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Reading Lacan with Education: Applications, Implications, Possibilities

by

Derek Briton

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

Sociology of Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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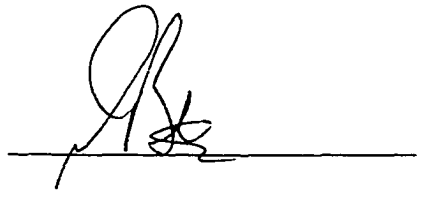

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a dissertation entitled *Reading Lacan with Education: Applications, Implications, and Possibilities,* submitted by Derek Briton, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Sociology of Education.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the implication of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in pedagogic practice. It was inspired by the cultural commentaries of Slavoj Žižek's (1989) remarkable *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and the pedagogical insights of Shoshana Felman's (1987) ovarian "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable." It proceeds as an exploration of, and investigation into, the political, social, and cultural contexts of education, treating issues of policy, learning, teaching, identity formation, and curriculum; it goes on to explain why psychoanalytic knowledge is of a peculiar sort—why it cannot, for example, simply be acquired, exchanged, or transmitted, why it must be exercised or *put to work*. It reveals how analytic learning is predicated on an act of transference or trust, and how Lacanian psychoanalysis challenges the very foundation of the Western Humanist Tradition—the centered, rational subject—but, contrary to popular belief, grounds knowledge in the subject itself. It explains why psychoanalytic learning is what occurs *in the pursuit of* psychoanalytic knowledge, not its understanding, why "things fall into place" for the learner once understanding is bracketed, why psychoanalytic learning makes no sense from the perspective of traditional conceptions of "knowledge," "understanding," and "learning," and why, from a Lacanian perspective, to *truly* know, to *truly* understand, to *truly* learn, one has to give up, or at least bracket, one's conventional notions of knowledge, understanding, and learning. In sum, the dissertation invites educators to join it in the pursuit of its own truth, of its goal, its thesis that a minimal, even flawed, knowledge of Lacan can be put to work in various educational contexts to gain greater insights into some of education's most perplexing problems.

I would like to acknowledge, first, the support, encouragement, and love of Gail Briton, my partner and Dean, Alex, and Clare Briton, my children, throughout the course of studies that culminated in this dissertation—they sacrificed much during the years it took to bring this work to fruition; second, the efforts of my co-supervisors, members of my examining committee, and my external reader; thirdly, the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

To the women I owe so much to: Margaret Briton, my mother, who birthed and envisaged for me greater things than I could ever imagine; Evelyn Swinney, my sister, who loved and indulged me as an infant; Gail Briton, my partner, who has loved, suffered, supported, and encouraged me through my studies and twenty-five years of marriage; Clare Briton, my daughter, whose compassion, care, and dedication I too often overlook and too seldom acknowledge.

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would better be left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?

(Foucault, 1990, pp. 8–9)

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Chapter One

Lacan and Pedagogy

> The reason for the usual misinterpretations of both Lacan's and Freud's pedagogical contribution lies in a misunderstanding of the critical position taken by psychoanalysis with respect to traditional methods and assumptions of education. Lacan's well-known critique of what he has pejoratively termed "academic discourse" (*le discours universitaire*) situates "the radical vice" in "the transmission of knowledge." Lacan thus blames "the narrow-minded horizon of pedagogues" for having reduced the strong notion of teaching to a "functional apprenticeship." (Felman, 1987, p. 71)

The Psychoanalytic Renewal

This dissertation explores the implication of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in pedagogic practice. It was inspired by the cultural commentaries of Slavoj Žižek's (1989) remarkable *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and the pedagogical insights of Shoshana Felman's (1987) ovarian "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable."[1] It proceeds as an exploration of, and investigation into, the political, social, and cultural contexts of education, treating

issues of policy, learning, teaching, identity formation, and curriculum. Although its focus may appear somewhat novel, it is representative of what Alice Pitt, Judith Robertson, and Sharon Todd (1998, p. 2), editors of "Psychoanalytic Encounters: Putting Pedagogy on the Couch," a recent special issue of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, describe as "a renewed interest in the implications of psychoanalytic theory for educational studies."

In their introduction to "Psychoanalytic Encounters," Pitt et al. (1998, p. 3) note how "recent inquiry into the stakes of student-teacher relations, into the resistances of learning..., and into the ways subjectivity is constituted through education..., draws inspiration from both within and outside a 'feminist rereading of Lacan's rereading of Freud'." The three further note that "alongside such rereadings, current writing in psychoanalysis and education has taken up the many different threads within the fabric of psychoanalysis itself." That this rereading and rewriting of psychoanalysis "has occurred within... the 'postdisciplinary' atmosphere of the academy suggests," they contend, "that what constitutes a renewal in psychoanalysis and education is not just a rereading of the immediate textual past (although it is that), but also a reading *with*, an openness to exploring with an oft-times eclectic spirit, what psychoanalysis and education have to offer one another."[2] Such a "reading with," according to Pitt et al., entails "moving beyond the 'what' of knowledge and beyond the disciplines that structure such knowledge within the academy—for the very modes of

intelligibility and certainty that disciplines offer are, of course, precisely what a reading of psychoanalysis *with* education undermines." It is, in fact, very much in this spirit of "reading psychoanalysis *with* education" and "moving beyond the 'what' of knowledge and beyond the disciplines that structure such knowledge within the academy" that this dissertation proceeds.

Finding a Way In

It was reading Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that first piqued my interest in Lacanian psychoanalysis. I had only just completed my first year of graduate studies, and although my undergraduate work in philosophy had introduced me to some challenging pieces by thinkers such as Hegel, Heidegger, Adorno, Habermas, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, Žižek's frenetic theorizing left me reeling—but not before it had intrigued and intoxicated me. After reading "How did Marx Invent the Symptom?," the opening chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, I remember feeling, at once, elated and despondent—Žižek's commentaries on Marx, Freud, Sohn-Rethel, Kant, Althusser, Hegel, Eco, Henry James, Mozart, Sloterdijk, Adorno, Tibetan Buddhism, Kafka, Kaniewska, Catholicism, Pascal, Zhuang Zi, Gilliam, and Allais, not to mention Lacan, proceed at a breakneck pace. Although familiar with the work of thinkers in the Hegelian/Marxist tradition, I knew little of Lacan, other than what I had read in passing, which ranged from adulation to censure, and I had not even imagined a relation between Lacan and such thinkers as Adorno, Kafka, and Zhuang Zi.

Žižek's range and scope was astounding, his insights compelling, and the brilliance of his analyses shone through even my bewilderment. But there was simply too much to consider, too much to absorb, especially since I had to produce a thesis in fairly short order.[3]

When it came time to write my master's thesis, there were aspects of Žižek's work that I felt comfortable enough with to draw upon, but it was not until I had completed that study that I began seriously to consider the relation of Lacanian psychoanalysis to pedagogy. My thesis, as I had hoped, proved worthy of publication,[4] and it was between writing revisions and reading galley-proofs that I stumbled upon Felman's (1987) *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture.* It was after reading the fourth chapter of that text, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable"—which inspired me to read Lacan's *Écrits: A Selection*—that I first realized the critique of mainstream education I had painstakingly developed in my thesis in many respects paralleled Lacan's critique of the psychoanalytic orthodoxy.

Portentous Parallels

The critique of the educational orthodoxy that I developed in my master's thesis draws upon the work of Marx, Nietzsche, Elias, and Heidegger to show that the modern practice of education is dishonest because its central premise—"the idea of a self-sufficient, rational individual, of a conscious, knowing subject that

exists prior to and independent of the objects of experience" (Briton, 1996c, p. 76)—is untenable. From Lacan's *Écrits* I learned that he, speaking at a time when the psychoanalytic establishment is "busy remodelling psychoanalysis into a right-thinking movement whose crowning expression is... the *autonomous ego*," challenged the psychoanalytic orthodoxy because (i) it ignores "the self's radical ex-centricity to itself with which man is confronted, in other words, the truth discovered by Freud," and (ii) it proceeds as if "the radical heteronomy... gaping within man can... be covered without whatever is used to hide it being profoundly dishonest" (Lacan, 1977, p. 171–172).[5]

But Felman's (1987) "Psychoanalysis and Education" did more than simply inspire me to read Lacan, it actually transformed my interest in the *application* of Lacan's thought to pedagogy into a desire to understand its *implication* in pedagogical practice. For as Susan Edgerton (1993, p. 220) points out: Felman "articulates Lacan's discipleship to Freud's 'discovery' not of the application of psychoanalysis to pedagogy, but of the '*implication* of psychoanalysis in pedagogy and of pedagogy in psychoanalysis'." And as Pitt et al. (1998, p. 3) note: "the threads of psychoanalysis in education and education in psychoanalysis are indeed long and tangled ones, often each one seeking to limit the other." It was my desire to understand this tangled web that provided the incentive to explore Lacan's thinking in greater detail.

What I discovered in the published works of Lacan and the commentaries thereon was that Lacan, in the "classroom" of his seminars, delighted not only in bringing theory (his rereading of Freud) to bear on the clinic (his practice) but also in bringing his practice to bear on his understanding of Freud. Lacan's interrogation of the relation between thinking and being proved especially fascinating, since I was still coming to terms with my own failure to wed theory and practice in my master's thesis—to establish a "pedagogy of engagement" (Briton, 1996c, p. 109).[6] It was not so much a calculated, rational choice that precipitated my turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis, then, as a desire to understand (i) the ties between psychoanalysis and pedagogy, and (ii) the relation between theory and practice.

The Psychoanalytic Challenge

Since one of my hopes in writing this dissertation is to encourage educators to explore Lacanian psychoanalysis, I do not wish to create the impression that some natural inclination or special predisposition is a prerequisite to its study. My own understanding of Lacan's work and its relation to education, limited as it remains, did not spring fully-formed from my head, as Athene from the head of Zeus: it resulted from much reading, thinking, reflection, discussion, and study. The aforementioned exercises, however, although necessary, are not sufficient to get to the truth of Lacanian psychoanalysis—they merely pave the way, make it *possible* to learn psychoanalytic truth.

Psychoanalytic knowledge is of a peculiar sort: it cannot, for example, simply be exchanged or transmitted, neither can it "be acquired (or possessed) once and for all: each case, each text, has its own specific, singular symbolic functioning and requires a different interpretation" (Felman, 1987, p. 81). In other words, it must be exercised, *put to work.*

My own efforts to get to the truth of Lacanian psychoanalysis through the works of Lacan and his commentators have convinced me that analytic learning is predicated on an act of transference or trust: the reader must assume that the text to be engaged with possesses the knowledge s/he lacks; s/he must then allow her/himself to be interpellated by that knowledge; finally, s/he must produce an interpretation of that knowledge—*put it to work*—for her/himself.[7] It should come as no surprise to discover that learning in this manner poses a challenge to those of us long subjected to what Lacan, in *Seminar XVII*, dubs "the discourse of the university." For as Felman (1987, p. 76) observes:

> proceeding not through linear progression but through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions and deferred action, the analytic learning process puts in question the traditional pedagogical belief in intellectual perfectibility, the progressist view of learning as a simple one-way road from ignorance to knowledge.

In fact, Lacanian psychoanalysis challenges not only "the progressist view of learning" but also the very foundation of the Western Humanist Tradition: the centered, rational subject.[8]

The Decentred Subject

Based on Freud's discovery of the unconscious, Lacan rejects this "fundamental master signifier—that of an 'I' that is identical to itself and transcendental" (Bracher, 1988, p. 40)—and posits the subject as irredeemably decentered, declaring of his own subjectivity that "what is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been in the process of becoming" (Lacan, in Macey, 1988, p. 105). For Lacan, as for a number of his contemporaries, the subject is a product neither of intro- nor retro- but of *extro*spection, of a looking outside and forward:

> As a being-in-the-world, man has a project, that is, a sense of the future, something he wants to do. Thus, he projects his life from the point he is at into the future. Heidegger originated the very important existentialist concept of the "project." I am *here* physically, but I *project* myself into the future, and I conceive of what I want to do. It is on the basis of what I want to do that I can experience difficulties and obstacles. Sartre developed this point at length: things are not obstacles in and of themselves, they are only obstacles if you want something. It is because you want something

> to happen further along that retroactively things are experienced as obstacles. (Miller, 1996, p. 10)

For Lacan, the subject is a being-in-process, not something that *was* or *is*. Bruce Fink (1996, pp. 63–64), for instance, notes how Lacan "never pinpoints the subject's chronological appearance: he or she is always either *about to arrive*—is on the verge of arriving—or *will have already arrived* by some later moment in time." Thus, when Lacan speaks of the subject, he uses either the imperfect tense (which tends to be ambiguous in French) or the future anterior (also known as the future perfect). Lacan, however, as Nestor Braunstein (1988, p. 53) points out, tends to favor "the anterior future of the verb: what will have been." Unfortunately, Lacan's future anterior constructions often tend to obscure that which they are called upon to illuminate, so much so according to David Macey (1988, p. 105) that "the opacity of the terminology masks the relative ease with which this temporality can be applied to the identificatory structures implicit in the ideal ego to which the subject strives to conform, or to the self-images of wish-fulfillment." By way of illustration, Macey offers the following anecdote:

> Freud writes to Fleiss and expresses the hope or phantasy that "someday" a marble tablet will be mounted on the wall of the house where he discovered the secret of dreams, he identifies with the great man he will have been. The history of his recollection of that hope or desire is neither the history of what he *has been* nor that of what he *is*, but the history of what he *will have been* when his

> discovery will have been publicly acknowledged. (p. 106, emphasis added)

In the Lineage of Rationalism

It is important, however, that the subject's enigmatic temporality not be conflated with its "death," for Lacan is no poststructuralist: he abjures neither the subject nor meaning. Žižek (1989, p. 7), in fact, targets such misconceptions in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: "against the distorted picture of Lacan as belonging to the field of 'post-structuralism,' the book articulates his radical break with 'post-structuralism'; against the distorted picture of Lacan's obscurantism, it locates him in the lineage of rationalism." Far from nihilistic, Žižek declares "Lacanian theory... perhaps the most radical contemporary version of the Enlightenment," noting how

> the text on the cover of the French edition of Lacan's *Écrits* already belies such an understanding: Lacan conceives there his theoretical effort explicitly as a prolongation of the old struggle of Enlightenment. The Lacanian criticism of the autonomous subject and [her/]his power of reflection, of reflexive appropriation of [her/]his objective condition, is therefore far from any affirmation of some irrational ground escaping the reach of reason. (p. 79)

With respect to meaning, Jacques-Alain Miller (1996, pp. 10–12) notes how Lacan "stressed the importance of seeking the laws of meaning. He didn't consider meaning to be some kind of dainty thing floating in the air here and

there which alights on something, gives it a meaning, and then disappears." For Lacan, "the fact that meaning is grounded in the subject—the fact that meaning is not a thing—does not imply that there are no laws of meaning." The subject is central to Lacan's work, but Lacan, as Heidegger, "defines the existence of man not as interiority, an inner something like ideas or feelings, but rather as a constant projecting outside."[9] It is because Lacan grounds meaning in the subject that truth, as the subject, is a function neither of what was, nor what is, but of what *will have been*, hence Žižek's paradoxical but characteristically Lacanian response to the question:

> From where does the repressed return?... From the future. Symptoms are meaningless traces, their *meaning is not discovered*, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but *constructed retroactively*—the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame that gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning. (Žižek, 1989, pp. 55–56, emphasis added)

Reading Lacan

It should come as no surprise, then, that Lacan, ever the teacher, structured his texts in such a way that the reader is constantly confronted with the enigmatic temporality that is characteristic of the subject and truth. As Fink (1996, p. 150) notes: "*a peculiar temporal logic is involved in reading Lacan*: you cannot read his *writings* (in particular the *Écrits*) unless you already know more

or less what he means...; in order to get anything out of his writing, you already have to understand a good deal of what he is talking about." Anthony Wilden (1968, p. ix), the translator of Lacan's seminal Rome Discourse, even situates his introduction to Lacan *after* his translation, noting: "it is almost impossible to write any sort of introduction to Lacan unless the reader has first been introduced to him."

Fink (1996, p. 150) contends that this peculiar temporal logic leaves the committed reader with two choices: "learn about Lacan from someone else—with all the biases that entails—...then try to verify or refute what you have learned by examining his texts"; or "read and reread and reread his work until you can begin to formulate hypotheses of you own, and then reread yet again with those hypotheses in mind, and so on." Both methods, however, are not only tedious and time consuming but also antithetical to "the publish-or-perish economic reality of most academics" and "a certain American pragmatism and independence." Many academics, in fact, argue: "if I cannot put someone's work to use for me in a relatively short space of time, what is the point?... I need to prove that I am an independent thinker, and thus I must criticize it as soon as I think I have begun to understand it." Fink (p. 151) contends that the unfortunate result of such reasoning is a peremptory reading of Lacan, "with a view to critiquing it, short-circuiting the 'time for comprehending' and proceeding directly to the 'moment of concluding'."[10] Consequently, the typical North American response to Lacan is

homologous to Freud's example of the threefold denial expressed by a man accused of returning a damaged kettle to its owner:

1. If I can't figure him out myself, then he's not worth thinking about.
2. If he can't express himself clearly, then it must be muddled thinking.
3. I never thought much of French "theory" anyway.

1. I returned the kettle undamaged.
2. The kettle had a hole in it when I borrowed it.
3. I never borrowed the kettle in the first place.

Contrary to the standard North American response to Lacan, Fink (1995, p. 151) suggests that "if an author is worth reading seriously, you have to take for granted at the outset that, as crazy as certain ideas may at first seem, considered in greater detail they may become more convincing, or at least lead you to understand the aporias that gave rise to them." Unfortunately, this "is more credit than most people are willing to give an author, and a love-hate ambivalence gets played out around reading. To assume that it is not as crazy as it sounds is to love the author..., whereas to read it critically comes off as hate." Thus, although many remain convinced that "hate is the condition for a serious reading," Fink cautions that "if that indeed is the condition, it had better be preceded by a prolonged period in which the reader loves the author and presumes him or her to have knowledge!"

Trust versus Understanding

I can certainly attest to the veracity of Fink's (1995) conclusions in relation to my own reading of Žižek (1989) and Felman (1987)—not to mention the work of Lacan and that of his many commentators. It would have been impossible to make sense of Žižek, Felman, or Lacan had I not assumed that their texts possessed the knowledge I lacked—allowed them to function as "the subject who is supposed to know" (Lacan, 1981, p. 232). In order to move beyond each text's vagaries, inconsistencies, and apparent contradictions, I had to lay my prejudices and suspicions aside and proceed with an open mind. This is not to say that I stopped questioning what these thinkers had to say, but that I was willing to bracket understanding, to proceed on faith so to speak, even when what one had to say seemingly contradicted the others. This was not always an easy task, however. I had, after all, spent a number of years of studying in an institution that extols the virtue of understanding. Yet, as Fink (1995, p. 71) notes, understanding serves only to confound psychoanalytic learning:

> it is precisely insofar as understanding involves nothing more than situating one configuration of signifiers within another that Lacan is so adamant about refusing to understand, about striving to defer understanding, because in the process of understanding, everything is brought back to the status quo, to the level of what is already known. Lacan's writing itself overflows with extravagant, preposterous, and mixed metaphors, precisely to jolt one out of the easy reductionism inherent in the very process of understanding.

In many respects, the reader who defers understanding, who proceeds on trust and ends up learning despite her/his misgivings, is much like the analysand who enters transference. This is because "the analysand's subjective frustration at not *understanding* what is going on, how the analytic process is supposed to work, what is really at the bottom of his or her neurosis, and so on, in no way hinders the efficacy of the psychoanalysis" (Fink, 1995, pp. 71–72). Freud, in fact, often remarked that the analysands who benefit most from analysis tend to be those who *understand* little or nothing of what went on. Perhaps there is a lesson here for those of us who feel compelled to understand one aspect of a lesson or one paragraph/section/chapter of a text before moving on to the next.

Putting Psychoanalysis to Work

Psychoanalytic learning, then, is what occurs *in the pursuit of* psychoanalytic knowledge, not its understanding. The neophyte who, on one level, diligently struggles to understand Lacanian psychoanalysis soon discovers that, on another, "things fall into place" without her/his conscious effort once understanding is bracketed. This, of course, runs counter to what most educators understand learning to be—it makes no sense from the perspective of traditional conceptions of "knowledge," "understanding," and "learning." From a Lacanian perspective, however, to *truly* know, to *truly* understand, to *truly* learn, we have to be willing to give up, or at least bracket, our conventional notions of knowledge, understanding, and learning. The educator looking to "learn"

Lacanian psychoanalysis, then, to "understand" it, finds her/himself in the unenviable, but equally comical, position of a character in a well-known joke—of the traveler who asks for directions and is told: "You can't get there from here." The Lacanian point is that we cannot get there (to *true* understanding) from here (from "understanding"); this is why *trust* (or as it is known in psychoanalysis, *transference*), not "understanding," is the key to *true* learning.[11]

However, because the waters of Lacanian psychoanalysis appear so murky and deep, it seems almost irresponsible to plunge into their cloudy depths, to trust, *before* one is an accomplished swimmer, before one "understands." The problem any would-be-swimmer faces, of course, is that s/he can only learn to swim *in* the water—the gap between "understanding" swimming (the principles of buoyancy and the various techniques and strokes of swimming) and swimming itself can never be closed through "learning," through the acquisition of more "knowledge." Learning to swim entails getting into the water *before* one can swim—an act of trust. Fortunately, the nature of trust, of transference, is such that its effects are not curbed by the learner's struggle to "understand." For "as soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere... (*sujet supposé savoir*)... there is transference" (Lacan, 1981, p. 232), and where there is transference there is an opportunity for psychoanalytic learning.

Those In the Know Are Lost

The significance of the psychoanalytic notion of learning for educators whose goal is to "learn" Lacanian psychoanalysis, to "understand" it, is that they will never have an opportunity to *truly* learn, to *truly* understand it, unless they are willing to pursue that goal through trust rather than "understanding." This is not to suggest that they must accept what Lacanian psychoanalysis has to say without question; it is perfectly acceptable to maintain a skeptical attitude. Those who do so, in fact, will be no different from the analysand who begins analysis suspicious of the analyst's ability to deliver what s/he seeks—who is, so to speak, *in the know*. Such analysands may well catch the analyst in an error of "knowledge," in an inconsistency or contradiction, just as educators in pursuit of psychoanalytic knowledge may well catch Lacan or his commentators in errors of "logic," but this is actually of little consequence—as Lacan is so fond of remarking, those in the know are lost (*les non-dupes errent*), are already in the grip of transference. To learn psychoanalytically, then, the analysand/reader must proceed on trust, proceed *as if* the analyst/text has the knowledge he or she lacks, despite her/his misgivings.[12]

That psychoanalytic learning occurs once the reader proceeds on trust, proceeds *as if* the text has knowledge s/he lacks, is the first lesson the dissertation sets out to teach; the second is that psychoanalytic knowledge is learned in the *pursuit* of psychoanalytic knowledge, not its attainment: "the truth... is that

which runs after the truth" (Lacan, 1981, p. 188). If Lacanian psychoanalysis is true, however, if "the truth... is that which runs after the truth," if *actual* knowledge, *actual* understanding, and *actual* learning do not correspond to what we "understand" them to be (as our "understanding" of swimming does not correspond to *actual* swimming), this truth is not amenable to being "learned" or "understood." How, then, to teach it?

The Goal versus the Aim of Learning

In a seminar on the drives, "The Partial Drive and Its Circuit," Lacan (1981, p. 179) offers a clue as to how psychoanalytic truth can be taught when he distinguishes between a drive's *goal* (that which it pursues) and its *aim* (the path it follows in pursuit of its goal): "when you entrust someone with a mission, the *aim* is not what he brings back, but the itinerary he must take. The *aim* is the way taken. The French word *but* may be translated by another word in English, *goal.*" Lacan's point in this passage is that a drive's real purpose, its truth, is not its goal, that which it pursues, but its aim, that which it brings about in the pursuit of its goal. This suggests the truth of any "mission" resides not in its professed goal but its aim. The pedagogical implications of Lacan's point are significant.

Take, for instance, an educator who undertakes a mission to teach that Paulo Freire's (1987) language-based, participatory model of learning is how learning *actually* proceeds, that the traditional transmission model of learning, what Freire terms the "banking" model, is a misrepresentation of learning. The

educator's goal may very well be to teach this truth, but the truth s/he *actually* teaches is what s/he brings about in the pursuit of that goal. An educator who, for example, elaborates on the various elements that comprise Freire's pedagogy, whether through a lecture or interactive discussion, does not teach her/his students the truth of that model, no matter how extensive or participatory the lesson; what s/he teaches is the truth of the "banking" model—*that knowledge can be transmitted as an accomplished fact.* It would be a fatal mistake, however, if that same educator simply sat her/his students in a "culture circle" and engaged them in a "dialogue," in a discussion of "generative themes," "naming the world," and "conscientization"—this teaches only that the nature of truth, what it *actually* is, cannot be taught, that the learner, if s/he is to learn the truth of Freire's pedagogy, must learn it for her/himself. A central tenet of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that the analysand/learner cannot access truth her/himself—there must be an other, a subject presumed to know. Learning the truth "is not a matter of being open, nor is it something you can do by yourself.... You need an other. It's quite mysterious the way you need an other. If we take the example of Freud himself, it looks like he did it alone [learned the truth of psychoanalysis], but in fact he did it in reference to another, his friend Wilhelm Fliess" (Miller, 1995, p. 235).

The Pursuit of Truth

The crucial Lacanian distinction that many progressive educators overlook, then, is that just because truth cannot be "taught," that is, *transmitted* from educator to learner, does not mean that the learner must learn truth her/himself and that s/he is free to choose whatever "truth" s/he wishes. Lacan spent decades in the clinic and in seminars teaching analysands and analysts how to arrive at the truth. For Lacan, teaching the truth entails teaching the conditions that make it possible for the learner to learn truth. To teach these conditions, however, the teacher must, first, engage the learner in the pursuit of truth—sustain the learner's belief that "learning" entails the acquisition of "knowledge" and that the s/he possesses the "knowledge" the learner lacks. Only then, after assuming the position of the "subject presumed to know" and establishing truth as a goal, is the teacher in a position to provide the learner with opportunities to learn that the nature of truth is such that it can never be "attained"—that truth, as the pursued in Homer's *Illiad* (Hector), always remains in sight, but out of the pursuer's (Achilles) reach; that Minerva's owl ("understanding") always flies at dusk, when the day remains in sight but is already past.

The pedagogical implication of Lacan's notion of truth, then, is that the learner cannot collect her/his metaphorical $200 for passing GO and then head straight to Jail, to the truth; the learner has to "play the game," continue to pursue

truth, before s/he can learn it. The reader who feels a little perplexed at this point should try not to worry if s/he finds the Lacanian notion of truth difficult to "understand"—learning, after all, entails trust, not "understanding." If it were possible to go directly to the truth of the psychoanalytic notion of truth, to make it "understandable," it would be false; to *be* true, according to its own definition of truth, the psychoanalytic notion of truth must defy "understanding"—*ergo* the need for trust. Since truth, then, *by definition*, is that which escapes "understanding," that which cannot be attained once and for all, the conditions that make it possible to learn truth cannot be taught as an accomplished fact, as "knowledge"—otherwise, they would be *un*true.

Why Educating Is an Impossible Profession

No doubt the vicissitudes of teaching the truth are what led Freud to declare educating (along with healing and governing) an "impossible" profession. The problem is that even when teaching the truth is established as a goal, it can only be taught as an aim—the truth, *by definition*, is that which is taught as an aim. Freud, for instance, did not teach the truth of psychoanalysis as an accomplished fact. He taught, rather, the oftentimes convoluted trail (the interpretation of dreams and various case studies) that made it possible for him to learn the truth of psychoanalysis; as Lacan taught the meandering, circuitous path (his rereading of Freud) that made it possible for him to learn the same. It is through his rereading of Freud, in fact, that Lacan demonstrates how, even when

Freud's professed goal was to teach psychoanalytic truth as "knowledge," as a biological science, his *aim* was always to teach psychoanalysis as that which confounds scientific "understanding." It *is*, in fact, given the psychoanalytic definition of truth, impossible to teach *the* conditions that make it possible to learn truth—if it *were* possible to teach a set of *general* conditions, the psychoanalytic notion of truth would be false. Freud was absolutely correct, then, when he declared educating an impossible profession: truth is precisely that which *cannot* be "understood," that which *cannot* be "learned" through the transmission of "knowledge."

Mapping the Terrain

In order to teach, then, how educators can, indeed, "get there" (to psychoanalytic truth) "from here" (from "understanding"), the dissertation that follows invites educators to join it in the pursuit of its own truth, of its goal, its thesis that a minimal, even flawed, knowledge of Lacan can be put to work in various educational contexts to gain greater insights into some of education's most perplexing problems—"the stakes of student-teacher relations, ...the resistances of learning, ...the ways subjectivity is constituted through education"—and "the many different threads within the fabric of psychoanalysis itself" (Pitt et al., 1998, p. 3). Since the dissertation's thesis, its truth, to qualify as psychoanalytic truth, must be revealed in the pursuit of its goal and not its attainment, the chapters that follow teach the conditions that make it possible to

learn the dissertation's truth—the path that made it possible for me, the dissertation's author, to learn that its truth is, indeed, that which runs after the truth. In *demonstrating* how its own truth arises out of misrecognition, the dissertation aims to teach "that the paths of truth are in essence the paths of error" and that "error is the usual manifestation of the truth" (Lacan, 1991, p. 263).

The chapters that follow, then, recount my own efforts to attain psychoanalytic knowledge by reading Lacanian psychoanalysis with education, putting Lacan to work, over a period of some five years. Chapter Two, for instance, brings a very rudimentary understanding of psychoanalysis to bear on the question of why educators failed to mount a unified resistance to New Right restructuring policies. The chapter is a slightly amended version of a piece first published in 1996.[13] It is an elaboration of certain themes touched upon but undeveloped in my master's thesis. It proceeds from an understanding of specular relations that was inspired by Lacan's concept of the Imaginary but is not, in fact, Lacanian. Somewhat ironically, it now serves as testament to Lacan's claim that meaning is a function of misrecognition. The chapter illustrates that even a partial understanding of psychoanalysis can, as Baldino and Cabral (1998, p. 2) suggest, be *put to work* profitably:

> From the beginning we must discard the academic conception according to which it would be necessary to first acquire an overall

> view of Lacan's work in order to be able to speak about it. Indeed, what stand could support such a view? At the moment that we uttered the first statement, we would already be in the plane of enunciation, that is inside the domain of language, hence inside the reality that psychoanalysis takes as an object. Therefore we would be obliged to listen to what Lacan's theory has to say about what we would be trying to say about it. We are inside the reality that we would be trying to contemplate, or to apply from the "exterior." In order to circumvent this difficulty, we prefer to take a fragment of Lacan's work and invest it in the concrete analysis of a... situation.

Chapter Three engages more directly with the implications of psychoanalytic theory for pedagogic practice, addressing the psychoanalytic notion of the "decentred subject." This chapter is based on a conference paper that was reworked for publication in 1996.[14] The piece reflects my own struggle to "learn," to "understand," the terms and concepts of psychoanalysis. The chapter sprang from the realization that while allusions to the "decentred subject" were appearing with greater frequency in the educational literature, little, if anything, was being said about the term's meaning or genesis. This chapter poses answers to such questions as: What is the "decentred subject"? What distinguishes this postmodern subject of language from the modern subject of consciousness it seeks to displace? What are the implications of the decentred subject for modern pedagogies based on the transference of knowledge? The chapter draws on the work of Lacan and a number of his commentators to elucidate the term's

distinctive features, highlight its distinguishing characteristics, and investigate its revolutionary implications for the field of education. Conceived as the first year of my doctoral studies drew to a close, this chapter reveals my growing interest in the implication of psychoanalysis in education and my increased willingness to put psychoanalysis to work.

Chapter Four is a reworked version of a conference paper that employs psychoanalytic concepts to interrogate the identity crisis resulting from the disintegration of the teacher-education orthodoxy and to outline a potential course of action for concerned teacher educators.[15] The chapter describes how an ideal image of teacher education emerged early in the century, how that image was finally shattered by an alternative lobby of teacher educators in the 80s, and how progressively-minded educators can prevent the field from dissipating into a plethora of special interest groups engaged in various forms of identity politics. The chapter draws upon central concepts from the psychoanalytic tradition, and the work of several theorists working in that tradition, to explore this perplexing problem and to outline a course of action for progressive teacher educators. The chapter stands as a record of one of my first attempts to develop a psychoanalytic explanation for a specific sociocultural problem: why a new collective identity has not emerged to replace that of a disintegrating teacher education orthodoxy.

Chapters Five and Six resulted from an invitation to contribute to a text on the relation between desire and knowledge in Jacques Lacan's thought—an

investigation into desire's implication in learning.[16] Writing that piece afforded me an opportunity to take a closer look at some of the more contentious issues in Lacan's thought, issues such as the "transference relation," the "four discourses," the relation of the "Imaginary" to the "Symbolic" and the "Symbolic" to the "Real," as well as the "materialist" nature of Lacan's thought. Written most recently, these chapters illustrate how my quest to attain psychoanaltic knowledge, my pursuit of psychoanalytic truth, made it possible for me to learn that psychoanalytic truth cannot be attained, that "the truth... is that which runs after the truth" (Lacan, 1981, p. 188).

Dialectical Method

The chapters that comprise the dissertation, then, each of which was written at a different time and with a different objective in mind, are posited as distinct but intimately related "moments" in my own quest to "learn" Lacanian psychoanalysis, to "understand" it. The dissertation's method, then, is best described as *dialectical.* This dynamic process of inquiry, which was popularized by Hegel, but is often mistakenly described as a mechanical movement from thesis to antithesis to synthesis, is, as Richard Bernstein (1971, p. 20) makes clear, more properly an organic mode of immanent critique, wherein

> one "moment" of a dialectical process, when it is fully developed or understood gives rise to its own negation; it is not mechanically confronted by an antithesis. The process here is more like that of a

> tragedy where the "fall" of the tragic hero emerges from the dynamics of the development of his own character.... [Subsequently,] a serious struggle takes place between the two "moments." Out of this conflict and struggle, out of this negativity, emerges a "moment" which at once negates, affirms, and transcends the "moments" involved in the struggle.

The difference between dialectical and more traditional forms of inquiry, according to Roy Bhaskar (1983, p. 122), is that the former, "in contrast to 'reflective' (or analytical), thought grasps conceptual forms in their systematic interconnections, not just their determinate differences, and conceives each development as the product of a previous less developed phase, whose necessary truth of fulfillment it is." Consequently, in dialectical thought "there is always a tension, latent irony or incipient surprise between any form and what it is in the process of becoming." It is the process of progressive unfolding motivated by contradictions inherent to the research process itself, then, that dialectical modes of inquiry seek to represent. Naturally, the challenge inherent to any dialectical mode of inquiry is bringing the "process of becoming" to a close.

The Paths of Truth

Through the dialectical pursuit of its own truth, the dissertation takes up this challenge and brings the dialectic to a "close" by revealing truth to be that which is constituted in its very pursuit, that which can never be attained. The dissertation reveals "knowledge" to be an illusion, something the subject

constitutes after the fact, retroactively, as opposed to something that exists in the other, the subject presumed to know. Transference, the act of supposing knowledge exists in the other, although misleading, is identified as a *necessary* error, because truth, paradoxically, can only be elaborated when we assume another possesses it and we are *discovering* rather than *constituting* it. What the dissertation makes it possible for the reader to learn, then, is that truth (necessity) is a function of error (contingency), and that "truth grabs error by the scruff of the neck in the mistake" (Lacan, 1991, p. 265).

Truth versus Integrity

What I hope to have established thus far is (i) that Lacan grounds meaning in the subject, (ii) that meaning is, therefore, neither a function of what was nor of what is but of what *will have been*, (iii) that analytic learning is premised on *trust* rather than "understanding," and (iv) that *because* truth is grounded in the subject, *because* truth is that which is constituted in the pursuit of truth, the dissertation's truth, its aim, can only emerge in the pursuit of its goal. It is essential, therefore, that the dissertation's pursuit of truth be presented as accurately as is possible. If, for the sake of clarity, cogency, coherence, integrity, etc., the dissertation steered the reader down a less precarious path to its truth, it would be guilty of a performative contradiction—guilty of teaching a *method* or *technique* of attaining the truth instead of the conditions that make it possible for the learner to find her/his own way. What the dissertation teaches, then, is that

the conditions that *make* it possible to learn the truth can only be taught as *a* path that *made* it possible to learn the truth, not *the* path; those conditions, moreover, *must* be taught as a *way* of pursuing the truth, as a *way* of proceeding, not as a method or technique of attaining it—truth cannot, *by definition*, be attained. In sum, what the dissertation teaches is that its truth can *only* be learned by those who are willing to pursue it in the same manner that made it possible for the author to learn it. Any attempt to make the process of inquiry recounted herein more "presentable," then, would only do the reader a disservice. This, perhaps, explains why Lacan wished his own writing to effect "the kind of tightening up that I like in order to leave the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult" (Lacan, 1977, p. 146).

The Work of Reflection

As Cornelius Castoriadis (1998, p. 1) so astutely notes in the preface to his *The Imaginary Institution of Society*: "it should be merely a commonplace, recognized by everyone, that in the case of a work of reflection, removing the scaffolding and cleaning up the area around the building not only is of no benefit to the reader, but deprives [her/]him of something essential." He continues: "unlike the work of art, there is no finished edifice here, nor an edifice to be finished; just as much as, and even more than the results, what is important is the work of reflection and it is perhaps mostly this that an author can make us see, if [s/]he can make us see anything at all."

Although it is tempting, especially so in the case of a dissertation, to present "the result as a systematic and polished totality, which in truth it never is," or even "the construction process—as is often the case, pedagogically but erroneously, in so many philosophical works—in the form of a well-ordered and wholly mastered logical process," Castoriadis (1998, pp. 1–2) cautions that this only serves "to reinforce in the reader the disastrous illusion toward which [s/]he, like all of us, is already naturally inclined, that the edifice was constructed for [her/]him and that [s/]he has only, if [s/]he so desires, to move in and live there." It is all too easy to forget that constituting the truth, thinking, "is not building a cathedral or composing symphonies," and that "if the symphony exists, it is the reader who must create it in [her/]his own ears."

There are compelling pedagogical as well as theoretical reasons, then, why the chapters that follow must remain as they were originally composed. In light of Roland Barthes' (1974) distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" texts, the dissertation might well be classified as an example of the latter.[17] This is because, in Castoriadis's (1998, p. 1) words: "contrary to the rules of composition, the walls of the building are displayed one after the other as they were erected, surrounded by the remains of scaffolding, piles of sand and rocks, odds and ends of wooden supports and dirty trowels."[18]

Chapter One Notes

[1] I refer here to the penultimate chapter of Felman's (1987) *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture.* The chapter was first published as an article in Johnson (1982).

[2] Recent telling examples of this renewal are: Deborah Britzman's (1998) *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning*, and Sharon Todd's (1997) *Learning Desire: Perspectives on Pedagogy, Culture, and the Unsaid.* Other recent psychoanalytically-informed educational analyses include: Appel (1996, 1999); Bogdan et al (1997); Briton (1995, 1997a, 1997b); Britzman (1996); Craig (1994); Donald (1997); Doyle & Fuller (1990); Edgerton (1993); Harper (1996); jagodzinski (1996); Kelly (1997); Kincheloe & Pinar (1991); Pitt (1996, 1997); Rankin (1992); Robertson (1997a, 1997b); Taubman (1990, 1999).

[3] In the summer of 1992 I attended a conference at Penn State University. Another graduate student and I cheekily dropped in on Henry Giroux, who graciously spent an hour-and-a-half with us. During that conversation, Giroux mentioned that he had read Žižek's *Sublime* and recounted a first impression much like my own—this proved somewhat comforting and provided me with an incentive to re-engage with the text once my thesis was completed.

[4] See Briton (1996c).

[5] This pastiche from *Écrits* illustrates how difficult it is to cull references from Lacan's work: "Lacan's style makes generalization—even quotation—vexing" (Alcorn, 1988, p. 8). But as Miller (1988. p. 121) reminds us: it is no mistake that Lacan's style of writing "does not allow the Other to choose what of Lacan must be repeated."

[6] In the postscript to my master's thesis (Briton, 1996c, p. 122), I reflect, with the help of Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 6), on my failure to recognize "my *unconscious* belief that thoughts and discourse *about* practice can be translated into truths *of* practice, that the truths of the physical and social realms can be accessed through the mental realm." This "failure," I came to realize, had significantly impacted the study, leading me to conclude:

> Premised on the existence of a "mental space which is apparently, but only apparently, [I now realize] extra-ideological," the study takes the form of a "theoretical practice" that "creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other," of a theoretical practice that proceeds from "the quasi-logical presupposition of an identity between mental space (the space of philosophers and epistemologists) and real space." Consequently, it unwittingly subjugates the concrete, lived experience of the physical and social realms to the analytic thought and abstract discourse of the mental realm. For on this view, "no matter how relevant, the problem of knowledge and the 'theory of knowledge' have been abandoned in favour of a reductionist return to the absolute—or supposedly absolute—knowledge."

Since Lacan was clearly concerned to not subjugate being to thought, or thought to being for that matter, I re-cognized in his project a way of fulfilling my own. Lacan's schema of the four discourses attempts just such a feat, bringing together structural and embodied elements of existence—see Chapter Six below. Lacan posits a relation between lived experience and thought that challenges us to avoid not only "the hasty imaginarization with concrete characters and objects to cover up the places and to hide the structure," but also "the use of structural thinking in a compelling way, forgetting that knowledge..., truth...; subjectivity...; and *jouissance*... are places, of course, but *bodily engaged places.*" (Braunstein, 1988, p. 51, emphasis added).

[7] This process of learning, which Lacan codifies in his Four Discourses, is taken up in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

[8] See Briton (1996c), where I trace the West's misplaced faith in the empirical-analytic tradition to this decidedly modern notion of self.

[9] To speak of this "existing outside," Lacan draws upon a word coined by French translators of Heidegger:

> Lacan is borrowing a term, *ex-istence*, which was first introduced into French in translations of Heidegger's work (e.g., *Being and Time*), as a translation for the Greek εκστασις and the German *Ekstase*. The root meaning of the term in Greek is "standing outside of" or "standing apart from" something. In Greek, it was generally used for the removal or displacement of something, but it also came to be applied to states of mind that we would now call "ecstatic." (Thus, a derivative meaning of the word is "ecstasy.") Heidegger often played on the root meaning of the word, "standing outside" or "stepping outside oneself," but also on its close connection in Greek with the root of the word for "existence." *Lacan uses it to talk about an existence that stands apart, which insists as it were from the*

> *outside, something not included on the inside. Rather than being intimate, it is "extimate."* (Fink, 1998, p. 22, emphasis added to last sentence).

[10] See Samuels (1993, pp. 10–14) for a succinct account of Lacan's three logical stages: (i) the instant of the look, (ii) the time for understanding, and (iii) the moment to conclude.

[11] Fink (1995, p. 71), in fact, insists that "true understanding" is "a misnomer, in that understanding is precisely short-circuited, unnecessary, irrelevant to the process. What is really implied is that something changes, and that is the point of Lacanian analysis as well: something takes place at the border of the symbolic and real which has nothing to do with understanding, as it is commonly understood."

[12] Since this is one of the lessons the dissertation sets out to teach, I have chosen not to preface the chapters that follow with a prolegomena to Lacan's work. Those who find it impossible to bracket understanding and proceed on trust may wish to consult one of the many book-length introductions to Lacan before proceeding; for example, Bowie, 1991; Clément, 1983; Gallop, 1985; Grosz, 1990; Julien, 1994; Macey, Marini, 1992; 1988; Ragland–Sullivan, 1986; Sarup, 1992; Schneiderman, 1983—not to mention the many introductions to Lacan's thought composed by Žižek (1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1994).

[13] See Briton (1996b).

[14] The paper, which shared the Bergamo Conference's 1995 Aoki Award, was published in *JCT*: see Briton (1996a).

[15] See Briton (1995).

[16] See Briton (1998).

[17] Paul Cobley (1996, p. 7) offers a succinct summation of Barthes' distinction between "readerly" and "writerly": "here [in *S/Z*] he speaks in the opening pages of two kinds of texts, the *readerly* and the *writerly*, where the reader is respectively an idle *consumer* of the text or a diligent *producer* of it, almost rewriting what is presented."

[18] The reader who struggles for understanding will undoubtedly be disappointed by the absence of familiar, readerly devices—synopses that point him/her in the "right" direction, transitions that keep him/her "on track," and glosses that "bridge" gaps in the dissertation's development. But it should now be clear why, although comforting, such devices serve only to

domesticate thought, precluding the possibility of "moving beyond the 'what' of knowledge and beyond the disciplines that structure such knowledge within the academy" (Pitt et al., 1998, p. 3).This, of course, is not suggest that all the rules of logic and composition go out the window when it comes to composing a writerly text. This is why some modifications have been made to readings that follow, but only to clarify their original position and objectives, not to provide them with braces and supports that furnish the dissertation with a polished veneer of completeness.

Chapter Two

Marketspeak: The Rhetoric of Restructuring and its Implications for Higher Education

> Meanwhile, the relations of knowledge and the functions of education are transformed as models of knowledge based on linguistics and cybernetics move in to subvert the epistemological foundations of the humanities, and the university faces a crisis as it is no longer capable of transmitting the appropriate cultural capital to emergent technocratic and bureaucratic elites. The proliferation of commercial laboratories, privately-funded research bases, of data banks and information storage systems attached to multi-national companies and government agencies, amplifies this trend so that higher education can no longer be regarded—if it ever was—as the privileged site of research and the sole repository of "advanced" knowledge. (Hebdige, 1988, p. 166)

The Allure of the New Right

As the 1980s drew to a close, Alberta's "progressive" conservatives—haunted by the abysmal failure of costly interventionist strategies intended to diversify the region's natural-resource dependent economy and propel the province into the

global marketplace of the 21st Century—traded their long-held corporatist ideology for one of *laissez-faire* neoliberalism, divesting themselves of any vestige of traditional Tory social responsibility in the process. Their neoconservative response to the crisis of capital that ushered in the 90s typified that of New Right regimes around the world, regimes enamoured with the myth of free enterprise and the fiscal logic of the market. Their proposed solution: "free" the market of all social obligation, "liberate" individuals of their collective responsibility, subjugate social justice to "individual free will," sanction "open competition," "rationalize" the lifeworld,[1] and jettison all notions of equity in favor of an all-encompassing commitment to "efficiency."

This process of rationalization,[2] however, completely ignores the staggering social costs of colonizing the lifeworld—as those who experienced the dour regimes of Thatcher in the UK, Reagan in the US, and Douglas in NZ readily attest—and Albertans were soon to discover.[3] Yet the allure of New Right ideology has proven an irresistible to many, even those most deeply affected by neoconservative marketplace politics—workers in the cultural sphere. Why are educators and other cultural workers long committed to the European Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and freedom for *all*—as opposed to a privileged few—willing to tolerate this resurgence of reactionary, anti-Enlightenment sentiment, this emergent, narcissistic politics of selfishness and greed? Why do large numbers of school teachers and teacher educators find

themselves attracted to a regressive political ideology Jürgen Habermas (1985) dubs "neoconservative postmodernism"? What are the implications and consequences for a society whose educational practices proceed from the premises of, and according to, the myopic logic of the marketplace? This chapter proposes answers to these perplexing questions.

First, the "neoconservative postmodernism" of the New Right is identified as a politics of reaction that seeks to "sever the cultural from the social, then blame the practices of the one (modernism) for the ills of the other (modernization)" (Foster, 1985, p. xii). The ills of postmodernity are then traced to a transformation in capitalism itself, a transformation greatly facilitated by new production technologies that are displacing those of Fordist mass production (Harvey, 1989). This is followed by an examination of the New Right's language of rationalization—"marketspeak"—and its central role as a signifying practice that seeks to hasten the commodification of culture. Unprecedented advances in media technology are then explored, advances that have spawned image-based marketing strategies that are increasingly impervious to rational critique, and which serve to not only accelerate the pace of commodification but also prompt the real subsumption of culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion of why educators should retain their commitment to educational aims premised on the emancipatory ideals of the Enlightenment.

The Politics of Reaction

Jürgen Habermas (1985, p. 6), perhaps modernity's most fervent supporter, notes how advocates of the New Right such as Daniel Bell, "the most brilliant of the American neoconservatives," identify the afflictions of the developed North as symptoms of a cultural dysfunction: modernism. Bell, Habermas notes, would have us believe that "the life-world is infected by modernism," by "the principle of unlimited self-realization, the demand for authentic self-experiences and the subjectivism of a hyperstimulated sensitivity." Contending that hedonistic impulses such as these are "incompatible with the moral basis of a purposive, rational conduct of life," Bell equates the disappearance of the Protestant ethic with the emergence of modernism, with the advent of a culture that "in its modern form stirs up hatred against the conventions and virtues of everyday life"—a life, according to Habermas, long "rationalized under the pressures of economic and administrative imperatives." The good news, however, according to Bell and other of his ilk, is that modernism's avant-garde has exhausted its options: "modernism is dominant but dead." Given modernism's decline, advocates of the New Right view the task of politics to be a restorative one—the reestablishment of social mores that will, on the one hand, "limit libertinism" and "reestablish the ethics of discipline and work"; and, on the other, "put a brake on the leveling caused by the social welfare

state" and restore to "the virtues of individual competition for achievement" their governing role.

Since, as Habermas (1985, p. 7) notes, "one can certainly not conjure up by magic the compelling beliefs which command authority," Bell and his followers prescribe a New Right panacea for modernity's ills: "religious faith tied to a faith in tradition." This oftentimes bitter remedy—somewhat sweetened by an ingenuous oppositional logic that traces the antecedents of the West's precarious "postmodern condition" (Lyotard, 1989) to a series of adversarial relations[4]—is enthusiastically dispensed "to provide individuals with clearly defined identities and existential security." These prophets of the new world order market their postmodern nostrum with an evangelical zeal and fervor that is deceptively appealing, illicitly shifting "onto cultural modernism the uncomfortable burdens of a more or less successful capitalist modernization of the economy and society" (Habermas, 1985, p. 7).

A Postmodernism of Resistance

There are, however, alternative analyses of the postmodern condition. Foster (1985, pp. xi–xii), for instance, suggests that "in cultural politics today, a *basic opposition* exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of *resistance* and a postmodernism of *reaction*" (emphasis added).[5] Of the two, the latter "is far

better known," and "is singular in its repudiation of modernism"—a repudiation "voiced most shrilly perhaps by neoconservatives but echoed everywhere." And even though Foster rejects Habermas's claim that postmodernism *per se* is necessarily conservative, he agrees that the New Right's postmodernism of reaction is unquestionably "strategic," an attack upon modernism intended to

> sever the cultural from the social, then blame the practices of the one (modernism) for the ills of the other (modernization). With cause and effect thus confounded, "adversary" culture is denounced even as the economic and political status quo is affirmed—indeed, a new "affirmative" culture is proposed.... Modernism is thus reduced to a cultural style (e.g., "formalism" or the International style) and condemned, or excised entirely as a cultural mistake, pre- and postmodern elements are then elided, and the humanist tradition is preserved.

Neoconservative "progressivism," then, proves to be little more than a thinly veiled argument for "a resurrection of lost traditions set against modernism, a master plan imposed on a heterogeneous present."

In blurring the distinction "between the welcomed process of societal modernization on the one hand, and the lamented cultural development on the other," Habermas (1985, pp. 7-8) contends that reactionary postmodernists seek to absolve the former by censuring the latter, ignoring how, "under the pressures

of the dynamics of economic growth and the organizational accomplishments of the state," societal modernization—the "subordination of the life-world's under the system's imperatives"—has penetrated "deeper and deeper into previous forms of human existence" and denuded "the communicative infrastructure of everyday life." Harvey's (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity* offers further evidence in support of this claim.

The Postmodern Condition

According to Harvey (1989, p. 328), with the advent of postmodernity our "experience of time and space has changed, the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgements has collapsed, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern." Hence: "images dominate narratives, ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics," and "explanations have shifted from the realm of material and political-economic groundings towards a consideration of autonomous cultural and political practices." Harvey's historical analysis of contemporary society suggests, however, that "shifts of this sort are by no means new," and that our most recent experience of such a shift—postmodernity—remains perfectly amenable to modern analytic frameworks, in particular, "historical materialist enquiry"; that is, "capable of theorization by way of the meta-narrative of capitalist development that Marx proposed."

Harvey's (1989) explanation of the postmodern condition proceeds as follows: contradictions and crises inherent to capitalism—especially tendencies toward overaccumulation—demand periodic restructurings of the capital accumulation process. Hence capitalism's shift from highly regimented Fordist production models to post-Fordist regimes of flexible accumulation.[6] Although some celebrate this shift (Halal, 1986) while others lament it (Lash & Urry, 1987), all agree on one point: "something significant has changed in the way capitalism has been working since about 1970" (Harvey, 1989, p. 173). Some of the changes that have reinvigorated capitalism's waning dynamism are: increasingly flexible employment practices, an international division of labour, greater geographical mobility, concerted deindustrialization of the North, an increasingly powerful and autonomous world financial system, and unprecedented advances in media technology. As in the past, however, the cost of capitalist restructuring in the face of declining profit is an ever accelerating pace of life and the further erosion of spatial barriers, the effects of which are experienced as "time-space-compression," an experience of which Marx (1983, p. 207) offered a telling account in 1848:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbances of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones

become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air.

That economic restructuring and not the "degenerate" cultural practices of modernism is responsible for the symptoms of malaise that neoconservatives decry is clear from Harvey's (1989) insightful analysis, a conclusion many others share: Jameson (1992, 1989, 1984); Lasch (1990); Lash & Urry (1987); and Tagg (1992), to name but a few.[7] Such analyses suggest capitalism, having entered a new phase of production—variously described as "disorganized" (Lash & Urry, 1987); "post-Fordist (Harvey, 1989); "late capitalist" (Jameson, 1992); or "post-industrial" (Bell, 1973)—has resculpted modern experience, producing a *post*modern ethos conducive to a new range of cultural expressions: *post*modernism—"the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1992). Revolutionary technological advances have served to accelerate the collapse of time and space and precipitate the proliferation of the image, producing effects that have, in turn, fostered the emergence of new production techniques and marketing strategies (Harvey, 1989; Poster, 1990).

The result, according to Harvey (1989): a plethora of new, "exciting, stressful, and sometimes deeply troubling" experiences that ignite a seemingly endless array of "social, cultural, and political responses" (p. 240). Stemming from "the collapse of time horizons and the preoccupation with instantaneity," such experiences are, in turn, attributable to "the contemporary emphasis in cultural production on events, spectacles, happenings, and media images.

Cultural producers have learned to explore and use new technologies, the media, and ultimately multi-media possibilities." (p. 59). This recalcitrant fascination with the spectacular, spontaneous, and ephemeral is the *mise-en-scène* of New Right politics, of such ideologically-driven initiatives as "voodoo economics," a dubious yet beguiling economic "policy that indeed worked wonders with mirrors even if it brought the United States several steps closer to international bankruptcy and fiscal ruin" (p. 329). Such spectacular economic misadventures have come to typify the simplistic yet mesmerizing politics of the neoconservatives. Whereas previous generations of politicians *had to forge* an ideology—a representation of the truth supported by rational justifications—in order to legitimate a capitalist vision of the future, the advent of postmodernity has rendered such ratiocinations superfluous, freeing politicians to manipulate public sentiment with hollow phrases and enticing images.[8]

Language and the New World Order

Putting a new gloss on the social Darwinism of their forbears, neoconservatives reiterate the chant that "societies must 'adapt' to their new environments or suffer the consequences" (Leiss, 1989, p. 283). Such thinly veiled "technocratic thinking," according to Leiss, continues to favor "the displacement of questions about value choices, regarded ultimately as ideological, by a simple overriding determinant for decision making that is 'objective' and quantitative in nature: efficiency in the allocation of resources." Convinced that technological

innovation will *inevitably* transform the life world, advocates of the New Right argue that public policy should be directed not toward tempering capitalism's transformation but exacting a greater profit from it. This, Leiss argues, "signals the advent of a decisive new phase in technocratic thinking," wherein New Right education policies assign educators the role of facilitators to change. Neoconservatives envisage two reasons for this. First, the rate of technological innovation and the intensity of international competition has increased to such a degree that societies, if they are to survive, "must provide some 'grease' to insure a faster response time." Second, a number of special interest groups have become increasingly adept at resisting innovations that threaten their income or status. Consequently, while convinced that market forces will *inevitably* triumph over such impediments, proponents of the New Right hasten to foreclose the possibility of this becoming a merely "Pyrrhic victory, for if serious delays occur the economic advantages of early entry will have been lost, and society will drift further and further away from the 'action' as each successive wave of innovation rolls in."[9]

To assist in this task, advocates of the New Right have appropriated from the recent cultural past a register of terms, a lexicon of signifiers, that resonate with traces of sociohistorical meaning for those whose compliance they seek to manufacture. By severing the culturally mediated tie between concept and word—between signified and signifier—vacuous signifiers resonating with traces

of residual meaning are used to win the support of those who might otherwise impede "progress." In this manner, educators and other cultural workers were duped into identifying with the sociohistorical meanings that reverberate in such signifiers as—"excellence," "accountability," "quality," liberty," "equality"—only to discover, often after it was too late to mount any real opposition, that the culturally shared meanings these signifiers once referred to had been replaced with purely instrumental concepts designed to meet the imperatives of the market.[10]

Resuturing Old and New

As Leiss (1989, p. 284) points out, it matters little to neoconservatives that their initiatives rely on such acts of *legerdemain*, for they value the effect of their initiatives, not their veracity. Such cynical reasoning, according to Žižek (1992, p. 30), invokes "not a direct position of immorality, it is more like morality itself put in the service of immorality"—would be-senator, Oliver North's appeal to personal honor to shield his fellow drug-running conspirators from prosecution springs to mind here. Engaged in a struggle to disrupt the postwar ideology that sanctions the liberal and social democratic consensus, the New Right has not hesitated to sever long-valued signifiers from their culturally resonant signifieds and resuture them to denuded economic meanings. "Freedom" becomes merely an absence of economic constraint, "equality" an opportunity to compete, "liberty" the abrogation of social responsibility. "Efficiency," the master signifier

of the New Right, is elevated from a means to enhance productivity—itself a means to improve the general welfare—to an end-in-itself. Although neoconservative linguistic practices lend credence to Heidegger's claim that language is the house of Being, and Lacan's that the relation of signifier to signified is arbitrary, they ignore the far-reaching political implications of such claims. The result, according to Donald Schon, is that in the neoconservative order any possibility of critique evaporates: "technological innovation belongs to us less than we belong to it. It has demands and effects of its own on the nature and structure of corporations, industry, government-industry relations and the values and norms that make up our idea of ourselves and of progress" (Schon, cited in Leiss, 1989, p. 287).

Only in light of such an inexorable assault on the lifeworld, of such an unremitting commodification of culture, can sense even begin to be made of the emergence of a culture conducive to "the election of an ex-movie actor... to one of the most powerful positions in the world"; to a culture susceptible to this "carefully mounted, crafted, and orchestrated" event—a spectacle contrived "with all the artifice that contemporary image production could command"; to a culture receptive to "the possibilities of a mediatized politics shaped by images alone." Only in reference to an increasingly impoverished culture can one begin to explain the re-election of that same individual when "the majority of the US electorate... disagreed fundamentally with him on almost all major issues of

social, political, and even foreign policy," not to mention his ability "to leave office riding so high on the wave of public affection, even though more than a dozen senior members of his administration had either been accused of or been found guilty of serious infringement of legal procedures and blatant disregard for ethical principles" (Harvey, 1989, pp. 329-330). For those of us engaged in the preparation of teachers, the emergence of this postmodern ethos is of significant import: it signals a stage of capitalism's development that demands a fundamentally different role of educators. As Giroux (1992, p. 39) notes: "we have entered an age that is marked by a crisis of power, patriarchy, authority, identity, and ethics. This new age has been described, for better or worse, by many theorists in a variety of disciplines as the age of postmodernism." It is to a closer examination of the implications of "the age of postmodernism" for education that I now turn.

The Commodification of Culture[11]

For educators, who serve as keepers and purveyors of culture, one of the most significant effects of "the age of postmodernism" is the commodification of culture. The *production* of culture in our increasingly postmodern age has become so lucrative that it has become the central preoccupation of many transnational corporations (TNCs). Cultural artifacts, such as works of art, information and knowledge, health and fitness, entertainment and leisure, and travel are now being exchanged in the marketplace to an unprecedented degree.[12]

TNCs now generate enormous profits from their control of cultural institutions; for example, satellite and cable broadcast networks, print media groups, film studios, and publishing houses.[13] Culture is now commodified to such a degree that many Rock stars, entertainers, and athletes have developed corporate identities that rival or surpass their cultural ones.[14]

The commodification of culture is not, however, restricted to the spheres of art and entertainment: the once sacrosanct realms of knowledge and education are also being colonized by the impersonal forces of the marketplace. Knowledge, once an aggregation of interpretation, narratives, and explanations carried within culturally transmitted meaning frames, is being stripped of the ambiguities and complexities that constitute its richness, in an effort to make it more amenable to exchange on the open market. And while this process may well create a greater demand for some education programs, such market-driven programming is unlikely to retain the culture-building focus of traditional forms of education, New Right rhetoric notwithstanding.[15]

Culture, according to Raymond Williams (1966, pp. 41–48), is understood best as a "*structure of feeling*," since it is something "as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity." As a result, it is "a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities, precisely because it is on it that communication depends." If we agree with Williams that culture is that "which expresses certain meaning and

values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior," it is not difficult to see why education is essentially a cultural practice. Premised on the ideals of enlightenment and reason, traditional forms of education seek to substantiate what they prescribe, "to make sense," but also to acknowledge that just as reasons can be offered in favor of a particular position, so too can reasons be offered against. Education, then, can assist members of a culture to develop and employ rational arguments against oppressive cultural norms. Education has not always played such a pivotal cultural role in Western societies, however. Unlike today's industrialized societies, premodern societies had little need of education, since social and cultural practices fully prepared the young to assume their assigned role in an abiding socioeconomic hierarchy.

The Subsumption of Culture

In premodern societies, tradition, convention, and authority provided a stable framework for the reproduction of goods, services, and culture. The lived experiences of such cultures underwent a dramatic restructuring, however, with the advent of modernity, when "what is thought of as modern society took shape in the 17th century in the northwest corner of the European system of societies, in Great Britain, Holland, and France" (Parsons & Platt, 1973, p. 1). Of the dramatic restructuring of experience that ensued, Berman (1982, p. 15), has this to say:

> There is a mode of vital experience—experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils—that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience "modernity." To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air."

For Foucault (1984, p. 41), "the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is." But it is only after "a world-historical process of crystallization that transpires over the course of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries," that is, "the 'early modern period'," that modernity achieves this, its "definitive form" (Wolin, 1985, p. 9). "The modern age," Barrett (1979) declares, "is the flowering of enlightenment out of the narrow other-worldliness of the Middle ages," reminding us that "three great events had combined to usher in this period—the

Renaissance, the Reformation, and the development of science" (pp. 196-197). It was the Renaissance and Reformation, Habermas (1987, p. 286) contends, that unleashed "the cognitive potentials contained in the traditions of Christianity and of ancient Rome and Greece," potentials "previously worked up only by cultural elites in monastic orders and universities." The Reformation, for instance, "abolished the barriers between clergy, religious orders, and laity and set the impulses of religious ethics of conviction free to shape profane realms of action"; while "the humanism of the Renaissance made the Roman-Greek heritage accessible to the science, jurisprudence, and art that were emancipating from the church."

The Project of Modernity

The Project of Modernity, Wolin (1985, p. 10) notes, prompted an "irrevocable transition," a transition from all premodern forms of association—"based on *cosmological* world-views..., characterized by the predominance of a single, monolithic value-system which pervades and structures its various partial subsystems"—to a modern form of association—based on "*de-centred* or *differentiated* world-views," characterized by the emergence of "individually functioning 'value-spheres'" that are "allowed to pursue their own inherent 'inner logics'." This resulted in the emergence of natural philosophy, political philosophy, and aesthetics as *autonomous* value-spheres, realms of endeavour that "no longer need a priori invoke the authority

of an antecedent and determinative cosmological stand point to legitimate themselves." While this project demanded great intellectual effort, Enlightenment thinkers devoted to the task of advancing civilization by liberating Europe's populace from oppressive traditions and beliefs willingly accepted the challenge to develop *sciences*—exacting and systematized accounts—of the emergent realms of nature, morality, and art. For those involved in this project,

> the scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want, and the arbitrariness of natural calamity. The development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition, release from the arbitrary use of power as well as from the dark side of our own human natures. Only through such a project could the universal, eternal, and the immutable qualities of all humanity be revealed. (Harvey, 1989, p. 12)

It is Habermas, however, perhaps modernity's most stalwart defender, who offers the most comprehensive analysis of the Project of Modernity.

According to Habermas (1987), social action in premodern societies is governed by cultural norms, but with the advent of modernity certain spheres of social action, particularly those involving the production of wealth and the distribution of power, free themselves from the larger cultural context and take the shape of two interrelated yet "uncoupled" social realms: the *Lifeworld*, a

realm where action is coordinated through cultural and communicative means; and the *System*, a realm where action is coordinated through a means-ends rationality to better facilitate the accumulation of wealth and power. Habermas's distinction, Brand (1990, p. 38) suggests, is "between two forms of integration of society: *social integration*, which takes place via the action orientations of participant agents, and *system integration*, which is a matter of the functional intertwining of action consequences." Neither realm, however, can exist independently of the other, for "there is no case for either looking exclusively at the former, as action theorists are inclined to do, or the latter, which systems theorists have a tendency to do. "Society," Brand continues, "should be conceived of as both System *and* Lifeworld." While the Lifeworld relies on the productive capacities and the administrative accomplishments of the System to provide for its material and organizational needs, the System depends on the Lifeworld to provide labour power, markets, revenue, and continued support, none of which exist in the abstract, being integrated elements of the "structure of feeling" that comprises the Lifeworld. To ensure its continued existence, the System must convince the Lifeworld of the legitimacy of its requirements; it does this by offering justifications that "make sense"—rational arguments—to the Lifeworld's members.

Building on Hegemony

That the capitalist system does not employ abstract labour power but sentient beings capable of shaping their own destiny was first noted by Marx, who also realized that labour power, an essential constituent of every human being, was being abstracted in the capitalist labour process and transformed into a commodity to be sold on the open market.[16] To reveal the exploitative nature of the obscured relations that lie at the heart of this process of commodification became Marx's most pressing concern. For this reason, Marx paid little heed to the linkage between System and Lifeworld, all but ignoring the far-reaching implications of the Lifeworld being colonized by a System seeking to ensure its unhindered development.[17] A much needed elaboration of Marx's analysis of capitalism's relation to culture did not take shape until Gramsci, struck by the considerable resources the bourgeoisie were willing to expend in order to win popular support for their policies—to manufacture hegemony—focussed more closely on the relation of culture to capitalism. Gramsci recognized that while the cultural realm provided the arena in which the bourgeoisie won support for their exploitation of the proletariat, it was also the site on which worker resistance to oppression could be staged. Gramsci developed a firm belief that bourgeois hegemony could be contested and overturned in the cultural realm (Gramsci, 1989).

Building on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Sut Jhally (1989) offers a two-stage theory of capitalism's subsumption of culture. Jhally contends that during its "industrial" heyday, the capitalist System, while steadily exploiting and undermining the Lifeworld from which it sprang, maintained support for its "progressive" vision by diverting capital from material production into cultural reproduction. Unable to explain glaring inequities in the distribution of goods during the late 1940s and 50s, proponents of capitalism grudgingly accommodated the demands of an increasingly disgruntled Lifeworld through a series of concessions—the most notable being the welfare state—in an effort to add luster to capitalism's rapidly tarnishing image. While already formally subsumed by the System at this point, the cultural realm retained a semblance of autonomy, lending credence to the System's claim that it continued to serve the interests of the Lifeworld. Jhally distinguishes this "formal" stage of subsumption from the stage that immediately follows: the "real" subsumption of culture.[18] It is the real subsumption of culture that marks the advent of postmodernity and which is of particular import to educators.

With the advent of postmodernity in the late 60s and early 70s, the capitalist system's reliance on ideology began to diminish. The modern, rational age, characterized by its "differentiated," autonomous "realms of discourse," gave way to a postmodern, arational age, characterized by a "dedifferentiated," heteronomous "regime of signification" (Lyotard, 1989, 1988; Lash, 1990). New

media technologies prompted a proliferation of images that soon far outstripped the known number of objects, images that referred not to things but to other images, in a seemingly endless regress, sensory stimulants that lacked material equivalents, libidinal triggers that fired *without* reason. In such a libidinal economy, rational justifications become superfluous, discourse redundant: the image supersedes the word. This leads postmodernists such as Vattimo (1990) to equate the end of modernity with the end of ideology.

Buying to Fill the Cultural Void

Divested of its need to provide rational justifications for its actions, the postmodern capitalist system simply taps into the libido of "consumers"—the notion of "citizen" having long since dropped from currency—triggering desires to consume that require no rational foundation. Postmodernity is thus experienced by many as "a shopping mall overflowing with goods whose major use is the joy of purchasing them; an existence that feels like a life-long confinement to the shopping mall" (Bauman, 1992, p. vii). Postmodernity has produced what Tomlinson (1991) describes as a cultural void at the core of contemporary society: "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... cannot be filled with stories of growth and development" (pp. 63-64). As a result, according to Howard (1977, p. 4):

> The typical emotion is anxiety in the face of a seemingly self-regulating System; things and people threaten my identity and stand against me as Other; I feel empty, and try to fill out my person and give it permanence by buying and acquiring commodities. I become the centre of my universe, a world of things functioning according to their own laws which I can at best understand and use but never fundamentally alter. I become an object to myself, calculating how best I can "spend" my scarce time, preserve myself and control the menace so as to acquire that empty calm called happiness.

The prolific production of meaningless cultural commodities that follows as the System accelerates production in an effort to fill this void, has been greatly facilitated by the development of powerful technologies of representation. These technologies have proven so effective that the images now employed to market cultural commodities are so alluring that the forms of social reality tend to pale in comparison. The transient romances of the "Soaps" or the episodic renditions of the O.J. Simpson trial, for example, are of more importance to many viewers than their own lived experiences, and high-tech renditions of actual events—CNN's spectacular coverage of the Gulf War, for instance—become for the many who vicariously "live" through such programming the "real" thing. Such developments led Guy Debord (1990, pp. 27-28) to conclude:

> At the technological level, when images chosen and constructed by *someone else* have everywhere become the individual's principal connection to the world [s/]he formerly observed for [her/]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.

World as Simulacra

The power of the contemporary media is such that Jean Baudrillard, the *enfant terrible* of social theory, argues that reality is a thing of the past and that the world we experience is merely a melange of fleeting images or simulacra. Such contentions lend support to Debord's (1990, p. 19) claim that "once one controls the mechanism which operates the only form of social verification to be fully and universally recognized, one can say what one likes." The media, Debord warns,

> proves its arguments simply by going round in circles: by coming back to the start, by repetition, by constant reaffirming in the only space left where anything can be publicly affirmed, and believed, precisely because that is the only thing to which everyone is witness.... There is no place left where people can discuss the realities which concern them, because they can never lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse and of the various forces organized to relay it. Nothing remains of the

> relatively independent judgement of those who once made up the world of learning; of those, for example, who used to base their self-respect on their ability to verify, to come close to an impartial history of facts, or at least to believe that such a history deserved to be known.

The New Right have proven to be masters of the image in this new age of media politics. Squiers (1990, p. 121) notes how "during the eight years of Ronald Reagan's presidency, the term 'photo opportunity' became a household word," and how "evening talk show hosts and television newscasters made jokes and sly remarks about 'photo ops'." These contrived sessions were used, Harvey (1989, p. 330) contends, to promote what a "long-time editor of *Nation*, described as 'the friendly face of fascism'." Reagan, the icon of New right politics, or "the 'teflon president,' as he came to be known..., could make mistake after mistake," Harvey reminds us, recollecting how Reagan's "image could be deployed unfailingly and instantaneously, to demolish any narrative of criticism that anyone cared to construct." Squiers (p. 123) also notes how

> after an initial bout of skepticism—in an article on Reagan's first hundred days, *The New York Times Magazine* slightly characterized him as a "one-time baseball announcer, B-movie actor and television pitchman"—the news media embarked on a long-term reportage that was mostly uncritical of the true substance of the Reagan administration policies while at the same time they poked good-natured fun at the fumble and foibles of the

media-genic head of state. In return, this White House courted, coddled, and spoon-fed the press as no administration had before.

Education and Postmodernity

Given the New Right's astounding success at manipulating public sentiment, the question of whether the Lifeworld will be able to withstand capitalism's onslaught assumes a new urgency.[19] Those who ascribe to the end of ideology thesis argue that the Lifeworld's collapse is imminent. I tend to agree with Terry Eagleton (1991), however, that this prognosis is a little premature.[20] I want to suggest, however, that such a meaningless existence remains as a potentially grim possibility if the further commodification of culture is not halted.

The field of education is being significantly impacted by the commodification of culture. Some pedagogical practices—those premised on a transmission model of knowledge, for instance—are proving extremely amenable to commodification. The entrepreneurially inclined are discovering that large profits can be secured by marketing readily consumable education commodities. Short cycle courses; self-directed learning packages; distance education; and competency-based, modularized learning systems all serve to accelerate the pace of production and consumption to maximize profits.[21] The danger, however, is that as education programs become more and more commodified, they become less and less cultural practices: they cease to draw upon the history and traditions

that invest life with meaning to foster learning. As they become more deeply implicated in postmodernity's libidinal economy, they are compelled to compete with the many other emergent "culture industries" for their market share. Such industries, rather than expend time and resources convincing consumers of their product's worth, focus on manufacturing markets through the manipulation of desire. To compete on this nonrational level, education practices will have to withdraw from the cultural sphere and abandon the critical ground from which the *worth* of libidinally-driven marketing strategies can be called into question.

The Challenge to Educators

The commodification of knowledge and learning presents a sobering challenge to educators, especially those who wish to continue in the liberal-humanist tradition of their predecessors. As fleeting, media-generated images proliferate and desire becomes increasingly the sole motive for consumption, there will be fewer and fewer opportunities, and less and less need, to appeal to a logic other than that of the market. If educators fail to resist the market-driven restructuring policies of the New Right, students will be deprived of the opportunity to formulate critiques of the commodification process that threatens their very culture. It is imperative, then, that educators begin to view education as a cultural practice and draw upon its critical potential before the very possibility of doing so is lost in a swirl of multi-media images.

Chapter Two Notes

[1] Ingram (1987, p. 116) defines the notion of Lifeworld introduced by Schütz, developed by Berger and Luckmann, and refined by Jürgen Habermas as: "the unthematized horizon of meanings that comprise the background against which particular items are thrown into relief...; a preexisting stock of knowledge that has been handed down in culture and language." The term now appears in various forms: e.g., Life-world, life-world, lifeworld, etc.

[2] In the process of rationalization, "world views implicit in the Lifeworld are made more and more explicit. They differentiate and get 'split-up' and embodied in various realms of knowledge and institutions...; the differentiation of the Lifeworld starts to impose such heavy demands on the interpretive capacities of actors that whole areas of action, mainly in the field of economics and government administration, 'drop out of language' as it were" (Brand, 1990, pp. 37-38).

[3] In a recent lead article of *The New York Time Magazine*, Andrew Sullivan (1999, pp. 40–41) writes of Thatcher's transformation of the UK:

> The results of her reign of willful uplift are now familiar. Britain, unlike her European partners, was turned from a social democracy into a market economy just in time for the gale of globalization. Union power was decimated; Government-owned businesses were privatized in one of the largest shifts in property since the Reformation; corporate and personal income taxes were simplified and cut; exchange controls were lifted; unemployment was allowed temporarily to soar; whole industries, like coal and steel, were allowed to wither and die before re-emerging as efficient private enterprises; the public health and education services were subjected to financial scrutiny they had previously avoided.
> ... [Thatcher] promoted the market economy as not simply the only means of economic growth but also as the very fabric of the country she ruled. "There is no such thing as society," she once declared.

[4] Such an oppositional logic identifies a "connection between modernism and nihilism..., between government regulation and totalitarianism, between criticism of arms expenditures and subservience to communism, between Women's liberation or homosexual rights and the destruction of the family..., between the Left generally and terrorism, anti-Semitism, and fascism" (Steinfels, cited in Habermas, 1985, p. 7).

[5] Although Foster is not the only commentator to divide postmodernism into two schools—cf. Rosenau (1992); Agger, (1990); Gitlin, (1989); Graff, (1979)—his categories of "resistance" and "reaction" capture important differences between the two strains of postmodernism that the categorizations of other commentators tend to muddy. Rosenau, for instance, refers to "skeptical" and "affirmative" postmodernism, assigning Continental postmodernisms to the former category, only to dismiss them out-of-hand as "the dark side of post-modernism, the post-modernism of despair" (p. 15). In fact, many of these postmodernisms are postmodernisms of hope, rather than despair, postmodernisms that struggle to establish an ethical, rather than an instrumental, base for action. While Foster views "postmodernisms of reaction" with suspicion, Rosenau who includes them in her category of "affirmative post-modernisms," views them favorably, impressed by their efforts to "retain the tradition of narrative, conventional history, subject, representation and humanism" (p. 16). This is not only to overlook the oppressive nature of the traditions that "affirmative" postmodernisms support, but also to fail to recognize that what Continental postmodernisms reject when they speak of "the demise of the subject, the end of the author, the impossibility of truth, and the abrogation of the Order of Representation" (p. 15) is not the principles that underlie such institutions but the inherently oppressive, present-day, popular manifestations of them.

[6] Harvey (1989, p. 173) cautions that this is "a historical transition, still far from complete and in any case, like Fordism, bound to be partial in certain important respects."

[7] See Graham (1992) and Deutsche (1991) for insightful critiques of such analyses of contemporary culture, analyses they claim depend on holistic representations of an incontestable capitalist totality.

[8] Although I agree with Bill Pinar's observation that politicians manipulated public sentiment long before the advent of postmodernity, and that it is naive to believe it was ever otherwise, my point is that such manipulations always proceeded under the *guise* of some rational, greater good—it is the absence of any appeal to some rational, greater good (no matter how insincere) that differentiates modern from postmodern politics.

[9] For instance, following the privatization strategy embraced and popularized by New Zealand's Roger Douglas, Roy Bricker, the chief executive of Alberta's Gaming and Liquor Commission, informed his counterparts in British Columbia that

> Alberta pulled off privatization [of government liquor stores] successfully by doing it without public discussion...; he warned that once public debate starts there will be so many conflicting stances that inertia will set in.... Gradual closures would be a painful death, he said. Alberta shut all its government stores in less than half a year after the announcement of privatization. 'You can only be called a Jackass so much in five months,' he added" (Thorne, 1997).

This strategy also manifested itself in the populist jargon of Alberta's Premier, Ralph Klein, as a refusal "to blink" in the face of public criticism.

[10] The relation between signifier and signified, as delineated by Ferdinand de Saussure and refined by Jacques Lacan, is taken up in much greater detail in the following chapter.

[11] An earlier version of this argument appears in Briton & Plumb (1993) and is further investigated in Briton (1996c).

[12] Even the quintessential cultural event, the Olympic Games, is not immune to the forces of commodification. Over the last twenty years, the Games have become increasingly commercialized—designer labels and corporate logos bedeck competitors and officials alike. Broadcasters buy exclusive broadcast rights, credit card companies buy exclusive credit rights, soft drinks manufacturers buy exclusive beverage rights. Should we be shocked, or even surprised, that venues competing to host the Games seek to buy the votes of members of the International Olympic Committee in their quest for the lucrative spoils of the Games? Once the logic of the market moves in, that of morality moves out.

[13] Cf. Douglas Kellner's (1990) *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*; Sut Jhally's (1989) *The Political Economy of Culture* (1989); and Michael Apple's (1986) *Teachers and Texts.*

[14] Consider, for instance, the multi-million dollar contracts of Rock starts such as Madonna, TV personalities such as Bill Cosby, or athletes such as Wayne Gretzky and Michael Jordan.

[15] Although somewhat oversimplified, the distinction between market-driven and culture-building programming can be grasped in the following terms: culture-building programming introduces students to previous and existing forms of knowledge and provides opportunities to consider yet to be realized forms; market-driven programming, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on drilling students in existing forms of knowledge. Marketers of "Hooked on Phonics" and "The Phonics Game," for example, promote their products strictly in terms of

improved performance on standardized reading tests, guaranteeing improved scores, as do the marketers of "Sylvan Learning Systems" and the aptly named "Score! Educational Centers." Because advocates of New Right educational policies are determined to implement standardized testing, more and more school districts are being forced to measure learning in such instrumental terms. Increasingly concerned about their child's performance on standardized tests, parents feel compelled to purchase market-driven programming. A recent *Newsweek* article, "The Tutor Age," declares: "It's an exploding market: millions of families are worried about the quality of their local schools. And a new breed of tutors is offering its services—at home, in schools, in shopping malls across the country" (Adler, 1998, p. 46). The "measure" of quality, of course, is performance on standardized tests. But later, in the same magazine feature, Springen & Peyser (1998, p. 54) note that "teachers and parents say that the increasing importance of AP exams—along with early admission programs and expensive SAT tutoring—has turned preparing for college into a four-year nightmare."

[16] See *Capital, Vol. 1* (Marx, 1976).

[17] Marx's acknowledgement that ideology is employed by capitalism to further mystify its exploitative nature attests to his recognition of the relationship between the System and the Lifeworld in modernity. See, for example, *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1947).

[18] According to Jhally (1989), "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). In this situation, the System diverts capital into cultural reproduction to foster a social clime conducive to capitalist enterprise. With Gramsci (1989), Jhally contends that as long as capitalism resorts to the manipulation of culture to ensure its perpetuation, it risks being challenged. Alternative cultural practices can create interpretations, norms, roles, or institutions—counter hegemonies—to oppose capitalism's representation of the truth. The history of capitalist modernity has, in fact, been one in which anti-capitalist forces have occasionally mustered powerful campaigns to contest capitalist hegemony. The "real" subsumption of culture, however, a process facilitated by the appearance of new media technologies and resulting marketing strategies, "refers to a situation where the media [and other cultural institutions] 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 a greater return. Culture is produced first and foremost as a

commodity rather than as ideology" (p. 73). The "real" subsumption of culture begins, then, when capital from material production is diverted into cultural institutions *not* to buttress the System's representation of the truth—ideology production—and justify continued exploitative practices but to *generate* capital. Cultural production, at this point, no longer serves to augment material production but to supplement it.

[19] It is interesting to note that while the New Right was first to employ linguistic chicanery and Saatchi and Saatchi media campaigns to minimize opposition to, and hasten acceptance of, "progressive" political policies, some socialist governments—Ontario's New Democrats, for instance—resorted, not for ideological but *economic* reasons, to similar questionable ploys soon after coming to power in the early 90s. Having formed the Province's government soon after the introduction of the Canada/US Free Trade Agreement, the NDs found themselves witnessing an almost overnight collapse of the Province's manufacturing tax base as US companies closed down their Canadian subsidiaries. This resulted in the NDs proposing reactionary fiscal reforms in the form of a new Social Contract. Only such a speedy economic response, they claimed, would create the space for future political maneuvering. This resulted in Bob Rae, the leader of the NDs—*comrade* Bob—being renamed *Conrad* Bob, a caustic allusion to free marketeer and newsmedia magnate Conrad Black, whose fiscal policies Bob Rae seemed to share. The adoption of such strategies proved disastrous for Ontario's NDs, but that socialist governments feel themselves compelled to jump on the New Right bandwagon offers further compelling proof of capitalism's totalizing impulse.

[20] Against those who equate the end of ideology with the end of modernity, Eagleton (1991, pp. xi-xii), argues that

> three key doctrines of postmodernist thought have conspired to discredit the classical concept of ideology. The first of these doctrines turns on a rejection of the notion of representation—in fact, a rejection of an *empiricist* model of representation, in which the representational baby has been thrown out with the empiricist bathwater. The second revolves on an epistemological scepticism which would hold that the very act of identifying any form of consciousness as ideological entails some untenable notion of absolute truth. Since the latter idea attracts few devotees these days, the former is thought to crumble in its wake. We cannot identify Pol Pot as a Stalinist bigot since this would imply some metaphysical certitude about what not being a Stalinist bigot would involve. The third doctrine concerns a reformulation of the relations between rationality, interests and power, along roughly neo-Nietzschean lines, which is thought to render the whole

> concept of ideology redundant. Taken together, these three theses have been thought by some to dispose of the whole question of ideology, at exactly the historical moment when Muslim demonstrators beat their foreheads till the blood runs, and American farmhands anticipate being swept up into heaven, Cadillac and all.

[21] As early as 1981, Susan Rose noted of one model of market-driven programming, "Accelerated Christian Education" (A.C.E.), initially developed for evangelical Christian schools:

> A.C.E. takes pre-packaged curricular systems and teaching models... to their extreme....
>
> Schools that use A.C.E. or similar educational systems are providing an alternative that may help to restructure the educational system of the United States in conformity with the needs of advanced capitalist society....
>
> The very reproduction of A.C.E. programs is modeled on the corporate franchise through which one buys the package that simultaneously makes one an independent purveyor of culture and an agent of corporate culture that blankets the nation. A.C.E. is a for-profit corporation operating out of Texas with a nationwide network of approximately 5, 000 entrepreneurs who pay for the use of the A.C.E. system. A.C.E. began in 1970 with forty-five students. By 1972, there were 4, 000; by 1974, 30, 000; by 1976, 80, 000; by 1978, 160, 000; by 1980, 275, 000. As of 1986, A.C.E. operates some 5, 900 schools throughout the United States and in eighty-six foreign countries. Moreover, they provide curriculum to 1, 600 families in the United States and 300 families in foreign countries who are educating their children at home. A booklet, "Facts About Accelerated Christian Education: Christian Education on the Forefront of Reformation," declares A.C.E.'s goal of having ten thousand schools with one million children by 1989.
>
> A.C.E. has been so successful in this country [the US] that recently they have broadened their ministry to reach students outside of the fundamentalist movement and beyond America. They publish a new curriculum under the neutral academic label of Basic Education which now provides materials in English, Spanish and French....
>
> Perhaps this is one of those moments in history when progress means deterioration of culture (pp. 210-212).

Chapter Three

The Decentred Subject: Pedagogical Implications

> What is unique about the "I" hides itself exactly in what is unimaginable about a person. All we are able to imagine is what makes everyone like everyone else, what people have in common. The individual "I" is what differs from the common stock, that is, what cannot be guessed at or calculated, what must be unveiled, uncovered, conquered. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Three Impossible Professions

According to Freud, there are three "impossible" professions, three spheres of endeavour that guarantee unsatisfying results, even before engaging in them: educating, healing, and governing. This did not, however, deter Freud from devoting the greater part of his life to healing and educating. Jacques Lacan, if not Freud's most notable, then certainly his most controversial disciple, argues that Freud, despite such misgivings, was able to make a positive contribution to the professions of healing and educating because of a discovery whose full impact is

yet to be felt—the unconscious and its corollary the "decentred subject," a revolutionary find that Freud himself compared to that of Copernicus: "it was in fact the so-called Copernican revolution to which Freud himself compared his discovery, emphasizing that it was once again a question of the place man assigned to himself at the centre of a universe" (Lacan, 1977, p. 165).

Allusions to the decentred subject can be found in a growing number of education texts, especially those focusing on the problematic of identity formation.[1] Yet while such texts employ the notion of the decentred subject to challenge the assumptions of pedagogies based on the unproblematic transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, few expand on the origins of nature of the notion itself. What exactly is the "decentred subject"? What distinguishes this postmodern subject of language from the modern subject of consciousness it seeks to displace? What are the implications of the decentred subject for modern pedagogies based on the transference of knowledge? This chapter traces the emergence of the "decentred subject" through its formulation in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to its origins in the Freudian corpus, drawing upon the work of Lacan and a number of his commentators to elucidate its distinctive features, highlight its distinguishing factors, and investigate its revolutionary implications for the field of education.

Lacan, who aspired first and foremost to be a Freudian, liked to present his work as a rebus or puzzle, not unlike a dream that demands deciphering before its inner kernel of meaning is revealed. Writing, for Lacan, is "a factor that makes possible the kind of tightening up that I like in order to leave the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult" (Lacan, 1977, p. 146). It is, Muller and Richardson (1982, p. 3) suggest, as if Lacan

> not only explicates the unconscious but strives to imitate it. Whatever is to be said about the native cast of Lacan's mind that finds this sort of thing congenial, there is no doubt that the elusive-allusive-illusive manner, the encrustation with rhetorical tropes, the kaleidoscopic erudition, the deliberate ambiguity, the auditory echoes, the oblique irony, the disdain of logical sequence, the prankish playfulness and sardonic (sometimes scathing) humor–of all these forms of preciousness that Lacan affects are essentially a concrete demonstration in verbal locution of the perverse ways of the unconscious as he experiences it.

And while it is now a commonplace that Lacan's reading of Freud is colored by the understanding of Hegel he developed as a consequence of attending Alexandre Kojève's seminal Sorbonne lectures of the 1930's—lectures attended by the likes of "Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Bataille, Queneau, and a host of existentialists, Catholics, Communists, and surrealists who eagerly awaited the event of Hegel's epiphany"—it is sometimes forgotten that "Kojève's

understanding of Hegel was indebted to Heidegger" (Pefanis, 1991, p. 3–11). It should come as no great surprise, then, that when Lacan, the *enfant terrible* of psychoanalysis, sets out in search of the decentred subject, he follows in the footsteps of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger was among the first to trace the emergence of the modern subject—the self-conscious, autonomous monad that exists prior to and independent of the objects of experience—to 17th Century France, where "Descartes found his 'unshakable foundation of truth' in the subject's awareness of himself in the very process of his own thinking/doubt" (Muller & Richardson, 1982, p. 167).

A Genealogy of the Subject

Lovitt (1977, p. xxv) informs us that for Heidegger, "the work of Descartes, itself an expression of the shift in men's outlook that had already taken place, set forth that basis in philosophical terms."[2] According to Heidegger, it was "in the *ego cogito (ergo) sum* of Descartes" that "man found his self-certainty *within himself*," where "man's thinking ... was found to contain within itself the needed sureness." From this point on, "man could *represent* reality to himself," he could "set it up over against himself, as it *appeared* to him, as an *object* of thought"; the result: "he felt assured at once of his own existence and of the existence of the reality thus conceived." It is the epistemology of Descartes, Heidegger (1977, pp. 126-127) argues, that makes the modern conception of science–"science as research"–possible. This new mode of knowledge, "knowing as research, calls

whatever is to account with regard to the way in which and the extent to which it lets itself be put at the disposal of representation." This distinctively modern way of knowing "has disposal over anything that is when it can either calculate it in its future course in advance or verify a calculation about its past." Consequently, "nature and history become the objects of a representing that explains ..., [but] only that which becomes object in this way *is*—is considered to be being." Heidegger's point is that "we first arrive at science as research when the Being of whatever is, is sought in such objectiveness":

> This objectifying of whatever is, is accomplished in a setting–before, a representing, that aims at bringing each particular being before it in such a way that man who calculates can be sure, and that means be certain, of that being. We first arrive at science as research when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation. *What it is to be is for the first time defined as the objectiveness of representing*, and truth is first defined as the certainty of representing, in the metaphysics of Descartes. (emphasis added)

It is with the advent of modernity, then, that "man, once concerned to discover and decisively to behold the truly real, now finds himself certain of himself; and he takes himself, in that self-certainty, to be more and more the determining center of reality" Lovitt, 1977, pp. xxv–xxvi).[3]

Taylor (1987, p. 467), echoing Heidegger, notes that it is Descartes who is "the originator of the modern notion that certainty is the child of reflexive clarity, or the examination of our own ideas in abstraction from what they 'represent'." With Descartes, the traditional notion of subject—"that-which-lies-before (for the Greeks, that which looms up, e.g., an island or mountain) ..., the reality that confronted man in the power of its presence" (Lovitt, 1977, p. xxvi)—was radically transformed. Descartes, Lovitt notes, "fixed his attention not on a reality beyond himself, but precisely on that which was present *as* and *within* his own consciousness." In this act lies the origin of the modern subject, for "at this point self-consciousness became subject *par excellence,* and everything that had the character of subject—of that-which-lies-before—came to find the locus and manner of its being precisely in that self-consciousness"; that is:

> in the unity of thinking and being that was established by Descartes in his *ego cogito (ergo) sum,* through which man was continually seeking to make himself secure. Here man became what he has been increasingly throughout our modern period. He became subject, the self-conscious shaper and guarantor of all that comes to him from beyond himself.

Representing the "I"

It was in the process of thinking, then, that Descartes recognized his own awareness of himself, his self-consciousness. This act of reflection, however,

involves, "over and above the registration and perception of sensations, an *apperception:* an act of attributing perception to an underlying perceiver" (Grosz, 1990, p. 35, emphasis added). Hence Descartes' dictum: *Cogito ergo sum:* I think, therefore, I am. It was this revelation that prompted Descartes to declare consciousness and subjectivity *coterminous.* It is exactly this notion of the unitary, centred subject that Freud's discovery of the unconscious undermined, however, revealing that "the very centre of the human being was no longer to be found at the place assigned to it by a whole humanist tradition" (Lacan, 1977, p. 114). But it is Lacan who rephrases the question first posed by Freud's discovery of the unconscious, in a way that is more in keeping with theories of language and visual perception—de Saussure's linguistics, and Lorenz and Tinbergen's *Gestalten*—that postdate Freud's own work:

> Is the place that I occupy as the subject of a signifier [*the enunciated subject*] concentric or eccentric, in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified [*the subject of enunciation*]? Lacan, 1977, p. 165)

The full implication of this rather cryptic statement will become clearer as we proceed.

Subject as Signifier

Lacan's answer to the above question is, of course, *eccentric* or "decentred," since he is convinced that "if we ignore the self's radical ex-

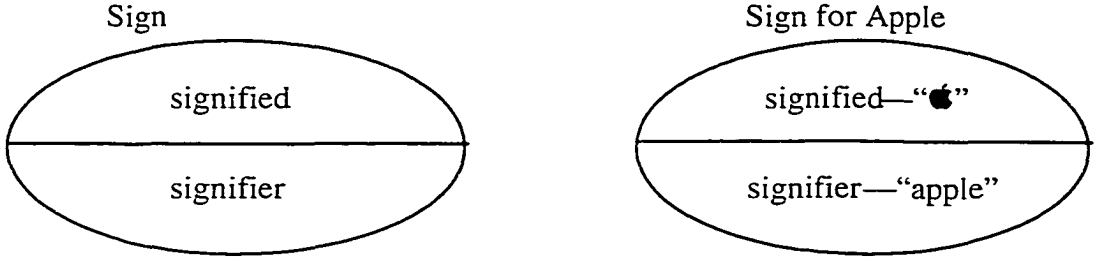
centricity to itself with which man is confronted, in other words, the truth discovered by Freud, we shall falsify both the order and methods of psychoanalytic mediation ...: the letter as well as the spirit of Freud's work" (Lacan, 1977, p.171). Following Freud, Lacan contends that the subject occupies different places or locations: one the realm of "signifiers," of conscious discourse; the other of "signifying mechanisms," of the unconscious that shapes the "signified" and can, therefore, be designated legitimately as thought. Since this means "the speaking subject is emphatically decentred in relation to the ego" (Boothby, 1991, p. 112), Lacan proposes a reformulation of Descartes' Cogito:

> I think [on an unconscious level, at the level of the "signified,"] where I am not [that is, on a conscious level, at the level of the "signifier"], therefore I am where I do not think (Lacan, 1977, p. 166).

"Descartes' error," according to Žižek (1994, p. 147), "was to assume that by choosing thought the subject secured [her/]himself a small piece of being; obtained the certainty of 'I' as 'thinking substance' (*res cogitans*)." In so doing, "Descartes thereby misrecognized the proper dimension of his own gesture: the subject which is left as a remainder of the radical doubt is not a substance, a 'thing which thinks,' but a pure point of substanceless subjectivity, a point which is nothing but a kind of vanishing gap baptized by Lacan 'subject of the signifier' (in opposition to the 'subject of the signified'), the subject lacking any support in

positive, determninate being." In somewhat simpler terms, what Descartes fails to recognize, according to Lacan, is that the concept "I" must be understood as a "sign" comprised of not one but *two* elements, elements that correspond to Ferdinand de Saussure's (1983) "signifier" and "signified," to the *material* and *immaterial* elements that compose each and every sign, to the sign's extramental and intramental objects.

Saussure's Sign



While it was Saussure (1983) who first argued that the relation of the material signifier to the immaterial signified—of *word* to *thought object*—is arbitrary, that is, established through convention rather than through some natural or preordained connection, it was Lacan who took up and extended Saussure's metaphor of "two floating kingdoms" to introduce the possibility of slippage between the two domains, arguing vehemently for "the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (Lacan, 1977, p. 154). In

placing the signified *below* the signifier, Lacan privileges matter over thought—the sign's extramental, material element supercedes its intramental, immaterial element. Lacan then represents the "subject of the signifier," the ego or subject of consciousness, that which is enunciated through and in language, with the matheme "S"; the "subject of the signified," on the other hand, the subject of the unconscious, that which *structures* enunciation, is designated by the matheme "*s*."[4] For Lacan, the crucial point that must not be overlooked is that "the S and the *s* of the Saussurian algorithm are not on the same level" (Lacan, 1977, p. 166).

According to Lacan, the individual's introduction into language is the condition for the possibility of the modern subject, for the subject's ability to "unknowingly" represent its own desire to itself. It is "in the unconscious, excluded from the system of the ego, that the subject speaks" (Lacan, in Boothby, 1991, p.111). As Slavoj Žižek (1989, p.68) notes: "the Lacanian notion of the imaginary [enunciated] self ... exists only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the *effect* of this misrecognition." It is not, however, the supposed inability of this self to reflect that Lacan focuses on, "on its being the plaything of inaccessible unconscious forces; his point is that the subject can pay for such reflection with the loss of [her/] his ontological consistency."

Enunciated versus Enunciator

Misunderstandings of Lacan's position are legend, yet for many commentators are readily explicable.[5] A failure to grasp Lacan's distinction between the two subject positions—between "the enunciated subject" and "the subject of enunciation"—is often a cause of much confusion. It is useful to bear in mind, therefore, that if the unconscious is the locus of thought—the subject of enunciation—and the conscious subject is the locus of language—the enunciated subject—an irremediable gap exists between what is *meant* and what is *said*: "Lacan's point is simply that these two levels never fully cohere: the gap separating them is constitutive; the subject, by definition, cannot master the effects of his speech" (Žižek, 1994, p. 13). It is for this very reason that "the implications of meaning infinitely exceed the signs manipulated by the individual. As far as signs are concerned, man is always mobilizing many more of them than he knows" (Lacan, in Felman, 1987, pp. 95-96).

Consequently, the unconscious, the domain of the subject of enunciation, is a site of unmeant knowledge that escapes intentionality and meaning, appearing to the conscious subject only in the form of verbal slips and dream images—it is a *speaking* knowledge that is denied to the *speaker's* knowledge. As Boothby (1991, p.126) notes: "the tendency of discourse to evoke a multitude of meanings—what might be called the essential 'extravagance' of speech—establishes the capacity of language to accommodate unconscious

intentionality even in the most apparently mundane and innocent banter": thus, we witness in the "multiple reverberations of meaning generated within the symbolic system as a whole by the signifying chain ... what Lacan calls the 'decentering of the subject'." Or, as Glogowski (1988, p. 17) succinctly puts it: "the signifier always goes at least one step further than the signified." The unconscious, then, can be characterized as "knowledge that can't tolerate one's knowing that one knows," and it is psychoanalysis that "appears on the scene to announce that there is knowledge that does not know itself, knowledge that is supported by the signifier as such" (Lacan, in Felman, 1987, p.77).

The point that should not be missed here is that *the very condition for the possibility* of any conscious knowledge is the *active* repression of some other knowledge on an unconscious level.[6] Ignorance is not the *absence* of knowledge but the *negative* condition for the possibility of any *positive* knowledge: the gap between knowing and not knowing, consequently, can never be closed. As Felman (1987, pp. 77-78) notes:

> there can be no such thing as absolute knowledge: absolute knowledge is knowledge that has exhausted its own articulation, but articulated knowledge is by definition what cannot exhaust its own self-knowledge. For knowledge to be spoken, linguistically articulated, it would constitutively have be to supported by the ignorance carried by language, the ignorance of the *excess of signs* that of necessity its language–its articulation–"mobilizes."

Implications for Education

Of the few who have attempted to investigate the implications of the decentred subject for pedagogy, Felman (1987) offers the most perspicacious account. She notes that Freud, not unlike Plato, the most eminent pedagogue in the Western tradition, is convinced that teaching is impossible. She asks us to consider, however, whether this claim does not constitute a lesson in itself: Freud might not have formulated psychoanalysis explicitly as a pedagogical practice, but Lacan views psychoanalysis through a decidedly pedagogical lens. Unfortunately, Lacan's pedagogical project is often misrepresented or misconstrued, due to certain misconceptions regarding psychoanalysis's critical position.

Lacan's critique of pedagogies based on the simple transmission of knowledge is often simply rejected as an *anti*pedagogical stance—as a desire to forget pedagogy, to give it up as an inconsequential practice that seeks only to undo what has been established through education. But as Felman (1987, p. 72) notes, this dismissive treatment of Lacan's pedagogical stance as simply anti-pedagogical "fails to see that there is no such thing as an anti-pedagogue: an anti-pedagogue is the pedagogue *par excellence*." In fact, both Lacan and Freud viewed pedagogy—in their case the education of analysts—to be of the utmost importance.

The Effects of Language

Misconstruals of Lacan's pedagogy tend to result from a failure to read his explicit statements about pedagogy as "utterances"—as *action* statements that seek not only to describe something but also to bring something about. In focusing on the "locutionary" and "illocutionary" dimensions of Lacan's statements—on the meaning and apparent intent of his words—such readings overlook their "perlocutionary force"—the *effect* he wishes to invoke in the listener. Unlike the locutionary and illocutionary aspects of language, whose meanings are open and can be discerned readily from spoken or written texts, the perlocutionary aspect is necessarily *masked*, since its meaning is a function of the speaker's desire to achieve an indiscernible aim. If, for instance, a speaker wished to invoke fear in her/his listener, for whatever reason, s/he could not simply declare "I want to frighten you," to do so would strip the utterance of its perlocutionary force. Lacan, in fact, through his own practice, was constantly exploring how what psychoanalysis teaches could be most effectively taught, and is renowned for deliberately coining neologisms and torturing linguistic conventions to create effects that extend far beyond the manifest meaning of his statements: "Lacan's style is not a *voice* that is heard, but a *drama* which becomes *enacted* within ourselves...; Lacan's signifiers do not refer to signifieds but, floating slightly above their various signifieds perform a dramatic function" (Alcorn, 1988, pp. 7-8). For Lacan, pedagogy entails much more than the mere

statement of facts: "it is an utterance. It is not just a meaning: it is action; an action that itself may very well at times belie the stated meaning," a process of learning that proceeds "through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions, and deferred action" (Felman, 1987, pp. 74-76).

In recognizing that psychoanalysis gives access to knowledge otherwise denied to consciousness, Lacan views it as a way of discovering that which can be learned in no other way. Psychoanalysis insists that "the radical heteronomy that Freud's discovery shows gaping within man can never again be covered without whatever is used to hide it being profoundly dishonest" (Lacan, 1977, p. 172). This distinguishes it markedly from pedagogies premised on the unproblematic transmission of knowledge and the gradual attainment of intellectual perfectibility—pedagogies that insist learning is a cumulative process and that the gap between ignorance and knowledge can be fully closed. Lacan reveals all attempts to close the gap between ignorance and knowledge through progressive mastery to be futile, because there is knowledge that does not know itself, because meaning infinitely exceeds the signs manipulated by the individual, because the subject of speech is always mobilizing many more signs than s/he knows.

The Desire to Ignore

The pedagogical consequence of an irremediable gap between ignorance and knowledge is that ignorance is no longer the antithesis of knowledge—a void to be filled: it is the radical condition for the possibility of knowledge, an integral

aspect of the very structure of knowledge: "ignorance, in other words, is not a *passive* state of absence, a simple lack of information: it is an *active dynamic of negation,* an active refusal of information" (Felman, 1987, p.79, emphasis added). It is, therefore, a *passion for* ignorance, a *resistance to* knowledge that teaching, like analysis, needs to concern itself with. More properly understood as a *desire to ignore,* the nature of ignorance reveals itself to be more performative than cognitive. As with the ignorance of Oedipus, which Sophocles portrays as more a *refusal* of knowledge than a simple lack thereof, ignorance represents an unwillingness to acknowledge our own implication in knowledge. That this ignorance, can teach us something, that the refusal to know is itself part of knowledge, is the truly revolutionary insight of psychoanalysis; consequently, the crucial questions the pedagogue must address are:

> Where does it resist? Where does a text ... precisely make no sense, that is, resist interpretation? Where does what I see and what I read resist my understanding? Where is the ignorance—the resistance to knowledge—located? And what can I learn from the locus of that ignorance? How can I interpret *out of* the dynamic ignorance I analytically encounter, both in others and in myself? How can I turn ignorance into an instrument of teaching? (Felman, 1987, p.80)

Teaching, then, involves not the *transfer* of knowledge but the *creation of conditions* that make is possible to learn, the creation of an original learning disposition. To teach, according to Lacan, is to teach the condition that makes

learning possible. But how does a teacher do this? Through the pedagogical structure of the analytic situation.

The Dynamic of Learning

In the analytic situation, the analysand/learner speaks to the analyst/teacher, whom s/he attributes with the authority appropriate to one who possesses such knowledge—knowledge of precisely what s/he lacks. This is the beginning of what Lacan describes as "transference"—Freud's "key for the understanding of other discursive practices: hypnosis, love, relation of the leader with the masses, pedagogy" (Braunstein, 1988, p. 51). The enigma of learning, as Žižek (1989, p.56) notes, is that "this knowledge is an illusion, it does not really exist in the other, the other does not really possess it, it is constituted afterwards, through our—the subject's—the signifier's working"; however, the act of transference "is at the same time a necessary illusion, because we can paradoxically elaborate this knowledge only by means of the illusion that the other already possesses it and that we are only discovering it." It is imperative, however, that the analyst/teacher recognize that s/he does not posses the knowledge the analysand/learner attributes to her/him—the teacher's knowledge, according to Lacan, resides only in textual knowledge, knowledge derived from and directed toward interpretation. But since each text has its own peculiar meaning—and demands, therefore, a unique interpretation—such knowledge cannot be acquired or possessed once and for all. Analyst/teachers, according to

Lacan, are "those who share this knowledge only at the price, on the condition of their not being able to exchange it" (Lacan, in Felman, 1987, p.81). This crucial point bears repetition:

> Analytic (textual) knowledge cannot be exchanged, it has to be used—and used in each case differently, according to the singularity of the case, according to the specificity of the text. Textual or analytic knowledge is, in other words, that peculiarly specific knowledge which, unlike any commodity, is subsumed by its *use* value, having no exchange value whatsoever. (Felman, 1987, p.81)

Double Ignorance

Lacan is singular in his insistence that knowledge derived from the analyst/teacher's previous engagements with other analysand/learners cannot simply be exchanged with the analysand/learner, it has to be *used*—and used differently, according to the particularity of the case—to create the conditions for the possibility of learning. There is, however, one very important thing the teacher/analyst must know: how to ignore what s/he knows, how to suppress what s/he learned from previous engagements with other analysand/learners.

Considering each pedagogical engagement as a new beginning, the analyst/teacher, in coming to the rescue of the analysand/learner's ignorance, is pulled into ignorance her/himself. Unlike the analysand/learner, however, who is

ignorant of simply her/his own knowledge, the analyst/teacher is *doubly* ignorant: pedagogically ignorant of her/his own deliberately suspended knowledge and actually ignorant of the knowledge the analysand/learner presumes her/him to possess. To make learning possible in this situation, the analyst/teacher must first situate, through dialogue, the ignorance—the place where her/his textual knowledge is being resisted. It is from this resistance, the analysand/learner's desire for ignorance, from the statements of the analysand/learner that always reveal more than s/he knows, that the analyst/teacher gains access to the unconscious knowledge of the analysand/learner—that knowledge which cannot tolerate its own knowing. The analyst/teacher must return the signifiers that express this areflexive, obfuscated knowledge to the analysand/learner from her/his own nonreflexive, asymmetrical position as the subject presumed to know, as an Other. Consequently,

> contrary to the traditional pedagogical dynamic, in which the teacher's question is addressed to an answer from the other—from the student—which is totally reflexive, and expected, "the true Other," says Lacan, "is the Other who gives the answer one does not expect."...Coming from the Other, knowledge is, by definition, that which comes as a surprise, that which is constitutively the return of a difference. (Felman, 1987, p. 82)

It is to the unconscious of the analysand/learner, to the subject of enunciation, that the analyst/teacher must address her/his question, then, not to

the analysand/learner's conscious ego, the enunciated subject. Only then will s/he be fulfilling her/his role as Other. To express the truth, the analyst/teacher must first be taught by the analysand/learner's unconscious. By structurally occupying the place of the analysand/learner's unconscious knowledge, by making her/him-self a student of that knowledge, the analyst/teacher assumes the only truly pedagogical stance, making accessible to the analysand/learner what would otherwise remain inaccessible to her/him.

Knowledge as Irreducibly Dialogical

For Lacan, knowledge is always already there, but always in the Other; consequently, a pedagogical stance of alterity is indispensable to the articulation of truth. Knowledge, then, is not a substance but a structural dynamic that cannot be possessed by any individual. It is the result of a mutual exchange between interlocutors that both say more than they know: "dialogue is thus the radical condition of learning and of knowledge, the analytically constitutive condition through which ignorance becomes structurally informative; knowledge is essentially, irreducibly dialogical" (Felman, 1987, p. 83). Knowledge, therefore, cannot be supported or transported by an individual. The analyst/teacher, alone, cannot be a master of the knowledge s/he teaches. This means the analyst/teacher must do much more than simply invite the analysand/learner to engage in exchanges or interventions, s/he must attempt to learn her/his own unconscious knowledge *from* the analysand/learner. In adopting this pedagogical stance, the

analyst/teacher denies the possession of her/his own knowledge and dismisses all claims to total knowledge, to mastery, to being the self-sufficient, self-possessed proprietor of knowledge.

This, then, is to reject the traditional image of the pedagogue as omniscient, an image modeled on an illusion: that of a consciousness fully transparent to itself. Based on the discovery of the unconscious, which abolishes the postulate of the subject presumed to know, Lacan contends that the position of the analyst/teacher must be that of the one who learns, of the one who teaches nothing other than the way s/he learns, of a subject who is interminably a student, of a teaching whose promise lies in the inexhaustibility of its self-critical potential—this is undoubtedly the most radical insight psychoanalysis offers pedagogy.

Chapter Three Notes

[1] See, for instance: Britzman, 1998, 1991; Britzman et al, 1993; Kelly, 1997; Appel, 1996; Edgerton, 1993; Giroux, 1991; and Gore, 1993, to name but a few.

[2] In my own writing, I always make a concerted effort never to use language that privileges a particular subject position—I am all too aware of the role language plays in perpetuating unjust and undemocratic conditions. There are times, however, when it is unfitting to "neuter" the texts of others, since to do so misrepresents the circumstances under which they were written—the present section on Heidegger being a case in point. With Sayer (1991, p. 5), I tend to agree that the very fact that 19th and early 20th century authors tended "to universalize under the sign of the modern the social experience of men should... be highlighted, not swept under a unisex carpet." Since when such authors "say 'Man,' that is precisely who they usually mean," it is pointless "to imagine this deficiency can be remedied by changing the gender of pronouns." To attempt to do so "is to efface even more thoroughly that world of feminine experience... so conspicuously neglected," and "it is also, of course, patronizing in the extreme." Consequently, I have chosen not to "neuter" certain references to the work of thinkers such as Freud and Descartes that are sprinkled throughout the dissertation.

[3] See Briton (1996c) for an extended discussion of the emergence of modernity and the modern subject and their implications for educators

[4] In his Inaugural Lecture to the College de France, Foucault (1970, in Foucault, 1984, p. 108) explicitly addresses his desire to assume the unproblematic position of the spoken subject—the enunciated subject, the subject of the signifier—rather than the highly problematic position of the speaking subject—the subject of enunciation, the subject of the signified:

> I wish I could have slipped surreptitiously into this discourse which I must present today, and into the ones I shall have to give here, perhaps for many years to come. I should have preferred to be enveloped by speech, and carried away well beyond all possible beginnings, rather than have to begin it myself. I should have preferred to become aware that a nameless voice was already speaking long before me, so that I should only have needed to join in, to continue the sentence it had started and lodge myself, without really being noticed, in its interstices, as if it had signaled me by pausing, for an instant, in suspense.

[5] Metz (1982, p. 223), for instance, suggests that Lacan's "*Écrits* make no claim to didactic clarity, at least in the ordinary sense (because I think they possess another kind of clarity,

profoundly didactic in its own way: blindingly so, to the point that the reader represses it and makes enormous efforts not to understand)." Of Lacan's elusive, protracted style Boothby (1991, pp. 15-16) declares:

> The difficulty of Lacan's style is not wholly unintentional. Convinced that the curative effect of analysis does not consist in *explaining* the patient's symptoms and life history, convinced, that is, that the analyst's effort to *understand* the patient only impedes the emergence of the unconscious within the transference and that what is effective in analysis concerns something beyond the capacity of the analyst to explain. Lacan's discourse is calculated to frustrate facile understanding. His aim in part is to replicate for his readers and listeners something of the essential opacity and disconnectedness of the analytic experience. Often what is required of the reader in the encounter with Lacan's dense and recalcitrant discourse, as with that of the discourse of the patient in analysis, is less an effort to clarify and systematize than a sort of unknowing mindfulness. We are called upon less to close over the gaps and discontinuities in the discourse than to remain attentive to its very lack of coherence, allowing its breaches and disalignments to become the jumping-off points for new movements of thought.

[6] It is for this reason that Foucault's notion of the subject, the subject produced through the process of subjectivization, must be dismissed as lacking. According to Foucault (1982)—see also his account of Bentham's Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977)—the subject is totally determined by the apparatuses of Power. That is, the *only* knowledge the subject possesses is that which the apparatus instills in her or him. This, however, overlooks the fact that *the condition for the possibility* of knowledge is the negation of some other knowledge that must remain hidden to and from the subject of subjectivization. The subject, in fact, can never be totally determined by or transparent to the apparatuses of Power, as is confirmed by the ongoing resistance of subjects to the System, despite the best efforts of the mechanisms of Power—for Althusser (1971), "Ideological State Apparatuses"—to quell such resistance. See Copjec (1989) for a closer analysis of the important differences between structuralist and psychoanalytic accounts of the subject.

Chapter Four

The Teaching Imaginary: Collective Identity in a Post-Prefixed Age

> Every society up to now has attempted to give an answer to a few fundamental questions: Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking? Society must define its "identity," its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires. Without the "answer" to these questions," without these "definitions," there can be no human world, no society, no culture—for everything would be an undifferentiated chaos. The role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions, an answer that, obviously, neither "reality," nor "rationality" can provide. (Castoriadis, 1998, pp. 146–147)

The Current Impasse

Of late, questions such as "Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking?" have become acutely pertinent to North American teacher

educators. No longer is it taken-for-granted that teaching is a field of endeavor worthy of study in the university. It seems as if the very notion of teaching as a profession, as a research-based discipline that proceeds from "a specialized, authoritative, and counterintuitive professional knowledge base" (Labaree, 1992, p. 135) is slipping from popular consciousness. The very *idea* of teacher preparation in North America seems in danger of reverting to one that flourished prior to the institution of Teacher Education[1] at the turn of the twentieth century. Until teacher educators better understand the reasons for this inversion, the question of how best to respond to populist, reactionary attacks upon the field will remain a point of contention and will inevitably promote in-fighting and further fragmentation of the field. This chapter looks to events leading up to and proceeding from the institution of teaching as an area of specialization in North American universities and colleges, and draws upon central concepts from the psychoanalytic tradition, and the work of several theorists working in that tradition—Castoriadis, Copjec, Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe, Lefort, and Žižek—to explore this perplexing problem and outline a potential course of action that will allow teacher educators to move beyond the impasse currently immobilizing the field.

In the Beginning

Early in the nineteenth century, well before Teacher Education as a distinctive area of study was even imagined, a craft-based mode of teacher

preparation flourished in normal schools across the North American continent.[2] An offshoot of mass public schooling in the US, the first normal schools appeared in the 1820s, opened by proponents of public schooling who believed existing secondary schools and liberal arts colleges were incapable of supplying the number, and perhaps more importantly, *kind* of teacher public education demanded—the more affluent secondary school and college graduates tended to be unsuited and ill-prepared for the less cerebral demands of public schooling, and those who did take teaching positions usually abandoned them forthwith for more lucrative professions.

Normal schools, "on the other hand, recruited a class of students who had limited opportunities for advanced education elsewhere or for achievement in other professions than teaching," and made no pretense to prepare their graduates for "educational leadership, which was still a function of talented amateurs like [Horace] Mann"; their goal was to produce teachers who "would remain in the classroom, teaching a curriculum prescribed by the board of education, through texts selected by that board or provided on a chance basis by parents, and according to methods suggested by master teachers or educational theorists, most of whom had been educated in the colleges." (Borrowman, 1965, p. 19–23)

Unlike the liberal arts colleges and universities, who sought to instill in their graduates the ideals of the Good or Contemplative life, "the American

normal school glorified and supported the ideal of superb craftsmanship in classroom management."[3] Academic limitations notwithstanding, normal schools offered the only course of study devised specifically for teachers, and the only alternative to the traditional "teachers' degree"—the B.A. degree offered by liberal arts colleges and universities. It was the establishment of normal schools, then, that brought the preparation of teachers to public consciousness, and made it possible, for the first time, to *imagine* Teacher Education as a distinctive area of study.

Institutional Reform

The idea of Teacher Education as a distinctive area of study did not coalesce, however, until late in the nineteenth century, when America's institutes of higher learning succumbed to reform—initially, to the mounting pressure to broaden the traditional liberal arts curriculum to include such new fields of endeavor as modern languages, English grammar and literature, history, political economy, the natural sciences, and education; and later, to the swelling demand for "useful knowledge," as the nation expanded westward and "those destined for leadership in any occupation—including manufacturing, commerce, and teaching—required higher education tailored to their vocational needs" (Borrowman, 1965, p. 17). Initially, it was advocates of agricultural and engineering education who imagined introducing "practical" fields of study into the new Midwestern state universities.[4] To such people, it made perfect sense to

use the new universities "to augment the supply of teachers for a rapidly expanding common-school system. It is not surprising, therefore, that the new universities moved quickly into the field of teacher education" (p. 18).

Not all, however, supported this course of action. W. C. Poland, of Brown University, for example, maintained that "the traditional B.A. degree, which required study of the 'laws of the mind,' was in fact a teachers' degree," and that any "specialized technical skills that the professional teacher had to learn... should be taught in a separate graduate school" (Borrowman, 1965, p. 18). But reform was in the air, and previous ideas of teacher preparation were soon sublated by that of Teacher Education—an area of specialization worthy of study in the academy: "by 1900, the normal-school and liberal arts college traditions of teacher education were coming together," and "in the half-century that followed..., the normal school moved from the position of a secondary school to that of a collegiate institution, and the study of education found a place in virtually every American university and in most of the liberal arts colleges" (p. 27).

The Impact of Practical Knowledge

The impact of practical knowledge on universities proved so great that by the turn of the century empiricism had eclipsed reason as the touchstone of truth, and the "scientific method" had established itself as the only assured path to truth's door.[5] This prompted a number of teacher educators to imagine Teacher

Education anew—as neither a liberal art, a profession, nor some amalgam of the two—but as a "science." Educational psychologist Edward Thorndike, who published his *Principles of Teaching, Based on Psychology* in 1906, typified the new "scientific" teacher educator. Thorndike (1935/1965, p. 175) was convinced that "just as the science and art of agriculture depend upon chemistry and botany, so the art of education depends upon physiology and psychology. A complete science of psychology would tell every fact about every one's intellect and character and behavior." Some three years later, Franklin Bobbit, an advocate of "scientific training," imagined Teacher Education based on the principles of scientific management popularized by efficiency engineer, Frederick Winslow Taylor. Bobbit was "an extraordinarily prolific writer and influential reformer" who insisted that "education would be governed by SCIENCE—scientific management in the administration of schools, scientific curriculum-making, and the scientific discovery of the qualities of a good teacher" (Kliebard, 1975, p. 11).

A Science of Education

Many teacher educators readily[6] identified with this new idea of Teacher Education, and convinced that "a 'science of education' was waiting to be discovered,... set about, with a rather unscientific show of faith, trying to quantify the field, searching for the 'laws' and irrefrangible principles they supposed governed the ways in which learning took place"; consequently, when noted psychometrician, Charles H. Judd, declared in 1918 that "all that was

necessary for solving educational problems... was the systematic application of the scientific method," few voices were raised in opposition (Koerner, 1965, pp. 28–29). Thus, as the 20s roared into vogue, and science-based curricula rose to prominence in American colleges and universities, the idea of Teacher Education became an almost exclusively "scientific" one. Now, as never before, the field looked to *reality* and the *rational* for answers to such fundamental questions as "Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking?" to "define its 'identity,' its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires" (Castoriadis, 1998, pp. 147–148).

According to Koerner (1965, p. 29–30): "the efforts of educationists to develop a bona fide discipline lured them for many years into the trap of scientism." In the beginning, few even attempted to hold their ground against scientism's blitzkrieg of "reason" and "reality,"[7] and even though opposition grew steadily throughout the 30s, 40s and 50s, Teacher Education was construed in scientific terms well into the 60s.[8] But the 60s proved also to be a time of change for Teacher Education. It was during the 60s, according to Wilfrid Carr (1995, p. 30), that the "orthodox view of educational theory was subjected to a barrage of heavy-handed attacks by an army of philosophers and denounced as 'confused', 'vague', 'pseudo-theory'," resulting in the field "being purged of its unacceptable features, and replaced by a somewhat arbitrary collection of academic

disciplines...—the philosophy, psychology and sociology 'of education'." As a result, Teacher Education was re-imagined as "education departments were reorganized; courses were restructured; professional identities were changed; new journals and academic societies were established, all displaying total allegiance to the view that educational theory was nothing other than the application to education of these 'foundation' disciplines." But as early as the mid-1970s, "the puritanical zeal with which the disciplines approach had originally been pursued began to be tempered by a growing realization that many educational problems were not accessible from the narrow confines of any single theoretical discipline."

In Search of New Answers

A number of teacher educators, it seems, had come to share Castoriadis's (1998, p. 147–148) conclusion that when it comes to such definitional questions as "Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking?"—that is, for the field to "define its 'identity,' its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires"—these are answers "that, obviously, neither 'reality,' nor 'rationality' can provide." Consequently, in spheres once the exclusive domain of the orthodoxy—teacher education publications, journals, and conferences—the institution's modernist "answers" were subjected to ever greater scrutiny by an increasingly vocal lobby of educators committed to alternative forms of knowledge and pedagogy.[9]

Inspired by the successes of feminist and civil rights initiatives in other arenas, this alternative lobby struggled unremittingly to strip the establishment's "answers" of their essentialist guise; to unveil the exclusionary interests at play behind their universalist gloss; and to expose their insensitivity to specific differences, whether of time, place, gender, race, class, ability, sexual preference, or age. But, to coin one of Marx's favorite Hegelian turns of phrase, their victory proved, at once, to be loss. Once the modernist "answers" that had long served to unify the field were discredited, the power of the orthodoxy began to wane—but so, too, did that of the alternative lobby. Having lost its *raison d'être*, the alternative lobby began to dissipate into a plethora of special interest groups engaged in various forms of identity politics. Thus, stripped of its oppressive, but also defining, characteristics, Teacher Education is suffering an identity crisis, a crisis that some teacher educators fear threatens the very being of the field.[10]

The Problem of Legitimacy

The problem confronting teacher educators, as researchers such as Labaree (1992, pp. 143–144) note, is one of legitimacy: if the very *idea* of Teacher Education has no legitimacy, can never be grounded in the modernist ideals of reason or reality, it would seem that all *post*modernist modes of teacher preparation are equally valid:

> The context-bound and particularistic accounts of instruction that emerge from postmodern research simply do not provide an

> authoritative, foundational, and technical justification for policy interventions in the same way as those scientistic accounts that philosophers love to deconstruct. This conflict poses an intellectual and professional dilemma for teacher educators. While empirically and theoretically the science of teaching is increasingly difficult to defend, to abandon it in favor of the postmodern approach is to give up the very thing that gives their works a privileged status within educational discourse. If they are not speaking authoritatively from the platform of positive science, then why should their ideas on education be accorded any greater weight that those of laypersons such as teachers, parents, and citizens?

But given that most teacher educators reject populist, reactionary calls for a return to a craft-based mode of teacher preparation, we need to investigate the nature of Teacher Education further if we are to discover how such rejections can be substantiated.

The Nature of Identity

What is it that makes a "Canadian" distinctly different from an "American"? While members of both collectivities will protest and defend their "differences," just *how* they are different is often a mystery to Canadians and Americans alike. The same is true of members of other nations. In fact, according to Benedict Anderson (1991, pp. 3–6), the concepts "nation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse." Such concepts Anderson contends, are "cultural artifacts of a particular kind";

consequently, "to understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being," and "in what ways their meanings have changed over time." Descriptors—or, to use Castoriadis's (1998) term, imaginary signifiers—such as Nation and Teacher Education, then, refer not to a set of objective or *real* features but *imaginary* relations. Why? Because teacher educators, not unlike "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."

However, just as the members of most nations consider themselves part of *real* rather than *imaginary* communities, so too do teacher educators. But if the reality of imaginary signifiers such as Teacher Education is not quantifiable and objective, as Anderson (1991) suggests, how does one arrive at their "truth"? According to Howard (1977, p. 249), who draws extensively upon the work of political theorist Claude Lefort, much of which remains unpublished, through a process of philosophical interrogation, because "it is the nature of the *reality* in question to only expose itself in this manner: it is an historical reality."[11] Lefort construes history in neither objective nor teleological terms, but rather as

> the repetition of the project which constitutes society: the assembling of men who situate themselves as depending on the same public thing, acquire a collective identity, inscribe their respective positions in a common natural space, their institutions in a private community vis-à-vis foreign people, find a certain

> equilibrium in the relation of forces (even if they constantly put it into question), and are led by the will of the Master, that of the most powerful or that of the majority among them, to find the means for their security and their development. (Lefort, cited in Howard, 1977, p. 249)

Although Lefort is concerned primarily with the coming-into-being, or institution, of societies, his analysis is equally applicable to the institution of Teacher Education, for the establishment of that community likewise involves: "the assembling of men [educators] who situate themselves as depending on the same public thing [Teacher Education], acquire a collective identity [as teacher educators], inscribe their respective positions in a common natural space, their institutions in a private community [establish faculties of education within the university] vis-à-vis foreign people [in relation to "other" academics], find a certain equilibrium in the relation of forces (even if they constantly put it into question) [agree on the need for a curriculum but differ on its content], and are led by the will of the Master, that of the most powerful or that of the majority among them [advocates of scientism], to find the means for their security and their development [a science of education].

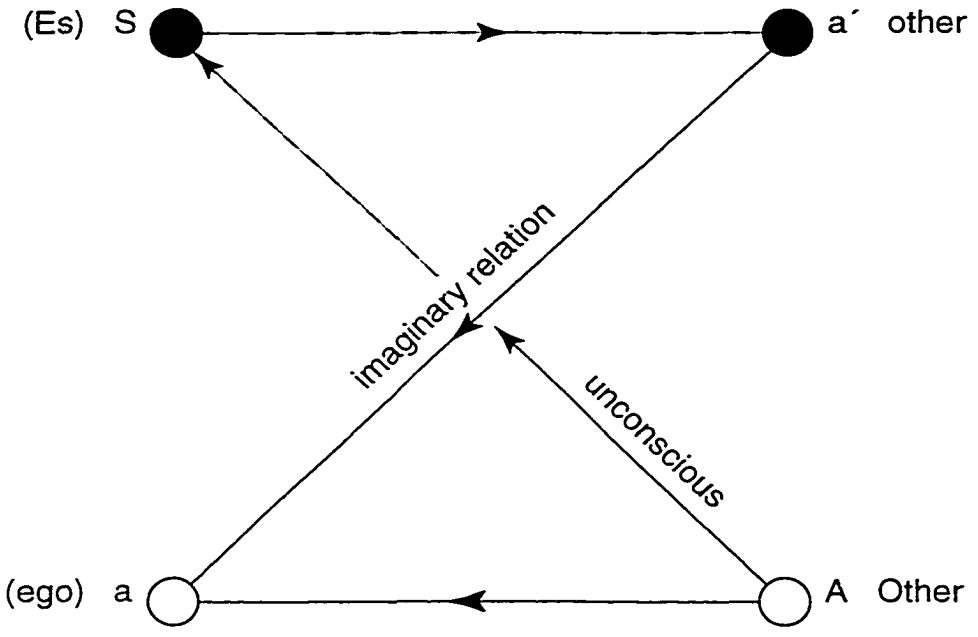
The Institution of Community

But the institution of any community, according to Lefort, is coterminous with a fundamental breech that bifurcates the community into two seemingly distinct, yet intimately related, components: the Social and Political. The

institution of Teacher Education, for example, entails the establishment of a mode of collective being that must obfuscate its origins on the level of the Social in order to appear to its constituents as "a public thing"—an ideal image, an imaginary signifier—on the level of the Political. This somewhat puzzling relation between practitioners (the Social) and their institutions (the Political) is not the easiest to grasp. It may be useful, therefore, to look to a graphic representation of a similar relation between the ego and ego ideal that Lacan maps in his Schema L.

If we look to Lacan's Schema L, it soon becomes apparent that the Social/Political axis Lefort posits at the core of collective being is homologous to the Imaginary/Symbolic axis Lacan identifies at the root of individual being. In Schema L, the Social corresponds to the Imaginary axis a—a′: the realm of consciousness, of the signifier, of the ego or "me" and its specular correlative or "other," the ideal ego. the Political, on the other hand, corresponds to the Symbolic axis S—A: the realm of the unconscious, of the signified, of the thinking subject or "I," and the ego ideal.

Lacan's Schema L



We learn from Lacan (1977, pp. 193–194) that individual being, the subject, "is stretched over the four corners of the schema: namely, S, his ineffable, stupid existence, a´, his objects, and a, his ego, that is, that which is reflected of his form in his objects, and A, the locus from which the question of his existence may be presented to him."[12] If the collective being of Teacher Education is extended across Schema L in a similar fashion, we find: S represents the undifferentiated, pre-institutionalized community; a´, the community's objects ("other" academic disciplines); and a, the community's image of itself in relation to those "other" fields of endeavor. These three elements are all located within the Imaginary or Social dimension. A, on the other hand, is located in the Symbolic or Political

dimension and represents the imaginary signifier, "the public thing" members of a community must identify with to constitute its very being: the founding principle or Law of the community—the place from which the question of its existence can be presented to it.

A Lacanian Notion of Law

It is important to recognize, however, that the Lacanian notion of Law at play here is not merely prohibitory but also enabling, something "conceived as an agency of 'disalienation' and 'liberation': it opens up our access to desire by enabling us to disengage ourselves from the rule of the Other's whim" (Žižek, 1991a, p. 265). Under the Law, the emergence of Teacher Education as a Law-governed practice allows teacher educators to distinguish themselves from the Other, to identify with one another and see themselves as distinct from all other fields of academic endeavor.

However, before teacher educators can recognize themselves in an idealized representation of their collective desire on the level of the Political—in the re-presentation of that desire as a Law—the Political ideal of Teacher Education must appear greater than, and qualitatively different from, the various instances of teacher education that emerged from and compete on the level of the Social—liberal arts-based, craft-based, and professional-based modes of teacher education. The institution of Teacher Education entails, then, the coming into being of a concrete instance of teacher education that must repress all knowledge

of its origins on the level of the Social in order to be able to re-present itself as an objective set of defining characteristics, the Law, on the level of the Political. In other words, a Particular instance of teacher education must begin to *function* as the Universal form of every instance of teacher education. In Platonic terms, then, an imaginary signifier is a Particular that *functions* as a Universal.

The inversion that elevates a particular to the rank of universal was of singular interest to Marx, who attributes the birth of German Idealism and the commodity form to just such an inversion. Writing of value, Marx notes:

> This *inversion* through which what is sensible and concrete counts only as a phenomenal form of what is abstract and universal, contrary to the real state of things where the abstract and the universal count only as a property of the concrete—such an inversion is characteristic of the expression of value, and it is this inversion which, at the same time, makes the understanding of this expression so difficult. If I say: Roman law and German law are both laws, it is something which goes by itself. But if, on the contrary, I say: THE Law, this abstract thing, realizes itself in Roman law, i.e., in these concrete laws, the interconnection becomes mystical. (Marx, in Žižek, 1992, p. 32)

If we modify Marx's example and substitute "liberal arts-based teacher education" for "Roman law" and "craft-based teacher education" for "German law," it becomes only too clear how, through an act of inversion, an ideal can be abstracted from a number of concrete instances that emerge in the Social and

function as an ideal or Master Signifier in the Political—Teacher Education. In retrospect, it is not difficult to see that the particular model of teacher education that began to function as the universal standard of teacher education is the pseudo-scientific model that emerged in the 50s. This is the Master Signifier, the Law, that the alternative lobby railed against.

The Quilting Point

That this Master Signifier to which all other signifiers refer can somehow be cashed-out in terms of a set of objective features—the *true* definition—was long the unquestioned belief of the field. But the field, in fact, this "multitude of 'floating signifiers'... is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning" (Žižek, 1989, p. 87). It is the Political ideal image, the signifier Teacher Education, that serves as this "nodal point." It may be easier to grasp this process of "quilting" if we take the term "radical democracy" as a corollary of the term "teacher education" and observe how this signifier, this ideal image, serves to "quilt," to sustain the *identity* of diverse fields of political endeavor, in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantall Mouffe (1985). Slavoj Žižek (1989, pp. 88–89) offers the following account of this process at play:

> Let us take the Laclau/Mouffe project of radical democracy: here, we have an articulation of particular struggles (for peace, ecology, feminism, human rights, and so on), none of which pretends to the

> "Truth," the last Signified, the "true Meaning" of all the others; but the title "radical democracy" itself indicates how the very possibility of their articulation implies the "nodal," determining role of a certain struggle which, precisely as a particular struggle, outlines the horizon of all the other struggles. This determining role belongs, of course, to democracy, to "democratic invention": according to Laclau and Mouffe, all other struggles (socialist, feminist...) could be conceived as the gradual radicalization, extension, application of the democratic project to new domains (of economic relations, of the relations between sexes...). *The dialectical paradox lies in the fact that the particular struggle playing a hegemonic role, far from enforcing a violent suppression of the differences, opens the very space for the relative autonomy of the particular struggles*: the feminist struggle, for example, is made possible only through reference to democratic-egalitarian political discourse. [emphasis added]

In the case of Teacher Education, "the dialectical paradox lies in the fact that the particular struggle playing a hegemonic role [that of the orthodoxy], far from enforcing a violent suppression of the differences, *opens the very space* for the relative autonomy of the particular [class, gender, race...] struggles." The irony in the current situation, then, is that the alternative lobby, in struggling to shatter the orthodoxy's image of Teacher Education, threatens to destroy that which "opens the very space for the particular struggles" that constitute the alternative lobby. This strange turn of events has arisen in Teacher Education, and arises in other institutions, when those in power, whether in a democratic or

totalitarian manner, declare the Political ideal—as they are inevitably inclined to do—*actually* rather than *apparently* greater than, separate from, and independent of its origins in the Social.

The Problem of the Political

Of course, divorcing the Political from the Social generates legitimation problems. In the name of what, for instance, might the ideal, the Law, be imposed—individual freedom, the common Good, faith(s), pragmatism, Truth? If those in power simply impose the ideal, those in the Social will inevitably revolt; but if those in power admit the ideal to be no more than a competing instance from the Social, it can no longer serve as the Law. The bifurcation into Political and Social is a conundrum all institutions must contend with: any institution, in the act of distinguishing itself from other fields of endeavor, comes into being through a Political re-presention that *appears* greater than, separate from, and independent of its concrete origins in the Social. But, as Howard (1977, p. 36) notes:

> Politics is not the sum and substance, the totality, of everyday life; it is and must remain different. At the same time, it cannot be isolated in its difference, either determining directly daily life from on high or being the simple addition or representation of the atoms which compose the social. It is the locus of Power, *the place where society represents itself to itself*: but at the same time that it is constitutive of the form of the society, it is constituted by and

> dependent on the society itself. Neither identical with, nor separate from the society, the political is not for that reason simply nothing: it is a *process* which is unending—and whose end could mark only the advent of a totalitarianism—in which the society and its members seek to define and structure their relations. In its concern with the good life of the citizens, it is universal; in its dependence on and relation to the individuals, it is particular and open to change.

Choosing a Course of Action

The issue of concern to many teacher educators is one of Power: in the name of what is Power to be exercised, and on whom and by whom? Lefort maintains that while Power *must* be represented, it is neither something that one can, nor should try, to determine empirically: it is a derivative of *L'imaginaire*, the Imaginary, whose "function is to neutralize the conflictual origins of the social, to create the illusion of permanence and necessity" (Howard, 1977, p. 256). The function of the imaginary, then, is to diffuse the divisive forces inherent to the institution, and it is in situations where Power is separated absolutely from the social, usually through an appeal to some form of transcendental legitimation, that institutions are most stable.

The price of such stability, however, is the blind imposition of Law on the Social. But Lefort contends that if *lived experience* is ever reduced to—that is, explained and determined solely in terms of either the Political or the Social—the institution is being governed *ideologically*. For Lefort, "ideology is articulated in

the attempt to re-create the... [institution] without history. The neglect of origins, the denial of the division, and the pretence of rendering the social space self-transparent are its characteristics" (Howard, 1977, p. 256). Any attempt to situate and occupy Power in either the Social or Political sphere is ideological: to attempt to do so in the Political is to identify oneself as an expert/leader; to attempt to do so in the Social is to identify oneself as an activist/militant. If we consider the course of action open to teacher educators in this light, it becomes possible to identify which of the competing Master signifiers are ideological attempts to situate and occupy Power in either the Political or Social.

Leader, Militant, or Teacher Educator?

The first course of action open to teacher educators is to identify with the orthodoxy, to assume the mandate of expert/leader. This is to situate Power in the Political and divorce the Political from the Social by legitimating Power in terms of the "scientism" of the Western empirical-analytic tradition. While this will undoubtedly provide the institution with a greater measure of stability, it is an ideological course of action because, in attempting to "bridge" the gap between the Political and the Social, it subjugates lived experience to the Political and in so doing diffuses the creative potential between the two poles.

The second course of action open to teacher educators is to identify with the alternative lobby, to assume the mandate of the activist/militant. This is to situate Power in the Social and to reduce the Political to the Social, making it

impossible to legitimate the Law in terms of something that appears greater than and different from the Social. This course of action too, then, is ideological because it tries to "mask" the difference between the Political and the Social and in so doing it, too, diffuses the creative tension generated between these twin poles.

According to Lefort, the only non-ideological course open to the teacher educator is to pursue a theory of the institution that s/he knows can only be philosophical. To think one can do more is self-deluding and *dangerous.* A theory that ignores its own limits inevitably falls prey to ideology of one variety or the other. The task, according to Lefort, is to participate from "one's own place: one analyses, writes, talks. No more can be done.... To want to be the leader, or to think of oneself as the militant, is to be open to contradiction in one's own attitudes and from the social reality itself" (Howard, 1977, p. 260). The challenge lies in resisting the temptation to diffuse the creative tension between the poles of the Political and Social by attempting either to dispel or ignore the difference between the two poles: in pursuing a *philosophy.*[13] Does this mean, then, that progressive teacher educators must relinquish the idea of collectively pursuing nonexclusionary, mutually beneficial ends?

Counteracting Bureaucracy

Unlike Lefort, Castoriadis (in Howard, 1977, p. 265)[14] maintains that while bureaucratization is a constant threat to progressive organizations, it is

something they must simply learn to counteract because social change requires collective action. For Castoriadis, "it is the stunting of the creative imagination of individuals, due to the existence of a socially legitimated collective representation—an *imaginaire social*...—which must be analysed." This is because everyday life is neither static nor predictable; it is praxical:

> the educator, artist or even doctor does not know the final result he/she seeks; nor does he/she simply follow material lines of force as if they could be somehow read directly from the given, as if the given were immediately and univocally signifying, as in the dream world of the positivist. There is an indeterminateness in every praxis: the project is changed as it encounters the materiality of the works; and the visage of the world is altered once my project contacts it. (p. 287)

Castoriadis is singular in his insistence that the action of *individuals* does not constitute praxis. Individuals are *always-already* social beings, embodied agents plagued by the unconscious, the multivalency of representation, and desire. That humans must contend with such "impurities," that they can never have complete knowledge of themselves, is overlooked by those of a rationalist persuasion in their zeal to escape humanity's "tainted" state of embodiment. This leads them to ignore the more important question of what exactly our relation to the unconscious, the multivalency of representation, and desire really is. Castoriadis, however, insists that we "can relate to them, act on and through them, only because they are Other, always already present and continually

changing. They are the horizon that gives sense to thought and action *the condition for the possibility of* creation" (p. 287). It is through embodiment that humans partake in an intersubjective world of symbolically mediated discourse since the body opens humans beings to not only the discourse of the Other but also the unconscious.

As Howard (1977, pp. 288–289) notes, for Castoriadis, Otherness is the condition of possibility of praxis, and alienation is not simply a result of the domination of the Other, but the fact that the Other to whom we relate "*disappears*, slides into an anonymous collectivity (the law, the market, the plan, etc.)." While some forms of alienation are unquestionably supported and fostered by those who benefit most from them, the fact remains that it "is concerned fundamentally with the relation of society to its own institutions," with "a struggle for the transformation of the relation of society to its institutions," with "the phantasm of the organization as a well-oiled machine." Castoriadis thus contends that "the kinds of struggle which one finds occurring today, in all spheres of society, from the family to the military, from the ecological to the ethnic, including many of those at the workplace [not to mention the realm of teacher education], find their unification in a revolt against the manner in which bureaucratic society perpetuates itself through this phantasm"; consequently, "they can be seen as attempts to reinstitute a praxical relation to the social institution." Castoriadis (p. 291) cautions, however, that

> it is doubtful that one can directly grasp this fundamental phantasm; at best it can be reconstructed from its manifestations because, in effect, it appears as the foundation of the possibility and unity of everything that makes up the singularity everything which, in the life of the subject, goes beyond its reality and its history. It is the ultimate condition permitting the surging forth of a reality and a history for the subject.

Castoriadis's project is to reveal how the institution comes to ignore its own nature as instituting and how alienation is the constitutive lack around which it is structured. For Castoriadis (p. 299), the organization, once instituted, only *appears* to be an inert object, and the struggle is to help the organization

> recognize itself as instituting, auto-institute itself explicitly, and surmount the self-perpetuation of the institute by showing itself capable of taking it up and transforming it according to its own exigencies and not according to the inertia of the institute, to recognize itself as the source of its own alterity..., to go beyond the frontier of the theorizable... [to] the terrain of creative history.

The Challenge: Maintaining Reflection

What a collectivity of progressive teacher educators can do, then, is change the relation of Teacher Education to its institution by making apparent and opening to debate what has been theretofore mystified and repressed—"reinstitute a praxical relation." The task of the organization is not so much to lead as to open and maintain reflection. If specific demands are

advanced, they must be understood not as legislative imperatives but in terms of their interrogatory effect. What Castoriadis, in contradistinction to Lefort, offers progressive teacher educators is a new way of exploring collective forms of practice, forms wherein, however, the fundamental task remains, always, to rethink the theory on which the collectivity's political activity has been built. As Žižek (1993, p. 2) notes:

> the duty of the critical intellectual—if, in today's "postmodern" universe, this syntagm has any meaning left—is precisely *to occupy all the time*, even when the new [Political] order (the "new harmony") stabilizes itself and again renders invisible the hole as such, *the place of this hole*, [the void the Political masks], i.e., to maintain a distance toward every reigning Master Signifier

Chapter Four Notes

[1] I use the term "Teacher Education" to distinguish the field from its various instances of practice—"teacher education."

[2] The emergence of normal schools is intimately related to the spread of mass public schooling in the US. Often referred to as the common school movement, this initiative—dedicated to bringing moral and civic education to every American—was championed by Horace Mann (1796-1859). The movement's central purpose was to reduce group conflict arising out of interdenominational, religious, class, and ethnic factionalism; and to forge, upon the principles of the Protestant Ethic, a national identity that would brace American society against the waves of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization that threatened to swamp the infant nation. Mann, a self-professed Whig, opposed the educational policies of the nation's first truly democratic president, Andrew Jackson. Jackson argued that all Americans should be prepared not only to vote in public elections but also to run for public office. This liberal vision of public education was rejected by the Whigs, who "feared that Jacksonian democracy could easily degenerate into 'mobocracy,' or rule by uneducated, unlettered, ignorant frontiersmen." Thus, the Whigs, who also feared that "the growing number of immigrants from Ireland and Germany would become pawns of political bosses or 'papist' priests," looked to common schools to "instill the 'right attitude and values' into the young and make them orderly, civil, and industrious citizens in a nation modeled on the mores of upper middle-class, English-speaking Protestants." In other words, "the dominant socioeconomic classes would use public schooling to mold the outlook and values of the lower classes and control the nation socially" (Gutek, 1997, p. 201). Hence the preference for "normal" as opposed to liberal schools of teacher education. According to the OED, the term "normal" came into English from Latin through French, and is derived from words that meant "rule," "model," or "pattern." Normal schools inculcated teachers with middle class, Protestant norms, models of thinking and behavior that they, in turn, instilled in their students to promote a conflict-free society.

[3] This, as Borrowman (1965, p. 23) notes, was more perhaps through necessity than choice,

> given students with limited knowledge, even of the elementary subject matter they would be required to teach, and a brief period of from six weeks to two years to train them. It was perhaps enough to hope that the student could be made a master of the elementary-school subjects, given a 'bag of tricks'—the more sophisticated title was 'the art of teaching'—by means of which [her/]his knowledge could be transmitted, and provided with an opportunity to practice [her/]his art under supervision.
>
> It should be noted that normal schools offered one of the few career alternatives available to women of the day. In fact, the inaugural class of the first normal school comprised of twenty-five female students. (Borrowman, 1965, p. 54)

[4] Cornell's founder, "Ezra Cornell, a hard-working craftsman and part-time farmer who had fought his way to the top of the telegraph empire, nicely represented the attitudes of those who controlled the new universities," and who "believed that *immediate* utility was an appropriate educational goal" (Borrowman, 1965, pp. 17–18).

[5] The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the scientific method as: "the principles and empirical processes of discovery and demonstration considered characteristic of or necessary for scientific investigation, generally involving the observation of phenomena, the formulation of a hypothesis concerning the phenomena, experimentation to demonstrate the truth or falseness of the hypothesis, and a conclusion that validates or modifies the hypothesis."

[6] Readily, because as Labaree (1992, p. 137) notes, teacher educators, being new to the academy, had to establish their professional status very quickly if they were to compete with other fields of endeavor and conform to the new academic norms that required them to conduct research and publish their findings:

> Fortunately, a model of how to assert a claim to professional status successfully in an educational setting was close at hand. Since the turn of the century, educational psychology has been one area with in education schools that has been able to establish itself as a credible producer of academic knowledge and, thus, its faculty as legitimate members of the university professoriate. Consequently, it is not surprising that the push for professionalization of teacher educators began with applying the methods of educational psychology to the problems of teaching. (Labaree, 1992, p. 137)

[7] Scientism did, however, spawn some apostates as early as the 30s. In 1934, for instance, a teacher educator who Koerner describes as "one of the most perceptive professors at Teachers College, who began his own career with faith in a science of Education," remarked rather pointedly that "the 'laws of learning' have an irritating habit of collapsing as evidence accumulates" (Bagley, 1934, cited in Koerner, 1965, p. 30). And, with the passing of time, the

number of apostates grew, as did their suspicion of "scientific" curricula: "the search for incontrovertible laws on which education and instruction could be based has not been and probably will never be successful and the hope of developing a science of 'human engineering' is fortunately unrealizable" (Kandel, 1957, cited in Koerner, 1965, p. 30).

[8] The impact of scientism on education was such that Koerner, writing as late as 1965, notes: "everywhere in the research and writing of the field, more so now than ever, is the drift toward quantification, toward classifying all things educational, measuring them, counting them, listing them, finding their modes, means, and medians, and coefficients of correlation" (p. 31).

[9] See, for instance: Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979, 1975; Aronowitz, 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Carr, 1979; Elliot, 1978; Hamilton et al, 1977; Huebner, 1976; Morris, 1972; Pinar, 1975; Schwab, 1977; Warwick, 1974; Wilson, 1975. In that such critiques condemn "answers" based on the modernist, instrumental rationality of the Western empirical-analytic tradition, they are sometimes referred to as *post*modernist. It should not be assumed, however, that such "postmodern" critiques have much else other than chronology in common.

[10] In response to this crisis, the *Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession* and the *Holmes Group* tabled, in 1986, reports that recommended teachers in the US reassert their identity as professionals. But as Labaree (1992, p. 146) notes:

> Even for teacher educators at research-oriented universities, the timing of the movement [professionalization] poses a problem. Teacher educators have come to the professionalization process rather late in the game, when the field is glutted and many predecessors have staked out the prime positions. Within the university, humanities has a strong hold on high culture, natural science has a claim to technology and the scientific method, and social science has a lead in the application of research to problems of social policy. Education is left to play catch-up, with borrowed equipment and a rookie's track record. In addition, teacher educators are coming late to the adoption of the scientific-rationalist model of research, *which is now under attack and in partial retreat in the waning years of the twentieth century*. (emphasis added)

[11] Lefort's notion of philosophical interrogation has much in common with Foucault's (1980, p. 117) notion of genealogy, since it, too, posits a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.

[12] The terms "a" and "a′" have been reversed to correspond to the version of Schema L that appears above—taken from Lacan (1988, p. 243). In the extract from *Écrits* cited, Lacan (1977, p. 193) refers to an adumbrated version of Schema L, wherein the positions of ego and other are reversed—perhaps to stress the specular, interdependent, and interchangeable nature of the two. Another version of Schema L appears in Lacan (1993, p. 14).

[13] As Howard (1977) notes: "philosophy is no longer the unveiling of a truth which was always there but somehow occulted; it is the contiual process of interrogation, destined to ambiguity, prohibited from absolutising its results" (p. 241); consequently, "the task of philosophy (or theory) becomes an eminently moral one, social and engaged, which consists in uncovering the moments of praxis within a given social and historical structure" (p. 9). It is important, therefore, that this notion of philosophy be distinguished from that of the Western empirical-analytic tradition—from that of *theoria*: the pursuit of timeless, placeless, abiding Truths.

[14] All page references in this section, unless indicated otherwise, are to Castoriadis in Howard (1977)

Chapter Five

Learning the Subject of Desire

> The fundamental presupposition of my approach to Lacan is the utter incongruity of a "synchronous" reading of his texts and seminars: the only way to comprehend Lacan is to approach his work as a work in progress, as a succession of attempts to seize the same persistent traumatic kernel. The shifts in Lacan's work become manifest the moment one concentrates on his great negative theses: "There is no Other of the Other," "The desire of the analyst is not a pure desire".... Upon encountering such a thesis, one must always ask the simple question: who *is* this idiot who is claiming that *there is* an Other of the Other, that the desire of the analyst *is* a pure desire, and so on? There is, of course, only one answer: *Lacan himself a couple of years ago.* The only way to approach Lacan, therefore, is to read "Lacan contra Lacan." (Žižek, 1994, p. 173)

Discerning Desire

Desire, according to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, pp. 482–483), is one of the most slippery terms in the psychoanalytic lexicon. The notion of desire at play in the Freudian doctrine, for example, they judge "too fundamental to be

circumscribed"; and while in the Lacanian corpus desire is treated more specifically—"desire appears in the rift which separates need and demand"—the two deem it, in the final instance, equally uncircumscribable: reducible neither to need—since it is "a relation to phantasy"; nor to demand—since "it seeks to impose itself without taking the language or the unconscious of the other into account." Where, then, does one even begin learning desire, let alone discerning its relation to knowledge in Lacan's thought—the task I undertake in this chapter? Well, one way, as one of my more pragmatically-minded colleagues is fond of putting it, is "to dig where you stand."[1] I have chosen, therefore, in the absence of any obvious starting point, to draw upon a recent experience of my own to explore desire's relation to knowledge in Lacan's thought.

Knowledge and Transference

If Shoshana Felman (1987, pp. 31–33) is to be taken at her word—and I think she is; if learning proceeds "not through linear progression but through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions, and deferred action"; if "the analytic learning process puts in question... the progressist view of learning as a simple one-way road from ignorance to knowledge"; if knowledge "is not a substance but a structural dynamic..., is not contained by any individual but... is essentially, irreducibly dialogic"; then learning desire and discerning its relation to knowledge will entail an act of transference, an act of dialectical engagement with Lacan's *sujet supposé savoir,* with a "subject presumed to know."[2] This has

certainly proven to be the case in my own struggle(s) to come to terms with Lacan's thought—to learn desire.[3]

It was after presenting a paper to a critical pedagogy conference—on the implications of psychoanalytic theory for pedagogic practice, a paper that draws extensively upon Felman's (1987) "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable"[4]—that one such struggle was to begin. While the overall response to my paper was positive, questions were raised about the viability of a learning strategy premised on psychoanalytic principles. Although it was impossible, in the limited time available, to identify the concerns that prompted these questions, I assumed them to be of an ethical nature, concerns about the propriety of a pedagogy premised on psychoanalytic principles.[5] The ensuing exchange did convince me of one thing, however: I needed to investigate the implications of psychoanalytic theory for pedagogic practice more closely.

Several weeks were to pass before an opportunity to reflect on that exchange would present itself. (I had, in the meantime, made some minor corrections to the paper in question and submitted it for publication). The process of introspection I was finally to embark upon offered little insight into the concerns of my interlocutors', however.[6] But it did reveal, somewhat to my surprise, that what I remembered most vividly about the polemics following my presentation was not my interlocutors' questions but the sense of guilt their probing had invoked in me. Why our exchange should have elicited guilt I could

now only wonder? What could possibly be its source? Perhaps a suppressed kernel of knowledge whose presence would subvert the argument I advance in the paper? Maybe a lacuna in my understanding of Lacan, a mar I had glossed over, repressed, rather than address? I knew I would have to work through my thoughts and feelings associated with the event before an answer to these questions would be forthcoming. This working through was to entail an act of transference on my part, a willingness to place an other in the place of subject presumed to know, an other I had (re)turned to a number of times before.[7]

The Trouble with Transference

Of Lacan's many commentators, one in particular, Slavoj Žižek, "the Giant of Ljubljana," has proven especially alluring to me.[8] It is to Žižek that I inevitably (re)turn whenever I find myself struggling to make sense of Lacan's thought, to learn desire—which is more often than I care to admit. In preparation for this particular return, I began rereading the paper I had delivered to the critical pedagogy conference. In so doing, my attention was drawn to a citation I had drawn from Žižek (1989, p. 68):

> the Lacanian notion of the imaginary self... exists only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the effect of this misrecognition. So Lacan's emphasis is not on the supposed incapacity of the self to reflect, to grasp its own conditions—on its being the plaything of inaccessible unconscious forces; his point is

> that the subject can pay for such reflection with the loss of [her/]his ontological consistency.

The point I remembered wanting to make, the point I had called upon Žižek to support, was simply this: that the imaginary self is an *effect* of misrecognition, a point succinctly made in the first two lines. That I had chosen to include the remaining lines now made little sense: far from supporting my argument that teachers should embrace reflection as a pedagogic strategy, they actually undermined it!

I remembered being puzzled by these lines when first I read them, being mystified by their indictment of concerted introspection: *the subject can pay for such reflection with the loss of her/his ontological consistency.* Could this possibly mean that assuming the position of subject presumed to know for an other, assisting an other to interpret her/his "resistance" or symptom, to the point of dissolution, might result in psychosis? Perhaps some of the guilt invoked by my presentation stemmed from a failure to pursue this anomaly when first it presented itself to me? What troubled me more, however, is why, if the knowledge transference discloses is, in fact, the very knowledge the subject must repress in order to maintain her/his ontological consistency, Felman (1987) would advocate dissolving that resistance, providing the subject, through an act of interpretation, with knowledge of her/his underlying support—with the truth of her/his symptom?

A closer inspection of Felman's (1987, pp. 82–83) text convinced me that this *is*, in fact, what she advocates: "by structurally occupying the position of the analysand's unconscious,... the analyst... makes the patient learn what would otherwise remain forever inaccessible to [her/]him." This knowledge is relayed to the analysand through her/his own signifiers, which "the analyst returns to the patient from [her/]his different vantage point, from [her/]his non-reflexive, asymmetrical position as an Other.... Coming from the Other, knowledge is, by definition, that which comes as a surprise." While the subject is ignorant of "that knowledge which is inaccessible to itself because it cannot tolerate knowing that it knows," such knowledge can be accessed through the mediation of the Other: unlike the subject, then, who is constitutively split and lacking, the Other is whole, lacking nothing. The analyst can, on this account, by occupying the position of the Other, make available to the analysand, through an act of interpretation, the underlying support of her/his symptom, that very knowledge which would otherwise remain inaccessible to her/him—the truth. But why, if the price of truth is psychosis, would Lacan advocate such a course of action?

That Felman (1987) has simply gotten Lacan wrong is, of course, one possibility. She certainly would not be the first, given the tangled web that constitutes Lacan's thought. But Felman's is no passing foray into Lacan's *oeuvre*. Unlike others', whose brief sojourns yield only what they set out to find, Felman's is a careful and well-supported analysis of Lacan's thought. Convinced of the

veracity of Felman's text, I decided there must be something I was missing, something I was overlooking. It was only through a return to Žižek, through attributing him with the very knowledge that I lacked, that I would finally resolve this dilemma. This return, however, was to draw me into the prickly debate on the nature of knowledge/truth and its relation to desire in Lacan's thought. It is to this debate that I now turn.

The Desire for Truth

As early as the 1950s, social scientists began abandoning ahistorical, "scientific" modes of inquiry in favor of contextualist approaches that accommodate historical and cultural forms of difference.[9] Such modes of inquiry tend, however, to be premised on conceptions of knowledge that differ significantly from those of their scientific counterparts: they abandon all hope of, all desire for, truth. Proponents of such postmodern modes of inquiry, dismayed by the totalizing consequences of past attempts to circumscribe truth (idealist and materialist alike) declare all aspirations to truth misguided—paternalistic, at best; despotic, at worst.

> Post-modernism challenges global, all-encompassing world views, be they political, religious or social..., reduces Marxism, Christianity, fascism, Stalinism, capitalism, liberal democracy, secular humanism, feminism, Islam, and modern science to the same order and dismisses them all as logocentric, transcendental totalizing meta-narratives that anticipate all questions and provide

> pre-determined answers. All such systems of thought rest on assumptions no more or no less certain than those of witchcraft, astrology, or primitive cults. (Rosenau, 1992, p. 6)

But the remedy such thinkers prescribe for the West's *malaise epistemologique* has proven too bitter a pill for many to swallow. Few are willing, even to escape the thralls of "scientism,"[10] to abandon themselves to the play of the signifier, to trade the promise of certainty for the ambiguity and indeterminacy of language. Those who reject nominalist conceptions of truth/knowledge, however, are faced with the task of finding a mode of inquiry that accommodates difference while retaining the desire for, the possibility of, truth. A formidable challenge. That such a mode of inquiry exists is something I was about to learn—the product, however, not so much of a desire for truth but of another desire: a desire to understand desire. It was to take the mediation of yet another desire, however—my own desire to resolve the conundrum of transference—to alert me to this fact. Desire, I was beginning to realize, works in mysterious ways.

Is it not desire, after all, that compels so many to reject postprefixed solutions to the current epistemological crisis—the desire to retain truth's reassuring aura and history's comforting promise? Is it not this very desire that fuels so many reproaches of contemporary thought, that exudes from even the most cursory of such condemnations? Rushdie's (1991, p. 118) sniping caricature of the French, for example:

> The French, these days, would have us believe that this world, which they call "the text," is quite unconnected to the "real" world, which they call "the world." But if I believe (and I do) that the imagined world is, and must, be connected to the observable one, then I should be able, should I not, to locate it; to say how you get there from here. And it is not easy, you see, to be precise...

Such testimonies to truth, however—their popular appeal notwithstanding—demand substantiation if they are to be taken seriously. And it is on this count that Rushdie and so many other defenders of truth come up short.

Upon what, for instance, does Rushdie base his claim that "the imagined world is, *and must,* be connected to the observable one"? What is the inarticulable *je ne sais quoi* that supports his belief in an incontrovertible "connection" between imaginary and real? It is somewhat ironic, then, but not unfitting, that at the very point where Rushdie finds himself at a loss for words, up against the very limits of language, at the point where words fail, where "it is not easy, you see, to be precise...," truth's defense is taken up by one so quintessentially French: Jacques Lacan.[11] Clearly *not all*—to coin a distinctly Lacanian turn of phrase—"the French, these days, would have us believe that this world... is quite unconnected to the 'real' world."

Rushdie, of course, is far from alone in identifying Frenchness with textualism—for many the epitome of poststructuralist thought.[12] But followers of Lacan such as Žižek (1989, pp. 153–154) are quick to point out that to label Lacan a textualist simply because he is French is not only to ignore "the radical break that separates him from the field of 'post-structuralism'," but also to overlook how "even the propositions common to the two fields obtain a totally different dimension in each." Lacan's claim that "there is no metalanguage," for instance, or "his thesis that truth is structured like a fiction" has, Žižek contends, "nothing at all to do with a post-structuralist reduction of the truth dimension to a textual 'truth-effect'." Why? Because Lacan is singular in his insistence on one thing: "psychoanalysis as a truth-experience." It is, however, only in light of textualist critiques of Lacan—critiques that chastise him for positing a material support for truth, for ascribing to an ingenuous realism, an indefensible metaphysics of presence—that the irony of labeling him a poststructuralist becomes fully apparent.[13]

While acknowledging the enigmatic nature of Lacan's materialism—"this odd materiality of the letter... is neither idealism nor materialism, although the emphasis is placed, after it has been distorted, on the second of these two terms" (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe , 1992, p. 29)—such textualist critiques tend to reject Lacan peremptorily as simply another perpetrator of metaphysical sophistry. But to dismiss Lacan as a sophist, of either a metaphysical or a textualist persuasion,

is to move a little too quickly.[14] Such dismissals tend to result from failed attempts to situate Lacan's enigmatic materiality within the Western philosophical tradition, within its twin branches of idealism and materialism. But it is in displaying such deference to conventional parameters of thought that Lacan's critics foreclose on much that is unique to, and distinctive of, his thinking.

Lacan's "Critique of Pure Desire"

That Lacan's thinking, along with that of other 20th Century French intellectual greats, was significantly influenced by Alexandre Kojève's Sorbonne lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology* is now a commonplace.[15] For Kojève (1969, p. 6), knowledge/truth and meaning are one and the same, as are meaning and desire: the meaning of life, of human struggle, for example, is its truth, and that truth corresponds to, is a function of, human desire:

> Desire directed towards a natural object is human only to the extent that it is "mediated" by the Desire of another directed toward the same object: it is human to desire what others desire, because they desire *it*. Thus, an object perfectly useless from the biological point of view (such as a medal, or the enemy's flag) can be desired because it is the object of other desires. Such a Desire can only be a Human desire, and human reality, as distinguished from animal reality, is created only by action that satisfies such Desires: human history is the history of desired Desires.

Kojève's Conception of History

There can be little doubt that Kojève's Hegelian conception of history—the meaning of history resides not in the concrete events that comprise the stuff of history, its objective content, but in the fundamental absence that escapes each successive attempt at mastery: human desire[16]—inspired Lacan to begin identifying the meaning of *any* chain of events, its *truth*, with that which escapes each event's attempt at mastery: its object of desire. I, for one—and seemingly Felman, for another—had certainly understood this identification of meaning with knowledge/truth and the correlation of meaning with desire to be a central axiom of Lacan's thought. And, in turning to Žižek, I was to find confirmation of this fact—but with a vertiginous twist!

In attributing Žižek with the knowledge I lacked, I committed myself to a much closer reading of his work. That reading was to reveal something I had previously overlooked—or had chosen to ignore: Žižek is a Lacanian of a particular sort, one of a school of Slovenian Lacanians whose reading of Lacan has been much influenced by the work of Jacques-Alain Miller and a small coterie of his followers.[17] This enclave of analysts did not undertake the task for which they are best known (the codification of Lacan's thought) until late in Lacan's life—due to their mentor's antipathy toward formal systems[18] and his concerted efforts to thwart the uncritical reception of his thought:

> If it is true that what I teach represents a body of thought, I will not leave behind me any of those handles, which will enable you to append a suffix in the form of an "-ism." In other words, none of the terms that I have made use of here one after the other—none of which, I am glad to see from your confusion, has yet managed to impress itself on you as the essential term, whether it be the symbolic, the signifier or desire—none of the terms will in the end enable any one of you to turn into an intellectual cricket on my account. (Lacan, 1997, pp. 251–252)[19]

Nonetheless, led by Miller, Lacan's heir apparent, this avant-garde began a systematic documentation of Lacan's thought, "pointing out the distinction between the different stages of his thinking, and placing an accent on the theoretical importance of the last stage, in which a central role is granted to the notion of the *Real* as that which resists symbolization" (Laclau, 1989, p. x). Due to the efforts of this intimate circle, and others since inspired by their work—most notably Žižek and other members of the Slovenian Lacanian school—it is now possible to consider Lacan's corpus in light of a single, overarching aim:

> Is not his entire work an endeavor to answer the question of how *desire* is possible? Does he not offer a kind of "critique of pure desire," of the pure faculty of desiring? Are not all his fundamental concepts so many keys to the enigma of desire? Desire is constituted by "symbolic castration," the original loss of the *Thing:* the void of this loss is filled out by *objet petit a,* the fantasy-object; this loss occurs on account of our being "embedded" in the

> symbolic universe which derails the "natural" circuit of our needs: etc., etc. (Žižek, 1993, p. 3)

What soon became apparent to those who participated in the codification of Lacan's thought, however, is that his "critique of pure desire" not only proceeds in three distinct stages but also undergoes radical revision in the movement from one stage to the next.

The Ternary Nature of Lacan's Thought

This was certainly a revelation to me. Could this, my failure to appreciate the ternary structure of Lacan's thought, be the source of my bewilderment and guilt? It was only through yet another return to Žižek (1994, p. 173), through attributing him, once more, with the knowledge that I lacked, that I would learn the answer to this question. That return, however, was very quickly to make one thing clear: in pursuing an "understanding"[20] of Lacan, I had unwittingly foreclosed on a crucial possibility: "the only way to comprehend Lacan is to approach his work as a work in progress, as a succession of attempts to seize the same persistent traumatic kernel" (Žižek, 1994, p. 173). This suggested the answers I was seeking resided not in Lacan's thought *per se* but in his failed attempts at mastery, in the *interstices* of his thought, in the *transitions* between one stage of his thinking and the next, in "the shifts" that "become manifest the moment one concentrates on his great negative theses"

Žižek (1989, pp. 131-133)[21] characterizes the three stages of Lacan's thought as follows: In the first, Lacan's focus is on how the word entails the death of the thing, how once something is snared in the symbolic web, it is more present in its concept than the thing itself: "Hegel puts it with extreme rigour—the notion is what makes the thing be there, while, all the while, it isn't" (Lacan, 1991, p. 243). Once ensnared in the symbolic network, the thing falls prey to the word, so that even when we focus on the thing itself, rather than its concept, we find it inscribed with a lack. Consequently, Lacan's teachings during this stage stress how, to have knowledge of a thing, "we must have recourse to the word which implies an absence of the thing." Lacan finds in the *Fort* and *Da* game of Freud's grandson a perfect example of this process of ensnarement:

> I talked about the *Fort* and *Da* with you. It is an example of the way in which the child enters naturally into this game. He starts to play with the object, or more exact, with the simple fact of its presence and its absence. So it is a transformed object, an object with a symbolic function, a devitalised object, already a sign. When the object is there he chases it away, when it isn't there he calls it. Through these first games, the object passes, as if naturally, on to the plane of language. *The symbol comes into being and becomes more important than the object.* (Lacan, 1991, p. 178, emphasis added)

Žižek maintains that the advent of Lacan's second stage of thought is signaled by a shift in focus from the word "to language as a synchronic structure, a senseless autonomous mechanism which produces meaning as its effect." This shift reflects Lacan's theoretical transition from phenomenology to structuralism, from the pursuit of psychoanalysis as a field of meaning to one of differentiality—the signifier as such. It is during this stage that Lacan (i) develops an interest in the relation of the Imaginary to the Symbolic—"the opposition between the imaginary level of the experience of meaning and the meaningless signifier/signifying mechanism producing it"; (ii) identifies the Imaginary with Freud's notion of the pleasure principle—positing it as a realm in search of homeostatic balance; and (iii) equates the Symbolic with Freud's death drive—positing it as a site of "blind automatism [that] is always troubling this homeostasis." Once ensnared in the web of the signifier, the subject is exposed to a mortifying effect: "[s/]he becomes part of a strange automatic order disturbing [her/]his natural homeostatic balance."

The shift from the second to the third stage of Lacan's thinking is marked by a growing preoccupation with the Real as impossible. During this third and final stage of his thinking, Lacan's focus shifts from the Imaginary/Symbolic relation—from discourse/language as a synchronic structure—to that of the Symbolic/Real—to the thing itself, *das Ding.* The origins of this shift, according to Žižek, can be traced to Lacan's teachings in the late 1950s, his seminar *The Ethics*

of Psychoanalysis in particular. Therein, the Symbolic is no longer identified with the death drive—that is, posited as the realm beyond the pleasure principle—but with the pleasure principle itself: "the unconscious 'structured like a language,' its 'primary process' of metonymic-metaphoric displacement is governed by the pleasure principle." It is now the Symbolic that is "striving for a homeostatic balance, but there is in its kernel, at its very centre, some strange, traumatic element which cannot be symbolized, integrated into the symbolic order—the Thing." It is the Real, then, not the Symbolic, that now constitutes the beyond of beyond the pleasure principle for Lacan. And, in another characteristic reversal, the death drive, earlier conceived as the Symbolic's threat to the illusory homeostasis of the Imaginary, now assumes the form of a threat to the very existence of the symbolic order itself, implying the "possibility of its radical effacement, of 'symbolic death'—not the death of the so-called 'real object' in its symbol, but the obliteration of the signifying network itself."

In carefully considering the different elements at play in each of these three periods of Lacan's thought, one thing became clear: the final stage of Lacan's thinking serves as the focus of Žižek's work, and the second as that of Felman's (1987) "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable." In failing to recognize, and distinguish among, the different stages of Lacan's thought, I had overlooked something of more than theoretical significance—how, in the transitions from one stage to the next, Lacan

reconstitutes the very aim of the psychoanalytic process, its central concepts, and its point of termination. Gaining insight into this transitional dimension of Lacan's thought was to involve yet another return to Žižek.

Rethinking Psychoanalytic Practice

What that return to Žižek (1989, p. 133)[22] revealed is that during the first stage of his thinking, Lacan's "emphasis is on the word as medium of the intersubjective recognition of desire." The subject's symptom is treated as a yet-to-be-symbolized imaginary element of her/his personal history. Through analysis, such symptoms are interpreted and given a place in the subject's symbolic network, giving meaning, retroactively, to what at first manifested itself as a meaningless trace. Analysis, during this period, comes to a close "when the subject is able to narrate to the Other [her/]his own history in its continuity; [her/]his desire is integrated, recognized in 'full speech (*parole pleine*)'."

With the advent of the second stage, however, Lacan's emphasis shifts to the sense of irredeemable loss—symbolic castration—that accompanies the subject's entry into language, into the differential order of the signifier: the Symbolic. The Symbolic is identified with the death drive, with the mortifying effect of the signifier's blind automatism on a subject, who, in the register of the Imaginary, conceives of her/himself as an unified whole. During this stage, analysis culminates "when the subject is ready to accept [her/]his fundamental

loss, to consent to symbolic castration as a price to be paid for access to [her/]his desire."

The third and final stage of Lacan's thought, however, is marked by a rejection of the Symbolic as an intersubjective guarantor of meaning, in favor of the big Other as flawed, constituted around a nonsensical, unsymbolizable "little piece of the Real": *das Ding.* To mask this nonsensical absence at the very heart of the Symbolic, the subject fabricates a fantasy to breach the unbearable emptiness of the void s/he must otherwise face. The final moment of analysis during this stage is "defined as 'going through the fantasy'...: not its symbolic interpretation but the experience of the fact that the fantasy-object, by its fascinating presence, is merely filling out a lack, a void in the Other." The analysand's task, then, is to recognize that there is nothing behind the fantasy, that its sole function is to mask the void at the very heart of the big Other.

Rethinking the Contradiction

In conflating Felman's reading of Lacan with that of Žižek, I had inadvertently juxtaposed commentary on the second stage of Lacan's thought—wherein "the Imaginary register is presented as a series of variants that must be referred to a stable symbolic matrix" (Laclau, 1989, p. x)—with that on the third—wherein "the Real is the rock upon which every attempt at symbolization stumbles, the hard core which remains the same in all possible worlds (symbolic universes)" (Žižek, 1989, pp. 169). Not realizing that Lacan's

thought proceeds in three distinct stages, and that Lacan subjects it to radical revision in the transition from one stage to the next, I had failed to give due consideration to this significant shift in focus. In the next chapter, I recount yet another (re)turn to Žižek, in order to gain a fuller appreciation of this turn in Lacan's thinking.

Chapter Five Notes

[1] The colleague in question is Bruce Spencer, of Athabasca University, Alberta.

[2] For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to stick with Felman's (1987) translation of the French term *sujet supposé savoir*, although many, Braunstein (1988, p. 50) included, insist that *sujet supposé savoir* be translated as "supposed-to-know subject (not the subject who is supposed to know as appears in the English translation [of *Écrits*])."

[3] The irony is that, in order to re-present this struggle cogently and coherently, I must attribute it with a sense of "linear progression" and continuity that were markedly absent from my original struggle with desire. That I am now able to impose a sense of order on that struggle is the result of a great many "breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions," and much "deferred action." The self-analysis I recount in this chapter has extended well over a year, and has entailed much headscratching, chinrubbing, handwringing, and rewriting, and I am still not sure that it is over. Obviously, for the purposes at hand, I had to bring at least a tentative sense of closure to the process.

[4] The paper in question, a reworked version of an earlier presentation to an interdisciplinary curriculum theory conference, served as the basis for the article (Briton, 1996a) that constitutes Chapter Three of this text.

[5] Only much later would I realize that this judgment was more a reflection of my own concerns than those of my interlocutors'.

[6] These concerns were to remain secret to me, as, perhaps, they were to the questioners themselves, something which "is best exemplified by a well-known Hegelian dictum according to which the secrets of the ancient Egyptians were also secrets to the Egyptians. When a subject is confronted with an enigmatic, impenetrable Other, the thing [s/]he has to grasp is that [her/]his question to the Other is already the question of the Other itself" (Žižek, 1989, p. 178).

[7] Only later would I learn that such a feeling of guilt is one to which those who aren't in-the-know are prone: "an indeterminate Kafkaesque feeling of 'abstract' guilt, a feeling that, in the eyes of Power, I am a priori terribly guilty of something, although it is not possible for me to know what precisely I am guilty of, and for what reason—since I don't know what I am guilty of—I am even more guilty; or, more pointedly, it is in this very ignorance of mine that my true guilt consists" (Žižek, 1994, p. 60). Upon learning this lesson, I remembered having experienced such a feeling of guilt when I went to answer the doorbell as a child only to find a police officer staring down at me—although totally innocent, I was overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt.

[8] I am attracted to Žižek's reading of Lacan for a number of reasons, not the least of which is his ability to reframe certain problematic aspects Lacan's thought through reference to the work of Hegel and vice versa.

[9] See, for example, Winch (1958).

[10] Habermas (1972, p. 4) describes scientism as "the conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science."

[11] As Catherine Clement (cited in Grosz, 1990, p. 193) notes, Lacan "is French to the very tip of his tongue, down to his erudite and antiquated way of citing a text in Latin, Greek or any other language—and without translation."

[12] That Rushdie, normally a defender of difference, is willing to employ, in the defense of truth, a strategy he so often decries—the vilification of the other through a process of crass homogenization—testifies to the intensity of desire that fuels so many condemnations of postprefixed discourses.

[13] See, for instance, Part II of Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992), for a Derrida-inspired, textualist critique of Lacan's "metaphysics."

[14] Of such overly zealous dismissals Žižek (1993, p. 4) notes:

> The perception of Lacan as an "anti-essentialist" or "deconstructionist" falls prey to the same illusion as that of perceiving Plato as just one among the sophists. Plato accepts from the sophists their logic of discursive argumentation, but uses it to affirm his commitment to Truth;... along the same lines, Lacan accepts the "deconstructionist" motif of radical contingency, but turns this motif against itself, using it to assert his commitment to Truth as contingent. For that very reason, deconstructionists and neopragmatists, in dealing with Lacan, are always bothered by what they

> perceive as some remainder of "essentialism" (in the guise of "phallogocentrism," etc.)—as if Lacan were uncannily close to them, but somehow not "one of them."

See also Žižek (1991a, pp. 196–197), for a succinct appraisal of Lacan's understanding of the contingent nature of truth.

[15] According to Pefanis (1991, p. 11), Kojève's weekly lectures on Hegel's Phenomenology, presented at the Sorbonne throughout the 1930s, had a significant impact on French thought, drawing future intellectual greats such as "Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Bataille, Queneau, and a host of existentialists, Catholics, Communists, and surrealists who eagerly awaited the event of Hegel's epiphany."

[16] Kojève's historicist conception of knowledge—the correlation of meaning with that which is absent from, rather than present in, history—differs markedly from historical materialist conceptions of knowledge, from the historicism that correlates the meaning of historical events with their particular historical circumstances. While historicism, in declaring knowledge historically relative, abandons Truth for truth(s) and History for history(s), Kojève's historicist conception of knowledge retains both the promise of Truth and History. See Žižek (1991a, p. 101) for a discussion of the important distinction Lacan, too, makes between historicism and historicity.

[17] Ernesto Laclau (1989) notes, of the Slovenian Lacanians and the focus of Miller's work, respectively:

> The Slovenian Lacanian school... possesses highly original features...: its insistent reference to the ideological-political field...; [its] use of Lacanian categories in the analysis of classical philosophical texts..., above all, Hegel.... Its special combination of Hegelianism and Lacanian theory currently represents one of the most innovative and promising theoretical projects on the European intellectual scene. (pp. xi-xii)
>
> [A] younger generation [of analysts] (Michel Silvestre, Alain Grosrichard, etc., led by Jacques-Alain Miller) has attempted to formalize Lacanian theory, pointing out the distinction between the different stages of his teaching. (p. x)

[18] Far from capricious, Lacan's objections to sytematization are, according to Samuel Weber (1991, p. xiii), well grounded: "I doubt that it [Lacan's work] can be assembled into anything like a system without the most incisive and pathbreaking aspects... being lost in the process."

[19] Lacan did not want psychoanalysis to become a discourse of the master—an end in itself as opposed to a means to promote change. As Bracher (1993, p. 61) notes:

> maintaining this distinction between end and means is crucial, for like deconstruction, psychoanalytic theory... becomes a discourse of the Master whenever its master signifiers (S_1) and system of knowledge (S_2) function as ends rather than means, that is, whenever its concepts are used to institute its preconstituted knowledge in its audience and thus achieve closure... rather than to promote a transformative practice, which,... entails radically different functions for the master signifiers and knowledge of psychoanalysis.

Lacan's Four Discourses are taken up in the following chapter.

[20] Why understanding thwarts psychoanalytic learning is taken up in Chapter One.

[21] All page references in this section, unless indicated otherwise, are to Žižek (1989, pp. 131-133).

[22] All page references in this section, unless indicated otherwise are to Žižek (1989, p. 133).

Chapter Six

From Subject to Object

> Up to his last years, all Lacan's effort was directed toward delineating a certain otherness preceding the One: first, in the field of the signifier as differential, every One is defined by the bundle of its differential relations to its Other, i.e., every One is in advance conceived as "one-among-the-others"; then, in the very domain of the great Other (the symbolic order), Lacan tried to isolate, to "separate" its *ex-timé*, its impossible-real kernel (the *objet petit a* is in a way "the other in the midst of the Other itself," a foreign body in its very heart). But all of a sudden, in *Seminar XX*, we stumble upon a certain One (from *There is One, Y a de l'Un*) that is not one-among-the-others, that does not yet partake of the articulation proper to the order of the Other. This One is of course precisely the One of *jouis-sense*. (Žižek, 1991b, p. 132)

Symptom as Ciphered Message

If one carefully considers the final stage of Lacan's thought, what soon becomes apparent is a certain tendency toward generalization. There is, for example, what Žižek (1989, 71-73)[1] describes as a "universalization of the symptom": to the point that "we can even say that 'symptom' is Lacan's final answer to the eternal

philosophical question 'Why is there something instead of nothing?'—this 'something' which 'is' instead of nothing is indeed the symptom." Symptom is not, however, the only concept Lacan elevates to the level of universality during this period. The generalizability of *symptom* is, in fact, predicated on the universalization of another concept: *foreclosure.* While in the fifties, Lacan restricted the use of foreclosure to the domain of psychosis—employing it to designate "the exclusion of a certain key signifier (*point de capiton*, Name-of-the-Father) from the symbolic order"—in the final years of his teaching, he employs it to designate an exclusion "proper to the order of the signifier as such; whenever we have a symbolic structure it is structured around a certain void, it implies the foreclosure of a certain key-signifier." It is this generalization of foreclosure that makes possible the notion of symptom-as-real that Lacan begins to favor in the last years of his teaching, a notion seemingly at odds, however, with such earlier claims as: "the unconscious is structured like a language," and the symptom is "a symbolic formation par excellence, a cyphered, coded message which can be dissolved through interpretation because it is already a signifier." As noted in the previous chapter, it is this earlier notion of symptom that informs Felman's (1987) text and which leads her to advocate its dissolution through an act of interpretation—the very course of action Žižek (1989) cautions against, based on the revised notion of symptom Lacan introduces in the final stage of his thought. This certainly explained the

contradiction I encountered when I called upon Žižek to support a claim by Felman, and why, "to explain this apparent contradiction, we must take into account the different stages of Lacan's development."

At the onset of the fifties, for example, Lacan posits the symptom as a coded communiqué addressed to the Big Other, an encrypted message whose true meaning is to be conferred upon it at a later date: "in the symptom, the subject gets back, in the form of a cyphered, unrecognized message, the truth about his desire, the truth that [s/]he was not able to confront, that [s/]he betrayed" (Žižek, 1992, p. 154). On this reading, the symptom is a product of failed communication, an articulation of the repressed word in ciphered form. But the symptom is more than *just* interpretable, it is actually *formulated* with interpretation in mind. In fact, there can be no symptom without transference, without the presupposition of some subject that knows its meaning in advance:

> Precisely as an enigma, the symptom, so to speak, announces its dissolution through interpretation: the aim of psychoanalysis is to re-establish the broken network of communication by allowing the patient to verbalize the meaning of [her/]his symptom: through this verbalization, the symptom is automatically dissolved.

The formation of the symptom *presupposes*, then, an all-knowing symbolic order, an omniscient big Other that already knows its meaning—its truth. Felman (1987, p. 83) is quite correct, then, when she states: "knowledge is what is already there, but always in the Other." The meaning or truth of the symptom is a function of

intersubjective communication that only becomes amenable to the analysand when s/he enters into a discourse with an analyst who assumes the position and function of the big Other. The structure of this discourse is one among four that Lacan describes in his schema of the four discourses—of the master, the university, the hysteric, and the analyst.

Lacan's Four Discourses

It was not until the sixties drew to a close that Lacan, somewhat uncharacteristically, consolidated his thinking on intersubjective communication into a theory of sorts—that of the four discourses. Lacan goes to great lengths to explain, first in *Seminar XVII* and later in *Seminar XX*, the resultant schema, which "indicates how differently structured discourses may produce certain psychological effects which in turn produce certain sociological affects—ruling [*the discourse of the master*], educating [*the discourse of the university*], opposing [*the discourse of the hysteric*], and revolutionizing [*the discourse of the analyst*]"; and how "four primary effects are produced by the particular location of the terms/factors and the generated discursive practices at the inter- and intra-subjective levels" (Milovanovic, 1993, p. 6).[2] In *Seminar XX*, Lacan (1998, p. 17) maps out the *places* and *terms* of his four discourses:

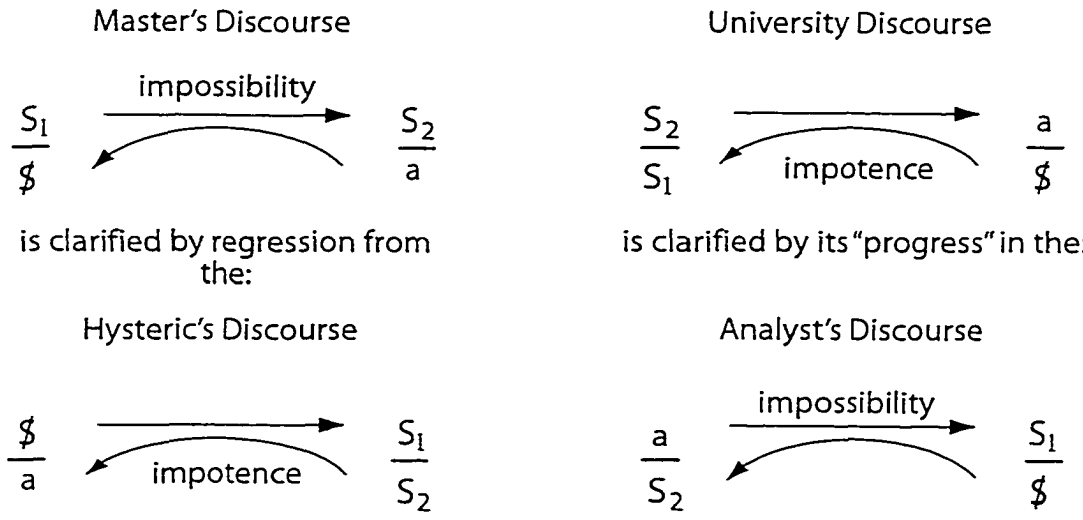
Lacan's Four Places and Terms

The places are those of:		The terms are:
agent	other	S_1, the master signifier
-------	----------	S_2, knowledge
truth	production	$, the subject
		a, surplus enjoyment

Lacan ascribes a particular function or effect to each of the four positions or places: the two leftmost—those of *agent/truth*—depict the position occupied by the source of communication, the sender of a message; the two rightmost—those of *other/production*—the destination of communication, the receiver of a message. In both instances, the element above the bar—whether that of *agent* or *other*—represents that which is conscious and dominant in the subject; the element below—whether that of *truth or production*—that which is repressed and subordinated; the bar itself, the irremediable gap between conscious and unconscious. Each of the four terms—designated by the mathemes S_1 , S_2, *a*, or $—is then assigned a place in what Lacan implies, but never explicitly states, is the originary discourse—the discourse of the master. In the master's discourse, S_1 is ascribed the position of *agent*, that which is most dominant in the process of communication, the factor that overdetermines the message; $ the position of *truth*, that which supports, or provides the conditions for the possibility of—albeit in a covert manner—the *agent* initiating communication; S_2 the position of *other*, that which is activated and most dominant in the subject

receiving the message;[3] *a* the position of *production*, that which is covertly elicited from the subject receiving the message. The remaining discourses are produced as each of the four terms rotate through the four positions in a counter-clockwise direction—discourse of the university, discourse of the hysteric, discourse of the analyst. Given that there are four positions and four terms, Lacan introduces the possibility of no less than twenty-four possible discourses; he chooses, nonetheless, to focus on only four.[4]

Lacan's Four Discourses of the Master, University, Hysteric, and Analyst



If we look to the discourse of the master, we see that, from the location of *agent*, the master signifier (S_1) seeks to impose its rule (S_2) on any listener that takes up the position of *other*, interpellating that listener as a subject, who, to identify with its rule, *must* reject all other forms of knowledge that threaten the

master's claim to omniscience; this surplus knowledge (*a*) is repressed to the position of *production.* Since this byproduct of interpellation (*a*) cannot be explained within the parameters of the subject's conscious knowledge (S_2)—its repression is the condition for the possibility of (S_2)—the subject can only experience this surplus as an absence or lack. This lack, manifested in terms of a desire for completeness (*a*), motivates the subject to pursue fulfillment through the only means available: the dogma of the master signifier (S_2). The repressed, divided subject, therefore, unwittingly provides support to the promulgator of the message—the *agent* (S_1)—and in so doing helps reproduce the discourse of the master. The *truth* of this discourse, then, is the divided subject ($); its *production*, the *objet petit a,* the *pas-tout* or not-all, *le plus-de-jouir* or surplus knowledge/enjoyment, the remainder, the repressed, the object-cause of desire, the symptom.

Of Lacan's four discourses, Žižek (1991b, p. 130) notes:

> The first is the *discourse of the master:* a certain signifier (S_1), represents the subject ($) for another signifier or, more precisely, for all other signifiers (S_2). The problem is, of course, that this operation of signifying representation never comes off without producing some disturbing surplus, some leftover or "excrement," designated by a small *a.* The other discourses are simply three different attempts to "come to terms" with this remnant (the famous *objet petit a),* to "cope" with it.

The Discourse of the University

In the discourse of the university, for example, a preconstructed, supposedly neutral body of knowledge (S_2) functions as the *agent* or subject of communication, and the symptom (*a*) as the object of communication, or *other;* the outcome, or *production,* of this discourse is a repressed divided subject ($), and its *truth* is the master signifier (S_1) that serves to support the *agent's* semblance of neutrality.

In the discourse of the hysteric, a dominant, divided subject ($) functions as the *agent* or subject of communication, and the master signifier (S_1) is posited as the object of communication, or *other;* the *production* of this discourse is the hysteric's desire for plenitude, in the form of a new body of knowledge (S_2) that will satisfy the subject's desire for stability, coherence, and meaning: "the discourse of the hysteric is at work when the discourse in use does not express, cannot embody, the underlying despair of the divided subject; at best, its symptoms are manifested"; consequently, the *truth* of this discourse is the *a*, "its *plus-de-jouir*, which is both the source of desire and its product..., the support for the dominant divided subject as well as its essential *pas-tout* character" (Milovanovic, 1993, p. 14).

In the fourth, and final, discourse, the analysand's symptom (*a*) functions as the *agent* or subject of communication, and the analyst ($) as the object of communication or *other;* the *product* of this discourse is the master signifier (S_1) that ruled the analysand, and its *truth* is a new body of knowledge (S_2) that

supports the analysand's desire—*le plus-de-jouir:* a body of knowledge "that is qualitatively different from the mathematical knowledge produced in the discourse of the master and university, the very knowledge which the hysteric rejects" (Milovanovic, 1993, pp. 17–18). Žižek (1991b, pp. 131–132) cautions, however, that "what we must not forget is that the matrix of the four discourses is a matrix of the four possible positions in the intersubjective network of communication"; that is, "within the field of *communication* qua *meaning*":

> What circulates between subjects in symbolic communication is of course ultimately the lack, absence itself, and it is this absence that opens the space for "positive" meaning to constitute itself. But all these are paradoxes immanent to the field of communication *qua* meaning: the very signifier of nonsense, the "signifier without signified," is the condition of the possibility of the meaning of all the other signifiers, i.e., we must never forget that the "nonsense" with which we are here concerned is strictly internal to the field of meaning, that it "truncates" it from within.

Žižek's point is that Lacan, "after establishing the definitive, logically purified structure of communication, of the social bond, via the matrix of the four discourses" undertook during his last years "to delineate the outlines of a certain 'free-floating' space in which signifiers find themselves prior to their discursive binding, to their *articulation*," to identify "the signifier insofar as it is not yet enchained but rather freely floating, permeated with enjoyment." He undertook this task because his relentless pursuit of desire in the clinic revealed that the

symptom does not simply dissolve upon being interpreted—it is *more than* meaning.

Symptom as Real

After noting how, in the clinic, "even after the completed interpretation, the subject is not prepared to renounce [her/]his symptom" (Žižek, 1989, pp. 74–75),[5] Lacan began considering the possibility that the symptom's meaning, its truth, was not *only* a function of the intersubjective network of communication—the play of the signifier—but also an expression of enjoyment, *jouissance.* More than a ciphered message, the symptom also serves as the vehicle, as the means, to organize the surplus knowledge/enjoyment resulting from the subject's interpellation, its entry into the Symbolic. Lacan identified the uncipherable knowledge/truth of this new dimension of the symptom—that which resists explanation in terms of the intersubjective truth of the big Other—with *fantasy,* formulating a series of oppositions to distinguish its truth from that of the symptom proper:

> symptom is a signifying formation which, so to speak, "overtakes itself" towards its interpretation—that is, which can be analyzed; fantasy is an inert construction which cannot be analyzed, which resists interpretation. Symptom implies and addresses some non-barred, consistent big Other which will retroactively confer on it its meaning; fantasy implies a crossed out, blocked, barred,

> non-whole, inconsistent Other—that is to say, it is filling out a void in the Other.

In introducing the notion of fantasy, Lacan added a second stage to the psychoanalytic process: the first stage, as always, demanded the interpretation of the analysand's symptom—and the subsequent isolation of the fantasy-formation serving to organize the analysand's enjoyment and block further interpretation; the final, and crucial step, however, now involved "going through the fantasy,... obtaining distance from it,... experiencing how the fantasy-formation just masks, fills out a certain void, lack, empty place in the Other."

Lacan's continued pursuit of desire, however, revealed this two-stage process to be equally ineffective in eradicating the symptom. In many cases, the symptom persisted long after the analysand penetrated her/his fantasy. This prompted Lacan to reconceptualize the symptom as *sinthome,* the neologism he coined to designate "a certain signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment: ...a signifier as a bearer *of jouis-sense,* enjoyment-in-sense." This reconceptualization of symptom as *sinthome* reflects Lacan's turn from a linguistic conception of knowledge/truth—wherein truth is a function of the subject, of the intersubjective network of communication, of meaning—to a materialist conception of knowledge/truth—wherein truth is a function of the object, of the object *in* the subject, of the subject's material support:

> symptom, conceived as *sinthome,* is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, symptom is the way we—the subjects—"avoid madness," the way we "choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe)" through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world.

It is in the final stage of his thought, then, that Lacan identifies the symptom, or more properly, *sinthome,* as *substance,* as that which is not subject, as that which is *Real.* But as with the concepts symptom and foreclosure, Lacan's notion of Real also underwent significant revision in the transitions from one stage of his thinking to the next.

Revisioning the Real

In the fifties, for example, Lacan envisages the relationship between the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic as that between "the *Real*—the brute, pre-symbolic reality which always returns to its place—then the *symbolic* order which structures our perception of reality, and finally the *Imaginary,* the level of illusory entities whose consistency is the effect of a kind of mirror-play—that is, they have no real existence but are a mere structural effect" (Žižek, 1989, 162). But in the late sixties and early seventies, the Real inherits characteristics much like those ascribed to the Imaginary during the fifties. For instance, in Lacan's very

first seminar, trauma "is defined as an imaginary entity which had not yet been fully symbolized, given a place in the symbolic universe of the subject"; in the seventies, however, trauma is defined as "a hard core resisting symbolization." The most significant effect of this shift is that it becomes irrelevant—literally, immaterial—whether the traumatic event "'really occurred' in so-called reality; the point is simply that it produces a series of structural effects." It is as something that *must* be presupposed, after the fact, to explain certain anomalies in the symbolic order, that the Real assumes its materialist—albeit paradoxical—status.[6]

The paradox of the Lacanian Real and Lacan's enigmatic materiality of the letter—"by 'letter' I designate that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language" (Lacan, 1977, p. 147)[7]—is that while it does not exist in the sense of being present in reality, its properties are such that its *effects* are readily apparent there: "it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects" (Žižek, 1989, p. 163). The Real is "an element which, although nowhere actually present and as such inaccessible to our experience, nonetheless has to be retroactively constructed, presupposed, if all other elements are to retain their consistency" (Žižek, 1993, p. 33). Herein resides the explanation of such Lacanian concepts as *sujet supposé savoir*—"it does not exist, but it produces a decisive shift in the development of the

psychoanalytic cure"; and the *objet petit a*—"a pure void which functions as the object-cause of desire" (Žižek, 1989, p. 163).

The singularity of Lacan's materialism, as Joan Copjec (1994, p. 3) adroitly notes, derives from his distinction between the two kinds of existence that are captured in"the famous Lacanian formulations 'The' woman does not exist *(La femme n' existe pas)*'"—in which case existence is "implied by the verb *exister*"—"and 'There is some of One (*Il y a d' l' un*)'"—in which case existence is implied "by the phrase *il y a*":

> The existence implied by the first is subject to a predicative judgment as well as to a judgment of existence; that is, it is an existence whose character or quality can be described. The existence implied by the second is subject *only* to a judgment of existence; we can say only that it does or does not exist, without being able to say what it is, to describe it in any way.

As to the charge of idealism—Lacan's supposed linguistic conception of knowledge/truth, his privileging of the signifier—Copjec retorts:

> In fact, the opposite is true; it is the rejection of the linguistic model, properly conceived, that leads to idealism. For the argument behind the adoption of this model—something cannot be claimed to exist unless it can first be stated, articulated in language—is no mere tautology; it is a materialist argument parallel to the rule of science which states that no object can be legitimately posited unless one can also specify the technical means of locating it. The

> existence of a thing materially depends on its being articulated in language, for only in this case can it be said to have an objective—that is to say, a verifiable—existence, one that can be debated by others.

Desire and Truth/Knowledge

It is not, then, that Lacan does not advance a linguistic conception of knowledge/truth, an intersubjective, communicative theory of knowledge that correlates meaning with desire, but that he, in the transition from the second to the third and final stage of his thinking, *abandons this communicative model of meaning for a materialist conception of truth*, a theory of knowledge that equates truth, not with the play of the signifier, but with the disquieting presence of the Real. It is through this shift, according to Žižek (1991a, p. 147), that "the emphasis of the notion of *transference* is radically displaced"—as a comparison of the Lacan of *Seminar XI* and the Lacan of *Logic of Fantasy* readily yields.

It is in *Seminar XI* that Lacan undertakes to stand Descartes on his head. While Descartes, in formulating his *Cogito,* equates thinking with being—*cogito ergo sum*; I think, therefore, I am—Lacan notes how the subject must, in fact, choose between thought and being—"I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" (Lacan, 1977, p. 166). Lacan insists, however, that there is really only one choice the subject can make: thought. For it is only through thinking that the subject can have being; psychosis is the only alternative. But as Žižek (1991a, pp. 146-148)[8] notes, when the subject chooses thought, "[s/]he gets

it, but truncated of the part where thought intersects with being—this lost part of thought, this 'un-thought' inherent to thought itself, is the Unconscious." In attributing existence to the "I" that remains after all that can be doubted is removed, Descartes, according to Lacan, made a fundamental error. Far from being the "thinking substance" Descartes imagines it to be, the "I" is nothing more than the empty form of thought, thought stripped of all empirical content. Lacan reveals this "I" to be not "a substance, a 'thing which thinks,' but a pure point of substanceless subjectivity, a point which is nothing but a kind of vanishing gap baptized by Lacan 'subject of the signifier' (in opposition to 'subject of the signified'), the subject lacking any support in positive, determinate being."

Some two years later, however, in his seminar *Logic of Fantasy,* "Lacan accomplished one of the reversals of his previous position so characteristic of his procedure and offered the opposite reading of Cartesian doubt." While still forced to choose between thought and being, Lacan now deems the subject's only possible choice to be that of being; consequently, the Unconscious becomes the thought lost through the choice of being, as opposed to thinking:

> Lacan's new paraphrase of *cogito ergo sum* is therefore: *I* (the subject) *am in so far as it* (*Es*, the Unconscious) *thinks.* The Unconscious is literally the "thing which thinks" and as such inaccessible to the subject: in so far as I am, I am never where "it thinks." In other words, I am only in so far as something is left

> unthought: as soon as I encroach too deeply into this domain of the forbidden/impossible thought, my very being disintegrates.

Žižek notes how this reversal introduces the paradoxical notion of a subject constituted through misrecognition, the ontological precondition for which is the repression of a certain knowledge, a knowledge that must remain forever unknown to the subject: the unconscious. The choice of being, however, is actually the choice of fantasy, since it is fantasy that gives consistency to, and provides the parameters for, reality—the fantasy-frame whose homeostasis is constantly threatened by scraps of knowledge released from the unconscious:

> *fantasy,* in its most basic dimension, implies *the choice of thought at the expense of being:* in fantasy, I find myself reduced to the evanescent point of a thought contemplating the course of events during my absence, my nonbeing—in contrast to *symptom,* which implies *the choice of being,* since... what emerges in a symptom is precisely the thought which was lost, "repressed," when we chose being. (Žižek, 1993, p. 64)

Consequently, while the Lacan of *Seminar XI* "defines transference as a supposed knowledge relying upon being (that is, upon the *'objet petit a' qua* remainder-semblance of being lost in the forced choice of meaning)," the Lacan of *Logic of Fantasy* defines transference "as a breakthrough into the domain of knowledge (thought) lost in the forced choice of being." Initially, then, "we had knowledge that relied on the remainder-semblance of being"; finally, however, we

have being (of the subject towards which we maintain a relationship of transference) on to which some impossible/real knowledge is hooked." The full significance of this shift is most readily apparent when considered in light of the fundamental revisions the Lacan of the seventies makes to the thought of the Lacan of the fifties; that is, in light of the latter Lacan's reconceptualization of the relation between knowledge/truth of desire as a function of the subject and knowledge/truth of desire as a function of the object; more precisely, between knowledge/truth of desire as a function of the intersubjective *network of communication,* the big Other; and knowledge/truth of desire as a function of the Thing, *das Ding,* the impossible Real.

The Objectification of Truth

In the fifties, for example, "the object was *devalorized* and the aim of the psychoanalytic process was consequently defined as '(re)-subjectivization': translation of the 'reified' content into the terms of the intersubjective dialectic." It is during this period, the heyday of psychoanalysis, that we find Kojève's influence still weighing heavily on Lacan's thought. For Kojève (1969, p. 6), the meaning of desire resides not in the *materiality* of the desired object but in the *immateriality* of desire itself—and he is singular on this point: "desire directed towards a natural object is human only to the extent that it is 'mediated' by the Desire of another directed toward the same object"; consequently, the meaning of desire—knowledge/truth of the desired object—is posited as a function of the

meaning the subject attributes to the object, rather than the *subject-independent attributes of the object itself.* Such an antimaterialist conception of knowledge/truth clearly informs Lacan's thought during this period: "in the 1950s, the object is reduced to a medium, a pawn, in the intersubjective dialectic of recognition (an object becomes object in the strict psychoanalytic sense in so far as the subject discerns in it the other's desire: I desire it not for its own sake but because it is desired by the other)."

In the seventies, however, "the object that comes to the fore is the *objet petit a*, the object which renders possible the transferential structuring of the relation between subjects (I suppose a knowledge in another subject in so far as 'there is in [her/]him something more than [her/]himself,' *a*)." In fact, from the sixties on, Lacan introduces new terms to his lexicon, seemingly to distance himself from his earlier work. Lacan, for instance, not only refers much less often to the signifier, preferring the term "letter," but also "avoids speaking of 'intersubjectivity,' preferring the term 'discourse'," which is "in clear opposition to the 1950s, when he repeated again and again that the domain of psychoanalysis is that of intersubjectivity"—that which distinguishes the latter from the former, of course, is "the addition of the object as fourth element to the triad of the (two) subjects and the big Other as medium of their relationship."

This shift in emphasis from the subject to the object of psychoanalysis—more precisely, to the object *in* the subject—in the last years of

Lacan's teaching certainly helped to explain the conundrum of transference: while the symptom (as ciphered message) must be interpreted early in the analysis (dissipated to reveal the fantasy-formation, the barrier to further interpretation), the symptom that remains after the analysand goes through her/his fantasy (the final, material support of her/his ontological consistency, the *sinthome)* must be allowed to persist, since its eradication entails psychosis. But if the symptom must persist after the analysis ends, what signals the end of the psychoanalytic process? It was in pursuing an answer to this question that I would stumble across that to another: that of the source of my guilt, the very absence that had prompted my return to Žižek and initiated the process of inquiry recapitulated herein.

The Subject of a Question

It was only after prescribing a definitive account of knowledge/truth as a function of meaning, of the intersubjective network of communication, of the Symbolic, (the schema of the four discourses) that Lacan—due to the failings of this approach—turned his attention to explicating knowledge/truth as a function of *le sinthome,* of the Real, of "the One *of jouis-sense,* of the signifier insofar as it is not yet enchained but rather freely floating, permeated with enjoyment..., enjoyment that prevents it from being articulated into a chain." (Žižek, 1991b, p. 132). However, since Lacan continued to define the signifier as "that which represents the subject for another signifier" (Lacan, 1977, p. 316), but no longer

posited the meaning—knowledge/truth—of the signifier as a function of the Symbolic, of the discourse of the master, university, hysteric, or analyst, I needed to address the question of just what exactly the status of this pre-interpellated, pre-subjectivized subject is.

According to Žižek (1989, 178-181),[9] "the Lacanian answer would be, roughly speaking, that before subjectivation as identification, before ideological interpellation, before assuming a certain subject-position, the subject is the subject of a question." This subject is not to be confused, however, with the subject of the Western Humanist Tradition, that is, the *poser* of a question; this subject is the *product* of a question: "it is an answer of the Real to the question asked by the big Other, the Symbolic order"; in fact, "the subject is the void of the impossibility of answering the question of the Other." It is not, however, the nature of the Other's question, its content, that excludes the possibility of response, but its very form: "the question [as such] lays open, exposes, denudes its addressee, it invades [her/]his sphere of intimacy. .., it aims at a point at which the answer is not possible, where the word is lacking, where the subject is exposed in [her/]his impotence." But what exactly is it in the subject that the question targets, what is it that constitutes the subject's prelinguistic, most intimate core? According to Freud, it is the subject's *Kern unseres Wesens;* to Lacan, *das Ding:*

> The real object of the question is what Plato, in the *Symposium,* called—through the mouth of Alcibiades—*agalma,* the hidden treasure, the essential object in me which cannot be objectivated,

> dominated.... The Lacanian formula for this object is of course *objet petit a*, this point of Real in the very heart of the subject which cannot be symbolized, which is produced as a residue, a remnant, a leftover of every signifying operation, a hard core embodying horrifying *jouissance,* enjoyment, and as such an object which simultaneously attracts and repels us—which *divides* our desire and thus provokes shame.

It is, however, through functioning in this obscene manner, through targeting the object in the subject that is more than the subject, that the Symbolic's unanswerable question serves to constitute the subject: "there is no subject without guilt, the subject exist[s] only in so far as [s/]he is ashamed because of the object in [her/]himself, in its interior." The Symbolic's question elicits a sense of shame and guilt in the subject that serves to divide, to hystericize the subject: "the subject as such is hysterical..., constituted through [her/]his own division, splitting, as to the object in [her/]him." At once fascinating and repulsive, the object in the subject, that aspect of the Real at the subject's very core, is "that of a 'death drive,' a traumatic imbalance, a rooting out. Man as such is 'nature sick unto death,' derailed, run off the rails through fascination with a lethal Thing."

Identification with the Thing

The processes of interpellation and subjectivization, according to Žižek, are nothing more than strategies the subject employs to avoid confronting this

traumatic element at its very core: the subject's attempts to dehystericize itself through identification. What is obscene about the question, about its very form, is that it aims beyond that which the subject identifies with to the traumatic element at her/his very core, triggering the very sentiments of shame and guilt the subject seeks to avoid through identification. This certainly helped to explain the feeling of guilt I had experienced during the exchange that followed my presentation. In identifying with Felman's (1987) conception of a pedagogy premised on psychoanalytic principles, I had found an answer to the Other's unanswerable question of how pedagogy should best proceed; when that conception of pedagogy was challenged, however, I found myself confronted, once more, with that which I had sought to avoid through identification: the unanswerable question.

The Other's Unanswerable Question

The guilt I had experienced during the exchange following my presentation was a product of my rehystericization, a consequence of my interlocutors' questions, questions that, by taking seriously, I had allowed to destabilize my identity with Felman (1987) and reacquaint me with the unsettling presence of the Real at my very core. In so doing, I had unwittingly stumbled into the very position the analysand finds him or herself in as the psychoanalysis draws to a close: the analysand's coming to terms with the unsettling presence at her/his very core, with the intrinsically hystericized state of his or her being is, in

fact, what marks the end of the psychoanalytic process. This state of resolve is achieved through an inversion—the reversal, of the Other's unanswerable question:

> at the end of the psychoanalysis the question is, so to speak, returned to the Other, the impotence of the subject displaces itself into the impossibility proper to the Other: the subject experiences the Other as blocked, failed, marked with a central impossibility—in brief, as "antagonistic."

In redirecting the Other's question, the subject seeks not to eradicate her/his symptom, to dehystericize her/himself through identification with some aspect of the Symbolic, but to embrace the sinthome, to identify with the little piece of the Real that constitutes her/his very being.

It is this identification with the symptom that Lacan designates *passage à l'acte*. As opposed to "acting out"—the subject's attempt, no matter how seemingly demented, to communicate with the Symbolic, to discover the meaning, the truth, of his or symptom in the intersubjective network of communication, in the omniscient big Other, to "understand"—Lacan's "passage to act" denotes the subject's withdrawal from the Symbolic, the dissolution of the social bond, the subject's transition into "subjective destitution," wherein "[s/]he has no name..., no signifier to represent [her/]him, which is why [s/]he retains [her/]his consistency only through identification with [her/]his symptom" (Žižek, 1991b, p. 139–140). It is, then, in choosing to identify with the symptom, rather

than eradicate it, that the subject is finally dehystericized, that the psychoanalysis comes to a close. For, in identifying with the *sinthome,* the subject reconstitutes the very parameters of knowledge/truth, revealing the total incommensurability of truth as meaning—as a function of the Symbolic—with truth as that which *must* be presupposed to explain the very existence of the Symbolic—as a function of the Real. It is for this reason that Lacan's thought is best understood "as a work in progress, as a succession of attempts to seize the same persistent traumatic kernel" (Žižek, 1994, p. 173), to grasp the truth of the Real, of the object in the subject, in its very indeterminacy.

Chapter Six Notes

[1] All page references in this section, unless indicated otherwise, are to Žižek (1989, pp. 71–73).

[2] Milovanovic, as Žižek, is a member of the Slovenian Lacanian School.

[3] As Milovanovic (1993, p. 7) notes:

> an understanding of the message presupposes that the factor occupying this location is responsive; this very responsiveness provides the primary mechanism by which the receiver is constituted, or interpellated, by the dominant factor...; the other entering one of the particular discourses, must become receptive to the message being sent.

[4] Fink (1995, p. 198) notes of Lacan's schema:

> other discourses... could be generated by changing the *order* of the four mathemes used.... If instead of keeping them in the order in which they are found in the master's discourse..., we changed the order..., four different discourses could be generated. In effect, a total of twenty-four different discourses are possible using these four mathemes in the four different positions, and the fact that Lacan mentions four discourses suggests that he finds something particularly important about the *order* of the elements.

[5] All page references in this section, unless indicated otherwise, are to Žižek (1989, pp. 74-75).

[6] Examples of such Real events that must be presupposed to explain the effectivity of the symbolic order are the Primal Parricide, as presented by Freud, and the Struggle of Lordship and Bondage, as presented by Hegel.

[7] I borrow the term "materiality of the letter" from Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992, p. 29).

[8] All page references in the next two sections, unless indicated otherwise, are to Žižek (1991a, pp. 146-148).

[9] All page references in the next two sections, unless indicated otherwise, are to Žižek (1989, pp. 178-181).

Chapter Seven

Establishing the Truth

> We can deceive animals by an appearance imitating a reality for which it can be substitute, but the properly human way to deceive a [wo]man is to imitate the dissimulation of reality—the act of concealing deceives us precisely by pretending to conceal something. In other words, there is nothing behind the curtain except the subject who has already gone beyond it. (Žižek, 1989, p. 196)

The Pursuit of Truth

What I hope the previous chapters have made it possible for the reader to learn is that truth *must* be presupposed in order to explain the very existence of the symbolic network within which we undertake the pursuit of truth, but that truth, nevertheless, *does not exist*—it is only by virtue of its nonexistence, the absence of its own truth, that the symbolic network can maintain its consistency. The constitution of a symbolic network is "the act of concealing [that] deceives us precisely by pretending to conceal something." However, despite all appearances to the contrary, "there is nothing behind the curtain except the subject who has already gone beyond it." As Žižek (1991a, p. 196) notes: "truth belongs to the

order of contingency; we vegetate in our everyday life, deep into the universal Lie that structures it, when, all of a sudden, some totally contingent encounter—a casual remark by a friend, an incident we witness—evokes the memory of an old repressed trauma and shatters our self-delusion." It is at moments such as this that the symbolic network we have invested so much time and energy in maintaining is called into question—its coherency, its truth, is challenged, called into question.

What this means, of course, is that psychoanalysis is "radically anti-Platonic: the Universal is the domain of Falsity par excellence, whereas truth emerges as a particular contingent encounter which renders visible its 'repressed'" (Žižek, 1991a, p. 196). This, according to Žižek, is why "Lacan's final lesson is not relativity and plurality of truths but the hard, traumatic fact that in every concrete constellation *truth is bound to emerge* in some contingent detail." Truth, then, is not simply up-for-grabs, for "although truth is context-dependent—although there is no truth in general, but always the truth *of* some situation—there is none the less in every plural field a particular point which articulates its truth and as such *cannot* be relativized; in this precise sense, truth is always *One*."

ŽiŽek's (1991a, p. 216) point is that, in any symbolic network, "if some signifier were not missing, we would not have a signifying structure but a positive network of causes and effects." Freud dubbed the act of "primordial repression"

responsible for the constitution of a signifying network *Urverdrängung*: "the radical rupture by means of which a symbolic system fractures its inclusion in the chain of material causality." If this act of primordial repression did not occur, "if some signifier were not missing, we would not have a signifying structure but a positive network of causes and effects." Žižek notes how, "in his *Seminar XI*, Lacan baptized this 'primordially repressed' signifier—the 'missing link' of the signifier's chain—the 'binary signifier'."

The Master's Discourse

Because of the binary signifier's "constitutive lack, the chain runs in a vicious circle, it produces again and again new 'unary' signifiers (Master-Signifiers) which endeavour to close the circle by retroactively providing it with foundation." Žižek suggests "it is the philosophical notion of the 'transcendental' dimension which gives perhaps the clearest expression to this paradox of an order, the positive condition of which is that something—its very foundation—must be missing, must remain 'repressed'; of an order which turns around its central void, an order *defined* by this void." The paradox, of course, is that "if this void were to be filled out, the order itself would lose its consistency and dissolve itself," and it is this paradox that defines the symbolic order:

> the paradox of a *finite totality*: every language constitutes a "totality", a universe complete and closed in itself; it allows of no outside, everything can be said in it; yet this very totality is

> simultaneously marked by an irreducible finitude. The inner tension of a finite totality is attested by a loop that pertains to our basic attitude towards language: spontaneously, we somehow presuppose that language depends on "external" reality, that it "renders" an independent state of things, yet this "external" reality is always-already disclosed through language, mediated by it.

The mechanism that allows us to "overlook" how "this very totality is simultaneously marked by an irreducible finitude" is that of the Master's Discourse.

The Master's Discourse, according to Bracher (1988, p. 40–42), "is known to us today only in a considerably modified form, but it is nonetheless active and visible in the various discourses that promote mastery—i.e., discourses that valorize and attempt to enact an autonomous, self-identical ego." It is a discourse, then, that "exercises an extremely powerful force in all spheres of human life, from the most intimate and subjective realms to the most common and collective. Its force is nothing less than imperialistic, and at times, it can be murderous." This leads Bracher to conclude that "the question, then, is 'how to stop this little mechanism'." The question is certainly an important one, but it was only *after* I engaged in the pursuit of psychoanalytic truth that I learned how this question had motivated my research from my earliest days as a graduate student.

What Will Have Been

Although I learned of Lacan's "discourse of the Master" relatively late in my graduate career, I can now say quite unequivocally that all my previous efforts as a student, teacher, researcher, reader, and writer—while not conceived as such at the time—were all concerned with a single question: "how to stop this little mechanism." Why? Because the truth of those previous efforts is a function neither of language (the Lacanian Symbolic) nor nature (the Lacanian Imaginary) but of the subject that submits to the signifying network they *will have been* integrated into. For, as Žižek (1989, pp. 56–57) notes: "meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively—the analysis produces the truth; that is the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning." Žižek's point is that "as soon as we enter the symbolic order, *the past is always present* in the form of historical tradition and *the meaning of these traces is not given*; *it changes continually* with the transformations of the signifier's network"; consequently, "every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, *changes retroactively the meaning* of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way"(emphasis added).[1]

This explains why the truth of my previous critical efforts became evident, "readable in another way," once I exchanged the "signifying frame[s]"[2] that previously gave them meaning for the "new master-signifier" that gives them meaning today—Lacanian psychoanalysis. It also explains why the dissertation's

truth could not emerge until the (Lacanian) symbolic network that would establish what its truth *will have been* was established. Of course, this Lacanian notion of truth, because it is neither discovered nor constructed but established through the process of inquiry itself, can neither be demonstrated nor taught, as the diligent reader has by now no doubt deduced. What can be taught, however, and what the dissertation seeks to teach (hence its somewhat paradoxical structure), are the conditions that make it possible to learn that truth "is an empty *place*, and the 'effect of Truth' is produced when, quite by chance, some piece of 'fiction' (of symbolically structured knowledge) finds itself occupying this place" (Zizek, 1989, p. 191).

How a Shift in Signifying Networks Differs from a Shift in Perspective

At first glance, however, the adoption of a new signifying frame seems to differ little from the adoption of a new perspective. But the exchange of one signifying frame for another involves something far more radical than a simple change of perspective. Take, for instance, the infamous "shower scene" from the once popular television series *Dallas*. In the opening scene of a new season, the meaning of the whole previous season was "rewritten" as nothing more than a figment of the imagination, a dream, of one of the central characters. This ingenuous inversion, which involved a simple change of perspective, proved not only unsatisfying but also unconvincing to most viewers, since it left far too many issues unresolved. But let us suppose the whole previous season had been written

with the idea of later depicting it as a dream. There would certainly have been fewer inconsistencies, perhaps none, in fact. The inversion, nonetheless, would have remained unsatisfying and unconvincing to many. Why? Because such a guileless inversion does nothing more than add another perspective to those that already exist, to those created by viewers themselves and representatives of the popular media. To be truly convincing, truly satisfying, a new reading must do much more than simply offer an alternative account. This is what distinguishes a shift in perspective from a shift in the signifying framework.

A shift in the signifying framework takes place when one perspective, one interpretation among many, begins to function as the only possible interpretation—when, for example, one species among many begins to function as its own genus, when a Particular assumes the role of the Universal. Once that interpretation is adopted, every perspective that preceded it is reinterpreted, recolored, as an instance in a chain of *inevitable* events leading up to that interpretation's *ineluctable* emergence. A perfect example of this retroactive effect is the manner in which capitalism, once it was firmly established, reinterpreted all previous modes of production as moments in its own process of development:

> In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a

> particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it. (Marx, 1973, pp. 106–107)

Marx, according to Žižek (1991a, p. 209), understood the retroactive effect of meaning fully, looking not to the historical origins of capitalism for its truth but its fully developed form. Thus Žižek remarks "of the famous proposition from Marx's *Grundrisse* according to which 'the anatomy of man offers us a key to the anatomy of monkey'," that "we should not forget for a single moment that we do *not* 'derive man from monkey': all we effectively do is reconstruct the process backwards, from the standpoint of the finished result."

Transference as the Path to Conversion

The psychoanalytic term that makes the emergence of a new signifying network possible is "transference," and even an understanding of how the process works is no protection against its effect even—*les non-dupes errent.* An analysand, for instance, who succeeds in catching his or her analyst in an inconsistency, who is in the know, does nothing more than prove that transference has *already* taken place, otherwise he or she would have no interest in proving the analyst wrong or mistaken. Žižek (1989, p. 39) suggests the theologian Pascal exhibits at least an implicit understanding of transference when he bids those unable to accede to his rational proof of God to overcome their reluctant passions by submitting themselves to blind ritual, to simply act *as if* they believe: "Pascal's final answer, then, is: leave rational argumentation and

submit yourself simply to ideological ritual, stupefy yourself by repeating the meaningless gestures, act as if you already believe, and the belief will come by itself."

This Pascalian method of conversion can be witnessed in millions of recovery groups around the world. Just as Pascal's reluctant converts to Catholicism were urged to overcome their reluctant passions by confessing their impotence and inability to believe, so too are neophyte substance abusers bid to admit their powerlessness over alcohol or drugs and to place their trust in a "higher power"—something other than their own reason (often the group or an individual sponsor for atheists and agnostics). Simply by not drinking or using, attending meetings, and following the lead of recovered abusers, struggling substance abusers find themselves, suddenly, believing not only what they could not believe but also that their new-found belief is something they believed *even before* they believed it!: "what distinguishes this Pascalian 'custom' from insipid behaviorist wisdom ('the content of your belief is conditioned by your factual behavior') is the paradoxical status of a *belief before belief*: by following a custom, the subject believes without knowing it, so that the final conversion is merely a formal act by means of which we recognize what we have already believed in" (Žižek, 1989, p. 40).

Why a Lacanian Signifying Network?

But why choose to follow the "custom" of Lacanian psychoanalysis, to adopt *its* signifying framework over that of other discourses—positivism, hermeneutics, critical social theory, phenomenology, socialism, liberalism, structuralism, deconstruction, etc.? Because, according to Fink (1995, p. 129): "Lacanian psychoanalysis constitutes a very powerful theory and a socially significant practice" but one that has no aspirations to be "a *Weltanschauung*, a totalized or totalizing world view," despite the fact that "many would like to make it such." Lacanian psychoanalysis "is a discourse and, as such, has effects in the world," but it fully acknowledges that "it is but one discourse among many, not *the* final, ultimate discourse." Fink recognizes, of course, that this begs the question: "if psychoanalysis is not somehow the ultimate discourse, being but one discourse among others, what claim can it make to our attention? Why should we bother to concern ourselves with analytic discourse at all, if it is just one of several or one of many?" The reason is quite simple for Fink: because psychoanalysis refuses to pose as a "metalanguage" yet "*allows us to understand the functioning of different discourses in a unique way.*"

Yet another reason to choose Lacanian psychoanalysis over other discourses is suggested by Mark Bracher (1993, p. 60–63). Bracher notes how "philosophical criticism—including even deconstruction, which criticizes the master signifiers of philosophy—finds it very difficult to escape becoming another master discourse, as demonstrated by the proliferation in the 1970s and

early 1980s of deconstructive master signifiers like 'logocentric,' 'aporia,' and 'undecidability'." Lacanian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, even though its concepts "function as master signifiers," given that "no discourse can operate without master signifiers," allows its "master signifiers (like 'master signifier')" to play a role "not in baptizing phenomena but in constituting a specific knowledge" that can be used "not for the immediate production of the satisfaction of mastery but as the basis of transformative practice." Bracher, of course, acknowledges that Lacanian psychoanalysis has the potential to degenerate into a discourse of the Master—"a possibility that Lacan noted explicitly on a number of occasions and to which he responded by insisting (following Freud) that psychoanalysis is not a metaphysics or worldview or alternative religion"—and that "Lacan's theory has at times been seen as a discourse of the Master"; nonetheless, he insists that "when Lacanian psychoanalysis is used as a means to bring about change and not an end in itself, its master signifiers can be used to promote a transformative practice, which... entails radically different functions for the master signifiers and knowledge of analysis."

Another and somewhat compelling reason for educators to choose Lacanian psychoanalysis over other discourses is because educators—who I have argued elsewhere are not so much knowledge as *cultural* workers[3]—need to be concerned with how culture initiates and resists social change. For, as Bracher (1993, p. 19) notes: when "culture plays a role in social change, or in resistance to

change, it does so largely by means of desire." But what often goes unnoticed is that "insofar as a cultural phenomenon succeeds in interpellating subjects—that is, in summoning them to assume a certain subjective (dis)position—it does so by evoking some form of desire or by promising satisfaction of some desire. It is thus desire rather than knowledge that must become the focal point of cultural criticism." And as Žižek (1993, p. 3) notes of Lacan: "is not his entire work an endeavor to answer the question of how *desire is* possible? Does he not offer a kind of 'critique of pure desire,' of the pure faculty of desiring? Are not all his fundamental concepts so many keys to the enigma of desire?" Surely, then, it is to Lacanian psychoanalysis that educators should look to gain a greater understanding of desire. This is not, of course, to suggest that knowledge is no longer of importance, for as Bracher makes clear: "knowledge is often an important factor in such motivation; indeed, it is always at least implicit in desire and jouissance." The problem, however, is that "knowledge cannot account for the position assumed by subjects within that knowledge, for position within knowledge is a function of identification or desire, or the ground of desire: being and its lack."

Another reason to choose Lacanian psychoanalysis over other discourses, and one of the most compelling for me, is because Lacan makes it possible to rethink the theory/practice divide, to work toward establishing what I describe in an earlier work as a *pedagogy of engagement* (Briton, 1996c). It is important,

certainly, that "analytic discourse is structured differently from the discourse of power," that "Lacan's 'four discourses' seek to account for the structural differences among discourses" (Fink,1996, p. 129), but what is of greater importance, for me at least, is that Lacan's schema of the four discourses brings together structural and embodied elements of existence, positing a relation between lived experience and thought that challenges us to use "structural thinking in a compelling way" but not to forget that the positions of "knowledge..., truth...; subjectivity...; and *jouissance*... are places, of course, but *bodily engaged places*" (Braunstein, 1988, p. 51, emphasis added).

The Lacanian Notion of Truth

Clearly, then, the Lacanian notion of truth advanced herein is antithetical to traditional notions that seek to ground truth empirically or transcendentally. In fact, the dissertation aims to reveal that when it comes to "objective" claims to truth,

> what we have here is an inversion by means of which what is effectively an *immanent*, purely textual operation—the "quilting" of the heterogeneous material into a unified ideological field—is perceived and experienced as an unfathomable, *transcendent*, stable point of reference concealed behind the flow of appearances and acting as its hidden cause. (Žižek, 1991a, p. 18)

A major implication of explicating truth as such, as an effect of suture/de-suture, of "the 'quilting' of the heterogeneous material[4] into a unified ideological field"

and not "an unfathomable, *transcendent*" cause, a "stable point of reference concealed behind the flow of appearances," is that understanding *must be thwarted* to ensure that "this purely textual operation" is not obfuscated in the process of exposing it. This is why the chapters that constitute the dissertation's pursuit of truth had to remain as they were originally composed, even though revising them in light of the signifying network that emerges in that pursuit would no doubt render the dissertation more "understandable." The problem is that "understandability" comes at a price. The more "understandable" the dissertation, the more its truth *looks* to be a function of some "*transcendent*, stable point of reference... behind the flow of appearances..., its hidden cause," rather than the emergence of a new Master Signifier, to a purely formal act of de-suture/suture that "quilts" the dissertation into "a unified ideological field" in the final chapter.

On one level, of course, it makes perfect sense to rewrite the body of the dissertation to better "reflect" the truth the process of inquiry establishes—to make it "understandable." Researchers in the realm of natural science, for instance, often make intuitive leaps to arrive at new discoveries but then attribute their discoveries to a linear, cumulative process of inquiry (the scientific method) to make them "understandable." This is because, as Thomas Kuhn (1970) notes, the scientific community (normal science) simply rejects scientific claims that are not "understandable" from the perspective of normal science, forcing scientists

who wish to remain part of that community to disavow any "gaps" they perceive in the supposedly seamless process of scientific inquiry. Such insidious acts of policing the truth explain why Lacan "is adamant about refusing to understand, about striving to defer understanding, because in the process of understanding, everything is brought back to the level of the status quo, to the level of what is already known" (Fink, 1995, p. 71). The central implication of explicating Lacan's retroactive notion of meaning, then, is that "understanding" must be sacrificed on the altar of truth—even though the reader may, at first, experience some difficulty identifying the altar and have to spend even more time thinking about what it is that is being sacrificed. To explicate Lacan's retroactive notion of meaning in a manner that sacrifices truth to "understanding" is to fall prey to a performative contradiction.

Teaching the Unteachable

Because the dissertation aims to reveal truth, its own included, as an effect of suture/de-suture, of "the 'quilting' of the heterogeneous material into a unified ideological field" and not "an unfathomable, *transcendent*" cause, a "stable point of reference concealed behind the flow of appearances," it is essential that "this purely textual operation" not be obfuscated by the masquerade of rewriting the process of inquiry recounted in the dissertation such that its truth appears as the mere *discovery* of an a priori *fact.* This is why it so important that the process of inquiry being recounted not be rendered more understandable/palatable, that its

truth not be attributed not to some "unfathomable, *transcendent*, stable point of reference... behind the flow of appearances..., [their] hidden cause," but to the emergence of a new Master Signifier, to a purely formal act of de-suture/suture that "quilts" the dissertation into "a unified ideological field."

The very structure of the dissertation, then, stands as an illustration of the defense offered in support of its central thesis: Lacan must be read contra Lacan to realize psychoanalysis' critical potential. The dissertation grounds its claim that Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a substantive ground for critique when Lacan is read contra Lacan by revealing how meaning is a function neither of nature/science (the facts never speak for themselves) or culture/interpretation (language is never enough) but of the subject itself, who constitutes truth through the very act of concealing it. In revealing its central thesis to be an *effect* that paradoxically precedes its *cause*, the dissertation reveals how truth is a function neither of nature nor culture but of the subject's efforts to eschew an encounter with the Real—"that truth has the structure of a fiction" (Žižek, 1922, p. 91).

The dissertation's central thesis, its truth claim, is not some *cause* that exists outside and independent of the processes of inquiry that result in its "discovery" but an *effect* of a series of misrecognitions within the process of inquiry itself that is posited as such after the fact, in retrospect, by the subject. The aim of the dissertation is to reveal how the dissertation's truth, its thesis that Lacan must be read contra Lacan to achieve psychoanalysis' critical potential, is

revealed as an *effect* that paradoxically precedes its *cause.* Once a *synchronic* understanding of Lacanian psychoanalysis is established in the pursuit of psychoanalytic truth, the thesis that Lacan must be read contra Lacan to achieve psychoanalysis' critical potential—or at least the *absence* thereof—is read back into the chapters that precede it.

Consequently, the meaning or cause of the thesis can never be traced through a *diachronic* investigation of the events that precede its establishment—Foucault falls prey to this very trap when he tries to trace the origins of modern sexuality to some event in the past; this is why he is forced to the very origins of Western society in ancient Greece, where the cause still eludes him. The paradox Foucault fails to come to terms with is that meaning is a function of past events being incorporated into a signifying network at a later date—of *what will have been*—not of something inherent to the context or nature of past events themselves.

Contingency: the Mother of Necessity

Each of the chapters that constitute the dissertation were undertaken without the thesis that Lacan must be read contra Lacan to achieve psychoanalysis' critical potential in mind. Each, in fact, was undertaken with the sole intent of reading education with psychoanalysis, of putting psychoanalysis to work to make better sense of an education-related problem. Consequently, even the most careful examination of these chapters will yield no trace of the thesis.

And yet, once a synchronic understanding of Lacanian psychoanalysis is established, this purely contingent series of chapters is *reinterpreted* as a chain of necessary events leading ineluctably to this conclusion. Much as capitalism, once established as a synchronic system, reinterpreted all previous modes of production (a diachronic chain) as moments leading inexorably to its own realization, the thesis that Lacan must be read contra Lacan to achieve psychoanalysis' critical potential (the *effect* of a series of open, contingent processes of inquiry) posits the chain of contingencies that led to its realization as its *cause*—illustrating how contingency is, paradoxically, the mother of necessity.

The dissertation, then, serves as an illustration of "the fundamental Lacanian thesis concerning the relation between signifier and signified: instead of the linear, immanent, necessary progression according to which meaning unfolds itself from some initial kernel, we have a radically contingent process of retroactive production of meaning" (Žižek, 1989, 102). Consequently, what the dissertation *means*, its truth, only becomes apparent after the fact. From the perspective of the (Lacanian) signifying network that emerges in the pursuit of psychoanalytic truth, what each of the dissertation's chapters overlooks is the fact that Lacan must be read contra Lacan before psychoanalysis can realize its critical potential. This "causal" error, however, is only constituted as such in *retrospect*, when the effect of that "error" (the realization that Lacan must be read contra

Lacan to realize psychoanalysis' critical potential) establishes itself as that error's very cause—*reinterpreting* all that preceded it. Hence Lacan's insistence that an effect *can* precede its cause. The past, as a series of diachronic events exists only as it is included in the synchronic field of the signifier—this is how the present brings about, gives meaning to, the past and how meaning is a function not of what was or is but of what *will have been*:

> The time structure with which we are concerned here is such that it is mediated through subjectivity: the subjective 'mistake', 'fault', 'error', misrecognition, arrives paradoxically *before* the truth in relation to which we are designating it as 'error', because this 'truth' itself becomes true only through—or, to use a Hegelian term, by mediation of—the error. This is the logic of the unconscious 'cunning', the way the unconscious deceives us: the unconscious is not a kind of transcendent, unattainable thing of which we are unable to take cognizance, it is rather—to follow Lacan's wordplay-translation of *Unbewusste—une bévue*, an overlooking: we overlook the way our act is already part of the state of things we are looking at, the way our error is part of the Truth itself....Truth arises from misrecognition. (Žižek, 1989, p. 59)

The Interminable Pursuit of Truth

Because one of the things this dissertation hopes to accomplish is to reveal "the way our error is part of the Truth itself," how "Truth arises from misrecognition," it would be remiss to pretend its central thesis existed *prior to*

the series of misrecognitions that produced it—to pretend the thesis consciously informed the project from the outset. This would no doubt invest the dissertation with a greater sense of integrity and make it possible to provide the reader with neat summations at the end of each chapter outlining how far we have come and how far there is to go, where we have been and where we are going next, and what has been discussed and what will be discussed next. Such techniques, of course, are the very mechanisms that serve to mask the way our error is part of the truth itself and how truth arises from misrecognition.

It is always difficult to draw an inquiry of this nature to a close, for there really is no close. My own struggle to learn psychoanalytic truth, to come to terms with Lacan's thought continues, and hopefully will continue, for years to come. The controversial nature of Lacan's work means there will always be much to come to terms with. As for the work of Žižek, it continues to allure, frustrate, and inspire me. While it may well seem so, the struggle to learn psychoanalytic truth reiterated in this dissertation was not contrived; it really did proceed from a desire to resolve certain difficulties arising from my own attempts to understand the implication of psychoanalytic principles in pedagogic practice. One thing my struggles with Lacan have taught me is that I never really know what it is that I'm trying to resolve until I resolve it—meaning, after all, being a function of retroactivity. Despite its controversial and enigmatic nature, I remain convinced that Lacanian psychoanalysis holds great promise for education. I can only hope

that this dissertation, although it only begins to address the nature of psychoanalytic learning, knowledge, and truth, will provide some encouragement to those interested in reading Lacaninan psychoanalysis with education.

Chapter Seven Notes

[1] This redemptive notion of truth is not unlike that sketched out by Benjamin in his unfinished *Passagen-Werk*. In her ovarian study of Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Susan Buck-Morss (1989, p. 124) notes how Benjamin resolves a lacunae in Marx (how, exactly, the transition to socialism would take place, which subsequently conjured the specter of economic determinism) by attributing the transition to socialism not to changes in the economic base, but changes in the superstructure: to "a separate (and relatively autonomous) dialectical process, 'no less noticeable... than in the economy,' but proceeding 'far more slowly.' It is *this* dialectic that makes possible the transition to a socialist society." Not only does this dialectic unfold in a space highly reminiscent of the unconscious, Žižek's "signifying frame" ("it plays itself out between the collective imagination and the productive potential of the new nature that human beings have brought into being, but do not yet consciously comprehend"), it is also "developed not by 'burying the dead past, but by revitalizing it." It was clear to Benjamin that "if future history is not determined and thus its forms are still unknown, if consciousness cannot transcend the horizons of its sociohistorical context, then where else but to the dead past can imagination turn to conceptualize a world that is 'not-yet'?" This redemptive inversion, moreover, "satisfies a utopian wish: the desire (manifested in the religious myth of awakening the dead) 'to make {past} suffering into something incomplete, to make good an unfulfilled past that has been irretrievably lost." Thus:

> The socialist transformation of the superstructure, which begins within capitalism under the impact of industrial technology, includes *redeeming the past, in a process that is tenuous, undetermined, and largely unconscious*. As a result of the distortions of capitalist social relations, the progressive and retrogressive moments of this process are not easily discerned. One of the tasks that Benjamin believed to be his own in the *Passagen-Werk* was to make both tendencies of the process visible retrospectively. (emphasis added)

Benjamin's redemption of the past, wherein for instance, all previous attempts at

revolution (1789, 1830, 1848, 1871) may be redeemed by a subsequent successful revolutionary act, should not be conflated with the more commonplace notion that victors get to write history. Benjamin, as Lacan, recognizes that redemption involves much more than simply constructing a supplementary account of what occurred previously. Even when a single account suppresses all others, as is often the case when totalitarian regimes accede to power and a single, "official" version of history emerges, the past is not redeemed. Redemption involves replacing the very ground, the fantasy space, the signifying network, or screen upon which the various accounts compete for supremacy. This is the truly ideological space, the framework that determines the very terms on which competition can take, the very parameters of meaning.

[2] For example, the Master Signifiers of Adorno, Derrida, Elias, Foucault, Habermas, Heidegger, Lyotard, Marcuse, Marx, Nietzsche, and others that informed my master's and early doctoral work.

[3] Evidence in support of the fact that educators are, indeed, cultural workers appears in Briton (1996c).

[4] In this case, the "heterogeneous material" is the chapters that constitute the body of the dissertation.

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