has almost disappeared from academic discourses.

The movement of the market into knowledge production enhances the ephemerality and fragmentation of knowledge. Knowledge elements are stripped out of their constitutive lifeworld contexts and exchanged on the market like softdrinks or vacuums. Increasingly, their value is determined not by what they

disclose about the world, about social relations, or about beauty and expressiveness (i.e. their use value), but by the number of books they sell, by the audience they gather, by the corporate contracts they attract, or, even more simply, by the money they make.

As noted in the preceding account of postmodernity, the entry of the market into cultural production vastly increases the number of circulating signifiers. Market driven knowledge production floods culture with information that it has little chance of assimilating. Instead of providing a backdrop of commonly held interpretations against which understandings can be worked out, information increasingly becomes background noise which interferes with the process of discursive will formation. In this context, individual information elements are not produced or consumed as validity claims open to contestation by lifeworld members, but increasingly as commodities valued only according to their market worth.

It is interesting to note that instrumental forms of adult education adapt easily to the changing nature of knowledge in postmodernity. The commodification of knowledge provides new and unforeseen opportunities for previously unprofitable adult education enterprises to make good money. Over the past twenty years, instrumental adult education has transformed from a collection of practices located in large state-funded educational institutions (technical institutes and community colleges) that aimed to meet the legitimation and accumulation needs of capitalism into a diverse array of small and mid-sized entrepreneurial enterprises which produce and disseminate information, skills, and even entertainment for profit.[29] The function of adult education is no longer to produce knowledge that may be

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[29] A very successful Toronto based adult education firm realizes they can make money providing training programs that do not provide information of skills but that engage students in an emotionally satisfying or relaxing afternoon. They call their company "The Entertrainers."

generally useful but to produce knowledge that specific purchasers are willing to buy. To make this possible, knowledge is packaged into discrete, measurable bundles of information that can be sold for specific sums of money. Many of these companies maximize earnings by focusing on short-cycle programming or tailored-to-fit training packages. Other "knowledge" products include courses, credentials, patents, processes, computer programs, research innovations, and so on. Computers, video, and telecommunications play a key role increasing the effectiveness of information dissemination.

Critical adult education has not experienced a similar positive transition. Instead, cultural commodification dangerously undermines the fund of interpretations that critical adult education draws upon to foster the health of the lifeworld. What is happening, in effect, is that commodification is destroying culture faster than restorative cultural practices like critical adult education can reproduce it. While it may be true that lifeworld rationalization is required to stop system colonization, it may now be the case that lifeworld destruction is to the point that it can no longer even support the discursive practices required for rationalization—this includes, most notably, the activities of critical adult education. The proliferation of market stimulated information, unassociated with any integrated and culturally sustained meaning frame, is not produced to undergird processes of communicative action. Information elements are not valued for their capacity to motivate discursive agreements. Rather, they are valued solely for the profits they can earn. Detached from the communicative contexts of life, they heed only the imperatives of the market. The commodification of culture means that critical adult education must make its way in an environment impoverished by the intrusive steering mechanisms of the system. All that remains of once integrated and vital cultures is the 'rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers.' The notion of culture presumed by critical adult

education offers little insight into how it might continue to foster the healthy discursive institutions that were once the pride and aspiration of modernity.

If critical adult education is incapable of accommodating the vicissitudes of cultural commodification, it is even less capable of dealing with the unruly implications of the drift from discourse to the image as the main means of signification in our society. Note once again that critical adult education presumes a discursive notion of culture and envisions itself as a dialogical cultural practice that fosters the communicative capacities of the lifeworld. The growing ability of the mass-media to produce representations that seem more real than reality itself, undercuts the modernist notion of culture as a discursive fund of interpretations that mediate the actions of lifeworld members. Figural forms of signification devalue the kinds of activities promoted by critical adult education. Images do not present themselves as validity claims open to dialogue, they do not call upon formal procedures for assessing their worth, and they do not inspire inquiry into their underlying meaning or significance. Rather, they present themselves as if they are "reality" and gratify needs directly without requiring people to deliberately coordinate their actions. Why should adult learners engage in critical discourse when it is so much easier and pleasurable and even more real to just go shopping.

Again it is interesting to note that instrumental adult education is not deleteriously impacted by this transformation. The "knowledge products" produced by adult education companies are increasingly image oriented. This is particularly apparent in skills training where much learning is carried out utilizing simulations of actual job situations. Computers and video technology now mean it is possible for airline pilots, electronic engineers, auto-mechanics, data-entry operators, and physicians to receive extensive training through simulation.

Critical adult education does not fare so well with the rise of the image. Representations produced as images require no mediation by culture. While it may

be true that culture still exists, the extensiveness of its influence is dramatically reduced in a society dominated by powerful media images. The pervasiveness of the image reduces the discursive territory within which critical adult education can operate. The modernist notion of culture as a terrain of action coordination is rendered partially incomplete with the upsurge of a world which connects directly with the soma of its consumers.

The delinguistification of culture that accompanies commodification and the rise of the image undermines the basis for critical adult education's dialogical practices. Whereas in modernity, critical adult education could engage lifeworld members in a critical appraisal of validity claims, in postmodernity, critical adult education is left without the discursive resources required to confront the validity of simulacra that seem more real than reality itself.

Critical adult education's belief that culture is differentiated into three separate realms no longer holds. The aestheticization of everyday life and the breakdown of the boundaries between aesthetic, moral, and theoretical realms overruns this understanding of culture. In postmodernity, all claims are assessed according to their sensational impact. There is a depreciation of deliberative discourse that transpires in moral and theoretical realms.

The concomitant blurring of the distinction between society and culture also has an impact on critical adult education's understanding of culture. No longer is culture seen as a distinct location for symbolic reproduction. The manufacture of representations as cultural commodities destabilizes the discursive sphere where critical adult education implements its practices.

All told, the commodification of culture confronts critical adult education with declining opportunities to engage in its political aspirations as a counter-hegemonic cultural enterprise. Critical adult education pins its emancipatory intentions on the modernist idea that culture is a key site of social contestation. In postmodern times,

however, the process of cultural commodification significantly lessens the importance of culture as a place where different social agents struggle over the norms and values governing society. Critical adult education is outflanked by these developments and, given its modernist theoretical foundations, is incapable of mustering an adequate response.

Even more unsettling, however, are the questions post-structuralism raises about the desirability of critical adult education's emancipatory agenda in the first place. Not only is critical adult education overwhelmed by transformations that commodification wreaks on culture, it is also challenged by the post-structuralist contention that the destruction of culture as a realm of legitimation provides new opportunities for less rigid and more heterogeneous social forms to emerge. Critical adult education has devoted itself to the idea that rational discourse can provide the basis for consensus about which norms should prevail in society. Post-structuralism raises the uncomfortable notion that critical adult education is just another means by which the heterogeneity of social life is suppressed. Locked into a modernist conceptual framework that posits social struggle in terms of the struggle for hegemony, critical adult education is poorly equipped to articulate how it can persist as a meaningful emancipatory practice without reinscribing itself as an institution that suppresses heterogeneity and difference.

Chapter Five

SPACE AND TIME: THE DIMENSIONS OF DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE IN POSTMODERNITY[1]

In the previous chapter, I explored how postmodernism challenges the notion of culture presumed by critical adult education. Some postmodern discourses, I argued, narrate changes in culture totally inimical to the project of critical adult education (how can critical adult education persist when culture is simulated, fragmented, and discontinuous?), some dismiss the whole idea of a counter-hegemonic cultural practice as an oppressive fiction and celebrate the implosion of culture in postmodernity as a final end to misguided ventures like critical adult education. In this chapter, I pursue this disconcerting line of inquiry in a slightly different direction. Postmodernism, I contend, challenges the taken-for-granted categories of space and time in which critical adult education locates its emancipatory practices. Some postmodern discourses narrate how even these seemingly fundamental categories liquefy and flow in new and inchoate patterns in the hot post-Fordist cyber-storm that buffets our postmodern world. Other discourses celebrate these postmodern transformations in space and time as an opportunity to escape the limiting geography of modernity. Whichever the case,

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[1] A version of this paper has been published in the *Proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Studies of Adult Education* under the title, "Time and Space in Adult Education: The Dimensions of Domination and Resistance in Modern and Postmodern Times,"(1993).

critical adult education must now make its way in a space and time far stranger than it has ever presumed before.

Space and Time

Because the categories of space and time seem so fundamental we rarely question their meaning. We understand them with our common-sense and assume that, at base, only one space and one time exists, and each is objective and measurable, the space and time of maps and clocks. Anthropology, even physics, tell us, however, that space and time vary.[2] Anthropological curios like the non-differentiation of past, present and future by the Hopi Indians or like the six directions recognized by the Plains Indians remind us of the flexible nature of space and time. Even in our own lives, our understanding of time varies. We experience the cyclical time of family life, where years can seem like seconds; the progressive time of contemporary society, a raging torrent, always changing, ever advancing; and the interrupted time of cataclysm and disaster, where minutes seem like hours. Space varies, too. Our personal awareness of space changes with who we are and what we do.[3] Children and adults, the mad and the sane, men and women, the wealthy and the poor, and so on, have very different senses of volume, distance, direction, and pattern. Prairie space is different if we walk its dusty undulations than if we drive its straight roads.

A host of contemporary Marxist geographers like Henri Lefebvre (1991), Edward Soja (1989), and David Harvey (1989) agree that the objectivity of space and time is an illusion and believe that the space and time of maps and clocks are culturally

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[2] For an interesting, albeit popularized, discussion of the varied notions of space and time in physics, see Steven Hawkings', *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*. Alfred Gell provides an interesting account of different cultures' notions of time in *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images*. Two other rather interesting accounts of how different cultures conceive of space and time are Robert Thornton's, *Space, Time, and Culture Among the Iraqw of Tanzania* and Stephen Fabian's, *Space-time of the Bororo of Brazil*.

[3] See Gaston Bachelard's, *The Poetics of Space*, for a phenomenological account of the different ways we experience/imagine space in our daily lives.

bound. The conceptions of space and time various cultural groups hold are not totally spurious, though. Theorists like Harvey contend that all notions of space and time, including the one we hold as objective, arise out of the material processes of societies. As Harvey writes:

> objective conceptions of space and time are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life....The objectivity of time and space is given in each case by the material practices of social reproduction, and to the degree that these latter vary geographically and historically, so we find that social time and social space are differentially constructed. Each distinctive mode of production of social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts (p. 204).

Soja and Lefebvre reiterate this perspective when they depict how space "is simultaneously the medium and outcome, presupposition and embodiment, of social action and relationship" (Soja, p. 129).[4] Different modes of production develop different conceptions of space and time and a host of related spatial and temporal concepts like society (Wolf, 1988), nation (Segal, 1988; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992), and culture (Tomlinson, 1991).

David Harvey describes how space and time both constitute and are constituted by the material processes of social reproduction. Drawing on the work of Hägerstrand, Harvey observes how all social actors carry out projects "that take time through movement in space" (p. 211). To achieve their projects, each individual must overcome limited time resources and the "friction of distance." These problems become more difficult when individual projects become part of larger social projects that require many social actors to meet in space and time to coordinate actions.

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[4] The perception that space is *both* the medium *and* the outcome only emerged in the 1980s. Doreen Massey (1992) relates how, to the Marxist "aphorism of the 1970s—that space is socially constructed—was added in the 1980s the other side of the coin: that the social is spatially constructed too, and that makes a difference. In other words, and in its broadest formulation, society is necessarily constructed spatially, and that fact—the spatial organization of society—makes a difference to how it works" (p. 70).

Social transactions of this sort are facilitated by a geographical array of social "stations" (places where people meet to carry out specifiable activities) and "domains" (where certain kinds of interaction prevail) (p. 211).

While this depiction offers important insight into the structuring of a culture's space and time, it does not illuminate how or why particular arrays of stations and domains prevail within social life. Harvey contends that one must realize that space and time are a crucial (perhaps the crucial) source of social power: those who command space and time, who influence the configuration of stations and domains, control the actions of all who live in that space and time (p. 226). For example, Henri Lefebvre, in his ground-breaking study, *The Production of Space* demonstrates how the command of space enables social agents to control the everyday activities of others. More explicitly, Michel Foucault studies control through the domination of space in institutions like asylums (1965), hospitals (1973), and prisons (1977), and advances the discussion further in his analysis of sexuality (1978) where he explores how it is even possible to control the inner space of the body. Other theorists like Paul Virilio (1989) and James Der Derian (1990) discuss the domination of space and time with regards to war, contending that success in war depends on a combatant's ability to create a battle space and time, through surveillance, simulation, and speed, where one can observe the actions of an opponent before one's own actions are observed (even weapons as destructive as nuclear warheads are useful only if they can be deployed in advance of the opponent's ability to counteract them).[5] Virilio shows how one can reinterpret the history of modern warfare as the history of technologies for dominating space and time. David Harvey's interest runs deeper

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[5] Der Derrian (1990) suggests that the time and space of modern warfare are radically different now than even a few years ago. In the modern age "as the aim of battle shifts from territorial, economic, and material gains to immaterial, perceptual fields, the war of spectacle begins to replace the spectacle or war" (p. 308).

than this, however. His concern is to show how, not only the history of warfare, but capitalist modernity as a whole can be reconceptualized as a struggle over space and time. For Harvey, space and time are never benign. They are central elements of any struggle for power and always bear the scars of historical social battles. Predric Jameson concurs and summarily observes that "neither space nor time is 'natural' in the sense in which it might be metaphysically presupposed (as ontology or human nature alike): both are the consequence and projected afterimages of a certain state or structure of production and appropriation, of the social organization of productivity" (1991, p. 367).

Space and Time in Modernity

Harvey's narrative of space and time in modernity focuses on the success of capitalism to create a spatial-temporal context conducive to its operations. His analysis details the capacity of money to create stations and domains that interweave the actions of people without the need for discursive communication. It reveals the power of the system to create a machine space-time which lifeworld members can inhabit only by becoming machines. What it does not show, however, is that the lifeworld also has the capacity to generate a discursive domain of action coordination with its own dimensions of space and time. Harvey does not make clear the complex interactions between system and lifeworld that generate the hybrid space and time of modernity, the space and time where domination and resistance are both possible, where critical adult education ultimately situates its practices. Let us turn for a moment to Harvey's story and then, by connecting it up with the analyses of the previous chapters, see if we can gain some perspective from which we can assess critical adult education's modernist notion of space and time.

According to Harvey, capitalist production, like other material processes, must contend with the limitations of space and time. To effect production, capitalists

struggle to create specialized spaces and times (the workplace and the workday) where the labour of workers and the material instruments of production mesh to generate commodities. Also, capitalists endeavor to create specialized spaces and times for commodity exchange (market), for the cultural practices that accompany their consumption (household), and for binding these various stations together (roads, shipping lanes, towns and cities). Historically, the rise of capitalism, with its novel use of space and time, required both material resources and a new attitude. The rising bourgeoisie accumulated the necessary material resources to transform space and time over several centuries preceding the industrial revolution. This was a difficult task. Almost every bourgeoisie advance was resisted by an aristocracy who garnered great social power from the space and time of feudalism. Not until the 19th century did the bourgeoisie accumulate sufficient resources to initiate a dramatic wave of space/time compression in the industrial revolution.[6]

The new attitude required for the reconstruction of space and time first emerged during the Renaissance when thinkers began, for the first time, to apply rationalized tools to measure and control space and time. For example, perspectival mapping (the mercator projection among others) permitted a detached observer to accurately gauge distance and area, and the chronometer, with its regular divisions to accurately coordinate actions (minutes were invented in the 17th century, seconds in the 19th). These rationalized tools contributed in important ways to the belief amongst Enlightenment thinkers that the entire world was ultimately knowable and controllable. As Harvey writes:

> The conquest and control of space [the hallmark of the project of modernity] first requires that it be conceived of as something usable, malleable, and

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[6] Harvey makes clear that the control of space was not acquired simply through the deployment of physical resources. For instance, the fact the French bourgeoisie had extensive trade connections with the petite bourgeoisie of regions surrounding Paris enabled them to amass a militia to crush the Paris revolution of 1848 (p. 255).

> thereafter capable of domination through human action. Perspectivism and mathematical mapping did this by conceiving of space and abstract, homogeneous, and universal in its qualities, a framework of thought and action which was stable and knowable. (p. 254)

Such attitudes provided fertile ground for the development of capitalism and for the rapid compression of space and time during the industrial revolution.

According to Harvey, capitalism's tendency to cycle through periods of overaccumulation, crisis, reorganization, and growth produced several waves of space/time compression during the 19th and 20th centuries.[7] The first took place during the first decades of the 19th century. Aided by the bourgeois state, capitalists in Europe created large factory cities; transformed small landholdings and large commons into privately owned pastures for wool production; cast peasants from their lands to seek employment in burgeoning urban sprawls; built intricate and massive networks of canals, roadways, and shipping lanes; and replaced the easy cycle of pastoral time with the frantic time of the mill and its regular regime of work hours. These transformations were not achieved easily. The bourgeoisie's efforts to create a compressed space and time conducive to capitalist enterprise not only forced them to expend a massive investment of resources but embroiled them in great struggles with the proletariat. Organizing themselves for the first time as a social class, the proletariat intensely resisted the space and time of capitalism. Proletariat resistance, however, was overwhelmed by the bourgeoisie's superior ability to shape space and time which enabled them, in the end, to contain and regulate the masses.

The space and time of early 19th century capitalism lasted until the great depression of 1847 when falling profits spurred capitalists to reach beyond the

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[7] Harvey points out that space/time compression provides capitalists with a powerful means for dealing with overaccumulation. It is possible for instance to invest resources in the future, to increase turnover time, or to expand geographically.

shores of their homelands for resources, labor, and consumers.[8] To effectively exploit the hinterland, capitalists and their supporting states produced an even more compressed space and time known as colonialism that eventually wove far off countries and industrial nations into a single world capitalist system.

This great wave of space/time transformation intensified to the beginning of the 20th century when it dashed itself onto the shore of World War I and the Russian Revolution and ran in eddies onto the dry beaches of the great depression of the 1930's. Already, though, a new means for further space-time compression was taking shape. Henry Ford discovered that the friction of distance could be greatly reduced by breaking production into a series of steps and coordinating these steps on an assembly line. Ford's innovation could easily manage massive industrial complexes and extremely intricate production processes.[9] The dislocations of the World War II were a perfect opportunity to implement this new and rapid compression of space and time. To meet the imperatives of assembly-line production, work hours were extended around the clock; time-motion studies were implemented in industry after industry to maximize efficiency; cities grew; transportation systems expanded; communication systems developed; surveillance systems emerged; households fragmented; shopping centers arrived. The old adage, time is money, was only partly true. In Fordist times, space and time were both money.

As Michael Storper and Allen Scott (1989) argue, domination in Fordism was achieved primarily through the domination of *place*. The basic strategy of Fordism

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[8] Despite the long debates about the validity of Marxist analyses of imperialism, particularly the rather economistic contention that overaccumulation is what forced capitalism out of its enclaves in Europe and North America and into the hinterland (see, in particular, Michael Barratt Brown's (1972) well known essay, "A Critique of Marxist Theories of Imperialism"), it seems fairly indisputable at this point that imperialism was driven by capitalist expansion.

[9] For a good depiction of the intricacies of Fordism see Benard Doray, *From Taylorism to Fordism: A Rational Madness*.

was to concentrate large numbers of workers in one geographic location to reduce the friction of distance and increase the efficiency of production. Industrial managers of the 1920's realized it was much easier to dominate the space and time of a single *place* than it was to coordinate actions occurring over a more diffused space. In its classical incarnation, Fordism was undergirded by massive, highly capitalized factories that either utilized continuous flow processes (petrochemical, paper, and steel production) or assembly line processes (manufactured products like appliances and cars) (Storper and Scott, p. 23). Centralized production processes created a concentrated domain where the actions of workers, analyzed into their component movements (time and motion studies and Tylerist behavioral analyses), could be interwoven within a rationalized array of stations that were easily monitored by surveillance and regulated by disciplinary force.

The rationalized space and time of the factory extended to other domains inhabited by workers and their families. The population concentrations required for mass production gave rise, in industrialized countries, to large urban complexes surrounded by increasingly smaller subsidiary industrial nodes all situated within a massive and sparsely populated agricultural hinterland (any sizable population concentrations outside of the industrialized urban centers were inevitably involved in resource extraction). Cities were important sites for Fordist capitalism not only because they were where most production occurred but also because they were where most consumption occurred. To ensure an efficient cycle in production and consumption, capitalism fostered the extension of the rationalized space and time of the factory into the urban domain. Standardized housing, transportation systems, and communications networks engendered a space-time in which labour and

commodities could easily flow.[10] The rationalization of space and time regulated consumption patterns. Commodities like cars, household appliances, leisure products, processed foods, all enabled people to negotiate the congested spaces and contracted times of the technicized urban environment. Special spaces and times, like markets, shopping malls, and recreation centers, developed to ensure the smooth marketing of products.[11]

Harvey's account of all of this accords powerfully with our experience of space and time in industrial society. We recognize with a feeling of dismay the restrictive and 'dehumanizing' space and time of urban life. However, the very fact that we still feel this dismay indicates that, to some extent at least, we realize the 'unnaturalness' of the capitalist environment. Harvey is so determined to reveal the power of capitalism to rationalize the space and time of social existence that he underplays other forces shaping the space and time of modernity. These forces become clear if we reflect on some of the ideas developed in our discussion of Habermas and the rationalization of culture.

It is easy to see that Harvey's prime concern is to relate the ways the economy and state in Fordism generate a space and time conducive to capital accumulation. What does not seem as important to him, however, are the varied forces that attempt either to shape space and time in their own interests (other forms of domination) or to resist the imposition of Fordism's rationalized spatial and temporal grid. While he does note the efforts expended, first by the aristocracy in early stages of mercantile capitalism and later by the proletariat in industrial capitalism, to oppose the imperatives of the bourgeoisie, he does not give the impression that these class

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[10] Le Corbusier's *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning* is held by many commentators to articulate most quintessentially the vision of the rationalized urban environment.

[11] For an interesting analysis of the ways stores alter space and time to maximize product sales see Ellen Seiter's (1992), "Toys Are Us: Marketing to Children and Parents."

based forces were capable of withstanding the inexorable power of the capitalism to rationalize social space. Neither does he provide a very clear sense of how other forms of domination organized around religion, race, gender, or the innumerable localized relationships in families, ethnic communities, sub-cultural groups, etc. interact with capitalism to produce the space and time of modernity.

As we have seen in other chapters though, the interactions between the system and the lifeworld have never been so entirely uni-directional. While the sub-systems of economy and state can coordinate actions for material reproduction, the system remains reliant upon the lifeworld, in all its diverse manifestations, for symbolic reproduction. Harvey's analysis relates how the system in its Fordist incarnation constructs a space and time conducive for accumulation. What he does not accour ' for, however, is the *simultaneous* construction of space-time by the lifeworld within which the processes of symbolic reproduction take place and which the Fordist system, to some extent at least, must allow to exist. The space-time constructed by the lifeworld is different from the space and time of the Fordism in that, instead of producing stations and domains based on the extracted logic of means-ends rationality made material in perspectival mapping, time-in-motion studies, the clock, flow charts, grids, and so on, the lifeworld produces stations and domains based on the complex and fluid process of communication. The space-time people move through in the lifeworld is one structured by meaning that people in various forms of communication attribute to things, locations, people, and moments. In traditional societies people are socialized into the taken-for-granted space-time of their culture. In modernity, the rationalization of the lifeworld means the desolidification of traditions and the liquefaction of space and time. Increasingly lifeworld members become responsible for developing the spatial-temporal horizons that will foster and constrain their actions. It is crucial to note that social formations that emerge from the lifeworld are not necessarily or even typically equitable or just. Power effects are

present in this realm, too, in the form of distorted communication which, on occasion, sustains extremely oppressive social relations. The Fordist system does not simply impose its space and time on a passive environment. In modernity, the system constructs a space and time only in relation to the complex spaces and times of the lifeworld.

While we want to avoid Harvey's one-sidedness, we must take caution, at the same time, not to overemphasize the extent to which the lifeworld influences space and time in modernity. The Fordist system, it turns out, is a masterful overseer and despite the resolve of people in lifeworld contexts to resist the imposition of machine space-time, advocates of Fordism have been able to maintain a spatial-temporal continuum conducive to capitalism's interests. True, the system does not have free reign. Its reliance on the reproductive capacities of the lifeworld means that, in important ways, it wages the battle for space and time on the lifeworld's terms. For instance, because action coordination in the lifeworld is based on communication, the space-time that it engenders is often anchored to the locality or *place* where communication transpires. While recent anthropological studies reveal that, in traditional cultures, extensive migration and intercultural contact rendered the boundaries of *place* extremely fluid and permeable (Gupta and Ferguson, p. 7), the dimensions of social existence remain, by in large, mapped onto a particular place. Up to the wane of Fordism in the early 1970s, advocates of the system had little choice but to develop their conceptions of space and time in the same place-bound fashion. The system's symbiotic relationship with the lifeworld disabled it from constructing a space and time which reproduced its labourers and consumers.[12] The system can *alter* the space and time of communicative places to block the emergence

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[12] For a depiction of how Fordism engenders a space and time consistent with that of the lifeworld, see Kevin Cox (1989), "The Politics of Turf and the Question of Class."

of lifeworld institutions capable of contesting its imperatives and to foster the establishment of nstitutions beneficial to its interests. But the system cannot destroy these *places* altogether without undermining the lifeworld's capacity to supply it with essential resources. What it can do, however, is to harden the boundaries of places to eliminate the inflow of new contingencies that cannot be controlled or dissolved.[13] As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) relate, "[t]he enforced "difference" of places becomes, in this perspective, part and parcel of a global system of domination" (p. 17).

The symbiotic relationship between system and lifeworld renders the space and time of modernity implacably place-bound. The system attempts to establish control over a given place by deploying a seamless array of instrumentalized stations which regulate the actions of lifeworld members within hardened geographical borders. Unable to extend beyond the rigidified boundaries established by the economy and state (nation, region, city, factory, neighborhood), varied and oftentimes competing lifeworld institutions struggle for control of the space and time by imposing a finely woven grid of norms and values which regulate the pace and distribution of lifeworld members' actions. The capacity of the system to coordinate action in a delimited locale places pressure on the lifeworld to develop increasingly coherent networks of controlling norms. The lifeworld can survive within the space and time of the system only to the extent that it can develop its own countervailing space and time hung from the lattice of customs, norms, and shared understandings of everyday life. One way lifeworld members can retain a degree of power within the spatial and temporal horizons of the system is by reinforcing or exacerbating traditional hierarchies in order to repress or eliminate cultural differences within a

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[13] Recent work in anthropology has analyzed how economies and states erect and reify "naturalized" conceptions of places such as nations, regions, neighborhoods, etc. See in particular Benedict Anderson's (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.*

given territory (the conservative option). This option involves repressing social actors who call into question the spatial and temporal horizons prescribed by the hierarchy. Another way lifeworld members can retain power in the space-time of the system is through developing an increased capacity to communicatively articulate differences amongst individuals and sub-groups who inhabit a particular territory through rationalizing the lifeworld and acquiring the capacity for communicative action (the democratic option). This option involves denouncing traditional forms of authority, calling into question traditional conceptions of space and time, and delineating a space and time consistent with the process of communicative action. The totalizing tendencies of the capitalist system has intensified both of these options. On the one hand, and perhaps most perniciously, it has encouraged the lifeworld increasingly to execute its own totalizing policies (nationalism, racism, gender-essentialism, classism) to establish a homogeneous, integrated, and unproblematic spatial-temporal framework for efficient action coordination. By in large, capitalism has been able to ride high enough above these alternate forms of domination to actually benefit from their emergence and perpetuation. On the other hand, the totalizing tendency of capitalism has stimulated an upsurge in institutions for discursive will formation (democratic organizations, labour-unions, leagues and associations) which draw upon and enhance the capacities of lifeworld members in a particular *place* to harmonize their actions. While there have been times when the 'democratic option' has attained historical significance, for the most part, the 'conservative option' has prevailed as the lifeworld's principle strategy for surviving the space and time of the system. The ultimate result of this tendency is that the implacably place-bound space-time of modernity is also one which is largely homogeneous and regular.

Space and time in modernity are not, as Harvey leaves us thinking, simply a result of Fordist production processes. Rather they are the consequence of an

elaborate, ongoing, and diligently fought battle between the instrumentalizing forces of the system and the contradictory and complex forces of the lifeworld. The space and time of modernity is neither completely a machine space-time nor a traditional space-time nor a communicative space-time. Rather it is a hybrid, a complex interweaving of these very different spatial-temporal continua which people must negotiate—one moment as machine, the next as lifeworld member. The space-time of modernity, to draw on Donna Haraway's (1991) image, is the space-time of *cyborgs*.

Critical Adult Education in the Space-Time of Modernity

As a cultural practice that fosters the rationalization of the lifeworld and that struggles to prevent its colonization by the system, critical adult education locates its activities within the space and time of modernity. It does not do this explicitly: critical adult education seldom speaks of the geography or the historicity of its practices. Just under the surface of its discourses, however, resides an implicit yet clear understanding of the role of critical adult education in the space and time of contemporary society— to foster a space-time consistent with the requirements and capacities of communicative action. To meet this goal it must struggle simultaneously on two fronts. On the one front, it endeavors to open up traditional, taken-for-granted constructions of space and time to the rationalizing power of communicative action. In a concrete sense, this means challenging the patterns and life-pace fostered by traditional forms of authority—religious, patriarchal or familial, racial, feudal, or colonial—and replacing them with a space and time sustained by democratic interaction. Examples of critical adult education's engagement with the space and time of traditional society abound. The most clear, perhaps, are the more recent. For instance, Paulo Freire first developed his critical adult education method to enable Brazilian peasants to challenge traditional forms of authority keeping them

in a 'closed society'. In his early days, Freire's primary concern was to open the oppressive space and time of the *latifundia* that so tightly bound the Brazilian peasant to the modern space and time of democracy. Freire (1973) is clear that the struggle to rationalize the lifeworld is a struggle to transform space and time:

> The social distance characteristic of human relationships on the great estate did not permit dialogue. Even the more humane relationships between masters and slaves which prevailed on some estates produced not dialogue but paternalism, the patronizing attitude of an adult towards a child....The proper climate for dialogue is found in open areas, where men [sic] can develop a sense of participation in a common life. Dialogue requires social and political responsibility; it requires at least a minimum of transitive consciousness, which cannot develop under the closed conditions of the large estate....Urban centers created and governed by the people might have afforded us an apprenticeship in democracy....In Brazil, urban centers rarely arose out of political solidarity, out of the need to associate human groups into communities. (pp. 24-25)

Freire's view of critical adult education is that it should open the closed world of the peasant, that it should shake the boundaries created by traditional forms of power, and that it should create a discursive context where peasants can join with one another communicatively to create and perpetuate a space and time conducive to democracy.

It would be a mistake to understand critical adult education's denunciation of the space and time of traditional society as its only or even its principal struggle. At the same time as it resists the space and time of tradition, it also resists the instrumentalizing space and time of the system. Paulo Freire (1973), for instance, contends that critical adult education must not only foster a transition from closed societies but must also resist the forces of "massification" that accompanies modernization:

> In our highly technical world, mass production as an organization of human labor is possibly one of the most potent instruments of man's [sic] massification. By requiring a man to behave mechanically, mass production

> domesticates him. By separating his activity from the total project, requiring no total critical attitude toward production, it dehumanizes him. By excessively narrowing a man's specialization, it constricts his horizons, making of him a passive, fearful, naïve being. And therein lies the chief contradiction of mass production: While amplifying man's sphere of participation it simultaneously distorts this amplification by reducing man's critical capacity through exaggerated specialization. (p. 34)

Freire's wariness of the mechanical space and time of technical society is shared by mid-century adult educators like Saskatchewan's Watson Thomson. Thomson exhorted people to be "scientific and to be cooperative." As Michael Welton (1987a) relates:

> Aware that the trend in agriculture was towards increasingly mechanized, capital-intensive, large-scale units, Thomson challenged farmers to bring their isolated farms together into single co-operative communities. He was convinced that the people could take the 'raw material' of a prairie village and create a rich community full of life and interest. But one could not do that without study and co-operative action. (p. 156)

Thomson's pedagogical strategy to develop the capacity of the community to generate its own space and time rather than succumbing to the mechanized space and time of capitalism lies at the heart of many critical adult education activities. In his account of critical adult education in the German-American community in Chicago in the last half of the 19th century, Fred Schied (1993) makes clear that one of the central struggles of radicals was to keep the time and pace of the workplace out of the daily life of the community. Basing themselves in a lose network of community institutions like saloons, workers clubs, and community newspapers, activists struggled to foster the involvement of all citizens in the day to day affairs of the community:

> From the start, the German-American working-class community in Chicago saw education in political terms. That is, education could never be separated from the goals and objectives of a community which sought nothing less than the social transformation of society. Thus education was not seen as something grafted onto certain institutions, but rather intrinsically connected

> to the community. To separate out some community activities and call them "educational" would have seemed absurd to the radical workers. Education, primarily but not exclusively informal, was at the heart of all institutions, gatherings and celebrations. (p. 127)

Whether they be Freire, Thomson, or German-American radicals, or whether they be folk-school leaders in Denmark, tutors of the Workers Education Association in Britain, civil rights educators with Highlander in Tennessee, or co-operation educators in the Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia, the strategy of critical educators is almost always to foster the capacity of people to contest the domination of *place* by instrumental or domineering forces. This strategy, it is important to observe, is essentially *geographic* and *historical*.. For the most part, it entails the actual struggle for control of identifiable locations, be they the community, the street, the factory, or the educational institution, and the reconstruction of that location according to a space and time commensurate with communicative action. It is no accident that Antonio Gramsci (1971) uses a geographic metaphor to characterize hegemonic struggle. He contends that the war of position against capitalist hegemony is waged on a front and that strategies of resistance take the form of gradually reclaiming the space and time of a geographic place from capitalist domination.

In practice, critical adult educators encourage people to unify to free the space of their community from surveillance; to take back spaces commandeered for the production process; to collectively institute a measure of time unregulated by the lock-step of the industrial process; to reclaim history; and to contest the idea that the learning process should be fragmented, that people's ideas should be monitored and evaluated, that adults should be taught individualized, skills oriented, curricula. Perhaps most importantly, though, they offer their learners a counter-hegemonic discourse to contest the space and time of the system, particularly the idea that space and time naturally conform to the imperatives of the capitalist process.

The very fact that capitalism is so adept at interweaving its space and time with the space and time of traditional forms of oppression means that critical adult education rarely struggles on just one of these fronts. The struggle against domination is a struggle that takes place in the convoluted and contradictory space-time of modernity. In almost every instance, however, their attempts to recapture space and time from the rationalized processes of the system always, at some level at least, involves recapturing a concrete and identifiable geographic and historical place.

The situation, ironically, is much the same for instrumental forms of adult education in modernity. Committed to the extension and consolidation of the system, instrumental adult education also endeavors to dominate a *place* , in this case a place conducive to capitalist relations. Emulating the space and time of industrial production, it prepares workers and consumers for the specialized and ever-changing tasks of the modernity. Like Fordist factories, instrumental adult education institutions regulate large numbers of students by constructing a concentrated and definitive *place* where all actions can be easily monitored and disciplined. Adult educators fragment knowledge into small pieces that can be systematically and sequentially taught to learners in compartmentalized workstations (classrooms, desks, and shops); they time learning activities and measure their outcomes; they expect students to keep hours consistent with the cycles of the workday and adhere to codes of conduct typical of the workplace. Such activities are governed by both surveillance and discipline made possible by the centralization and definitivness of the institution. If instrumental adult educators find it impossible to construct an actual physical place to emulate the space and time of the factory, they develop distance education technologies to emulate this place. Film projectors, mobile workshops, and portable classrooms help create the place-bound and regulated space and time of capitalism in remote locations.

Instrumental adult education both inhabits and promotes the rationalized space-time of capital. It uses its maps, its schemas, and its clocks to systematically develop regularized pedagogical practices that engage people in the machine space-time of a clearly delineated place. The terrain it travels is clear and bright, like urban highways. Its power comes from the purity of calculation that shapes the dimensions of the administered place. In the 20th century it has inexorably expanded and consolidated in community colleges, technical institutes, universities, and corporation training centers to become a powerful shaper of the dimensions of modernity.

Critical adult education makes its way in a very different terrain. Rather than the super-highway of machine space-time, it finds its way in the dark and tangled space-time of communicative action. It cannot move smoothly and swiftly to institute pedagogical approaches in a regularized terrain. Instead, it plants itself in a locality and its history and seeks the meanings of the complex and variegated landforms it finds there. It listens and speaks and fosters listening and speech that reiterate and transform the dimensions of the communicative landscape. Critical adult education has resisted the imperatives of the system and has contested the pedagogical impulses of instrumental adult education by fostering the verdant space-time of the lifeworld. Occasionally this has included challenging the hardened borders of places. Most often, however, it has involved challenging the organization and regulation of space and time *within a specific place*. While its visibility has decreased steadily throughout the 20th century, critical adult education has always implicitly understood itself as an important shaper of modernity's complex space-time. The advent of postmodernity challenges this historic role.

Space and Time in Postmodernity

Let us return once again to Harvey's narrative to try to understand, for a moment, the way in which postmodernity alters our conceptions of space and time. Harvey locates the impetus of postmodernity in the depression of 1973 which he contends spurred capitalist enterprises to seek new ways of increasing the efficiency of their operations. Advances in communications and computer technologies, the development of sophisticated transportation systems, and the growth of the service and culture industries provides avenues for restructuring space and time that were inconceivable only years before. While in Fordism, capitalists overcome the friction of distance and problems of action coordination by establishing large scale industries to produce industrial commodities for distribution in mass markets, in the regime of accumulation that first emerged out of the economic turmoil of the early 1970's, which Harvey identifies as post-Fordism, capitalists utilize the coordinating power of computers and telecommunications to discern small markets, and to coordinate the manufacture of small batches of specialized products by decentralized, often widely dispersed production units. Harvey identifies this change as *flexible accumulation*:

> *Flexible accumulation* ...is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation. It has entrained rapid shifts in the patterning of uneven development, both between sectors and between geographical regions, giving rise, for example, to a vast surge in so-called 'service-sector' employment as well as to entirely new industrial ensembles in hitherto underdeveloped regions. (Harvey, 1989, p. 147)

A key feature of this regime, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is the commodification of culture. To an unprecedented degree, we noted, cultural products and services — works of art, knowledge, health and fitness, fashions,

movie images, TV programs, sports spectacles, music, and so on — comprise what is bought and sold in the marketplace. Most products and services are ephemeral and produced by small, highly specialized production units and transported electronically or by flexible transport systems to nuanced and highly volatile markets throughout the world.

All of the above changes have fostered what Harvey identifies as "a new round of ...'space–time compression'...in the capitalist world—the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space" (p. 147). The Fordist strategy of centralizing production and homogenizing consumption to overcome the friction of distance and the problem of coordinating action becomes cumbersome and inefficient in a world of computers, satellites, and video images. Today's capitalist enterprises do not attempt to dominate *place* to ensure efficient production and consumption. Rather, technology permits them instantly to coordinate the actions of labourers and consumers over vast distances: sophisticated surveillance techniques monitor geographically dispersed production units, computers manage the complexities of the production process, market surveys identify potential market niches, satellites instantly transport image products to the consumer. Domination in postmodern times is effected, not through the control of a unified *place* but through the control of a fragmented and variegated *space-time*.

We must be careful, I think, not to follow Harvey too far and adopt a determinist understanding of space and time in postmodernity. In a real sense, we can represent flexible accumulation as a response rather than as a cause of an altered space-time. As I noted in Chapter 2, Harvey minimizes a multitude of other social forces that move to undermine the homogeneity of modern society. For example, Salman Rushdie (1991) identifies migration as an important force of change in

postmodernity. His novel, *The Satanic Verses* (19 , explores the corrosive force of the *diaspora*, on the rigid borders of cultures throughout the world. *The Satanic Verses*, he contends:

> celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Mélange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and that, is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-co-joining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves. (p. 394).

Harvey would counter that migration, like other cultural forces that heterogenize and "mongrelize" the monolithic space and time of modernity (alternate political voices—feminist, gay, anti-racist—for instance), does not necessarily threaten the space and time of the *system* in postmodernity. Augmented with cybernetic devices, capitalist enterprises are increasingly capable of monitoring and exploiting the complex and changing space-time of postmodernity, including the variegations caused by migration. Each new fluctuation or fragmentation is recorded and incorporated as another source of flexible labour or another market niche to be exploited.

While the system as a totalizing social force may have the capacity to make the transition from the homogeneity, unity, and boundedness of modern space-time to the heterogeneity, fragmentation, and diffuseness of postmodern space-time, the lifeworld has more difficulty. The principle reason is that, while the system coordinates action based on autonomous instrumental processes whose effectiveness is vastly increased with the advent of cybernetic technologies, the lifeworld coordinates action through the tenuous and resolutely place-bound means of communicative action. Certainly it is true that advances in communications technology place new tools in the hands of lifeworld members to work out action

coordinating agreements spanning ever greater distances and times (to the point that some hopeful theorists of the 1970's viewed the advent of the micro-computer as offering great new possibilities for democratization). But such advances are insufficient to offset the dramatic heterogenization of discourses that transpires with the space-time compression of postmodernity. Whereas, in modernity, the place-bound forms of social organization still represented a context where lifeworld members could develop unified representation of social reality that can undergird social action (occasionally inimical to the interests of the system), in postmodernity, increasingly complex and fragmented forms of social organization do not provide such a context. The collective capacity of lifeworld members to articulate coherent and widely accepted representations of their social reality is undercut by the growing heterogeneity of members' backgrounds and interests that accompanies space-time compression.

Fredric Jameson provides a particularly lucid account of our experience of space and time under the changed conditions of postmodernity. He contends, for instance, that the fragmentation of space and time results in a growing incapacity to perceive any depth behind the multitude of confusing surfaces that confront us in our daily lives. "What is striking about the new urban ensembles around Paris, for example, is that there is *absolutely no perspective at all*.. Not only has the street disappeared (that was already the task of modernism), but all profiles have disappeared as well." We now live in a hyperspace. "Normal space," he contends, "is made up of things, or organized by things. Here [in postmodernity] we are talking about the dissolution of things. In this final moment one cannot talk about components anymore" (1988, p. 7). The space of postmodernity, he contends:

> ...involves the suppression of distance (in the sense of Benjamin's aura) and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places, to the point where the postmodern body—whether wandering through a postmodern hotel, locked into rock sound by means of headphones, or

> undergoing the multiple shocks and bombardments of the Vietnam War—is now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed. (1991, pp. 412-413)

At the same time as postmodernity significantly alters our experience of space, it also restructures how we perceive time. According to Jameson, in postmodernity, any "notion of 'deep time'...seems radically irrelevant to our contemporary existence, which is one of a perpetual spatial present" (1988, p. 6). In postmodernity, where "the past" is produced right along with a host of other cultural products—where "the world itself, in fact only created a second ago, was carefully 'antiquated' in advance and deliberately endowed with the artificial traces of deep wear and age and use, so that it seemed to carry a past and a tradition within itself" (1991, p. 350)[14]— time is subsumed within the flattened dimensions of postmodern space. In other words, as postmodernity grips our world, our sense of time itself becomes less temporal and more spatial. Postmodernism, in effect, obliterates memory. The past and the future appear arrayed before us as fragmented images in a flat and confusing landscape.

Despite the cogency of Harvey's and Jameson's accounts, though, it is important to acknowledge that the breakdown of the seamless space-time fomented within the tightly construed places of modernity has some very positive consequences. Even though place-bound lifeworld institutions like labour unions, nationalist movements, racial and ethnic groups, religious organizations, and gender groups historically were able to sustain a space and time powerful enough to successfully contest the instrumentalizing forces of the system, they often (perhaps even usually) achieved their power by suppressing the diversity of cultural interests inhabiting a particular place. The terror of the capitalist system was and still is offset, in many

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[14] Jameson recalls the androids in Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner*, whose memories, which they cherished as real, were actually provided for them by their engineers.

cases, by the terror of totalizing, rigid, and extremely oppressive lifeworld institutions. Norms and values that shape the space and time of the lifeworld are, in actuality, rarely engendered in 'democratic' contexts featuring an equitable distribution of power. Rather, social history is replete with examples of certain lifeworld interests shaping a space and time to their own advantage. Rushdie's "love-song to our mongrel selves" expresses the liberation experienced by those set free from the twisted and exclusionary spatial and temporal frameworks that emerge in the contest for place in modernity. His exuberance, understandably, is shared by a plethora of previously marginalized groups (women, racial groups, ethnic and religious groups) set free from the homogenized space-time of rigidified lifeworlds.

However, while the breakdown of modern space-time allows divergent social interests to spring free of the oppressive place-bound geography of modernity and to celebrate the uniqueness of their particularity and difference and diffuseness, people like Harvey point out that it also *renders very problematic* any possibility of the lifeworld developing the capacity to resist the imperatives of an economic system increasingly capable of interfacing with even the most heterogeneous and wide-flung cultural environments. While the logic of collective action that prevails at the level of the system (instrumental-monological) survives the transition to postmodernity, the logic that operates at the level of the lifeworld (dialogical) becomes progressively attenuated.[15] At the same time as the global economic system progressively establishes larger, more inclusive, more intensely interactive spaces and times (massive free-trade zones, international markets, multi-national corporations), the space and time of the lifeworld is gradually ground into fragments

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[15] For a good discussion of the "two logics of collective action," see Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*.

incapable of resisting the imperatives of money and bureaucracy.[16] When the battle against modernity's metanarratives is sharpened to the point that dialogical, communicative action is abandoned altogether as a viable means for creating a space and time, the lifeworld loses an important means for offsetting the imperatives of a system unhindered by the diversification of social life. Freedom from the oppressiveness of modernity's homogenous and tightly bounded space and time (easy targets of postmodern skepticism) is paid for with a new vulnerability to the massive and increasingly incomprehensible space and time of postmodernity. The space and time of postmodernity operates in gargantuan dimensions that exceeds the imagination of any place-bound emancipatory cultural practice.

Year Zero, No Map: Critical Adult Education in the Space and Time of Postmodernity

In his book, *Cambodia: A Book for People Who Find Television Too Slow*, Brian Fawcett (1986) informs us that the impetus behind Pol Pot's genocidal program of 1975-1979 was to exterminate memory in Cambodia in order to reset its cultural clock to 'year zero'. In a provocative and disturbing analysis, Fawcett contends that "there are uncomfortable parallels to this extermination of memory and imagination within the media-saturated world" in which we now live (1991, p. 65). The spacialization of time in postmodernity observed by Jameson is, in essence, an annihilation of remembrance. The flickering of the video image training us to ever more subliminal levels of perception and gratification together with an increasingly pervasive sense of disconnectedness and fragmentation undermine our capacity to connect one moment to another, to possess anything but the briefest of short-term memories.

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[16] For a fascinating and timely survey of the cultural fragmentation of Europe which is occurring simultaneously with the formation of the European Economic Community, see the special issue of the *Observer*, ??.

Critical adult education once made its way in a world obsessed with memory as a way of both preserving and contesting social order. It took its place in the vast struggle over historical interpretation, fostering the willingness and the capacity of people to recover and create their own histories. Now it must find its way in a world in which the antique is just yesterday's product and where the most salient and evocative memories are located in the vast data banks of corporations' computer networks. The shallow and fragmented temporality of postmodernity militates against critical adult education's efforts to foster an understanding of historical connection, a capacity for deep remembrance, or an illuminating spark of imagination. In the perpetual 'year zero' of postmodernity, critical adult education loses its coherency. People are no longer threatened by a selective interpretation of history: it is no longer remembering the truth that is required. Critical adult education is now overburdened with the task of enabling remembering at all.

It is not just the time of postmodernity that eludes the ordinary capacities of critical adult education. The vast and complex space of postmodernity also exceeds its grasp. Critical adult education continues to huddle over the old maps of modernity not realizing that the territory upon which it waged its politics has shifted under its feet. It is Jameson, again, who expresses most clearly the nature of this shift:

> [T]his latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment—which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of spacecraft to those of the automobile—can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects. (1991, p. 44)

While one wants to avoid being alarmist, it is difficult not to notice that critical adult education is insufficiently cognizant of the dimensions of postmodernity. For one thing, it is only barely aware that the most important of its critical practices have developed within the space and time of Fordism. Its strategies for resistance, for example, hinge on the notion that domination is effected through controlling a *place*. In postmodernity, the domination of place gives way to a far more integrated and extensive form of spatial domination that is loosely, if at all, effected by geographical location. The tiny locals in which we move and breath are woven together with shining fibers that communicate light-speed to cybernetic ganglia circling far above the corpus of our earth. Critical adult education's cognitive map, which assumes capitalist forces will continue to foster a unified, regular, and tightly bounded space-time to sustain its inequitable relations, is profoundly insufficient in a world where unity and regularity and boundary are increasingly irrelevant. Its community-based approach, which assumes a territory to struggle for, is sadly incapable of saying what the space of freedom might be like or where it might be found in a world in which every fragment of space is monitored and cybernetically managed (the space of work, the space of consumption, the space of recreation, where we walk, what we think, who we are).[17]

While critical adult education seems outflanked by the space and time of postmodernity, instrumental forms of adult education reveal no such difficulties.

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[17] In important ways, there is nothing particularly *personal* about the forms of surveillance that now encode our actions (unless, somehow, you distinguish yourself as a statistical anomaly—being a criminal, a media or sports star, or welfare recipient will do it). It is not individual people who they are concerned about when they sell the information the gain from Air Miles cards to 500 or so corporations or when they link Statistics Canada information to postal code to consumer activities to get a sense of political beliefs (a practice widely used by political candidates in the 1993 Canadian federal election). Rather, it is the data people produce with their actions that is viewed as important and that is detected, converted into information (statistics, mostly), and acted upon (usually in the form of new material or cultural production—material products, images, information, entertainment).

The ephemerality of the postmodern adult education product allows adult education entrepreneurs to utilize the most sophisticated modern technologies to transmit their specialized adult education programs into the cyberspace of the postmodern world. Old forms of instrumental adult education, which were located in large, state sponsored institutions and which reproduced the space and time of Fordism, are rapidly losing their force. New forms of adult education monitor markets around the world and develop their products to meet nuanced and diverse "learning" needs. For example, the University of British Columbia's adult education department provides specialized training programs for corporations and governments throughout the Pacific Rim. Unlike in the 1950's and 1960's when similar international endeavors would have been implemented as part of larger governmental modernization initiatives, UBC's current program is motivated, not by ideological concerns, but to make money.

As much as critical adult educators might despise the self-seeking entrepreneurship manifest in these postmodern forms of adult education (to the point that they are questioned as being adult education at all), it becomes difficult in postmodernity to secure a position from which to condemn such activities. Critical adult education's own participation in the project of modernity and its contribution to the dramatic struggle for *place* has, ironically, left it in league with much that is under assault in postmodern times. One must remember that, in postmodernity, it is not the system's attempts to dominate place that are under closest scrutiny; postmodernists are primarily skeptical of the lifeworld forces which, in the name of emancipation, suppress the heterogeneity of social life in order to generate a tightly unified space and time. Postmodernism offers a new sense of freedom to many groups whose particular needs were ignored or suppressed in the battle for place in modernity. Any new call to re-map the space of postmodernity or to recover a sense of time that transcends the fragmentary, the incidental, and the fleeting is greeted by

many with blank stares. Critical adult education is not only confronted with the difficult task of gaining a new and critical sense of space-time in postmodernity, it must do so in an environment highly skeptical that such an operation is necessary or even desirable.

Chapter Six

POSTMODERNISM AND IDENTITY

The concept of identity stands in the middle of a cluster of notions under special scrutiny within many postmodern discourses. These discourses observe how postmodernity destabilizes and fragments modern forms of subjectivity, undermines modernist conceptions of community, and renders problematic modernist notions of agency. Some discourses, especially those which adhere most tightly to the precepts of post-structuralism, anticipate the transformation of these various constructs as the welcome demise of oppressive and exclusive forms of identity. Other discourses, particularly those still energized by Marxism, worry that postmodern forms of identity are ill equipped to continue the emancipatory project of the Left. Whatever the case, postmodern transformations of identity stand as serious challenges for discursive formations like critical adult education which remain deeply wedded to unified and definitive concepts of subjectivity and community.

Identity and Modernity

There is little agreement on what, exactly, is meant by the term "identity." In common parlance, something is said to have an identity when it can name itself as distinct from all other entities. Having an identity implies that an entity must define itself as somehow unified and persisting. To successfully maintain its identity, an

entity must carefully articulate any changes in its constitution as part of and consistent with a deeper and constant essence. As Fredric Jameson (1990) relates, the "garden variety" conceptions of "psychic identity" posit it as something that:

> ...tirelessly reassures us that we really still do have a persistent identity over time, that my personal consciousness is still somehow 'the same' throughout all the unexpected peripeties of the biographical adventure, and that all the new dawns still reveal a world and an expanse of objects which, however, they have changed their places, retain their older names and remain somehow, and however distantly, familiar. (p. 17)

Because, even at this level, it bears the characteristics of constancy, unity, distinctness, and autonomy, "identity" is deeply implicated in the project of modernity. Its collusion with modernity is even more pronounced given that, since the enlightenment, identity has tended to be seen as the achievement of none other than that most ubiquitous and notorious modern entity: the "individual subject." In many people's minds, the quintessential striving of the modern age has been to foster conditions in which the individual subject, with will and reason, is capable of throwing off the shackles of oppressive traditions to freely create and legislate its own unique identity. Even in cases where the individual subject has been overturned as the agent of individuation in favour of some notion of the collective identity, modernist notions of unity, constancy, distinctness, and autonomy have persisted. As we will see below, it is these characteristics of identity that postmodernism calls into question.

For the most part, prior to the seventeenth century, it was uncommon to believe that people, particularly individual people, constituted their own identity. Rather, a person's identity was something that was ascribed to them by their social group. Emile Durkheim observes, for instance, that, whereas in recent times, "the contents of men's (sic) minds differ from one subject to another," in traditional forms of society, "individuation is not the essential characteristic of personality" (Durkheim,

1965, p. 306). Rather, individuals partake in a *consc ience collective*, a binding totality of commonly held norms and values in which people are positioned during socialization. Durkheim links the change in identity construction in contemporary society to the individualizing consequences of a growing division of labour and the concomitant change from "mechanical" means of securing social solidarity, in which individuals are socialized into and thereafter bound firmly to the norms and values of the social collectivity, to "organic" forms of social solidarity, in which individuals shape their identity in relation to their position in the division of labour.

More recently, Norbert Ilias (1982; 1983) offers another explanation for the emergence of the notion of the self-constituting individual. He suggests that people began to view themselves as isolated and self-determining individuals who can construct their own identity during the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. The increasing centralization and organization of the aristocratic state gave rise to the royal court in which people's actions were less governed by externally imposed punishments (less directed from the outside) and more by rules (manners) internalized by people as forms of self-control.[1]

Whatever the original cause of the process of individualization, from the mid-17th century to late in the 18th, philosophers from René Descarte to Immanual Kant endeavored to work out theoretical problems with the independent and autonomous self- constituting subject. Throughout this period, Ian Burkitt (1991) relates, "we find the notion of humans as divorced from the world around them and from their own emotional lives, living only within consciousness, as though in a case" (p. 7). The risks of loneliness and separation of this individual life (which were to become so

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[1] Foucault makes a similar point in *Discipline and Punish* when he observes that, during the 17th and 18th centuries there was a general movement "from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalised surveillance" in which social members increasingly developed the characteristics of self-censure and control"(p. 209).

manifest for theorists like Durkheim and Weber) were not so palpable even by the early 19th century. Hegel, for instance, is still optimistic about the possibilities of free subjectivity. "The greatness of our time," he writes, "rests in the fact that freedom, the peculiar possession of mind whereby it is at home with itself in itself, is recognized" (1968, p. 423).

Historically, the rise of the independent subject worked itself out ever more completely first in the Reformation, then in the Enlightenment, and finally in the French Revolution. As Habermas (1987) notes, under the influence of Luther, religious faith became the purview of the solitary individual relating directly to a personal God and bypassing the authority of the Church. With the emergence of the Enlightenment, the insight of the reasoning subject (especially, like Galileo, the scientist) challenged the authority of both priest and tradition: "The host was simply dough, and the relics of the saints mere bones" (Hegel in Habermas, 1987, p. 17). The French Revolution and particularly the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the constitution of the Napoleonic Code asserted the sovereign power of the individual over and against traditional forms of authority and hierarchy, both aristocratic and religious.

Moreover, the solitary and self constituting subject inscribed itself in different cultural realms. In the realm of science, the individual reasoning subject increasingly stood against an observable, explainable, and, ultimately, controllable objective reality. Similarly, in the realm of law and politics, the individual moral agent asserted its power to perceive what was acceptable moral behaviour and was increasingly burdened with the obligations of maintaining smooth social relations. In the realm of aesthetics, the social agent increasingly took on the task of "expressive self-realization" (Habermas, 1987, p. 18). An individual forged their identity as a rational being capable of knowing and controlling reality, as a social being capable of legislating their own actions consistent with a reflectively derived

body of norms, and as a self-expressive being capable of asserting their own individuality.

Not until the mid-19th century does the enthusiasm with this vision of the self-constituting individual seriously begin to fade. Karl Marx, for instance, resolutely refuses to follow Hegel and to be unremittingly optimistic about the capacity of an individual to "subjectively raise himself (sic) above...relations whose creature he socially remains" (Marx, 1977, p. 92). In *Capital*, Marx considers "individuals...only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests" (p. 92). As Paul Smith (1988) recounts, in capitalism, the essence of the human subject (their capacity to assert their own identity) is subverted by economic relations that alienate them from their true nature. Marx contends that the notion of the self-constituting individual is an ideological figment and that most people of the working class are not autonomous at all but constructed within the oppressive economic relations of capitalism. "Thus, concrete individuality does not exist in the current conditions of alienation but rather is smothered beneath the weight of those real conditions. In other words, subjectivity can currently have no force and no effect, and can only await its fulfillment, exactly, in the destruction of capitalism and the building of socialism/communism" (Smith, p. 7).

Marx's critique of what he understands as essentially bourgeois notions of the autonomous, self-constituting subject hinges on his contention that individuals and society must not be viewed separately. Individuals can only constitute their identity within their social context and in relation to other individuals. "Not only," he writes, "is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the speaker is active): my own existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being..." (Marx in Sayer, 1989, p. 16). The idea

that people stand outside social relations and that they are totally free to construct themselves and their history as they will is merely the idealist projection of a society in which only the most advanced system of social relations makes the myth of such individualism seem possible. As Marx observes:

> The further back we go in history, the more does the individual, and accordingly also the producing individual, appear to be dependent and belonging to a larger whole. At first, he is still in a quite natural manner part of the family, and of the family expanded into the tribe; later he is part of a community, of one of the different forms of community which arise from the conflict and the merging of tribes. It is not until the 18th century, in 'bourgeois society', that the various forms of the social nexus confront the individual as merely a means towards his private ends, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is precisely the epoch of the hitherto most highly developed social (according to this standpoint, general) relations. Man is a *zoon politicon* in the most literal sense: he is not only a social animal, but an animal that can isolate itself only within society. (Marx in Sayer, p. 21)

The isolated and self-made person is only possible within the context of a society that sustains her or him materially and morally. "Men (sic) make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under the circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 29).

Marx's concern is to show that the individual does not establish their identity out of thin air, but forges it together with other people within the particular social relations of their society. As Eleanor MacDonald (1991) points out, however, neither feminism —which also develops a suspicion of the autonomous, self-constituting (i.e. white male) subject at the heart of common notions of identity—nor Marxism is willing to "abandon the subject altogether" (p. 48).

> The project of "putting the subject into question" has a political purpose, which is often to empower the subject through an increase in his or her ability to act, to reason, to be aware of his or her creation, and therefore to increase the subject's own capacity for self-creation. The criticism of the Cartesian

> subject is spurred, in part, by a desire still to be a subject, often with the recognition that the ability to act as a subject, however deceptive that may be or has been, is an ability which has rarely been exercised by the majority of people. As radical, therefore, as this subject-critique may be, the general impulse of Marxism and feminism has been to retain some faith in agency, truth, and the power of collective action. (p. 48-49)

While it may be true, as MacDonald relates, that, at some level at least, Marxism and feminism end up retaining an individualist notion of a self-constituting agent, one must not underplay their corollary insistence that social agents derive their identities within the context of concrete social relations (shaped by the capitalist economy, for Marxism, and by patriarchy, for feminism). Marx insists, in fact, on a dialectical view of identity constitution in which the individual is both the recipient and creator of their own identity and poses this dialectical notion of identity as a basis for critiquing capitalist society in which individuals from different classes experience dramatically divergent opportunities for self-constitution.

The extreme poles of what Marxists claim as the dialectic of identity have been highlighted recently within the context of a debate between communitarians and liberals.[2] We have already outlined the major characteristics of the liberal view that each individual is responsible for defining what constitutes her or his "good life" and for realizing it in her or his own way. Liberals contend that individuals constitute their own identity and pursue their own specific and private interests. As Georges VanDen Abbeele (1991) points out, community, if it is acknowledged as important at all, is conceived in terms of the "social contract popularized by Locke and the Enlightenment *philosphes* ...[which]assumes the *prior* constitution of self-determining subjects who 'freely' aggregate to form a community" (p. xi).

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[2] Michael Walzer provides a concise summary of this debate from a communitarian perspective in "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism" (1990).

On the other side, the communitarian view holds that individual interests are subordinate to the interests of a type of community constituted by commonly held morals and values and engendered according to a clear notion of "the common good." The communitarians believe that the notion of citizen (a person who harmonizes their own individual needs to the broader constraints of the community) should form the central identity of all social members. Community, in this instance, is theorized much more strongly according to "the organicist notion of the "body politic" most colloquially linked with the name of Hobbes" (Van Den Abbeele, p. xi). Quite rightly, the communitarians assert that the long dominance of the liberal view of individual identity has led to a disintegration of social bonds and to the disastrous array of maladies like anomie and disharmony that now plague our society. Equally valid, however, is the liberal's insistence that the communitarian commitment to a tightly cohesive society is abysmally pre-modern and that the existence of such a society would jeopardize all sorts of hard-won democratic institutions. Van Den Abbeele frames the deep inadequacy of both perspectives of identity as follows:

> Both organicist and contractual theories of community conceal the essentialism of a subject immanent to itself, which speaks either for and as a whole that would precede the parts or as a part that is itself already a whole before its encounter with other "parts." In their respective inabilities to think the communal relation as such and as the inaugural condition for the very subjectivities that claim to speak for it, the alternatives of atomism and totalitarianism have each proceeded to an aggressive reduction and elimination of social difference, which in turn has fueled the contemporary sense of the loss of community....[b]oth of these forms of social essentialism vitiate the very condition of the communal relation, namely the *difference* between singular subjectivities which is part of what *they* share by being in common, even as those essentialisms take place in the name of preserving some mythic "community". (p. xii).

Pursuing the implications of this seeming impasse further, Chantal Mouffe (1992) poses the following questions:

> How are we to conceive the political community under modern democratic conditions? Or also: How are we to conceptualize our identities as individuals and citizens in a way that does not sacrifice one to the other? The question at stake is to make the fact that we belong to different communities of values, language, culture, and others compatible with our common belonging to a political community whose rules we have to accept. As against conceptions that stress commonality at the expense of plurality and respect of differences or that deny any form of commonality in the name of plurality and difference, what we need is to envisage a form of commonality that respects diversity and makes room for different forms of individuality. (p. 30)

Habermas (1987, 1990) contends that the conceptual categories of a theory of communicative action are quite capable of sustaining such a complex notion of identity. He relates how the "linguistification of the sacred" creates special conditions for identity formation. In traditional society, the religious and cultural worldview, the various institutions for material and symbolic reproduction, and individual personalities are not tremendously differentiated from one another. Rather, "they are fused in the collective consciousness constitutive of the identity of the group" (Habermas, 1987, p. 88). Individuals in traditional societies garner their personal identities almost exclusively from the identity of the group to which they belong. Only in societies in which "the rationality potential of action oriented to reaching understanding becomes unfettered"(p. 88) do individuals begin to constitute their identities and the identities of the group to which they belong, in what Habermas presents as the curious process of individuation.

Habermas argues that people become increasingly capable of coordinating action via the process of reaching mutual understandings to the extent that they acquire the required communicative competencies through the process of socialization. "Linguistically and behaviourally competent subjects," he contends, "are constituted as individuals by growing into an intersubjectively shared lifeworld" (1990, p. 199). At the same time, however, "the lifeworld of a language community is reproduced...through the communicative actions of its members" (p. 199). The

liberal demand for autonomy, and the communitarian demand for cohesion and connectedness are not, in fact, mutually exclusive in the communicative context. As Habermas writes:

> [T]he identity of the individual and that of the collective are interdependent; they form and maintain themselves together. Built into the consensus-oriented language use of social interaction is an inconspicuous necessity for participants to become more and more individuated. Conversely, everyday language is also the medium by which the intersubjectivity of a shared world is maintained. Thus, the more differentiated the structures of the lifeworld become, the easier it is to discern the simultaneous growth of the autonomous individual subject and his (sic) dependence on interpersonal relationships and social ties. The more the subject becomes individuated, the more he becomes entangled in a densely woven fabric of mutual recognition, that is, of reciprocal exposedness and vulnerability. Unless the subject externalizes himself by participating in interpersonal relations through language, he is unable to form that inner center that is his personal identity. (p. 199)

For Habermas, then, modern forms of identity constitution, both individual and collective, emerge with the developing rationalization of the lifeworld and the growing capacity of human agents to coordinate action through communication. The fragility of contemporary personal and collective identities is due to fact that identity formation in the modern age is no longer the product of a process of socialization that instills in people a constant and unchanging sense of place in the traditional community. Rather, it is now the product of a perpetually vulnerable and risk-filled process of communicative action. This does not mean, however, that, in Habermas's scheme, the individual or collective identity sheds its modernist characteristics of unity, cohesiveness, distinctness, or autonomy. "The ego-identity of the adult [and presumably, as well, of the mature collectivity] proves its worth in the ability to build up new identities from shattered or superseded identities, and to integrate them with old identities in such a way that the fabric of one's interactions is organized into the unity of a life history [or group history] that is both unmistakable and accountable" (Habermas, 1987, p. 98).

The capacity of individuals and groups to establish a modern identity though the tenuous process of communicative interaction varies according to the integrity of their lifeworld contexts. As Scott Lash (1990) observes, different historical contexts have offered different social groups varying opportunities for forging coherent identities. Prior to the mid-19th century, for instance, the bourgeoisie, drawing upon the enlightenment notion of the self-constituting subject, attained a great capacity to form integrated personal identities and to establish themselves as a coherent class with a clearly defined sense of what comprises them as a group (and what distinguishes them from others on the outside of their group).

Placed in the context of the notion of hegemony discussed in Chapter 4, one might argue that by the mid-19th century, if not much sooner, the bourgeoisie asserted an ideology of identity constitution (emphasizing the notion of autonomy and self-constitution) as a key means to attain hegemony. The idea that individuals are free to create their own identities provides a basis from which traditional norms and values constraining the freedom of privateers can be successfully contested. It also creates a discursive context that militates against any collective notions of identity formation that might challenge the teleological social relations most conducive to capitalist growth.

By the end of the 19th century, bourgeoisie notions of identity formation began to destabilize. Lash identifies the growing capacity of alternate collective actors (especially the working class) to challenge the individualism underlying the bourgeois idea of identity as the primary source of this destabilization (p. 16). He also contends that, from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, the working class, particularly in countries like Britain, were able to commandeer the tendencies towards secularism, the assumption of natural rights, and the beliefs in historical process that were held dear by earlier generations of the bourgeoisie to create communicative contexts conducive to their own identity formation (p. 17).

Interpreted once again in Gramscian terminology, we could say that the consolidation of the working class enabled it to assert another form of identity constitution (recovering, in part, the importance of solidarity in identity formation) that was powerful enough to contest the bourgeoisie's ideology of individualism and enough actually to destabilize bourgeoisie identities.

For much of the 20th century, a key battleground of the bourgeoisie's hegemonic struggle has been identity. The cultural landscape most conducive for capitalist growth is one in which individuals give up the coordinating power of traditional norms and values as well as the coordinating capacity of interpersonal communication. Instead, capitalism requires that we succumb to the coordinating genius of money and bureaucracy which instrumentalizes all social relations and pits one person against another in a competitive system of self-seeking interests. Identities most beneficial to capitalism, therefore, are those that are most highly atomized and self-serving.

In its efforts to advance an individualized notion of identity, the bourgeoisie has encountered two different resisting forces. On the one hand it has had to battle the kinds of identity formation prevalent in traditional society where socialization incorporates individuals into an integrated and all encompassing system of norms and values. On the other hand, it has had to battle the forms of identity formation that emerge with the rationalization of the lifeworld where, through a process in which individuals are integrated into an intersubjectivity, they are capable of distinguishing themselves as unique and self-constituting identities. On both counts, the strategy of the bourgeoisie has been to vilify all forms of social solidarity as inimical to individual freedom. As I have noted previously, however, the extent to which the bourgeoisie has been capable of carrying out this project has been curtailed by the symbiotic relationship that has long existed between system and lifeworld which has left the system reliant on the lifeworld's capacity for symbolic

reproduction. One might argue that the complete displacement of "socialized" forms of identity has been prevented by the system's continued need for personalities capable of normative regulation.

As I noted in my discussion of cultural commodification and again in my discussion of the compression of time and space, the sub-systems of economy and state may now becoming capable of sustaining themselves without drawing upon the accomplishments of the lifeworld. In the current context I would argue that the concomitant erosion of the lifeworld jeopardizes forms of communication essential for the formation of secure personal or collective identities. The emergence of postmodern social forms produces very different conditions within which identities are now procured. Before moving on to examine identities in postmodern times, however, let us examine for a moment the great involvement of critical adult education in the constitution of modern identities.

Critical Adult Education and Modern Identity

Critical adult education's tight entwinement with the project of modernity is clearly revealed in the way it sustains a modern notion of identity. It is true that critical adult education rejects the classic liberal belief that lone and unencumbered individuals forge their own identities. For instance, in her examination of how the "ideology of individualism" dominates instrumental forms of adult education just as it does primary schooling, Nel Keddie (1980) points out the following:

> [A]dult education is oriented towards the same dominant or middle-class values that are reflected by the education system as a whole and are evidenced by its clientele. These values give particular social and political meanings to individualism which reflect the educational and cultural models of the elite....[T]hese models have often been passively accepted as models for the working class, even when its own social and political purposes have been very different from those of the elite. The failure to recognize this leads to a notion of the learner as an 'abstract and universal individual' rather than as 'a person situated in a historical, social and existential context. (p. 47)

Keddie's concern with instrumental adult education's tendency to abstract individuals from their concrete contexts and thereby overestimate their power to shape their own life-histories is widely shared by critical adult educators, including Michael Collins (1988). In his criticism of one of adult education's pet notions, *self-directed learning*, Collins suggests that:

> In reinforcing an individualistic approach, self-directed learning sustains a well entrenched taken-for-granted notion that 'you can make it on your own efforts." Thus it militates against the creation of educational contexts that might foster critical dialogue, through people learning together, about social inequalities which contradict this taken-for-granted assumption. Far from empowering adult students, self-directed learning strategies steer them to a negotiated compromise with predominant interests which support social conformity. (p. 63)

Paulo Freire (Freire and Shor, 1987) is also sceptical of the self-constituting individual. "I don't believe in self-liberation, " he relates. "Liberation is a social act. Liberating education is a social process of illumination" (p. 109).

But, just because they criticize individualism does not mean that critical adult educators substantively turn away from what we have seen above to comprise a modern conception of identity. I would argue, in fact, that a central underlying pillar of critical adult education is its effort to foster and sustain modern forms of identity constituted through processes of communicative action.

In Habermas's conception of identity formation, social agents achieve the autonomy required for creating their own identities and the identities of their community only to the extent that they are integrated into the context of communicative action. There is ample evidence that critical adult education is devoted to this paradoxical process of simultaneously fostering both autonomy and solidarity required for identity constitution. From the outset, critical adult education has endeavored to bring about strong and unified communities. This was certainly the interest of Grundtvig and the Danish folk schools. It was also the interest of the

workers institutes that sprung up throughout Europe in the 19th century. In his depiction of what constitutes desirable forms of education for emancipatory action, Paulo Freire (1972) confirms his own concern for *solidarity* when he identifies the four essential constituent elements of "dialogical cultural action" as being cooperation, unity for liberation, organization, and cultural synthesis (pp. 167-186).

By in large, however, the aforementioned instances of adult education view the formation of coherent discursive communities as a precondition of and not a replacement for the autonomous constitution of personal and collective identities. Most historical instances of critical adult education fostered coherent and unified collectives in order to provide a context for productive critical discourse. The importance of the term 'critical', understood as the capacity of the individual subject to take an autonomous stand on knowledge claims, has retained a fundamental importance in critical adult education. It certainly is important for Paulo Freire (1972). While he asserts that solidarity is essential to combat oppression in the modern age, he is equally insistent that solidarity must not be achieved at the expense of the autonomous subject:

> In the theory of dialogical action, there is no place for conquering the people on behalf of the revolutionary cause, but only for gaining their adherence. Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate, does not "sloganize." This does not mean, however, that the theory of dialogical action leads nowhere; nor does it mean that the dialogical man [sic] does not have a clear idea of what he wants, or of the objectives to which he is committed. (p. 168)

While the individual subject may not be able to generate her or his identity unhindered by concrete social relations, she or he is not without the capacity to be critical in an appropriately communicative context. Freire makes the continued importance of the autonomous subject clear in the following comment on Marx's critique of individualism:

> What Marx criticized and scientifically destroyed was not subjectivity, but subjectivism and psychologism. Just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance. If men (sic) produce social reality (which in the "inversion of the praxis" turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for men. (p. 36)

Freire is very clear that the critical pedagogical process fosters the capacity of the individual and group to constitute their identities within the context of "dialogical" action. Critical adult educator, Tom Lovett (1988), is also deeply aware of how individual autonomy is only possible within the context of a healthy collectivity. He observes the following of critical adult educators.

> They are concerned to find new ways and means whereby individuals can be freed from existing constraints and afforded the possibility of individual growth and development through collective action. Theirs is an essentially optimistic view of human nature, one which stresses cooperation, fraternity, and egalitarianism. It is basically a call for people, oppressed people, to have more control over their own lives, to shape their world and to use modern resources and technology to do so. (p. 143)

The presumption, indeed the goal, of critical adult educators like Freire and Lovett is to foster communicative contexts where individuals and groups can constitute a coherent identity. They do not presume, of course, that a person's or community's identity remains static. Nonetheless, there is the prevailing belief amongst them and other critical adult educators that a central need for individuals and groups is to be able to integrate the changes and dislocations of contemporary life within the horizons of a unified and coherent identity. The establishment of communicative contexts in which the twin poles of modern identity constitution—autonomy and solidarity—can be brought into productive balance is a central striving for critical adult education.

Critical adult education's commitment to identity formation is difficult. The balance between solidarity and autonomy, between coherency and individuality,

between inclusiveness and definitivness is tough to maintain. Too much focus on the community and its integrity creates contexts where the heterogeneity of individual differences are suppressed. This, I noted in Chapter 3, was the concern the WEA had about NCLC pedagogical methods which tried to foster class solidarity directly through pedantry without making their way through the troublesome territory of dialogical action. To much focus of the autonomous individual, on the other hand, and one looses the communicative context within which individuals and groups gain a sense of who they are and what they can do. This was the NCLC concern. The WEA focused so much on individual growth that they undermined the capacity of working class groups to form a coherent identity to withstand and struggle back against the corrosive power of capitalist enterprise.

In its efforts to effect this balance, critical adult education must struggle on two fronts. On the one side, it must fight against traditional forms of power that attempt to maintain personal and group identities through manipulating discourse. For the most part, this struggle takes place within the lifeworld and against a traditional normative universe that sustains itself communicatively in the lifeworld. The rationalization of the lifeworld in this instance means that traditional social arrangements are opened to critical appraisal and that identities are no longer generated according to a taken-for-granted body of norms but, rather, according to the dynamics of communicative action. On the other side, critical adult education must fight against forms of power that attempt to extinguish or suppress personal and group identities through destroying discursive contexts. This struggle is against the systems of economy and state. The rationalization of the lifeworld in this context means that the lifeworld develops the capacity to resist the tendency of the system to undermine processes of individual and collective identity formation.

Identity and Postmodernity

Despite the differences amongst various modernist conceptions of identity, all retain several distinctive characteristics. They all are committed to the idea that an entity (individual or collective) can attain some kind of coherence and distinctness that lasts over time and that can be named. They are also all committed to the notion that entities are responsible, in one way or another, for establishing and maintaining their own distinctiveness. By in large, postmodernist discourses retain no allegiance to these basic commitments. They call into question the idea of unified, constant, and definitive identities suggesting that qualities like dispersion, transitoriness, and diffuseness are much more characteristic of contemporary social agents. They challenge the notion of self-constitution, point out how individuals and groups emerge in diverse and complex ways with no firm boundaries or fixed constitutions, and observe how no entity occupies a single position from which to construct a lasting and distinctive identity.

Rather than beginning by directly examining these postmodern critiques, I would like to commence my account of identity in postmodernity by once again picking up the 'guiding thread' with which I endeavored to account for culture change and space-time transformations in the two previous chapters. While I maintain that this guiding narrative of postmodernity offers important, if not perplexing, insights into the changing nature of identity in postmodern times, in the end I also acknowledge its ultimate incapacity to do full justice to postmodernism's trenchant rejection of modernist conceptions of identity. It is necessary in the case of identity, in particular, to embellish and de-simplify the guiding narrative of postmodernity by splicing together a montage of discourses that variously dispose of the notion of a unified and self-constituting identity.

First, a summary. We have seen how in traditional society individual identities are constituted according to a pre-given and relatively unchanging and all-

encompassing grid of norms and values. And, in Habermasian fashion, we have noted how, in modern society, fluid forms of identity formation emerge in which individuals reproduce both their own identities and the identity of the collectives to which they belong through the relatively tenuous process of communicative action. We have also seen how a key plank in the struggle for social control in the 20th century has been the battle to shape identities. Because the system has remained reliant on the reproductive capacities of the lifeworld to produce, amongst other things, personalities motivated to act in accordance with the needs of the economy and state, social agents who had most to gain from the growth of the system (historically, this has been the bourgeoisie) attempted to foster identities most suited to effective system functioning. The ideology maintained by the bourgeoisie was resisted by counter-hegemonic forces that aimed to foster identities constituted by unhindered communication.

Also recall from previous chapters the narrative which relates how postmodernity emerges at the historical juncture where the system rapidly gathers the capacity to reproduce itself free from its symbiotic relationship with the lifeworld. Whereas, in modernity, the system is forced to rely on the lifeworld's capacity for symbolic reproduction, in postmodernity, the system increasingly acquires the ability to motivate behaviours and to coordinate actions without appealing either to communicatively derived norms and values or to processes of discursive will formation. At the same time, as cultural commodification generates a plethora of signifiers that inundates the ability of individuals and groups to locate action in any coherent space and time, the system gains the capacity to coordinate action in a space and time extending far beyond the bounds of what is cognizable by lifeworld members.

All of this has great implications for identity formation, both individual and collective. For one thing, in postmodern times the success of the system does not

hinge as greatly on the formation of identities consistent with its functional requirements. In fact, the formation of coherent identities becomes increasingly antithetical to the interests of a system attempting to get the most out of its newfound capacity to exploit complex gradients of nuance and difference. Armed with the cybernetic capacity to manage a vastly fragmented labour process and to detect and gratify complex psychic and somatic desires, the system no longer requires the people it contacts to possess coherent or lasting traits. Relentlessly, it extends its information seeking tendrils into the unwary bodies and minds of workers and consumers where it can immediately detect even the most minute differences in mood or desire and quickly utilize the most curious or changeable competencies. In so doing, the system decreasingly requires us to have identities. It now possesses other more pernicious and more direct ways of wheedling its way into our soft tissues than by manipulating processes of identity formation to create such useful, if rather contested, personalities like worker, consumer, and client or collectives like nation, profession, and family.

Simply because the system no longer needs identity does not explain why identity formation becomes problematic in postmodern times. The system, we should keep in mind, is not now, nor ever has been, capable of carrying out identity formation. Always, identities are nurtured within the horizons of the lifeworld, through socialization or, more typical of modernity, through the dynamic process of communicative action. Just because the system no longer requires this particular accomplishment of the lifeworld, why should it be jeopardized? Shouldn't the breakdown in the symbiotic relationship between system and lifeworld actually set lifeworld members free to initiate identity formation processes impossible within the distorted context of modernity?

This is indeed what might happen if the breakdown in symbiosis meant that the lifeworld and system were to part ways. In actuality, however, the demise of the

mutuality of the system/lifeworld relationship has far more iniquitous implications. It does not mean that the system is loosing interest in the lifeworld or that it has stopped drawing upon it as a resource. It simply means that, for the first time, the system is not required to exercise the same restraint in its dealings with the lifeworld as it has been in the past. Freed from its dependence on the lifeworld's capacity to reproduce the symbolic dimensions of society, the system can now destroy the lifeworld's few remaining tatters with impunity. The last of traditional norms and values as well as recently learned communicative competencies are irretrievably lost in this final and most ecstatic plundering of the lifeworld's cultural storehouses. Traditional and modern practices that enabled the constitution of integrated identities boil away in the maelstrom now raging through the lifeworld's weakened structures. Unified cultural contexts disappear—the basis for traditional forms of identity formation evaporate. At the same time, communicative contexts attenuate—the basis for modern processes of identity formation, both at the individual and the collective level, lose their cogency.

According to this Habermasian narrative, postmodernity causes a decline in the capacity for identity formation with very negative effects. The destruction of the lifeworld leaves individuals and collectives with insufficient symbolic resources for constituting stable identities. Cut off from traditional storehouses of meaning and incapable of activating competencies for communicative action, individuals and collectives in postmodernity are left with the ongoing task of patching together a series of ramshackle constructs of who and what they are out of the jumble of signifiers that flood their daily lives. In this context, neither individuals nor collectives autonomously can sustain unified, constant, and definitive identities.

While many postmodernists agree that individual and collective identities are disintegrating in postmodern times, not all agree that this fragmentation of identity is such a bad thing. Many, especially those influenced by theorists like Lacan,

Deleuze and Guattari, and feminist theorists like Irigaray and Kristeva, contend that the whole notion of a coherent, unified, and self-consituting subject, from the outset, has been a fictitious entity invented to further particular interests (those of the rationalist intellectual). Pauline-Marie Rosenau (1992) summarizes this outlook as follows:

> The skeptics [postmodernists] question the value of a unified, coherent subject such as a human being, a person, as a concrete reference point or equivalent character. The subject, they contend, is fictitious, in the extreme a mere construction, "only a mask, a role, a victim, at worst an ideological construct, at best a nostalgic effigy" (Carraventa). They criticize the subject for seizing power, for attributing meaning, for dominating and oppressing. They consider the subject to be a fossil relic of the unacceptable object-subject dichotomy. They argue that personal identity of this sort, was only an illusion, and it is no longer possible today, in a post-modern context. (p. 42-43)

In some ways, the postmodern view of identity is not new. Frank Hearn (1985) observes, for instance, that as far back as the late 19th century, the cultural movement of avant-guard "modernism" supported similar skeptical attitudes about the coherent and rational subject.[3] As part of a more comprehensive rejection of rationality and an advocacy of personal freedom, expressiveness, spontaneity, impulse, and desire, avant-guard modernist thinkers rejected the prevailing notion of the reasoning human subject as a stultifying and repressive construct. Because Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory served as an important stimulus and

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[3] We should be careful to distinguish the term 'avant-guard modernism' from the terms 'modernity' and 'modernization'. While modernity refers to the kind of society that emerged out of the breakdown of traditional society and the upsurge of reason as a principle organizing element of society, and modernization refers to the process in which elements of society are organized primarily according to the instrumental logic of capitalist development, avant-guard modernism refers to the cultural movement which rejected both modernity and modernization and which called for an abandonment of reason and a reaffirmation of personal freedom, expressiveness, impulsiveness, pleasure, instinct, and experience. For a discussion of the cultural movement of modernism see Matei Calinescu (1987), *Five Faces of Modernity* and Frank Hearn (1985), *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*.

background for the critical impulses of this movement, it is worth taking a moment to examine the basis of his analysis of identity.[4]

At the center of Freud's theoretical opus lies his contention that civilization is founded on the denial of individual human freedoms.[5] Freud argues that identities (ego) are forged in the conflict that erupts when personal desires (id impulses) encounter a social and material reality that denies these desires free and unencumbered expression. An individual's ego emerges to mediate between the expansive desires of their sensual and embodied id and the moral and physical constraints of the social and material world (internalized in the personality as superego). For Freud, the development of the ego is an important step in the socialization process for it provides a means for the id to gratify at least some of its desires (often through diverting and sublimating its energy to socially acceptable outlets) without disturbing the integrity of broader social formations.

While avant-guard modernists of the early 20th century generally concurred with Freud's assessment that civilization required the suppression of id impulses, many disagreed with his belief that this was either positive or necessary. They did not believe that the development of a strong ego, which could rationally suppress and in some instances divert energy from the id down socially harmless channels, was really a good thing. Rather than favouring the maintenance of forms of civilization that denied the desires of individuals (seen as necessary by Freud) and which forced the development of a strong and repressive ego, early avant-guard modernists

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[4] Frank Hearn provides an interesting overview of Freud's theory in relation to modernism. For a more complete postmodern critique of Freud's work see Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) *Anti-Oedipus*.
[5] For Freud's clearest statements on this theme, see *Civilization and its Discontents*, (1930). Herbert Marcuse offers a penetrating analysis of Freud's insight into the relations between id and society in *Eros and Civilization*.

favoured the liberation of id impulses, the weakening and undermining of highly rationalized ego structures, and the softening of repressive social structures.

Historic cultural currents like these are revived to inform many postmodernist analyses of identity. A critique of identity, developed in terms of a release of desire from the constraining limits of the ego, is particularly central to the post-structuralist critique of modernity. Drawing on earlier post-structuralists like Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari, theorists like Derrida (1978) and Foucault (1970) view the subject as merely a consequence of language, an effect of an individual temporarily taking a position in discourse. In general, post-structuralists view the break-up of coherent forms of identity in a positive light because it provides new opportunity for the expression of forms of desire suppressed by rationalized personality and community structures. The deconstructive strategy of post-structuralism calls into question the way human subjects are identified. It challenges the legitimacy of any claim that it is possible to name a lasting and coherent identity.

Postmodernism raises doubts about the most recalcitrant essentialisms of identity. Whether it be in deconstructive writings of feminist theorists like Julia Kristeva (1981), Jane Flax (1990), or Donna Haroway (1991) who challenge the notion of what constitutes female and male identity; whether it be the writings of bell hooks (1990) or Cornell West (1992) who challenge us to rethink what constitues racial identity; or whether it be a host of writers from around the world (for example, Said, 1978; Rushdie, 1991) who challenge the notion of nationality in a time of massive migration and dislocation, postmodernism calls into question the very possibility of representing, speaking for, or fighting in favour of a unified and lasting identity, either individual or collective. Postmodernism asks us to give up the presupposition that identities can be delineated, that subjects are unified, and that a stable perspective or position can be adopted. It asks that we stop seeking to bind together what is best left fragmented and spurious.

Unlike the Habermasian perspective that bemoans the loss of identity as a negative consequence of cultural destruction, the postmodernist celebrates it as a new opportunity for fragmented selves to realize desires heretofore hemmed in by external and internalized societal constraints. Postmodernists argue that, in refusing to abandon the modern imaginary of individual self-constitution, Habermas simply perpetuates forms of power he, himself, desires to eradicate. One wonders, however, how much is gained by refusing the critical theoretical perspective offered by theorists like Habermas. The advantage of the guiding narrative offered above is that it casts fresh light upon social and cultural transformations that flutter like moths on the dark edges of our comprehension and that move so quickly we hardly have a moment to sense their ephemeral passage. It gives reason for us to pause and to wonder if the postmodernist's easy celebration of fragmented forms of identity is but the final hallucination of our culture in the thrall of death.

Critical Adult Education and Identity in Postmodernity

The fragmentation of identity has profound consequences for a cultural practice that has had, as one of its critical mainbeams, the constitution of modern forms of identity. Critical adult education, from the outset, endeavored to foster the capacity of individuals and groups to constitute their own identities through the tenuous process of communicative action. It has struggled both to bring about the healthy communities and to foster individual communicative competencies required for healthy identity formation. It has proceeded in its political mission comfortable in the knowledge that domination can best be opposed by identities capable of reasonably confronting irrational forms of power. While, in many cases, it has been careful not to impose specific forms of identity on adult learners, it has never doubted that identify should be unified, coherent, persistent, and self-derived.

The transformation of identity in postmodernity calls the traditional strategies of critical adult education into question. No longer is it sufficient to foster the emergence of a particular kind of identity sufficiently strong to overcome the inequitable norms of capitalism. Now, identity itself is in question and resistance to social inequities must emerge somehow from the fragmented and disparate voices of people in postmodernity. New processes of identity formation must be discovered that deal more dynamically with the heterogeneity of individual differences. Identity is still possible and is still capable of resisting the imperatives of contemporary oppressive institutions. Critical adult education must discover the ways that identity can still productively be mobilized in the fragmenting environment of postmodern times.

Chapter Seven

Hegemony, Surveillance, Seduction and the Politics of Critical Adult Education

For over a century, critical adult education has participated as an institution of emancipatory change in the drama of modernity. Throughout this time, it has envisioned itself as a resistive political force, as a force for establishing that great tripartite Enlightenment ambition: liberty, equality, fraternity. It has battled domination of all kinds—feudal, state, patriarchal, racial, religious, colonial, economic, and bureaucratic—by encouraging adults to learn communicatively to rationalize their cultures, to take control of the space and time of social existence, and to assert their own identities. Guided by the beacon of emancipation and sure of its role in the vast struggle of hegemony versus counter-hegemony, critical adult education has moved with confidence through the difficult, often even dangerous political environment of modernity.

This confidence is no longer warranted. Critical adult educators are confronted now by a recalcitrant world where domination is affected by new and ethereal means and where resistance congeals in slippery configurations difficult to grasp or represent. If we open ourselves to the aporias of postmodernity we learn that critical adult education's modernist presuppositions about domination and resistance no longer hold: the politics we once believed were oppositional now become more subtle ways of dominating; the strategies we once decried as soft or accommodative

rise up as legitimate forms of resistance. Postmodernism, I contend below, does critical adult education the service of deconstructing its political foundations. It rightfully calls into question the taken-for-granted assumptions about domination and resistance that have heretofore undergirded its political aspirations. In so doing, however, it also exposes critical adult education to a great danger. Postmodernism leaves the very purpose of critical adult education in jeopardy and renders it vulnerable to abandonment as a viable political institution. Unwilling to succumb over easily to this alternative, I end this chapter resolved to explore ways critical adult education might address the challenges of postmodernism and reconstitute itself as a dynamic political enterprise equal to the difficulties of postmodern times. In the final chapter of this study, I take the first tentative steps towards this reconstitution.

Politics in Modernity: Totality, Teleology, Utopia, Hegemony

In each of the previous three chapters, politics has been a quiet but powerful attendant theme. We felt its closeness in our discussion of modernist notions of culture, of time and space, and of identity. We sensed its importance when we examined the presence of these modernist notions at the heart of critical adult education. Now, with a richer, more comprehensive grasp of these corollary ideas, it is time to address politics more carefully on its own, to consider directly how it is viewed in modernity, and to set the scene for a final encounter between postmodernism and critical adult education.

To help me in this task, I would like to begin by recounting a short but insightful narrative offered by Zygmunt Bauman (1992) in which he attempts to illuminate the basis of modern politics. With a little elaboration, Bauman's narrative provides a good foundation for understanding how modern forms of politics are profoundly

challenged by the emergence of new and inchoate representations of domination and resistance in postmodernity.

Bauman centers his presentation on the contention that modernity "emerged out of the discovery that human order is vulnerable, contingent, and devoid of reliable foundations" (p. xi). This discovery was not, he insists, a result of reason. Rather, like Durkheim before him, he tracks its origins to the breakdown of "self-enclosed communities" in the latter 17th and early 18th centuries. Bauman contends that social control in these self-contained communities was effected by the tight disciplinary power of surveillance; not the panoptical, distant, and centralized form of surveillance depicted by Foucault (1977), but the "reciprocal, ubiquitous, and comprehensive" surveillance of the intimate community. "Social order at the level of daily life was reproduced through the persnickety and oppressive surveillance exercised matter of factly, thanks to the permanent physical proximity of its, simultaneous, subjects and objects" (p. 6).

The breakdown of the cyclical pace and cohesive space of traditional society made the whole issue of social control and social reproduction problematic. At first, the dissipation of mutual surveillance as a social control mechanism sparked a great euphoria. For a time, individuals (particularly those well enough endowed to afford the high cost of autonomy) celebrated the possibility of freedom from traditional certainties. As Bauman relates, however: "A pure, unclouded celebration was...short; just a brief interlude between the Divine and the man-made orders, between *being what one was* and *making oneself what one should be*. From Erasmus, Mirandola, Rabelais or Montaigne to Descartes or Hobbes there was but the distance of a generation" (p. xiii). After the first rush of exhilaration, the collapse of traditional orders quickly fanned heretofore unfelt fears. For the first time, people realized the new freedom they had to create their own ordered society also entailed a weighty responsibility. Contingencies which were once absorbed by the fabric of

traditions now confronted humanity full force. "The weakening of routine was the blessing of freedom for the strong and bold; it was the curse of insecurity for the weak and diffident. The marriage between freedom and insecurity was prearranged and consummated on the wedding night; all subsequent attempts at separation proved vain, and the wedlock remained in force ever since" (p. xii).

Confronted with the uncertainties of an emerging new world, it was not those capable of tolerating diversity, those willing to remain open to the other, those possessing humility and courage that were motivated most strongly to action. Rather, the most dynamic social actors were the ones most frightened by the sudden loss of control, of loosening, of far-reaching responsibility that attended the great transformations of the Renaissance. According to Bauman, their immediate impulse was to institute a seamless world purged of contingency and uncertainty:

> Enlightened and not-so-enlightened rulers set out to build anew, willfully and by design, the order of things which the anointed monarchs of the past had stupidly allowed to crumble. When seen from the watchtowers of new ambitious powers, diversity looked more like chaos, scepticism like ineptitude, tolerance like subversion. Certainty, orderliness, homogeneity became the orders of the day. (pp. xiii-xiv)

From the perspective of the purveyors of this new world order, however, the impulse to restrain contingencies through rationalized systems of control was not viewed at all as the result of weakness or cowardice. The underlying insecurities driving the will to control were rationalized away. The annihilation of difference was not interpreted as simply a wanton bid for power; rather, it was seen as a morally justified calling, as a reasoned harmonization of interests. "There was really no good reason to tolerate the Other who, by definition, rebelled against the truth....Modernity was not merely the Western Man's thrust for power; it was also his *mission* proof of moral righteousness and cause of pride" (p. xiv).

Unlike the old order which left control to the unreflective contrivances of tradition, modernity imagined a different world where order was rationally planned and implemented. Bauman contends that the utopias of the age followed the fashion of the *Cosmopolis* where "functional urban quarters, the straight, unpolluted geometry of streets and public squares, the hierarchy or spaces and buildings which, in their prescribed volumes and austerity of adornment, mirrored the stately sovereignty of the social order" (p. xv). In modernity, order was not natural or the result of divine intervention, it was an urbanity planned and built by reasoning human subjects:

> The new, modern order took off as a desperate search for structure in a world suddenly denuded of structure....The practice stemming from the conviction that order can only be man-made, that it is bound to remain an artificial imposition on the unruly natural state of things and humans, that for this reason it will forever remain vulnerable and in need of constant supervision and policing, is the main (and, indeed, unique) distinguishing mark of modernity. From now on, there would be no moment of respite, no relaxing of vigilance. The ordering impulse would be fed ever again by the fear of chaos never to be allayed. The lid of order would never seem tight and heavy enough. Escape from the wilderness, once embarked on, will never end. (p. xv)

In traditional society, social control was effected locally through a process that emphasized ideosyncracies and differences in particular forms of life. With the dissolution of mutual surveillance as a means of ensuring social order, the community was transformed from one where domination was effected through a network of everyday relations, invisible because of their very comprehensiveness, to one in which asymmetrical power relations were apparent and which required deliberate and purposeful activity to maintain. The breakdown of tradition enhanced the presence of the only institution of the day possessing sufficient resources to establish effective social control—the absolutist state.

One of the first steps taken by the modern state was to attempt to centralize social power. As Bauman points out, this meant more than just changing the locality of government: it meant transforming the concept of domination. "The advent of the absolutist state was hence tantamount to the transformation of control into a consciously administered, purposeful activity conducted by specially trained experts" (p. 6). In traditional communities social control was maintained in part through perpetuating local uniqueness. Contrarily, the state's strategy was to acquire social control through banishing differences and fostering "supracommunal uniformity":

> Differences between ways of life were correspondingly redefined as relations of active mutual engagement. Popular, locally administered ways of life were now constituted, from the perspective of universalistic ambitions, as retrograde and backward-looking, a residue of a different social order to be left behind; as imperfect, immature stages in an overall line of development toward a 'true' and universal way of life, exemplified by the hegemonic elite...(p. 7)

According to Bauman, then, the political energy of dominant groups in modernity was directed towards creating uniform cultural contexts in which social differences were eliminated. Intellectuals were given a central role in this political context. They became the purveyors of the new and homogeneous cultural environment, or to use Bauman's term, "legislators," whose "authority involved the right to command the rules the social world was to obey; and it was legitimized in terms of a better judgment, a superior knowledge guaranteed by the proper method of its production" (p. 11). The "organic" intellectuals of the Enlightenment were charged with the task of developing an ideology that could "culturalize" the world. The "intellectual ideology of culture" emerged as an aggressive and self-certain doctrine for rationally transforming society. It revealed itself as a zealous political force that showed no hesitation either in its mission to bring the entire world within

the bounds of its administrative processes or in its willingness to destroy or eliminate all that was unassimilable.

Swinging outside Bauman's narrative for a moment, it is important to recall that, while the intellectuals of the Enlightenment remained unified in their condemnation of traditional society, they became increasingly divided over exactly which totalized cultural forms should replace traditional means of social control. Initially, these divisions were occluded by the all-encompassing cultural crusade that pulverized the feudal system. The Church, King, Baron, fief, rite, totem, myth, and tithe were all consumed by the hot flame of rationality that burned throughout Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. By the middle of the 18th century, however, the smoke had cleared enough to reveal a crack between two very different visions of how society should be rebuilt from the rubble of feudalism. Then, at the end of the century, the French and American revolutions drove a sharp wedge into this crack opening a great split in how intellectuals envisioned the totality that was to become the modern world.

Having already discussed these two competing factions in Chapters 3 and 4, it is enough at this point simply to summarize their essential difference: On the one side were intellectuals (or, more broadly, cultural producers) committed to generating cultural conditions conducive to the perpetuation and expansion of newly congealed hierarchies of domination; on the other side were intellectuals committed to fostering emancipation from oppression. Despite their differences, though, both visions were committed to the continued supercession of tradition. Both, it is important to emphasize, were essentially *modernist*.

The root similarities of these perspectives becomes clear in the light of Dick Hebdige's suggestion that three characteristics distinguish modern political orientations:

1. Throughout the history of modernity, politics has been essentially *totalizing*.[1] Social agents who stood to gain most from the growth of the sub-systems of economy and state enlisted the support of intellectuals to create and promulgate a totalizing cultural ideology which subordinated lifeworld contexts to instrumental social processes. One social group in particular, the bourgeoisie (and, as I will discuss in a moment, they were not the only ones), moved quite deliberately to diffuse conflict arising from the one-sided distribution of capitalism's benefits by fostering cultural contexts capable of legitimating inequitable social relations. Dominant groups like the bourgeoisie secured compliance with the precepts of modernity not just through direct force (although historical examples abound when the bourgeoisie most willingly turned its hand to this form of discipline) nor by nagging forms of mutual surveillance. Rather, it endeavored to secure compliance by supporting the creation of cultural horizons so total as to occlude the possibility of oppositional thought or action. Intellectuals from the 'middle class' were recruited "to address a transcendental subject, to define an essential human nature, to prescribe a global human destiny or to proscribe collective human goal" (Hebdige, p. 186) to create a discursive context capable of muffling or eliminating all dissenting views.[2] For the bourgeoisie and the mediating cultural producers of the middle class, politics in modernity meant developing seamless cultural totalities.

It is important to observe, however, that the political strategy of groups in opposition to society's dominant factions was oftentimes even more perniciously totalizing than the strategy of the dominant groups themselves. Once again, it was

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[1] Following the style of Bauman, I will continue, for the moment at least, to speak of "modernity" in the past tense.

[2] Discussions of how middle class intellectuals were increasingly recruited to mediate the conflicts between the bourgeoisie and proletariat abound. Central among these accounts is Barbara and John Ehrenreich's (1977), "The Professional-Managerial Class," in which they provide a classic account of the function and history of this important mediating social group.

primarily middle class intellectuals who assumed the task of generating cultural forms capable, in this case, of resisting the unified cultural totalities promulgated by intellectuals controlled by the ruling elite. But as much as their counter-cultural ideologies opposed the constructions of their adversary intellectuals of the oppressor's camp, they were, in the end, no more tolerant of traditional forms of life than any dominant group. Oppositional intellectuals did not, by in large, view the diversity and dissimilitude of traditional society as a viable alternative to the totalizing aspirations of ruling groups. They imagined both domination and resistance in modern terms: domination was effected by unifying culture to favour the elite; resistance was effected by unifying culture to favour the downtrodden. Totalization was confronted by totalization. Intellectuals, assuming their capacity to *represent* the "oppressed," offered counter-narratives which were as all-encompassing, as unified, and, in some cases, as oppressive as the ideological constructs of their rulers. The occasional instance aside, the *grands récits* of emancipation showed little tolerance for the "thickness" of social life.

The most obvious historical example of the totalizing tendencies of emancipatory politics is, of course, the vast and much maligned Marxist-Leninist experiment of Sino-Soviet socialism. It would be short-sighted, however, to assume that the old Left was the only social agent to attempt cultural unification as a means of battling domination. It would also be wrong to assume that modernist representations of domination and resistance were limited to people involved some way with class struggle. Recent debates in feminism, for instance, reveal the great extent to which early feminists advanced totalizing (even biologistic) accounts of gender relations to counter the calcified cultural dominance of patriarchy. A similar claim is made about many early attempts to resist modernization and racism in the Third World. Many oppositional social factions resisted the negative cultural landscape of colonialism through instituting their own projects of cultural imperialism.

2. Hebdige also claims that modernist politics have always been *teleological*. At the heart of the project of modernity has been an abiding belief in the directionality of social development. In the early years, this manifested itself as a belief in the capacity of humanity to gradually, progressively, and rationally reclaim social action from the haphazard and contingent world produced by deteriorating traditional society. Intellectuals who supported dominant social groups like the bourgeoisie nurtured the belief that social control was possible by means of a growing homogenization and systematization of cultural life. The emergence of science and technology as ideology provided powerful reinforcement for the notion that dominant social agents could incrementally establish the ultimate goal of total social control.

Intellectuals allied with dominant social groups were not the only ones to believe in directional social change. Many of those associated with subordinate groups also exhibited confidence that social change was unfolding in a directional fashion. This was especially true up until the first decades of the 20th century when empirical historical events (WW I, the vast commercialization and urbanization of European and North American social life, the consolidation of Soviet bureaucracy) seemed, for the first time, to unsettle the ready belief held by many intellectuals that continued social development and struggle could progressively produce an emancipated society. It was not the modernist notion of teleological change that was at issue. The idea in dispute was simply how best to carry forward the progressive aspirations of the liberatory cause.

3. The final characteristic of politics in modernity highlighted by Hebdige is that it has been resolutely *utopian*. Not only have intellectuals of all stripes projected a belief in the necessity of a totalized culture, not only have they held fast to their belief that totalized culture is progressively attainable, they have also consistently envisaged vast and oftentimes rich and detailed future destinations for humanity.

Intellectuals favouring dominant groups envisaged societies in which social relations could be healed to sustain existing hierarchies without the niggling bother of dissatisfaction and social disharmony; intellectuals of the "other" camp envisioned future societies in which inequitable social hierarchies would be dismantled in favour of social relations worked out in fair and equitable ways.

The reason I have introduced Bauman's narrative is that it not only highlights the drastic totalizing proclivities of modernity, but also provides some account of the collective sense of insecurity (first thematized in the writings of *fin de siecle* sociologists like Durkheim and Weber) that motivated the politics of cultural unification. While the adequacy of modern politics have long been questioned, nothing detracts from the fact that, for much of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, thinkers *believed* in the totalizing, teleological, and utopic politics of cultural unification. David Tetzlaff (1991) contends that the "single, central Big Brother" image, while it may be a pathetically over-simplistic remnant from ancient structures of 'master-slave' domination, has profoundly shaped the representation of both domination and resistance in modernity. Occasionally, as in the case of Soviet socialism or in the surge of fascism in the 1930's and 1940's, these beliefs have even succeeded in erecting what come close to being totalized cultural formations.

In actuality, of course, the intent of various social groups to attain effective social control through establishing cultural unity was not usually achieved so neatly (It can reasonably be argued—admittedly, against Weber and critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer—that Stalin's Soviet socialism and Hitler's fascism, as consequential as they ended up being, were as much the result of contingent historical circumstances as the final outcome of a teleological social process). As recent events in the former Soviet Union underscore, social control through cultural unification is a far more tenuous a process than modern representations would have it. Despite their unremitting zeal, moderns are always in danger of having the

bulwarks of their belief structures and their political machinations breached by an erosive river of contingencies. Any political strategy that moves to establish social control through cultural homogenization requires long term and ultimately exhausting efforts to continuously maintain the dikeworks that exclude difference. The struggle for cultural domination, it turns out, is just as difficult to maintain as it is to achieve.

This is clearly visible in the actions of the Left where the persistent tendency of empirical historical events to overrun the utopic predictions of classical Marxism (especially as expressed by Kautsky and Plekanoff at the end of the 19th century) prompted the emergence of the innovative concept of *hegemony* as a dynamic means for explaining away residual contingencies and incongruities threatening the Marxist-Leninist vision of a seamless society. In their post-Marxist plea for the abandonment of the modernist underpinnings of Marxism, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) relate the following:

> [B]ehind the concept of 'hegemony' lies hidden something more than a type of political relation *complementary* to the basic categories of Marxist theory. In fact, it introduces a *logic of the social* which is incompatible with those categories. Faced with the rationalism of classical Marxism, which presented history and society as intelligible totalities constituted around conceptually explicable laws, the logic of hegemony presented itself from the outset as a *complementary* and *contingent* operation, required for conjunctural imbalances within an evolutionary paradigm whose essential or 'morphological' validity was not for a moment placed in question. (p. 3)

Hegemony helped Leftists explain the failure of classical Marxism's totalizing political agenda without requiring them to give this agenda up. It did this by providing a clearer, empirically more satisfying depiction of the ways domination and resistance are achieved through cultural unification. Rather than depicting cultural unification as a straightforward imposition of one cultural totality on another, hegemony highlighted the intricate and nuanced struggle that transpires

between many different social groups, a struggle through which the bourgeoisie, in alliance with the intelligencia of the middle class, has emerged most successfully, but which has also been beneficial at different times and in different ways for a plethora of social groups (gendered, racial, religious, ethnic). The notion of hegemony allowed Marxists like Gramsci to depict domination as a far more complicated and dynamic process of cultural unification than the classical Marxists would ever admit. It provided an equally flexible depiction of resistance as an intricate struggle by the working-class to form alliances, work out articulations, and overcome differences between diverse social agents in order to unify culture in a fashion capable of countering the totalizing impulses of the bourgeoisie. It represents, in sum, a superior way of capturing the actual form politics assumed in the 20th century.

For all this, however, Laclau and Mouffe contend that hegemony still did not call the basic modernist strategy of cultural unification into question. Theorists of hegemony never crossed the line where they would doubt the fundamental precepts of modernity: they continued to understand domination as a process (albeit, a complex process) through which capitalists construct a seamless culture conducive to their interests; moreover, they continued to believe that the way to resist this domination was to erect another unified culture beneficial to the interests of subordinate groups.

Postmodernists do not hesitate at the same threshold. They show little reluctance to give up on any or all of modernity's sacrosanct preserves. Many of its adherents no longer hold to the representation of domination as cultural unification and some observe that barely anyone in power seems interested in fostering *cultural* homogeneity anymore: fragmentation and heterogeneity are now seen as the order of the day. Its most vigorous proponents also no longer believe in the desirability of Marxism's totalizing and essentializing emancipatory project. Some contend that, unless it is fully deconstructive, cultural politics of any stripe is a very questionable

activity. Claims like these, of course, have vast and disturbing implications for a field of practice like critical adult education wedded as closely as it is to the aspirations of modernity. Before turning to a fuller examination of politics in postmodern times, let us consider for a moment the ways critical adult education adheres to modernist political forms.

The Politics of Critical Adult Education in Modernity

It is helpful, I think, to begin this section by reiterating a caveat issued earlier in this study. This is particularly true given my wish at this point to advance the rather contentious claim that critical adult education has persistently conducted itself as a totalizing political practice. I have already related how this study does not intend to offer a final or definitive depiction of critical adult education and have observed that our understanding of phenomena like critical adult education is tightly bound to the language and, ultimately, to the rugged topography of power that both enables and constrains our imaginations in contemporary society. This does not mean, however, that it is necessary totally to yield to relativism and to claim that we have no justification for setting up boundaries around critical adult education or making claims about how it has carried out its activities. As long as we are clear about the status of the story we tell (that it is a *perspective* intended to provide insight into changing and heterogeneous phenomena; that it is a claim to truth and not truth itself) we can make and defend strong assertions and can gain important insights into the changing nature of critical adult education in postmodern times. Narratives are totalizing when they refuse to admit their discursive foundations or to acknowledge that validity is derived, not in the purity of an abstracted argument, but in the situated to and fro of communication. Thus, I wish to emphasize that the claims I make in the following paragraphs are not intended to end discussion about the nature of critical adult education as a modern institution but to begin it.

In Chapter 3, I told a story of critical adult education's emergence as part of a broad socio-historical movement to rationalize the lifeworld and to develop a counter-hegemonic culture to contest the totalizing impulses of the bourgeoisie and ultimately of capitalist society. Then, in successive chapters, I recounted how critical adult education's relationship to notions like culture, space and time, and identity all spring from its political mission to generate unified cultural conditions (to a large extent communicated by the term 'socialism') capable of sustaining the fullest measure of those great modern goals: freedom, justice, and social harmony. With all of these contentions in tow, I would like, in what follows, to relate how, guided by its modernist visions, critical adult education has persistently operated as a totalizing, teleological, utopic, hegemonic force.

It is quite easy, for instance, to observe critical adult education's participation in what Bauman identifies as the Enlightenment intellectual's aspiration to "culturalize" the world. It is true that critical adult education in the 19th century did not emerge as part of the dominant bourgeois doctrine of cultural unification (that is, unless we expand our notion of critical adult education to include instances like the Danish folk-school movement). As Richard Johnson (1988) makes very clear, even as early as the late 18th century, critical adult education in much of Europe clearly was motivated to further the interests of the working-class and not the bourgeoisie. In early working-class movements like Chartism and Owenism, for instance, deliberate educational efforts aimed to advance "practical knowledge" rather than the abstracted knowledge of the liberal intellectual. "Practical knowledge," according to Johnson, "was knowledge from the point of 'the people' or 'the productive classes'" (p. 22) which enabled them to attain a consciousness of themselves as a class and to constitute forms of life consistent with their class interests.

But it is a mistake to assume that, just because critical adult education aimed to foster working-class culture, that it was somehow tolerant of the heterogeneity of

traditional cultures or that it was not essentially a modern political institution. In fact, intellectuals in working-class movements like Chartism and Owenism were as interested in cultural unification and modernity as their bourgeois counterparts. Critical adult educators in these early movements identified the prejudices, ignorance, and arbitrariness of traditional society as their principle point of concern. They believed that the way to build a modern and rational society was to dispel the heterogeneity of traditional life and replace it, not with bourgeois culture, but with the unified cultural forms of socialism.

Paulo Freire's account of the politics of critical adult education is another case in point (although one easily could pick from an number of clear, historical examples). Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" describes dominant social agents (identified as the oppressor) distorting culture so that subordinate social agents (the oppressed) become caught in a web of social relations which they cannot question and which denies them their basic humanness. The oppressor establishes control by invading and transforming the culture of the oppressed, or, in Gramsci's terms, by establishing a process of hegemony.[3] As Freire (1972) relates:

> In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression....Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders....In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes. (pp. 150-151)

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[3] Freire refers to Gramsci on occasion and always in a favourable light. Unfortunately, there is no instance when he systematically works through the meaning of hegemony or reflects on potential problems with the concept. Critical adult educators can learn much, I think, by reviewing the long and productive engagement with Gramsci's ideas of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. For an interesting review of this encounter, see Graeme Turner (1990), *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*.

In Freire's mind, domination is the achievement of a group of people (oppressors) who create a cultural context (in his words, a "culture of silence") within which inequitable social relations are capable of persisting (hegemony). Freire is keenly aware of the discursive nature of this strategy of domination. By commanding the norms and values of a society, oppressors are capable of maintaining the legitimacy of their rule (rule through consent).

Freire's solution to this situation is to help subordinates create an alternate cultural context (undistorted) where, through reason and open discourse, they can resist the relations of power oppressing them and thereby bring to fruition forms of life consistent with their essential human nature. Freire is clear that critical adult education should foster a "cultural synthesis" in which people are able to take an active and rational role in creating their own forms of discourse and in assessing the norms that govern their social interactions (Freire, 1972, p. 181). For Freire, the static, the fragmented, and "intransitive" forms of culture that exist in traditional society, (in Brazil, the colonial relations of the *fazenda* mimicked the most stultifying parochialism of feudalism) cannot successfully resist the unifying capacities of modern oppressors (Freire, 1973, p. 22). Cultural unification to suppress open discourse can only be combated with cultural unification to permit it. Critical adult education must foster rational and *totalized* forms of culture in which all people can participate in creating equitable relations of power.

In an insightful critique of Freire's cultural politics, C.A. Bowers (1983) notes the irony of a pedagogical form "that liberates by displacing traditional cultural patterns of thought with a distinctly Western mode of thinking" (p. 935). Bowers observes that the language used by Freire, replete with Enlightenment "metaphors like freedom, liberation, critical reflection, praxis, and the idea that man's [sic] historical mission is to create a new society" belies his continued commitment to modernity. He also observes how, sometimes, the modern cultural forms advanced by Freire are

actually destructive to traditional ways of life that might better be left alone. For instance, Bowers examines the implications of conscientization for Chippewayan people in Northern Alberta. He contends that Freire's pedagogy which emphasizes a critical rather than an accepting relationship to culture, injects unwarranted doses of modernist thinking into the traditional fabric of Chippewayan culture with potentially destructive effects (pp. 939-943). He questions whether calling Chippewayan traditions or ways of thinking into question, in the end, is emancipatory at all.

One might argue that the reason Freire depicts domination and resistance the way he does is that he developed his ideas within the extremely volatile context of a post-colonial country in the throes of incorporation into the broader relations of multi-national capitalism. Within his lifetime Freire experienced the rapid demise of the *fazenda* and the paternalism of the *senhores* at the hands of new and vigorous forms of power. Given the pervasiveness of the latifundian system in Brazil until the middle of the century and given the rapidity of its transformation in the 1950's and 1960's, it is not all that surprising that Freire understands domination in terms of an oppressor-oppressed dichotomy. For most Brazilians, the fantastic upheaval in their direct and visible relations of feudal power that dominated their society only a short time ago, stand as a ready model for understanding and resisting the relations of power in modernity. On this account, Freire's claim that critical adult education should implement a politics of cultural unification can be understood as the expression of a particular historical circumstance.

Such a contextualist line of reasoning only carries us so far, however. This becomes particularly apparent when we recognize that, with minor modifications, the same dichotomized notions of oppression and liberation and the same unifying

politics also prevail the West. The very fact that Freire's analysis of domination and resistance continues to resonate so strongly in North America and in Europe[4] indicates that the politics of cultural unification cannot be passed off as just a quirk of a particular historical context. While recent theorists of critical adult education are less forthcoming with explicit presentations about what constitutes domination and how it should be resisted, it is still possible to assert that politics in critical adult education is viewed in a similar hegemonic/counter-hegemonic fashion.

An example of the persistence of modernist portrayal of domination and resistance can be found in Michael Collins's (1991) book, *Adult Education as a Vocation: A Critical Role for the Adult Educator*. Reacting strongly to the aggressive tactics of neo-conservatives in the 1980's to reassert a culture conducive to the stable functioning of capitalism, Collins argues that adult education itself has been pervaded by what he identifies as the *"cult of efficiency"* (p. 2). Collins observes that the political strategy of neo-conservatives has been to give fresh impulse to an ideology of technocratic efficiency in order to generate cultural forms that are fertile ground for a new round of intensive capitalist growth. While it is true that his careful use of critical theorists like Marcuse and Habermas enable Collins to retain some hold on the mysterious workings of capitalist exploitation which transpire in the purity of instrumental realms of action like the market and the state, he does not, in the end, escape the culturalist interpretation of domination we observed in Freire. Domination, for Collins, is achieved hegemonically, through the development of a cultural form (cult of efficiency) within which oppressive social relations are allowed to persist. Likewise, resistance is viewed culturally, as the counter-hegemonic effort

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[4] Freire's ideas continue to inspire admiration, agreement, and debate. See, for example, Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, Eds. (1993), *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, for a compendium of relatively uncritical reflections on Paulo Freire's theory of adult education.

to establish rational cultural forms consistent with the deepest aspirations of the Enlightenment. Rightfully suspicious of insipid and deactivating popular trends in adult education towards non-interference and 'self-directed learning', Collins calls critical adult educators to commit themselves anew to the vocation of critical adult education (p. 44). For him, this means committing to a cultural politics which develops and sustains the conditions necessary for communicative action. As he suggests: "An important part of the on-going educative task becomes one of identifying and confronting coercive structures that obstruct, and gloss over the need for emancipatory rational communicative action as the prime source of everyday projects of action" (p. 12).

Collins is but one example of a contemporary critical adult educator still committed to unifying forms of politics. Another important theorist, Mechthild Hart, also expresses a clear vision of critical adult education as a political practice for cultural unification. In a paper in which she works to develop a comprehensive concept of emancipatory education, Hart (1985) explores the capacity of Habermas's notion of communicative action to serve as a normative foundation for critical adult education's cultural politics. Situating herself in the concrete context of female oppression, Hart observes how domination "is defined in terms of male-supremacist structures and ideologies, expressed and sustained by the normative systems of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' which organize the female life-context in ways which directly and unilaterally benefit the interests of men" (p. 120). For Hart, sexist men dominate women by fostering a unified cultural context which keeps women's "individual autonomy within strict and narrowly defined boundaries." This is achieved, she adds, "either through direct, open power in the form of violence (or the permanent threat of violence), or through the mechanism of a false consciousness in the grips of beliefs and assumptions which reflect and cement power relations" (p. 120-121). It is clear from the rest of her essay, though, that she views the latter

mechanism of domination more prevalent in contemporary society (remembering, of course, that violence against women is a pervasive and ever-discomfiting threat).

Adult education, she contends, has an important role in resisting cultural unification through fostering and sustaining an alternate cultural unity which permits what she identifies as a "mature form of participation" (p. 121), where all women and men are able to "reflect critically upon the values and norms guiding social behaviour, and to shape new or better ones in co-operation with other members of society." Like Collins, Freire, and early socialist intellectuals, Hart believes that domination is achieved through the construction of a unified normative context. And like them, she does not identify the richness of traditional social life as the thing that can resist the totalizing impulses of modern forms of domination. Instead, following the lead of Habermas, she recommends that critical adult education confront the unifying and instrumentalizing impulses of modern oppressors with a totalizing cultural politics of its own. For Hart, "the all pervasiveness of power itself calls for a unified analysis, and for an all-embracing, comprehensive cure" (p. 132).

Critical adult education's determination to combat the unifying cultural politics of dominant social groups with a unifying cultural politics of resistance renders it implacably totalizing. Whether it be Nova Scotia's Antigonish movement desiring to build a better world through co-operation, whether it be Highlander in Tennessee struggling to foster democracy, or whether it be Ulster's People's College working to better social conditions in Northern Ireland, critical adult education insists on the universal nature of its intentions. When it claims that it works for freedom, for reason, or for justice, it makes these claims for all people and for all times. Paulo Freire believes that liberation is a human necessity, Myles Horton believes that democracy is felt in the heart of each person, Collins believes that the vocation of critical adult education should be the preservation of the lifeworld, Hart believes

that we should all participate in the shaping of our society. In each instance, critical adult education strives to create seamless cultural contexts.

Critical adult education as a modern political practice is also teleological. While many critical adult educators are aware that their cultural practices confront powerful forces that may never finally be defeated (Collins, for instance, demonstrates keen awareness of the resolute power of modern institutions of oppression [pp. 109-117]), almost all believe in the progressive capacities of critical adult education. Moreover, almost all critical adult educators value the utopic dimensions of their field. Paulo Freire, for instance, talks unabashedly about the utopian spirit that animates his pedagogical theory. He contends that the struggle of the oppressed is the "Utopia of liberty that severs the chains of oppression" (Freire and Macedo, 1993). Discussing Freire's utopianism, Peter McLaren and Tomas Tadeu da Silva (1993) observe the following:

> Critical pedagogy based on Freirean principles creates what we call an arch of social dreaming, that is, a forum for sharing and engaging stories of pain and suffering but also for constructing a new narrative of hope through the development of a pedagogy capable of uniting those whose racial gender, and class subordination appears to have foreclosed the possibility of an active struggle for emancipated subjecthood....Freire's Utopia is not the Utopia of 'unbridled subjectivism' or 'totalistic, adolescent psychological states' that provides 'an illusory basis for human action'. Freire's Utopian thinking is provisional rather than categorical....Critical pedagogy must serve as a form of critique and also a referent for hope. (pp. 68-69).

Michael Collins, too, speaks strongly against those who decry utopic thinking. In defense of the "romantic" beliefs of adult educators like Paulo Freire, Moses Coady, and Eduard Lindeman, Collins observes that, unlike the prevaricating and uninspiring message of contemporary instrumental forms adult education, the message of these prophets of critical adult education "is unequivocal, couched in the language of hope and possibility, and focused upon the role of the adult educator" (1991, pp. 115-116).

Critical adult education imagines itself as part of the great drama of modernity. It envisions domination as the attempt to create a distorted normative context within which no one can question the legitimacy of inequitable social relations. It envisions resistance as the inevitable struggle which will eventually penetrate the ideology occluding the profound irrationality of oppressor culture in order to create new cultural forms that are truly rational and emancipatory. For better or for worse, critical adult education's self-understanding and its politics remain deeply modern.

But they are not ineluctably so. Despite the fervency of my argument to this point, it is necessary now to hesitate and to observe that, despite the energy with which it has approached its counter-hegemonic mission, the corpus of critical adult education has long been pricked by a sliver of ambiguity which has never allowed it to be completely easy with its modernist assumptions or its unifying cultural politics. Like other elements of the Left, it too has had to deal with the pernicious power of empirical reality to overrun all endeavors to secure a unified and emancipated culture. While it has never fully escaped its fateful role as "legislator," critical adult education has never been completely comfortable with it either. Even though it has readily deployed accommodative concepts like hegemony to explain away the constant erosion of the cultural unities it promulgates, it has not succeeded, in the end, in pulling the splinter of ambiguity from its flesh. But perhaps this is not so bad. As Kierkegaard observes of Abraham, it was the power of his doubt, not the power of his conviction, that is the basis of his greatness as a spiritual leader. As I will argue in a few moments, the ever present doubt of the critical adult educator becomes especially consequential in postmodern times. Ironically, it leaves open an important avenue along which critical adult education may potentially move to address the political quandaries of postmodernity.

Politics in Postmodernity: From Hegemony to Surveillance and Seduction

While postmodernity has caught the attention, at one time or another, of commentators from all points on the political spectrum, its most unsettling consequences have been reserved for those who have struggled against domination. No longer is it possible for Marxists or anti-racists or feminists to rest easy with the notion of an emancipatory politics. The varied discourses of postmodernism, propounded by in large by disaffected theorists of emancipation, call into question basic representations of domination and resistance undergirding emancipatory politics. While the final implications of postmodernity for the 'Left' remain unresolved, it is certain that there have been few assaults on it more disconcerting.

To fully appreciate postmodernity's ramifications for Leftist politics, it is necessary, first, to ensure we have a clear bead on what these politics amounted to in modernity. Recall, for a moment, Bauman's contention that modernity emerged out of the seemingly boundless threat posed by the breakdown of traditional society. Out of fear that society was going to deteriorate into anarchy, dominant social agents embarked on a brave new plan for cultural unification. With scientific reason as their inspiration and guide, they endeavored to build a society where all of life's contingencies were contained and regulated by the logical formulations of rational social planning. Freedom, equality, and solidarity were possible only if the ignorance and moral diversity of traditional society could be dispelled in favour of the purity and impartiality of reason. The politics of modernity have continuously assaulted the heterogeneity of traditional forms of social life.

Leftist politics are no exception. From the outset, socialists (and later, anti-racists and feminists) concurred with the great dreams of the Enlightenment. They, too, believed a better society could be achieved through a judicious application of reason. According to the narrative of the Left, however, the problem with those in control of

society was not their desire to unify culture or to instill rational forms of life. Rather, the problem was their residual allegiance to irrational forms of authority which led them to foster cultural unities inimical to the interests of humanity. Armed with ever more sophisticated analyses of how dominant social agents subvert reason through ideology and through the hegemonic process (including racism and patriarchy), the Left struggled to foster alternative truly rational and emancipatory cultural unities. As a result, as well as being resolutely anti-traditional, politics in modernity has been prefigured by the dramatic contest of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

It is this very contest that becomes suspect in postmodern times. French post-structuralists like Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, for instance, reject the totalizing politics of the Left. Drawing upon Nietzsche's critique of reason, these theorists call into question the supposition that hegemony is best resisted through counter-hegemony. In their assessment, the cure offered by counter-hegemony is, in the end, little better than the illness of hegemony, itself. Both sides attempt to impose an order upon the diversity of social life and, regardless of their intentions, both end up suppressing all that does not fit easily in the tight bounds of reasoned society. The entire impulse towards a rational totality springs from an unnecessary desire to control contingencies. As Foucault relates, the only way that the wildness of the unknown, unknowable, and uncontrollable Other can be handled is to banish it to the fringes of what is asserted as reasonable. Thus, for the post-structuralists, it is not any particular *form* of cultural unity that is the problem. Rather, it is the will to totalize in any form that stands as an delusive and unnecessary feature of modernity.

For the post-structuralists, modern forms of domination are best resisted, not by promulgating additional totalities, but by revealing the power that lies at the root of all efforts to unify culture. Deconstructing (Derrida) or at least contesting (Foucault and Lyotard) the totalities of modernity opens new opportunities for banished

fragments of culture. Freed from the oppressive homogeneity of modernist meta-narratives (be they the stories of emancipation through free enterprise, on the one hand, or through collective action, on the other), the Other of reason and its social carriers—the marginalized and eccentric of society—will find new room to maneuver. For the post-structuralists, fragmentation, heterogeneity, inconsistency, irrationality are the key for new and untold social freedoms.

One must admit the power of this argument. The twentieth century is too replete with tragic stories of good intentions gone wrong to allow anyone easy acceptance of cultural unification as a viable political aspiration. As a strategy of resistance, deconstruction has its appeal.

For theorists like Fredric Jameson, however, a politics of fragmentation only makes sense when hegemony prevails as the dominant form of social control. Deconstructing totalities only works when domination is effected through cultural unification. In postmodernity, this may no longer be the case. As I have related at several points, the tendency in contemporary times seems increasingly to be to deliberately destroy culture, not to unify it. Moreover, to an ever greater extent, social control is being effected through seduction and surveillance rather than through the process of hegemony. Striking the post-structuralists at the socio-historical foundation of their ideas, Jameson argues that the political habit of deconstruction, developed within the specific and, in some respects, peculiar historical circumstance of 1960-70s France (the French Left was dominated by a directive and uncompromising Stalinist leadership; de Gaul used heavy-handed tactics to defeat the student revolts in 1968; states Left, Right, and Center—especially the Soviet Union and the United States—resorted to belligerent levels of force to exact their will on smaller nations), is only minimally generalizable to other contemporary contexts. As Jameson (1991) relates:

> The 'war against totality' has finally its political motivation....[It is] clear that the fear of Utopia is in this case our old friend *1984*, and that a Utopian and revolutionary politics, correctly associated with totalization and a certain 'concept' of totality, is to be eschewed because it leads to Terror: a notion at least as old as Edmund Burke, but helpfully revived, after innumerable restatements during the Stalin period, by the Cambodian atrocities. Ideologically, this particular revival of Cold War rhetoric and stereotypes, launched in the demarxification of France in the 1970s, turns on a bizarre identification of Stalin's Gulag with Hitler's extermination camps...; what can be 'postmodern' about these hoary nightmare images, except for the depoliticization to which they invite us, is less clear....Finally, this general feeling that the revolutionary, Utopian, or totalizing impulse is somehow tainted from the outset and doomed to bloodshed by the very structure of its thoughts does strike one as idealistic, if not finally a replay of doctrines of original sin in their worst religious sense. (pp. 401-402)

Not all contexts are France in 1968. Cultural unification has not, in fact, been a particularly prevalent strategy of social control in recent times. In the United States, for example, where cultural fragmentation has largely facilitated and not hindered the actions of powerful regimes, where surveillance increasingly replaces norms as the means for regulating social space, where capitalism floods indigenous cultures with meanings which can never be sorted or contextualized or understood, where desires are ecstatically gratified by the great imaging machines of postmodernity, and where people are seduced by the proliferation of commodities that inundate their daily lives into increasingly chaotic and isolated forms of existence, fragmenting politics may not be liberating at all. Jameson is not the only theorist suspicious of the deconstructive politics of the post-structuralists. Cornel West (1988), too, has reservations:

> Without "totality," our politics become emaciated, our politics become dispersed, our politics become nothing but existential rebellion. Some heuristic (rather than ontological) notion of totality is in fact necessary if we are to talk about mediations, interrelations, interdependencies, about totalizing forces in the world. In other words, a measure of synecdochical thinking must be preserved, thinking that would still invoke relations of parts to the whole....(p. 270)

West, along with Jameson, worry about the abandonment of attempts to map new forms of domination prevailing in postmodern times. They worry that the post-structuralist criticism of totality will produce political forms incapable of or unwilling to take on the cybernetic capacities of post-Fordism. Post-structuralism challenges taken for granted assumptions about what the Left believes is effective forms of resistance. However, in doing so, it fails to challenge some of its own assumptions. It fails to reflect, for instance, on its own presumptuous and totalized understanding of what constitutes domination. It fatefully equates domination with totalization and does not see that hegemony only represents one way dominant social forces can perpetuate oppressive social relations. Without endeavoring to attain the broader view, without hazarding an explanation, without risking the process of drawing larger connections, post-structuralism deprives itself of a means of checking the validity of its own culturalist biases. For someone like Jameson, giving up the perspective of totality renders us dangerously vulnerable to the vast social forces that now seduce us into vapid consumerist lifestyles or which erect elaborate surveillance systems that effectively display on a computer terminal the smallest nooks of social life. For him, fragmenting politics is but a symptom of a broader loss in our capacity to come to terms with the vast dimensions of domination in postmodernity.

But perhaps Jameson and other critics of post-structuralism go too far. One must admit that the impulse toward totalization no longer seems to be quite as legitimate as it once may have been. People really do seem suspicious of large schemas which claim to explain or to control all aspects of contemporary existence. Our experience with past efforts to map social reality, which ended up excluding and marginalizing people as much as they did help them live better lives, makes us cautious of calls to seek the totality anew. Once bitten, twice shy.

It is ironic (although no coincidence), I think, that it is at this juncture in our history that postmodernism charges us with the task of rethinking emancipatory politics. Now is the moment when our society is experiencing revisions so substantive that they extend to the microfibers of how domination is effected in daily life (revisions at least as dramatic as the great abandonment of mutual surveillance and reinforced particularism as a means of securing social order in traditional society for the madly ambitious modern dream of universal culture). Now is the moment when we need to be oppositional to prevent the consolidation of new and terrible social forms. Now is the time for political action.

Postmodernity allows us no such easy escape. It has hit us with a double punch that we must somehow withstand. The starkness of the postmodern critique of totality stands as a challenge we cannot ignore. Any dream that somehow life can be better within the exclusive horizons of a cultural totality, be it hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, are now dispelled. If we hope somehow to preserve at least the vestiges of the Enlightenment dream of a society that is free, equal, and shared, we must now find a way to do so that does not call up the old heavy-handed tactics of the moral "legislators" who have dominated emancipatory politics from the outset. Postmodernism confronts us with a puzzle that is terrifying in its urgency and implications. It confronts us with the necessary task of mapping the contours of an unimaginably vast system of domination at a time when we no longer have confidence in mapping. It asks us to develop political forms we have not even imagined are possible. The situation is grave. There is no guarantee that the cultural resources we now possess are sufficient to allow us to learn to live meaningful lives in postmodern times.

The Politics of Critical Adult Education in Postmodernity

The history of critical adult education has indeed been illustrious. With diligence and strength it has worked to generate social conditions in which people could enjoy better lives. Enlivened with a modernist vision of the good life, armed with a comfortable analysis of domination, confident in its capacity to foster positive social change, critical adult education has made positive contributions to fostering a just society. There are many good reasons for admiring its accomplishments.

We should take care, however, about being too unequivocal in our enthusiasm for critical adult education, particularly if it prevents us from looking anew at its status in postmodern times. The world is very different now. It is wrong to think that the politics of critical adult education require no review or scrutiny.

As I have pointed out throughout this study, there are, in fact, many good reasons to doubt the capacity of critical adult education to persist as an emancipatory political enterprise in postmodern times. In Chapter 4, I argued that critical adult education's modernist conception of culture is insufficiently flexible to disclose the full implications of cultural commodification for its cultural practices. Critical adult education still operates on the assumption that domination in contemporary society is secured hegemonically. The consolidation of new and sophisticated forms of domination like seduction and surveillance call into question a form of politics that operates as a counter-hegemonic force.

Critical adult education also retains notions of space and time that are increasingly outmoded by postmodern transformations. As I noted in Chapter 5, the dimensions of domination and resistance in postmodernity are more vast and incomprehensible than they have ever been before. The growing capacity of super-institutions like multinational corporations to cybernetically monitor and control complex, volatile, and widely dispersed spaces undermines all conceptions of domination as the resolute contest for geographical place. Critical adult education

must rethink the geographic assumptions underlying its emancipatory politics. The same goes for the way it conceives of time. In a time continuum fragmented by fleeting images, history looses its force. Critical adult education's strategy of contesting the oppressor's narrative of the past and by challenging its vision of the future becomes meaningless in a world that exists in a perpetual present.

In Chapter 6, I argued that critical adult education retains a notion of identity that may no longer hold. Critical adult education places identity constitution at the center of its politics. Its oppositional strategy is to create open and unconstrained communicative contexts where people authentically and autonomously can reproduce their personal and collective identities. The constancy, unity, definitiveness, and autonomy of individuals and collectivities presumed by this political strategy is suspect, however, in a world where identities are increasingly chimerical and fragmented. Domination is no longer secured through the constitution of unified identities morally motivated to participate in an inequitable society. Domination is now effected through grinding identities into slivers of desire that can be gratified directly by the imaging machines of postmodernity. Humans and machines are melded together. Critical adult education has yet to attend to an appropriate politics for cyborgs.

In sum, critical adult education has fallen out of step in its representations of culture, of space and time, of identity, and, finally, of domination and resistance. It has not faced up to the challenge of reconstituting the cognitive maps upon which it bases its political actions. It has not grasped the transformations that are sweeping the world and that threaten to sweep it into oblivion.

These are representational challenges that, in modern times, critical adult educators would address by rebuilding totalizing schemes consistent with the new empirical conditions. In postmodern times, though, it is not so easy. Now, the whole process of constituting grand explanatory frameworks is suspect. Postmodernism

simultaneously deconstructs the totalized frameworks that have governed the politics of critical adult education and denies the possibility of reconstituting new, more adequate explanations. The deconstructive impact of postmodernism on critical adult education is probably positive. The power of the postmodernist critique enables it to cut through the layers of protective armor encasing the deepest assumptions of critical adult education. It places critical adult education in a better position to recognize its own oppressive dimensions, its nagging exclusions, its unwillingness to tolerate diversity. This, I think, is a very positive service, particularly since it opens critical adult education to the possibility that its representations of domination and resistance are desperately in need of revision.

The deconstructive proclivities of postmodernism are not all positive, however. At the same time as they grind up the calcified presumptions of critical adult education, they also make it very difficult for it to foster any subsequent guiding framework for action. The fragmenting politics of postmodernism are capable of undermining modern totalizations but they do not offer much help when it comes to representing or combating postmodern forms of domination. The danger for critical adult education is great. Postmodernism raises questions about whether critical adult education as an institution intrinsically wedded to the project of modernity can persist as a meaningful and emancipatory enterprise in postmodern times. My own prevailing belief, despite my fairly grim analysis throughout this study, is that, while there is an urgent need to learn to think very differently about critical adult education, the time has not yet come to abandon it altogether as an emancipatory enterprise.

Chapter Eight

Critical Adult Education In the Terrible Terrain

In some ways, I hesitate to take the next step and sketch out a possible path forward for critical adult education. My principle intent in this thesis has been to disclose the unsettling nature of postmodernity for critical adult education. In my mind, the most immediate need is for critical adult educators to absorb the magnitude of postmodernity's implications, without rushing to find answers. While mindful that it is easier to disassemble an existing theoretical construct than it is to create a new one, I would still be satisfied, at this stage, if my study were to have a deconstructive effect and challenge the seeming coherency of critical adult education's underlying assumptions. My hope is that people might find my analysis disturbing, that it might rock complacency, that it might prompt a second look at taken-for-granted assumptions. Only in Hollywood movies and soap commercials do things come out unequivocally right and white in the end. A study like this need make no such gesture.

Still, I cannot suppress a feeling of resolute optimism that critical adult education does have a way forward, that it still has an important role to play, despite the profundity of postmodernity's aporias. In the context of this study, I am satisfied merely to hint at what may be possible. In the end, the discursive contours of critical adult education in postmodern times will not spring forth from any one person's

mind. It will only emerge from the collective learning efforts of theorists and practitioners open and committed to the emancipatory potentials of a social learning process.

The Terrible Terrain

I would like to begin by harkening back to an earlier section of the thesis in which I discussed Stuart Hall's (1990) account of the development of cultural studies in Britain (Chapter 2). In that section, I related Hall's depiction of the schism that divides the heart of cultural studies. Later in the chapter, I argued that there is a sense in which critical adult education also has a divided heart. On the one hand, as an emancipatory political enterprise, critical adult education is devoted to effecting concrete social changes that improve the lives of people. It is not the refuge of disengaged intellectuals. It is, in Hall's words, "a serious enterprise" that does not fear committing to a position and fighting for it. Historical figures like Watson Thomson, Myles Horton, and Paulo Freire and more recent figures like Sue Collard, Phyllis Cunningham, and Mechthild Hart all display a bravery and devotion that typifies the critical adult educator.

Political seriousness is only one of the qualities of critical adult education, however. It also stands as a discursive formation that, to a very real extent, is never completely comfortable with its status as a modernist enterprise. While it cannot be claimed that critical adult education has never pinned itself to a master narrative, it is safe to say that it never rests easy as a totalizing institution. Its theorists and practitioners are always shaken by the recalcitrance of adult learners to fit into any over-arching narrative.

Thus, to some extent, at least, critical adult education has always had to deal with a tension that exists between two competing imperatives at its heart. The desire for political expediency pushes critical adult education to exclude the unresolvable, to

close itself off to contingencies; its disconcerting awareness of a need to remain open forces it to admit the mysterious, to open itself to contingencies, at least a little. Unlike many critical adult educators who bemoan and who try to escape the tension that impairs their capacity to get things done or that hurries them through discursive situations, I would like to celebrate this ambiguity and to identify it as the very thing that may make it possible for critical adult education to persist as an emancipatory political enterprise in postmodernity. To make this point, I will turn to a writer considered briefly in Chapter 2. In a comparative study of critical theory and postmodernism, Stephen White (1991) offers a means for better understanding the schism that divides the heart of critical adult education.

In his book, *Political Theory and Postmodernism*, White contends that the transition from modernity to postmodernity has been accompanied by a shift in the way intellectuals view their social responsibility. On the one hand, modern intellectuals possess a sense of *"responsibility to act* in the world in a justifiable way, a moral-prudential obligation to acquire reliable knowledge and act to achieve practical ends in some defensible manner" (p. 20). Postmodern intellectuals, on the other hand, possess a sense of *"responsibility to otherness"* to the extent that they possess a moral-aesthetic obligation to open themselves to the perspective of the Other and to understand the world in a more complete manner (p. 20). Postmodernists contend that the moderns over-emphasize the responsibility to act with dire consequences:

> It requires [them], at some point, to fix or close down parameters of thought and to ignore or homogenize at least some dimensions of specificity or difference among actors. To act in this sense means inevitably closing off sources of possible insight and treating people as alike for the purpose of making consistent and defensible decisions about alternative courses of action (p. 21).

Moderns contend that the postmodernists's unwillingness to take responsibility for action leaves them without the capacity to derive clear, defensible, or even fair

political practices. Refusing to define the boundaries of discourse inevitably means being overwhelmed by contradictory perspectives that leaves one impotent to act in coherent and decisive ways. It means relinquishing the capacity to take a stand, to oppose wrong, or to sustain a just course of action.

White argues that abandoning either of these notions of responsibility entails forsaking important ethical qualities. The problem is, there is no easy way to hold to them both at the same time. In essential ways, the two senses of responsibility are oppositional. Holding them together produces a tension that can only be withstood with great and judicious effort. The tendency in contemporary times has been to seek the refuge of one extreme or another. White argues that this is wrong and that, somehow, we must learn new ways of sustaining the strain of the terrible terrain into which we are thrust as soon as we try simultaneously to respect both senses of responsibility.

Focusing first on Heidegger, next on Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault, and finally on the feminist discourse on "care," White illuminates the value of approaches to the world that are open to the vast and, ultimately, incomprehensible richness of social life. Drawing on Heidegger, he reveals how we must resist reacting to the finitude of life by closing off happenstance or the unpredictability of the Other. He describes the profound sadness, grief, humility that accompany this demeanor and the deepened understanding of the mystery of the Other that commitment to openness permits.

Drawing upon Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and Rorty, he illuminates how post-structuralism attempts to address the need for a responsibility to otherness without giving up totally to "impertinence, the voice that shocks" (p. 90). The strategy of all of these theorists is, in one way or another, to temper the ambitions of a decontextualized and universalized sense of responsibility to act by insisting upon the need to anchor action in the concrete and particular. Responsibility to otherness, in this context, means adopting an attitude of care for the Other.

The problematics of the notion of "care," White relates, receives substantive treatment by feminists. Unwilling too easily to dismiss the importance of a responsibility to act, but well aware (particularly from the work of Carol Gilligan [1982]) of the importance of care and of the responsibility to otherness pervading feminism, feminist theorists like Seyla Benhabib(1986) and Nancy Fraser (1986) attempt to negotiate the conflicted terrain produced when these two senses of responsibility are brought together. White summarizes Benhabib's position as follows:

> Benhabib envisions the standpoint of the concrete other as injecting an "anticipatory-utopian" dimension into moral discourse. The narrow focus on norms of justice can now be broadened to include questions of the good life or good society. Discourse now continually taps into "intimations of otherness" that emerge when an attitude of care is brought into play and previously "private" needs, motives, desires, and so on are made accessible to moral communication. (p. 104).

While Nancy Fraser applauds Benhabib's effort not to allow either of the two senses of responsibility to prevail and to seek ways that both justice and care can both inform moral practice, she is, in the end concerned that Benhabib's interpretation of care in terms of the kind of empathic sense extended to intimate others obscures the fact that in political life, the kind of care that is extended is not the same as it is in intimate and personal relationships. It is not the individual to whom that care is extended but the *collectivity*. Without allowing herself to slip totally away from a concern for the other, Fraser shifts the emphasis in moral-political action from Benhabib's position privileging an ethic of care, to one more in line with the universalistic offerings of Habermas. While both theorists go some way towards developing means for managing the tension between justice and care, in the end, both slide quietly to one of the two poles.

It is not just people favouring a sense of responsibility to otherness who sense the importance of maintaining some form of productive tension between justice and care. While he is often savaged for his resolute modernism and his seeming commitment to universalized conditions for emancipatory action, Jürgen Habermas also upholds the contention that communicative action is only possible when a sense of the responsibility for action and the responsibility to otherness are both present in the discursive situation. While Habermas does place final emphasis on action, he is careful to maintain that each participant in communication must open themselves to the claims and criticisms of all others. Communicative action demands hermeneutic willingness. It demands that participants not jump to consensus but gradually achieve it through the slow process of mutual understanding. It is true, as White relates, that "Habermas has sometimes not been sufficiently sensitive to the blindness generated by his metanarrative of modernity" (p. 140). But, to claim he has no sensitivity at all to the issue of care, or that he completely abandons the task of retaining both senses of responsibility for a comprehensive depiction of modernity that unremittingly excludes the Other does not do him or his theory justice.

What White is trying to track down in all of this is the extent to which both senses of responsibility can be retained in fruitful tension. Perhaps the most important thing about his presentation is that it does not shirk either the necessity or the difficulty of retaining both justice and care as corollary notions informing a political ethic. Very simply, White can see no way out of the terrible terrain of dialogical action, where, to reiterate Hall's words, one is asked "to say 'yes' and 'no' at one and the same time" (p. 284), to remain open to the indeterminacy of the Other, to the impossibility of final discursive closure, but to not let that indeterminacy paralyze action.

The notion of radical democracy, promulgated by theorists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) displays a similar concern for the tension at the heart of dialogical action. Laclau and Mouffe speak of this tension in the following terms:

> Every radical democratic politics should avoid the two extremes represented by the totalitarian myth of the Ideal City, and the positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project. This moment of tension, of openness, which gives the social its essentially incomplete and precarious character, is what every project for radical democracy should set out to institutionalize. (p. 190)

Speaking of the changed nature of Marxist criticism in this new terrible terrain they continue:

> Every project for radical democracy necessarily includes, as we have said, the socialist dimension—that is to say, the abolition of capitalist relations of production; but it rejects the idea that from this abolition there necessarily flows the elimination of the other inequalities. In consequence, the de-centering and autonomy of the different discourses and struggles, the multiplication of antagonisms and the construction of a plurality of spaces within which they can affirm themselves and develop, are the conditions *sine qua non* of the possibility that the different components of the classic ideal of socialism—which should, no doubt, be extended and reformulated—can be achieved. (p. 192)

Radical democracy implies an openness to the diversity of forms of domination and forms of resistance in contemporary society. It is committed to action but insists that it must be formulated in the very difficult circumstances of open and inclusive discourse. Radical democracy is the political ethic that lies at the heart of cultural studies and, I would argue, is the ethic that lurks in the shadows of critical adult education. Postmodernism is deeply challenging for critical adult education. It undermines critical adult education's comfortable links to the meta-narratives of emancipation and it insists that it take a giant step into the uncomfortable landscape of radical democracy. The way has been prepared by for critical adult education by

courageous forebears. The task now is to learn more fully how to persist in this terrible terrain.

Critical Adult Education in Postmodern Times

Jameson's impassioned plea for us to develop new cognitive maps of our world seems discordant in a context of violence and despair. In the thick of the fight to preserve the few remaining fortifications protecting the frightened encampments of our culture, it is hard to see the use of developing new ways to ward off the enemy or, even more obscure, of imagining our enemy anew. Rather, our impulse is to resort to old and habitual ways of struggling, to close off to the need for taking any additional risks, and, so armed, to battle to the bitter end.

But even if we were to admit the validity of Jameson's contention, and agree that we must reconstitute how we view ourselves and our world in postmodern times, could we possibly take the next and perhaps most painful step and acknowledge that we can no longer rely on the hard and glistening logic of instrumental reason to help us form these new maps? Faced with the urgency of change required, faced with the danger of cultural destruction, can we admit that the struggle to map postmodernity must now transpire in the verdant and dangerous terrain of radical democracy?

In some strange way, I think critical adult education is particularly capable of offering an affirmative response to this question. While its heritage, its aspirations, its conceptual foundations, and its self-understanding are all bound up in the project of modernity, there is a sense in which critical adult education has always resisted embracing whole-heartedly the role of cultural legislator. Critical adult education has always been shot through with ambiguities that belie its recognition of radically democratic forms of sociation. Critical adult education has always been attracted to the terrible terrain of dialogical action. It already possesses considerable resources to

sustain the tension of discourse and action, of openness and resolve, of the variegated boundaries, of the heterogeneity that prevail in a radical democracy.

Postmodernity presents us with unprecedented challenges. To survive its hazards and to take advantage of its opportunities, requires we learn to live together in entirely new ways. Critical adult education can play a positive role in this transition. To do so, however, it must renovate its theories and practices in ways consistent with postmodern times.

Recalling the Pipes
(A song for Derek)

All the rest have gone to war
Our sisters and brothers who've lived before
Together they've struggled, braved pain and strife
Yielded their souls for a better life

And late at night under moonless sky
Laying side by side, knowing they must die
Hearts grown cold with the fear of fight
Cast eyes to the east searching dawn's first light

Chorus
Please play the pipes at the break of day
Play fiddle and fife to guide our way
Stir our hearts with the beat of your ancient drum
Sing a verse so whilst dying we hear a song

Today we're caught in another war
The cod are dying, we fish no more
Our unions are shattered, our children are gone
We sleep in the day with the TV on

How can we gather together to fight?
The basis for struggle seems lost in this night
We sleep all alone and forget our dreams
We're blind to the advance of the war machines

Chorus

Our fear of the morning is needed again
Sisters and brothers recall your pain
To the horizon we once again must cast our eyes
And wait for the dawn that will see us rise.
And wait for the dawn that will see us rise.

Chorus (repeat)

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