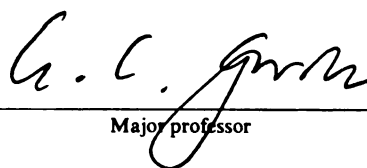This is to certify that the

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MODERN ENGLISH AND THE
IDEA OF LANGUAGE: A
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PRACTICE

By

Bernard E. Alford

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ABSTRACT

MODERN ENGLISH AND THE IDEA OF LANGUAGE: A POTENTIAL POSTMODERN PRACTICE

By

Bernard E. Alford

Postmodernism presents a challenge to English Studies both in practice and theory. In practice, the postmodern rejection of modernist institutions and formations, a rejection brought on by changing material conditions, exploits the vulnerability of English studies. Theoretically, postmodernism threatens the underdeveloped critique of language that currently serves as a disciplinary foundation. Through the revitalization of pragmatism, the adoption of new models and metaphors from emerging sciences of complex and chaotic order, and a biologically driven critique of language, English studies can be reformulated as a postmodern and post-intellectual cultural site. This dissertation reconstructs a pragmatics based on the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela to address the issues of language theory that inhibit the construction of a postmodern practice of English.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter One

VERSIONS OF POSTMODERNISM

INTRODUCTION

In his forward to a recent text, appropriately enough entitled *After Poststructuralism*, Frederick Crews challenges what he calls the "methodological dubieties of poststructuralism" (vii). Crews praises the text in question for restoring a "set of impartial ground rules for critical inquiry" (x), and bringing a sense of sanity back to the profession. His polemic was echoed in a recent edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, hardly the place might expect to find such concern about critical theory, which trumpeted the "death of deconstruction." While neither poststructuralism nor deconstruction adequately encompasses all that postmodernism implies, the message is nonetheless clear. After becoming what Crews calls the "new academic establishment" (vii), the poststructural, and by implication the postmodern, radical critique has overstayed its welcome, used up its radical and methodological credibility, and is ripe for replacement.

From a slightly different perspective, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner have argued that "postmodernism lacks the dialectical and critical social theory necessary to conceptualize the complex and often contradictory features of contemporary societies" (299). Similar attacks on the political failures of postmodernism have also been a constant feature of British Marxism. Perhaps first articulated by Terry Eagleton, this line of critique can be found in numerous Marxist and materialist tracts, but it has been most evident in the recent works of Christopher Norris. In both *What's Wrong*

With Postmodernism and *The Truth About Postmodernism* Norris goes to great lengths

to detail the political shortcomings of postmodernism. He finally characterizes it as a

"wholesale collapse of moral and intellectual nerve (TPM 1)," that results in the

capitulation of radical critique to the lowest common denominator of liberal

capitalism. Critics of the political formations of postmodernism invariably prefer the

political and moral constructions of Marxism.

These dual charges, one of excess and methodological intolerance, the other of

political naivete and cultural relativism, reflect the disarray of critical thought and

practice. Postmodernism is a term without concrete significance, perhaps best

represented, as Susan Bordo suggests, by the confusion over its own origins and

definition. As such, it becomes a convenient stalking horse for critics in search of a

golden return to an earlier sense of practice, albeit inflicted with the self-conscious tic

of all postmodern discourse, a condition Gilles Deleuze refers to "auto-critique."

Truthfully, it would be difficult to define or defend everything done or published

under the banner of postmodernism. It does seem, however, that this loose affiliation

of discourses and practices should count for more than a brief interruption of what

Crews might call serious inquiry, or as a potentially insightful side bar that requires

the taming and politically self-conscious hand of Marxist critique to have value. In

the constellation of diverse and often contradictory discourses and practices that

comprises the postmodern there are intellectual concerns worth a further analysis, not

on the basis of their abrogated relationship to modernist practices and principles, but

in their own right.

Without trying to define the postmodern or to construct yet another genealogy

of its roots and affiliations, to try once again to fix the relationship in time and method between the modern and the postmodern, we can still adumbrate a sense of what the postmodern represents in a broader context. That is, we can examine what the postmodern represents as a habit of thought and reflect on how this type of thought impacts our ideas of language, culture, and intellectual practice. Although there is no consensus about what, exactly, postmodernism stands for or, even more fundamentally, what modernism is or when it started, there do seem to be agreed upon symptoms of the postmodern, characteristics of postmodern thought. These characteristics, often with their own conflicted and contradictory narratives, represent a shift in intellectual practice that can be traced and connected with changes in other cultural dimensions. In short, while it may be necessary to jettison the more hyperbolic claims of the postmodern, the basic shift in thought and practice they represent is critical to a cultural critique not willing to succumb to either nostalgia or despair.

More to the point, the question I want to raise is what a better understanding of the key characteristics of postmodernism would mean to English studies. Although Crews and a host of other commentators see postmodern discourses as a new orthodoxy dominating the profession, there is good reason to be skeptical of those claims. A case in point is Gerald Graff's exploration of the Alice Walker for Shakespeare "scandal" that grew out of the canon wars. Graff's analysis in *Beyond the Culture Wars* clearly proves that while the rhetoric of wholesale change is everywhere, things may look very different on the ground. He shows, through an examination of book orders, that 76% of departments still require "historical

coverage," and that while 124 students might, in spite of William Bennett's objections, have to read *The Color Purple*, there were 1,555 students reading Shakespeare. My point is simply that while editorial control over a few key journals and the celebrity status of a few of what Pierre Bourdieu in the context of the French Academy refers to as "sanctioned heretics" may look like the postmodern tide overwhelming the profession, that does not mean that the rank and file of the profession or the student in the typical English class, literature or composition, has been much impacted by postmodern practice.

I think it makes sense to resist the claims of both those who see postmodernism as a nominalist freefall from material and historical responsibility and those who would exaggerate the importance of postmodernism in current practice. My goal is to examine what a practice of English or language studies, recast in a postmodern light, might eventually look like. It is my contention that if we understood the broad implications of postmodern thought we would be better prepared to ask ourselves what, if any, future English studies can expect to occupy in the university. To do that, however, requires a more thorough and thoughtful reflection on what a postmodern habit of thought might include.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERNISM

In trying to identify characteristics of postmodernism, I am not trying to define or to classify all that currently passes as postmodern. Instead, I intend to concern myself only with three characteristics that are generally recognized as critical in the clash between modern and postmodern perspectives. My goal is not to create an inclusive set of principles but to try and uncover the elements of postmodern thought

that I believe are essential to understanding how English studies, cultural studies, or even a broad concern with the issues of language and culture are shaped by these habits of thought. Finally, a habit of thought can only claim to be postmodern if it is rooted in a local and specific sense of practice and resistance.

One of the problems of discussing the characteristics of postmodern thought is that such a project has to begin with no hope of "getting it right," or in Steven Toulmin's terms "starting from scratch." That is, every term and characteristic is already part of an ongoing conflict. Postmodern thought does not create a new terminology or a new historical vantage point. It is always already deeply implicated in the language and practices of modernism, and it seeks no systematic or purely theoretical clarification. Instead, this project will argue for alternative perspectives, not exclusionary or dominant perspectives, for the characteristics examined. Perhaps the best we can hope for, again in Toulmin's terms, is to avoid "backing into the millennium." That is, we can use our own conflicted and tarnished practices to struggle for alternatives.

ANTIFOUNDATIONALISM

Antifoundationalism is one of the most characteristic and contradictory elements of postmodernism. From Jean-Francois Lyotard's condemnation of metanarratives in *The Post-Modern Condition* to the "rhizomes" and "nomads" of Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, postmodern discourses, particularly those connected to New French Theory, have made much out of the abandonment of the Enlightenment project. A corresponding discourse of historical eclipse has resulted in boastful claims about the end of the Enlightenment, the end of

history, and the reification of post-movements. We are now post-Marxist, post-feminist, and post-colonial in addition to the more traditional post-industrial and postmodern. I would argue that much of the criticism, often well-deserved, of postmodern critique has the confused and confusing claims of antifoundationalism at its core. For that reason, trying to unravel the issue of antifoundationalism is an essential first step toward exploring a postmodern habit of thought.

The first issue is whether or not antifoundationalism is defining characteristic of postmodernism, that is are postmodernists intentionally antifoundational and only then whatever else they may be, or is postmodernism a response to the lack or destruction of foundations. If the point seems pedantic, I think it is important to fix this question in relation to the political and economic limits of postmodern thought. If postmodernism is busy, as for example the Futurists were, in merely prophesying and propagandizing a hopeful and hyperbolic outcome, then the seriousness of their political, if not their artistic, claims should be viewed with some skepticism. If, on the other hand, the lack of foundations already exists and postmodernism is more a pragmatic and reflective response to an already existing condition, antifoundationalism is less an avant-garde manifesto and more a specific and historical political reaction. My contention is that postmodernism is associated with the latter, and that it involves not only the rational and scientific but the religious and social aspects of culture.

The first step toward a sensible understanding of antifoundationalism is to debunk the notion of local or antifoundational standpoints as being somehow unstable or utterly choatic. Although he is not much interested in the antifoundational aspects of postmodernism, in *Postmodernism and Its Critics,* John McGowan situates the issue

of antifoundationalism as a function of community norms.

> Phrased positively, postmodernism is the attempt to legitimate knowledge
>
> claims and the moral/political basis for action, not on the basis of indubitable
>
> truths, but on the basis of human practices within established communities.
>
> The recognition of such communities' stability means that the worry of such a
>
> foundation is not strong enough is absurd; our constant worry should be that
>
> this communal foundation is too strong.(24)

McGowan's analysis is worth pursuing on two points. First, he offers a view of

"local" or antifoundational norms which is in opposition to the nihilistic and

nominalist sense of philosophical antifoundationalism. The antifoundational impulse

that is rooted in a renewed sense community, practice, and aesthetics is not the same

as surrendering all matters of judgment and measurement. It merely refuses to make

the means of judgment or measurement wholly external and universal instead of local

and negotiable. Second, McGowan makes it clear that the practices and habits of

communities are not only "strong enough" as foundations for action and belief but

potentially "too strong." Orthodoxies are not all logocentric products of Enlightenment

thought. Communities, as the Balkans continually remind us, can produce their own

peculiar brand of hegemony and mayhem. Antifoundationalism, as it feeds what

McGowan defines as "positive freedom," is a skepticism that must be trained as much

on the irrational as the rational. It is, in ways McGowan does not utilize, a move

toward a more complex set of criteria for cultural critique, one that is unwilling to

simply trade modernist foundations for pre-modern ones.

> McGowan's treatment of postmodernism is a serious and acute analysis of

some of the inherent contradictions and complications of postmodern thought, and I will return to his pragmatic critique of liberal individualism, but the issue of antifoundationalism bears further scrutiny. By recognizing the way that postmodernism reflects, and not arbitrarily creates, the lack or abandonment of universal foundations in favor of localized practices, McGowan validates antifoundationalism as a response to social realities. He says that antifoundationalism creates neither "chaos" nor "liberation" because of the strength of what Bourdieu calls the "habitus," the shared and lived perception of the social. What I want to argue is that postmodernism recognizes the inherent chaos of our shared reality as a means of liberation. That is, only by constructing more subtle, complex, and choatic notions of the social sphere, including cultural reproduction and intellectual practice, can the hegemony of what Jameson, *pace* Mandel, refers to as "late capitalism" be challenged. McGowan does a salutary job of distinguishing the way that a positive sense of freedom turns away from the liberal humanist notion of individualism and individual freedom, which is essentially only freedom from social control, and toward freedom to belong to, define and shape local conditions. What is less evident in his analysis is the need to avoid creating the monolithic structures that much social theory depends on, in favor of more complex models of social interaction and resistance. It is, finally, the ability of antifoundational thought to bring the individual and the social or the local and the global together, not as bipolar opposites but as coexistent phases of the same experience, that makes it different in a positive, and not a nihilistic sense, from the reasoned foundations of the Enlightenment project.

It is also important to realize that undercutting the universals of Enlightenment

thought is not just a matter of challenging reason and the discourses that create and support it. Toulmin argues that the Peace of Westphalia was not so much the end as the displacement and sublimation of theological first principles. Western thought has maintained a gnostic component to this day, with the research scientist replacing the gnostic vision flight in the search for one truth. My point is that the foundational nature of western thought, obviously reflected in the constructs of social theory, is more than coincidental or methodological. David Hall suggests at the end of *The Uncertain Phoenix* that the only to change the way we order experience and society is to eventually reconfigure our religious sensibilities from monotheism to polytheism. In his telling of it, an antifoundational impulse is essential to any experience of the other that is not eventually reduced to domination.

From a slightly different perspective, we can see this alternative version of antifoundationalism as a struggle over cultural authority. In *A World Made by Men*, Charles Radding explores the evolution of thought and its linkage to cultural authority through the Middle Ages. What Radding's analysis illuminates is how the myths and narratives of cultural, and in that period spiritual, authority are weakened by exposure to practice and thought. That is, that each successive set of laws or rules crumbles when it no longer serves as an adequate definition of social and divine reality. From his perspective, the evolution of individual agency is the eventual outcome of a move away from divine and toward rational explanations of reality. Foucault, of course, dramatized the same impulse in his earlier works contrasting the classical and modern "epistemes." Although Foucault's sense of power and authority are more complex than Radding's, they share a sense of how the exposure of social authority is the first

phase of its mutation. As it relates to antifoundationalism, the issue of social authority cuts to the heart of the difference between nominalistic and nihilistic versions of antifoundationalism and the potential for a postmodernism not limited to those constructions.

It makes a difference whether anitfoundationalism is the result of nihilistic or nominalistic theories or the emergence of a more complex and inclusive social authority. In the first case, the rejection of existing order is in the name of a privileged few and decidedly antidemocratic in its formation. Nietzsche's view was not that the social contract was too limited but that it was already too inclusive and intrusive, and in the process too inhibiting to the fortunate few entitled to live beyond its bounds. His thought is, of course, deeply implicated in the class warfare between intellectuals and the "masses." That construction, as John Carey points out, is also fundamental to the construction of modern English studies. On the other hand, antifoundationalism can also be the result of the search for a more inclusive and complex form of social authority and enfranchisement. In this form it eschews the elitist formations of Nietzsche's thought and the more benign, but no less premodern and individualist, versions such as Richard Rorty's privileging of "strong poets" and their private "final vocabularies." Ultimately, we must learn to see divisions of high and low culture, the private and the public, and the elite and the masses as the self-created barriers of modern intellectual privilege and as a hinderance to postmodern versions of knowledge, thought, and action.

It depends on what kind of antifoundationalism one refers to before it is possible to agree with McGowan's assertion that it is nothing more than a red herring.

Although it is difficult to distinguish between various forms of antifoundationalism (the problem of the postmodern refusal of clean, systematic breaks in operation again) it is essential that a constructive sense of postmodernism begin with a strong sense of antifoundationalism, a sense that implies and embraces the reconstruction of social authority on new grounds and creates what Mary Louise Pratt calls a "contact zone" between the modernist divisions of science and the humanities. That kind of antifoundationalism is necessary to frame and explore the other characteristics of a constructive postmodernism.

One final perspective that can shed light on the conflicted notions of antifoundationalism is to examine the contact zone between science and critical theory. In *Chaos Bound,* N. Catherine Hayles addresses the issues of local and global systems and their similarities in both critical and scientific circles.

> The representations that many scientists now find interesting are self-similar with the contemporary episteme, in the sense that they are themselves models of the aleatory and ambiguous connection between representation and reality. Focusing on complex systems that are inherently unpredictable, chaos theorists recognize that chance variations are intrinsic to these systems and consequently that their representation will never coincide with the systems' actual behavior. (227)

What Hayles offers is a means of thinking through the vexing contradictions of local and global models or the tension between theory and practice without reducing the outcomes to an oversimplified conflict between science and poetry. Antifoundational thought does not preclude, in an absolute sense, universalist representation any more

than chaos theory precludes accurate measurement. On the contrary, as McGowan notes, postmodern thought relies on holistic thought, even though it never trusts its reliance. There are better ways to qualify and interrupt the harmful consequences of universalization without resorting to an all out retreat to individual and premodern versions of the poetic or the irreconcilable factions of "language games." Representations, such as the constructions of histories, are negotiable on a scale- or context-dependant basis. The nominalist and relativist ploy of raising the local to the status of the global is a clever but bloodless means to avoid the real complexity that faces us.

In short, antifoundational thought can be a means of rethinking and restructuring what I would argue are the disastrous results of over a century of humanist thought based on the faulty distinctions of aesthetic and scientific thought and consciousness. The sense of antifoundationalism I am arguing for allows resistance without surrendering all hope of a public sphere or an inclusive sense of community.

PLURALISM

The postmodern commitment to pluralism is no less conflicted and controversial than its affiliations with antifoundationalism. Broadly understood, pluralism in the postmodern fashion has been constructed around the principles and politics of difference. It takes as its target the supposed hegemony of Eurocentric principles and patriarchy, seeking the fracturing and displacement of that hegemony through discursive and non-discursive practices. Beyond these broad parameters, the postmodern celebration of pluralism and difference become problematic, prone to the

same excessive claims that complicate antifoundationalism, and bearing the additional

burden of intellectual involvement in cultural reproduction. That is, pluralism is a site

of cultural and not natural conflict. It is in the definition and creation of social

space(s) that pluralism takes shape, and intellectuals play an ever enlarging role in the

definition and maintenance of these spaces.

In this sense, pluralism is both a political and an intellectual /aesthetic problem,

and though I will attempt to separate these characteristics, they so infuse and inform

each other that their separation can only be a matter of convenience. My argument for

trying to treat them separately is to help articulate the role that humanist intellectuals,

in particular, have played in holding "cultural" concerns hostage to their privileges

within the system of social reproduction. That is, I will attempt to show why

intellectuals have become dubious curators of plurality, whether it be political or

cultural.

On the political side, pluralism is often intertwined with a "politics of

difference," which is problematic on several levels, as McGowan notes.

> Even if we accept that a "politics of difference" names a possible and desirable
>
> political hope, the delegitimation of collective identities provides us with no
>
> way to get from here to there. How are the social groups who will work for
>
> the politics of difference to be formed? How will they formulate their goals,
>
> legitimize theory, and shape strategies appropriate to achieving them without
>
> employing any of the tyrannical means of group formation that the advocates
>
> of difference see as universally prevalent? A reliance on individual action
>
> hardly offers an effective alternative. (172)

McGowan juxtaposes his version of "positive freedom" to the prospect of a facile and empty politics of difference undermined by its own theoretical confusion. He makes a strong case against reifying difference or diversity as a solution in and of itself. In a world where diversity can translate into Sarajevo or Mogadishu and not some United Nations promo of smiling, harmonious people, McGowan's skepticism toward difference as a defining political principle is well founded. Even the notion of communities is not without the problems of mingling exclusive and inclusive political energies. The truth may be, as David Kolb has commented, that the world is a good deal more "fractured" and "fragmented" than even the most ardent proponent of difference and diversity is prepared to acknowledge. Our task, if the earlier discussion of antifoundationalism is at all on target, is less the creation of more diversity than it is the construction of democratic practices and values to maintain and support it.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have linked postmodernism and democracy in their work, attempting to create a politics that is diverse yet strong enough to resist the oppressive forces of consumer capitalism.

> Our central problem is to identify the discursive conditions of the collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and changing relations of subordination. (153)

As in McGowan's project the emphasis here is on the reconstruction of a democratic space, and as in McGowan's project, though not so pointedly, a heavy burden falls on the reconstruction of intellectual practices. I think it is worth exploring the criticisms of Best and Kellner to help frame the dilemma posed by intellectuals and the value of pluralism.

Best and Kellner criticize Laclau and Mouffe for, in this order, misreading Marx, their reliance on discourse theory, and their theories of "democracy, socialism, and alliance politics" (200). My intent here is not to quibble with the accuracy of their judgments or to reify the work of Laclau and Mouffe. I think some of their points are acute and well taken. Rather, I want to focus on the tone of the criticism, which they repeat in their concluding chapters on the failings of postmodern theory in general. Perhaps the tell-tale remarks center on the misreading of Marx. For Best and Kellner, the sanctity of what they call "Marxian principles" is an essential element in reclaiming postmodernism from its own excesses. They "reject the postmodern renunciation of macrotheory," pointing to the discursive and fragmentary emphasis of postmodern critique.

> Postmodern theorists do not do social theory per se, but rather eclectically combine fragments of sociological analysis, literary and cultural readings, historical theorizations, and philosophical critiques. They tend to privilege cultural and philosophical analysis over social theory and thereby fail to confront the most decisive determinants of our social world. (259)

Best and Kellner share a vision of society and social theory not only akin to Marx but to Weber's view of society driven by a "formal process," creating a social world as deterministic as it is mechanistic.

In the conflict between 19th and early 20th century social theory and what Constance Penely and others refer to as "ludic" postmodernism the problematic nature of pluralism is exposed. If society is viewed from an empirical, if not positivist, perspective, Newtonian and Darwinian concepts of a mechanistic world governed by

laws and determined by rational principles make sense. Even if, as I would readily

grant, such an interpretation does not do justice to Marx, Weber, or Hegel, its legacy,

in practice, has been the creation of disciplines using, by today's standards, the crude

tools of universalized rationality that create a hegemony of intellectuals, their political

affiliations notwithstanding, attempting to dominate cultural production. In this sense,

difference is less what Raymond Williams kept referring to a "lived experience," and

more a means to catalogue mass behavior. Meaningful pluralism is lost in the

prescriptive rationality and social distinction created within the modern university.

These categories then extend and continue intellectual hegemony based on the

reduction of people to masses and the need to control their behavior.

On the other hand, postmodernists who offer diversity as the answer to

Weber's "iron cage," or who think that discourse analysis alone is a sufficient point of

social resistance miss the mark in the other direction. Romanticisng the Other,

community, or difference, as McGowan notes, offers nothing but a negative individual

freedom. It does nothing to problematize or realize democratic practice. Following

Rorty into a series of "conversations" may make it easier to see how language "goes

all the way down," in Rorty's famous phrase, destabilizing the logocentric foundations

of the Enlightenment, but it makes it easier to succumb to what Michael Bernard-

Donals suggests is the mistake of confusing changing the way one reads with changing

the way one lives. Further, as both McGowan and Iris Marion Young point out, there

are conflicts between and within the idealized terms of diverse, pluralistic societies.

Young examines the value of communities in progressive political struggles.

Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are

transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social

closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically

problematic, I argue, because those motivated by it will tend to suppress

differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political

groups persons with whom they do not identify. The vision of small face-to-

face, decentralized units that this ideal promotes, moreover, is an unrealistic

vision for transformative politics in mass urban society. (300)

My point here is that even the most obvious and attractive aspects of pluralism are

problematic and complex. Neither a traditional return to social theory nor the

celebration of diversity will prove adequate in promoting or defining a productive

sense of how to make the postmodernist commitment to pluralism work.

The polemics of both camps add to the confusion, of course, making it difficult

to tell what is at stake. As open as Best and Kellner are to postmodern discourse,

they are unwilling to relinquish the commanding viewpoint that classical social theory

provides. That is, they underestimate the increasing importance of cultural

reproduction as a fundamental characteristic of a postmodern society. From the other

side, the willingness to abandon materialist critique creates a discourse rooted only in

discourse. The problem here is the same problem of global/local emphasis current in

postmodern antifoundationalism. Each approach privileges one side of the equation.

If our understanding of issues such as pluralism is to advance, this modernist stalemate

must be broken. Clearly, we have to be able to think both globally and locally to

fully appreciate the challenges of a democracy ever more pluralistic and participative.

The indictment of intellectual practice growing out of specialized, modernist discourse

is that it privileges control, the hegemony of intellectual formations, and professionalism over any truly democratic initiative. For that reason, intellectual practice becomes an issue in the attempt to promote pluralism.

In *Intellectuals in Power,* Paul Bové addresses the antidemocratic and hegemonic configurations of critical discourse. By examining the role of humanist intellectuals in society, Bové exposes the limitations of even those practices intended to be oppositional.

> As I argue throughout, the present configuration of critical practice is politically and socially unsatisfactory; indeed, it is often irresponsible and reactionary: it supports the worst elements of an imperialistic and repressive society while justifying itself under the sign of "liberal humanism," of "litterae humaniores." Not until the profession begins to see through the discourse of humanism and to understand some of the material functions of the institutions it embodies as these relate to the hegemony can criticism begin to wrest the knowledge-producing apparatus away from the interests it now serves. (xiii)

For Bové the "power" of intellectuals, regardless of their political agenda, is directly related to institutional and discursive practice that suppress the nonprofessional voices on the margin to control the social confusion that modernist intellectuals have found constantly at their door.

John Carey focuses on the way that humanist intellectuals have written and rewritten their fear and loathing of the mass into some of the practices Bové describes.

> As an element in the reaction against mass values the intellectuals brought into being the theory of the avant-garde, according to which the mass is, in art and

literature, always wrong. What is truly meritorious in art is seen as the

prerogative of a minority, the intellectuals, and the significance of this minority

is reckoned to be directly proportionate to its ability to outrage and puzzle the

mass. Though it usually proports to be progressive, the avant-garde is

consequently always reactionary. That is, it seeks to take literacy and culture

away from the masses, and so to counteract the progressive intentions of

democratic reform.   (18)

Like Bovē, Carey makes a point of not confusing the professed political agenda of an

intellectual faction with the results of their practice. Thus, he considers leftist

intellectuals as culpable as any other faction. "Their rewriting of mankind as mass

inevitably separated them, as intellectuals, from the non-intellectual majority- though it

was intended to have quite the opposite effect" (39). The issues of social control and

hegemony raised by Bovē, and the intellectual habit of using their position to construct

and limit democratic reform by presenting the mass as the equivalent of social

disintegration, as described by Carey, cut to the heart of the problematic relationship

between pluralism and intellectual practice.

If a postmodern sense of pluralism is to emerge, it must chart a course away

from what Sande Cohen calls the "redemptive" function of intellectual practice and

toward a more complex and inclusive notion of culture. Such a notion emerges, to

give three quick examples, in the histories that Jacques Ranciēre has constructed of

French intellectual culture, in Michel de Certeau's use of "poachings" and "guerilla

raids" to explain popular culture, and in John Fiske's attempt to use those concepts to

explain popular culture in a manner that proves that Marx need not be unimportant or

uninteresting to postmodern critique.

To return to the criticism leveled against postmodernism by Best and Kellner, the problem they confront, and (re)create, resonates in the polemic between modernist critical practice and postmodern critique. For them, the choice is either a stable and intellectually responsible cultural theory, with a dash of postmodern discourse theory for creative energy, or the anarchy and politically irresponsible position they see reflected in much postmodern critique. The problem is that the categories they reify in their practice have the same view of nature and culture that drove nineteenth century science and social theory. Why must we choose between discursive and materialist theories? A postmodern humanist practice, true to both the antifoundational and pluralistic affiliations it claims, should be able to draw on both, in exactly the same way that scientists shift focus, Kuhnian revolutions notwithstanding, between models that prove the inadequacy of Newtonian physics and their use of those very same models to actually produce parts of their work.

Pluralism demands that we see postmodernism as an evolutionary, but by no means guaranteed, phase in democratic culture. It demands that our view of culture and the tools of the discourses we use to critique it become more organic, interactive, and complex, and less mechanistic. To date, both sides have failed to produce a vision of pluralism that is compelling enough to help put aside the facile notions of difference or the other and strong enough to provide the ethical and methodological compass of postmodern practice.

PRAGMATISM

Pragmatism is a central part of postmodern thought in thinkers as diverse as

Deleuze and Guattari and McGowan. What is much more difficult is adequately describing what each of these thinkers means by their appeal to pragmatism. On one hand, Norris simply dismisses pragmatism as going along to get along, as lacking any critical or ethical standards. On the other hand, Rorty has posited a neopragmatism that ultimately dissolves into personal vocabularies, a socially constructed view of reality that would dismiss Norris' objections as the unfortunate delusions of someone who thought grounds for certainty still existed. In between are a loose affiliation of approaches that promote "constructive postmodernism" or "speculative pragmatism" and often share little but the umbrella term of pragmatism. In spite of the variety of applications and the disputes over its merits, pragmatism has a central role in postmodern discourse. Just as pluralism and antifoundationalism have weaker versions, so, too, does pragmatism. My intent is to trace the affiliations that result in a stronger, more viable pragmatism, one capable of providing a framework for new methods and metaphors.

Without rehearsing a complete genealogy of pragmatism, it is important to note the number of critical approaches, ranging from the more traditional pragmatic concerns of Elgin and Goodman to the theologically grounded inquires of some "constructive" postmodernism, that return to Peirce and Dewey to find fruitful entry into social and critical theory. In the process, many of the foundational concepts of Western philosophy have been overturned, reconfigured, or in Cornel West's term, avoided. Pragmatism has been a staging ground for assaults on traditional problems of ethics and philosophy. From its borders, consciousness, the mind/body split, objectivity, subjectivity, the referential nature of language, and epistemology have all

come under fire. While other critiques of these issues have come from other sources, Saussure's linguistic science for instance, I believe that pragmatic approaches to these problems are most productive because they provide the only means of overcoming nominalist and realist views of nature and culture, and because they offer the prospect of reconnecting the human and natural sciences.

I am not arguing for a simple return to the pragmatism of Peirce and Dewey, which I will try and demonstrate is based on a problematic version of science. In fact, I think it could be argued that Lyell's *Doctrine of Uniformity*, the notion that change occurs in incremental and mechanistically predictable stages, is as important to Peirce and Dewey as it was to Newton and Darwin. Even Dewey's most radical and progressive constructs are built on a notion of and belief in scientific inquiry rooted, understandably, in the nineteenth century. I am also not promoting the neopragmatism of Rorty, which provides a great freedom for skeptical inquiry and social critique, based on a linguistic or nominalistic view of reality. As I have argued earlier, I do not think a postmodernism that turns everything into texts has or deserves much hope for survival. Instead, I will argue for a pragmatic moment grounded in post unified field theory science, the science of Chaos Theory, Complex Systems, and Fractal Geometry. In doing so, I am arguing that humanist and scientific discourses alike have to form a new set of concepts, metaphors, and complexities to describe nature and culture.

Of course, not everyone would agree that pragmatism and postmodernism are compatible. Robert Cummings Neville in *The Highroad Around Modernism* argues that "modernism," by which he means the nominalist strain of European thought

emanating from Heidegger and Neitzsche, is only an aberrant form of "modernity,"

and as such is avoidable. He defines postmodernism as the latest form of modernism,

and he argues that pragmatism and process philosophy are a viable alternative, and as

such offer a path around the pitfalls of modernism. In a similar vein, Eugene

Rochberg-Halton argues in *Meaning and Modernity* that this nominalist strain, which

he labels "abstractionism," can be counteracted by an appeal to Peircean formulas of

nature, community, and meaning. Finally, David Ray Griffin argues in his

introduction to a series on what he labels "constructive postmodern philosophy," that

we must delineate between "constructive" and "deconstructive" forms of

postmodernism. In his view, pragmatism and process philosophy are constructive

while the theories vilified by Neville and Halton are deconstructive. Their objections

are worth engaging.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, much depends on how we ground

our notions of the postmodern. Neville, Rochberg-Halton, and Griffin ground theirs in

the pragmatic refusal of nominalist theories of meaning and language. As I have

already argued, such a definition runs the risk of minimalizing, perhaps even

trivializing, the profound social, economic, and political issues that are part of the

totality of postmodernism. While their criticism of nominalist approaches is often

acute, limiting postmodernism to those approaches is an ironic contradiction of their

own methodology. While expanding upon the way that pragmatism grounds language

and other signs (semiotics) in nature and community, that is, while arguing that any

expression is relational, the attempt of a community to bring to awareness and

intelligibility the conditions of their existence, these theorists dismiss nominalist

theories as just language, or in Lyotard's famous phrase, "just gaming." Their own methods of analysis would seem to argue that, as flawed as they may be, theories and methodologies that deconstruct reality through language are a community attempt to articulate a deeply sensed dissonance in the relationship of utterance and reality. That is, even if Rochberg-Halton, for instance, is right in criticizing the way that "abstractionism" frames the issues and solutions, he cannot, without invalidating his own theory of language and cultural production, argue that these utterances or signs come from nowhere and amount to nothing. In short, if pragmatism is an accurate description of how semiotics works it must be an accurate description of all utterances and not just those self-consciously produced in its image.

Pragmatism, then, is not a means to merely repudiate nominalist theories but to investigate and interrogate them, not only on the level of rival methodologies and practices but as signs of deeper social meaning. Superficial as are Rorty's conclusions and his retreat to liberal and individualist final vocabularies, his attempt to articulate the slippage in cultural authority and disciplinary practice must be understood as a valuable, if flawed, inquiry. Rochberg-Halton, Neville, and Griffin confirm the insight that nominalism is an inadequate method to achieve that inquiry, or that nominalism succeeds in placing its practice in dialogue with other methods of inquiry, but it should not be dismissed *tout court* on those grounds. The critical question for a pragmatic approach is not how it can dismiss oppositional theories but how it can add them to the inquiry. From this perspective, pragmatism becomes an integral part of investigating the problems a radical pluralism poses to the whole issue of communities and inquiry.

McGowan focuses on the political aspect of this problem by arguing for a pragmatism that problematizes and overcomes liberal notions of freedom.

> [P]ostmodern theory aims to discover some alternative principle of action to offered by contemporary Western society, but this aim is vitiated by the habitual association opposition with distance and exteriority... On the whole these writers remain wedded to modernist notions of distance and disengagement as enabling radical critique, notions that their own attack on autonomous models of selfhood render inoperable.
>
> What we need instead is an account of the self's inevitable immersion in the social that also explains how selves can experience themselves as integral agents capable of dissenting from or choosing alternative paths among the options social situations present. The fundamental point is that a holistic view of society does not eliminate the possibilities of difference...(211)

McGowan has his own ideas about how this might be accomplished, of course, but he doesn't attempt a methodological or theoretical closure. In fact, his analysis opens instead of closes a line of inquiry, which is, in Peirce's term, "fallibalistic," meaning it is open to continuing critique.

This example is but one of the struggles or inquiries that a postmodern pragmatism must engage. Even as McGowan attempts to define a "positive freedom," he relies on terms such as community,self, and the social that become ever more complex and problematic. "The engagement of that complexity is what separates a postmodern pragmatism from earlier versions. Even though Peirce's view of the cosmos includes chance (tychastic evolution) and love (agapistic evolution) his sense

of realism and nature regulates these influences. To move beyond the instrumentalist limitations of American Pragmatism requires a more active interrogation of science and sincere effort to mediate the humanistic and scientific views of turbulence, disorder, and chaos. The troubling history of biological determinism, represented by Stephen Jay Gould in *The Mismeasure of Man*, notwithstanding, a postmodern pragmatism must examine the relationship between physical, biological, linguistic, and social formations. In doing so, the opportunity exists to reconstruct the border between the humanities and the sciences in ways that avoid premodern, romantic appeals on one side and reductive and asocial methodologies on the other.

Two examples of specific areas of inquiry are the mind/body split and the resultant views of objectivity/subjectivity. Griffin argues for "panexperientialism" as a means to overcome "the inadequacies and apparently insolvable mysteries that seem otherwise inevitable(10)" in sensationalist and empirical methods. Griffin's suggestion, central to constructive postmodern philosophy, is aimed at the limited way that science collects data and assigns value to experience. These methods have led, in Sandra Harding's view, to a both a separation of science from the life world and the reification of social distinctions in scientific methodology.

> Objects of knowledge then become, once again, dissimilar from the subjects of knowledge. Subjects of real knowledge, unlike subjects of mere opinion, are disembodied and socially invisible while their natural and social objects of knowledge are firmly located in history. (463)

Harding argues for an objectivity based on standpoint epistemologies that reflect not just the outcomes or methods of scientific inquiry but the questions that drive it. She

argues that the effect of social distinction is already visible in scientific methodology.

> In these respects, nature-as-an-object-of-knowledge simulates social life, and the processes of science themselves are a significant contributor to this phenomenon. Thus the subject and object of knowledge for the natural sciences, too, are not significantly different in kind. Whatever kinds of social forces shape the subjects are also thereby shaping their objects of knowledge. (454)

Harding's critique of objectivity in the scientific method denies the possibility of bracketing the scientific from the social and linguistic, thereby denying any special privilege of objectivity outside that social authority to constitute it. This is a properly pragmatic question because it both problematizes the methods of inquiry that we rely on and integrates methods of inquiry which modernist discourses, both humanist and scientific, have sought to separate. Her analysis helps expose one of the many fault lines that run through these contact zones and helps define an area of future inquiry and reconstruction.

As Brazilian biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Verela have argued, the integration of formerly disparate discourses extends to the contentious relationship between biological and cultural studies.

> What biology shows us is that the uniqueness of being human lies exclusively in a social coupling that occurs through languaging, generating (a) the regularities proper to the human social dynamics, for example, individual identity and self-consciousness, and (b) the recursive social dynamics that entails a reflection enabling us to see that as human beings we have only the

world we create with others- whether we like them or not. (246)

Maturana and Varela reinforce the pragmatic view that social and contextual forces govern the way we think and communicate. They also help make it clear that even pragmatic thought must find more complex models and metaphors, whether in Ilya Prigogine's dissapative systems or David Bohm's "implicate order," for the way we think about order and systems, especially those systems reified by the human sciences.

Hayles puts it of her vision of the interrelationship of humanities and science that she saw them as "two mingled voices within the cacophonography that we call postmodern culture" (208). Much of the work it will take to blend those voices even further will be done by a pragmatism revitalized by the complex, local forms of knowledge produced in both the sciences and the humanities. All disciplines, but especially one so entrenched in traditional forms of social discourse as English studies will be challenged to find ways to adapt, in practice and not just in theory, to new models and metaphors, new ways of thinking about language, knowledge, and culture.

THE CONDITION OF POSTMODERNISM

Obviously, there is much more that postmodernism can be said to represent and contain, but I am not trying to paint a picture of a unified postmodernism. Instead, I want to use antifoundationalism, pluralism, and pragmatism to demonstrate that postmodernism is not just a nominalist freefall, and at the same time, remember the historical importance of critiques of language before simply dismissing new theories of language. My point is that postmodernism can be seen as producing what Henry Giroux calls a "politics of possibility." That is, that postmodernism can provide the grounds for critiquing the direction and potential of English studies, both as a

historically specific discourse and as an emancipatory pedagogy. The characteristics

listed here could be expanded. Parody, democracy, technology and media, and what

McGowan calls "holistic theory" could be examined, but the key point is that these

characteristics can serve as the basis for a politically and culturally responsible

critique.

In this telling of it, postmodernism is more than a brief domination of radical

linguistic critique. Instead, as Giroux notes, "postmodernism constitutes a general

attempt to transgress the borders sealed by modernism, to proclaim the arbitrariness of

all boundaries, and to call attention to the sphere of culture as a shifting social and

historical construction" (18). It is this larger cultural sense of postmodernism, and

not the specialized linguistic discourses within the discipline, that make a postmodern

critique of English studies viable. A large part of that critique should center on the

realization that the critique includes a review of science and the very means by which

knowledge is recognized and sanctioned in this society. Such a critique must start

from the realization that the unity of the modernist position was more a function of

discursive hegemony than an accurate description of reality. As Kolb says:

> [T]here can be no liberating hope for a brand new world. There can be no
>
> change of the world as a whole, since there is no world as a whole constituted
>
> by a unitary granting of presence or a single basic shape of spirit. There are
>
> too many different rhythms and fields and possibilities for all to come to a
>
> climax or completion at once, nor are they totally unified within themselves.
>
> (261)

Postmodernism is not so much the creation of diversity and multiplicity as the honest

recognition of them. As such, the conservative analyses of the current situation which

calls for a return to the old boundaries and formations are ineffective because they

miss the point in the first place. The prior unity was an illusion held together by

repressive practices, including language practices, and returning to any unity, political,

economic, or canonical,

cannot be accomplished without a ruthless reinstatement of those practices overthrown

in the name of equality.

On the other hand, the leftist response to postmodernism has missed the mark

in several critical ways. First, it has invested too much energy in the creation of

nominalist freedoms divorced from the pragmatic and material conditions which could

sustain them. Second, much leftist criticism has included what Evan Watkins once

called "the leftist version of 'My God, they've gotten dumb out there'"(TP 40). From

that point of departure it is all too easy to produce what Ben Agger refers to as "leftist

scholasticism," and miss the resistance already under way in much popular culture.

Finally, the privilege of academic discourse is no less coveted by leftist intellectuals.

As a result, leftist postmodern critique runs the risk of being marginalized as effete or

irresponsible, in either case failing to grasp the opportunity at hand.

In my view that opportunity has much to do with the democratic potential of a

new way of understanding order and complexity. In *Eros and Irony*, Hall develops

what he calls "philosophical anarchy," another way of rejecting first principles, a state

"both more conservative and more radical(5)" than what it replaces. For Hall the key

is to move away from "either or" and toward "both and" means of creating order. In

the same vein, Bohm attacks the fragmentation of thought and language that prevents

us from realizing what he calls the implicate order. Both of these views share Hayles' observations about cultural critique and science coming to totally different conclusions when faced with chaos. The key points here are that the shift from one view of unity to the other requires a radical change in the way we construct differences and that that change can only be captured in a broader cultural context.

My argument is that postmodernism allows those concerned with the critique and analysis of language and culture an opportunity to reshape their practice around this broad cultural shift. That opportunity will be squandered if the analysis is too narrowly or discursively constructed, leaving intellectual practices that increase fragmentation in place. The only way to take advantage of that opportunity is to discard some of the current notions driving the teaching and analysis of language and culture, including the myths and narratives that define literacy and competency, and to use more complex models to rethink and reinscribe what a radical pedagogy might entail. Foremost among those concerns should be, as Giroux notes, the relationship between language, schooling, and democracy.

> Education must be understood as producing not only knowledge but also political subjects. Rather than rejecting the language of politics, critical pedagogy must link public education to the imperatives of a critical democracy. Critical pedagogy needs to be informed by a public philosophy dedicated to returning schools to their primary task: furnishing places of critical education that serve to create a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise power over their own lives and especially over the conditions of knowledge production and acquisition. (37)

English is what Watkins calls an "intraeducational" discourse (93). It plays a commanding role in providing and maintaining the distinctions that a modernist and capitalist cultural economy demanded. To construct a postmodern critique of its future positionality is to challenge almost everything it has been designed to produce.

I plan to examine four key elements in my critique. In Chapter Two, I will analyze current critiques of the discipline to match their analysis with the opportunity of a postmodern revision. In Chapter Three, I will look at the issue of language practices as they have been historically grounded, and of how they might be reconfigured. In Chapter Four, I will both critique the modernist assumptions and definitions of aesthetics and offer a postmodern alternative. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will look at the way intellectual practice is implicated in these changes. I realize that it may be futile to even talk about changing English studies in the current political and economic crisis in American colleges and universities. But cultural moments that require or invite monumental change do not come along that often, and missing them may result in even more repressive and destructive consequences.

Chapter Two

ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR CRITICS

Critiquing English studies has become a growth industry in the last two decades. Institutional histories and critiques of the discipline have flourished, representing almost every view and vested interest imaginable. I think any attempt to apply the postmodern characteristics discussed in the first chapter must first sort through and sort out the work already available on the future of English studies. Only by examining the ground already covered and the correctives already offered can we get a clear sense of how a postmodern revision that extends beyond nominalism and identity politics differs from the radical and progressive critique already in place. Key among these differences is the realization that both the means of cultural transmission and the legitimate sites of that transmission have shifted away from literary notions of literacy and culture. That is, English studies can not be revived or reconstructed without exposing it to the dynamic and popular forces it was designed to resist. Obviously, this view denies any hope of reconstructing the social and political consensus that made literary studies a visible part of the modern university, but it also denies the possibility of simply using that cultural site against itself in a Gramscian "war of position."

The critiques of the discipline that are sympathetic to a more inclusive and democratic version of the academy, that is those critiques not encumbered by a nostalgic view of the literary, share two somewhat contradictory themes. The first theme, represented by Edward Said in *the World the Text and the Critic,* is that

33

English studies, and the humanities in general, have traded professional competency, status, and privilege for any meaningful role in a broader cultural dialogue.

> [W]e have reached the stage at which specialization and professionalism, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentricism and nationalism, as well as a surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature -- the most focused and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture -- into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals, and critics have in fact built. (25)

Said's call for an "oppositional" criticism that attempts to reverse the condition he describes is based on a belief common to many critiques, namely that the institutional position of English studies is open to radical reversal, to a take-over as it were, by radical intellectuals. Said represents the view that the power and tools to do meaningful cultural and political work are already at our disposal if we could only seize them.

The second theme, which both contests and supports the first, is represented by Peter Widdowson in his essay *W(h)ither English?*

> The last two decades have seen an unprecedented meltdown at the core of an academic discipline which by the mid-twentieth century had achieved a status and a popularity in secondary and tertiary education second to none.(16)

Widdowson is much less sure than Said that the tools and power to reshape the discipline are still in the bag of tricks that English studies has at its disposal. As his

title suggests, his analysis reflects the postmodern realization that the site of power, in this case of cultural transmission, has shifted.

Both Said and Widdowson can be read as demanding a new, more politically acute, role for English studies. Both can be read as attempting to inscribe a new direction to critical discourse, although Widdowson is much less certain of how, exactly, that might be done. Both defend the positionality of the discipline in both its professional and institutional forms, although Widdowson admits this is more in the self-interest of the practitioners than for any compelling social or political reasons. The sense of "meltdown" Widdowson describes cuts against Said's assumptions about a transferable practice, but neither extends their criticism to the extent that Bovē and Carey do in calling into question the whole notion of intellectual practice. Finally, both Said and Widdowson suggest a larger cultural dimension, though both seem unsure about how to engage it.

Indeed, only by recognizing the limits of the political critique both Said and Widdowson propose can we begin to construct a different sense of practice. This practice must contest the notion of politics being driven by an intellectual class which has lost touch with its cultural roots and functions. We need to rethink the foundational assumptions that support the kinds of literacy narratives and aesthetic judgements which are reinforced even by critics who promise a radical new version of English studies. Even if we accomplished what Said or Widdowson suggests, it is doubtful that the discipline would meet the challenge that postmodernism poses for it. Instead, we should examine the way critics of the discipline position themselves on the issues of culture and language, and how those positions translate into practice. In a

postmodern landscape, many of the traditional critiques of English studies and the intellectual practices they support must be examined anew. My goal is to adumbrate a practice that is true to the anti-foundational and democratic impulses of postmodernism and avoids the pitfalls of radical critique. Critics of English studies have traded too heavily on subjectivities and intellectual privileges rooted in Kantian metaphysics, and they have pursued a cultural synthesis that suppresses the dynamic play of popular forces. An intellectual practice that seeks to pick its way through the ruins of negative play and difference without reducing the cultural to the merely textual and without losing the potential for democratic action must be willing to part company with many of the assumptions of radical critique.

The meltdown in English studies, the uneasy sense that what English means, does, or stands for is poorly defined or focused, even oppressive and reactionary, begins with attempts to address the forward nature of the "crisis" in English studies. These attempts, while exhibiting a stunning variety of pet theories and terminologies, can be sorted into two categories: the first acknowledges that something is indeed amiss, but it offers a moderate, usually pluralistic, solution. The second attempts to challenge the ideological construction of the discipline, to direct the resources of English departments toward social and political goals. It is worth looking at examples of these critiques before examining their limitations.

An example of the first category of critiques which has enjoyed some notoriety is Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature.* Graff's criticism is directed at the department and the field coverage model of education which has prevented the issues and disputes dividing the profession from being addressed, much less resolved.

> By organizing itself on a principle of systematic non-relationship in which all
>
> parties tacitly agree not to ask how they might be connected or opposed, the
>
> department prevented potentially edifying conflicts from becoming part of what
>
> literary studies was about. (8-9)

This lack of direction and focus is central to Graff's diagnosis of and cure for literary

studies. Having developed as a weakly formulated oppositional discourse to the

sciences, literary studies, at times carrying the banner of the humanities and at times

trying to emulate the opposition, lurched through its early history as a discipline. The

central point of Graff's argument is that whatever loose affiliations used to bind the

humanities together have unraveled, and the time has come to rethink their purpose.

> There are those who argue that the humanities have become disablingly
>
> incoherent seem to me right, but many of them fail to see that coherence can
>
> no longer be grounded on restored consensus, whether it be traditional "basics,"
>
> revolutionary or something else. (15)

What Graff finally suggests is a pedagogy that reflects how one "situates" oneself to

the cultural text in order to bring the disputes out into the open where they can be an

informing rather than a disruptive influence. In short, we should "teach the conflicts."

Borrowing heavily from Robert Scholes, Graff's critique is based on better

reading, reading with a cultural edge to it. As is typical in this type of critique, Graff

embraces a tolerant and pluralistic vision of English. His department has room under

the big tent for all forms and varieties of practioners, with the exception of

composition teachers whom he entirely ignores. His assumption is that the old

covenant has been shattered but that a new one can be constructed out of the contested

fragments. He would like to see literary studies as a more public discourse, which reveals his belief that there is still a cultural and, more specifically, a literary vision to share.

> At issue in the teaching of literature, then, and in the formation of a literature curriculum, are how much of the 'cultural text' students must presuppose in order to make sense of the works of literature, and how this cultural text can become the context of teaching. That there is no agreement over how the cultural text should be understood, or whether it should come into play at all in the teaching of literature, seems to me an arguement for rather than against a more explicitly historicized and cultural kind of literary study that would make such distinctions part of what is studied. (258)

Thus, Graff moves toward what Said would call "engagement" by presenting an agonistic discourse that is still contained within the department.

In *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education*, Graff expands his focus to the institutional and political issues surrounding departmental conflicts.

> For contrary to the assumption that has dominated the recent debate, politics need not be a corrupting intrusion into the parity of principled intellectual thought. Political conflict at its best is fought out as a battle of ideas, arguments, and principles. It is when the principles underlying institutional politics are buried from public view that those politics tend to become unedifying, since departments then express themselves in rancour, calumny, and insult rather than a principled argument. (143)

Here Graff is willing to extend his definition of the proper site of cultural conflict, and he works throughout the text to include a broader perspective of the issues than the one presented in *Professing Literature.* But the site and the nature of the conflict is still very much a university matter, and as such does not connect with the shift in cultural production and transmission that postmodern culture demands.

Although Graff does not address this issue, it is worth noting that this type of critique operates in composition theory also: the continual revision of the "process" model and the move toward "collaborative" and "socially constructed" schemes exemplified in the work of Kenneth Bruffee are an example. What Bruffee advocates and what others, such as Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holtzman, have argued for is an expanded "social" definition of writing, one that places the student in a "community" and conceptualizes language as more flexible and less positivistic. Finding fault, correctly, with the overly individualized and atomistic versions of language instruction, Bruffee, like Graff, wants a new game in an old ballpark. When Graff and Bruffee are through and the dust of renovation settles, English departments will still occupy roughly the same space in the educational system. Literature and composition, sporting a collaborative, social, or even "postmodern" agenda, will still be taught.

One of the most thorough and well received progressive critiques of composition is Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition.* North's analysis of the power differential between "scholars," "researchers," and "practioners," and the role "lore" plays in the practice of composition has become a fixture in the current critiques of the field. Like James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality,* North's

analysis has gone a long way toward making composition a field of its own, with a history and methodological evolution that naturalizes teaching writing in the university. Both Berlin and North offer a progressive and positive historiography of composition, a path for reformers to follow in search of increased respect and influence. Both claim an expanded role for composition in the way meaning is constructed in the university and the way writing is viewed in society. Neither of these critiques, however, challenges what John Mayer calls "common sense" language education, by which he means our time-honored assumptions about how we use language, learn to read, and participate in the construction and production of our own knowledge.

It is this element that makes these critiques progressive without making them threatening. The social and cultural status of English, a status that is seldom even examined, is left intact. The power relationships, the issues of race, gender, and class may be admitted to the discussion, but they are never brought to bear on the social and material practices of English. This pluralistic vision owes much to the pragmatism of Richard Rorty, and like his "grand conversation," it is "full of high sentence but a bit obtuse." As Stanley Fish observed in *Is There A Text In This Class*, the power stays where it always was.

> It has been my strategy in these lectures to demonstrate how little we lose by acknowledging that it is persuasion and not demonstration we practice. We have everything we always had tests, standards, norms, criteria of judgement, critical histories, and so forth. (367)

One need only add grades, graduate school admissions, editorial control of journals,

and control over curricula to complete the picture. The cultural scene that Fish

oversees is an arena cultural practice inscribed by differential values of power, and

already naturalized by disciplinary history and practice.

Another example of the "big tent" approach common to progressive critiques is

Patrick Brantlinger's *Crusoe's Footprints*, which does for cultural studies what Graff

did for literary studies. Brantlinger lays out an impressive assortment of material,

referencing all the major theoretical movements of the last few decades. He concludes

on an even more inclusive note than Graff, calling for the masses to be included in the

"common culture." Like Graff, however, Brantlinger lacks a "situated" position of his

own. His work bears mentioning because he proves that even the most radical and

contested positions can eventually be safely appropriated by a pluralistic metanarrative.

In just this way, deconstruction has come and gone from the critical radar. In

America it often amounted to little more than New Criticism writ large anyway, but its

appropriation to literary studies is an example of what can happen to theories once

they encounter the black hole of literary formalism. In the hands of Jonathan Culler

and J. Hillis Miller, to cite two well known examples, deconstruction is limited to a

literary technique or category. The philosophical implications are limited by literary

concerns, and the perhaps more radical promise Gregory Ulmer argues for in *Applied

Grammatology*, is lost.

Deconstruction is just one of a whole series of approaches growing out of New

French Theory neutralized by literary progressives. These theories, ranging from

Derrida and Foucault to Baudrillard and de Certeau are informants of poststructural

and postmodern critiques that promise much, raise the tenor of the argument, and

vanish into the forest of literary texts that absorb these mediations but retain the text's significance. Simply restructuring or rethinking the literary applications of theory stops far short of any attempt to unmask or critique the interests behind the theory. When confined to literary texts, all theories still produce readings that reproduce the material conditions of the reader, that is, readings that enforce the power of the canon. Here, too, the privileges of texts and intellectuals are confined to a practice naturalized by institutional concerns and isolated from authentic cultural production. Any attempt to construct a social practice compatible with the goals I have outlined is going to have to go beyond theory and change the educational practices and assumptions which subsume them.

The failure of these theories, setting aside the usual arguments over what actually constitutes a better reading, is that the educational and cultural role of English remains largely unchanged and unchallenged. Even Fish admits that his proposal is made for the glory that comes from formulating a new, if essentially inert, idea. The assumption is that if we just did what we do better, more in line with new theory or pedagogy, the problem would be solved. There is still a rock-ribbed belief in the value of English and the humanities in progressive approaches that does little to explain the historical formation of the humanities or their conflict with science. What progressive critiques lack is how to problematize the whole idea of English.

Richard Ohmann may have been the first American scholar in the field to say bluntly that English is not neutral. In *English in America*, (1976) Ohmann delivered what has become the staple of radical and ideological critiques of English.

I used to wonder why it is that society pays English teachers so much money

to do what by and large is fun: teaching fine literature. I now think that our

function is extremely valuable: namely to ensure the harmlessness of all

culture; to make it serve and preserve the status quo. (63)

Ohmann makes the connection between English and cultural hegemony that drives

radical criticism of the discipline. Far from merely rescuing the old value from its

recently debased state, radical critics challenge the whole notion of inherent value. In

place of the inherent value of the humanities, radical critics envision a situated and

limited sense of value, as Widdowson urges.

> All literary studies courses, in other words, should present their students some
>
> defamiliarizing account of the activity they are commonly engaged in, some
>
> representation of how artificially constructed 'the subject' is, how problematical
>
> is its identity, and what its aims and objectives might be: what it is for. If it is
>
> to be involved with the 'method of critique,' it must be scrupulously self-
>
> critical from the start. (51)

For Widdowson, the problem is how to reclaim the pedagogic space occupied by

English, and then how to construct a "materialist" politics in its place. The key here is

that the critic occupies a position determined not by the method she employs but the

critical standpoint she inhabits. As Said says, "critical systems - even the most

sophisticated kind - can succumb to the inherently reproductive relationship between a

dominant culture and the domain it rules" (24). The critic must stand outside that

domain, outside the literary, at least, to supply the element that separates radical from

progressive criticism. The critic/intellectual is engaged in the remaking and

redefinition of cultural relationships and production.

Jim Merod tries to sketch a critical practice of this nature in *The Political Responsibility of the Critic*. For Merod the critic is obligated to "speak more boldly about justice and its obstacles' (174). As teachers they must help their students to "read so that they see their own relation to social power and intellectual authority" (129). Merod argues for an engaged or committed intellectual practice that utilizes the role of critical and teaching intellectual in the university. Merod is concerned with how to convert intellectual privilege into social change, elaborating on a connection between literature, subjectivity, and capitalist oppression that Eagleton mined and developed in the 80's. Like Eagleton, Merod undermines the Leavisite belief in the beneficial role of the humanist agenda. Like Said, Merod turns to Antonio Gramsci and his description of the role intellectuals play in creating and challenging cultural hegemony.

Gramsci's great insight was to recognize intellectuals not by their faculties (or their Zarathustrian souls) but through their functions. It is the role played by intellectuals, as a class, in cultural production, particularly in education and religion, that Gramsci taps as a resource of political resistance, and it is this role that Said and Merod claim for their oppositional practices. The differences and disagreements about how such a practice could be constructed are part of another story. What is important in this analysis is that the role of intellectuals defined by Gramsci is foundational to so many radical critiques. Whether some variation of Gramsci's "organic" intellectual, Foucault's "specific" intellectual, or something akin to Giroux's "transformative" intellectual, the main actor in these critiques is the critic/intellectual who politicizes English by exposing sexist, racist, or classist elements in the culture. Graff's

"conflicts" have been replaced by situated intellectuals, dug in for a "war of position."

It may appear that this analysis collapses important distinctions between, for example, Feminist and Marxist perspectives. While there is some truth to that, what is at stake here is not which of these mediations is "correct" but whether any mediation situated in English can do what its practioners claim. To put it simply, are intellectual practices that leave the disciplines and institutions that create them intact "oppositional?" One need not go as far as Peter Washington does in denouncing English department radicals as "middle-aged people with glasses, dogs, and mortgages," to question whether English provides the platform that radical critique claims it does.

There are three problems associated with radical claims. The first is the position of English in society. The second is the transcendent intellectual privilege of radical critique, and the third is an inadequate and limiting notion of cultural reproduction, particularly through language. In the first instance, much radical critique suffers from the same assumptions that progressive critiques do, namely the assumed cultural importance of English. In the second instance, radical dependance on Gramscian intellectual formations created a power/knowledge formation with its own limited practice. But it is the inability of radical critque to theorize what the linguistic turn in philosophy and the postmodern assault on authority mean to our idea of culture that most seriosly handicaps radical critique.

One of the most aggressive examples of radical critiques is supplied by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton in *Theory, (Post)Modernity, Opposition.* In sketching what they refer to as a radical "critique-al" theory, Zavarzadeh and Morton expose

what they think are the weaknesses of progressive and apolitical theories. Lumping together theorists as different as Derrida and Foucault as "decontructionists," they launch an attack against "ludic" postmodernism and its reinforcement of late capitalist "political economy." They manage to show the limits of the "literary" constructions of Graff and Scholes, and they do a thorough job of analyzing the flaws in a textual approach to politics and ethics. What becomes problematic is how their sense of practice would historicize cultural analysis. They defer making any comments about an "affirmative" theory, but even if they had, they would still be faced with the problem of situating their readings in a cultural and institutional context.

History itself is a problematic construction. As Sande Cohen has pointed out, the potential for abuse from historical narratives is immense. In the same way that early American pragmatists failed to problematize science, Marxist intellectuals place too much faith in the historical. The ludic practices they critique may indeed be as flawed as the authors suggest, but they have made it impossible for anyone to accept at face value another historical narrative. In other words, Zavarzadeh and Morton fail to problematize their own systematic dependance, much as Best and Kellner did in their analysis of postmodern theory. Another nagging question is just what hope cultural studies have of influencing the power relationships they want to change. Is the way we think about knowledge likely to be affected by a discourse so far removed from the power of cultural formation? Discourses challenging the power/knowledge relationships in late capitalist societies are nothing new, yet they have failed to alter those relationships much, if at all. The material relationships of the work Zavarzadeh and Morton perform are with students, and the whole texture of their argument

suggests those relationships will remain unchanged.

More to the point, however, is the lack of an adequate theory of culture and language that emerges in so much radical critique. Because this form of critique depends on Marxist ideas of cultural reproduction, it ends up reifying economic and historical narratives of deterimancy that are problematic at best when applied to a postmodern culture. As Fiske, de Certeau, and Ranciēre, among others, have observed, this narrow, ideologically determined vein of Marxist social critique is simply inadequate. It fails to examine the real differences in cultural expression encompassing both the means and sites of that expression which characterize the dynamic cultural activity that Marxist theory denigrates as "mass culture" and "false consciousness." Zavarzadeh and Morton end up in the same position that Said, Eagleton, and Merod do, advocating the enlightened perspective of "engaged" intellectuals as a corrective to mass culture. It is difficult to see how the democratic and dynamic promise of a postmodern practice is well served by such advocacy.

Perhaps the only radical critiques with real cultural punch are those based on gender and race. The reason for their influence helps define the problems that radicals in English departments face in trying to find a means to circulate their ideas. I would argue that feminist critique is influential not for what it means to English, although it attempts to challenge much that is foundational to the discipline, but because of what it means to a whole emerging economy of gender politics in our society. There is little evidence to suggest that feminist theory will fundamentally change the practice of English. Feminists construct literary categories for their work and produce different but authorized readings of sanctioned texts. The difference is that their critique

engages issues of cultural identity in a way that has little to do with English and the literary. The historical situation is in the society, not in the discipline. The problem is that English studies, as a discourse and a practice, fails to engage vital social forces.

Radical critiques have done much to advance serious reform in the discipline. By challenging the progressive assumptions of cultural value, Giroux, Michael Apple, and Stanley Aronowitz, for example, have made it clear that teaching is always done in the interest of some social order. In composition, Ira Shor and James Berlin have mounted concrete and viable challenges to the composition industry, and J. Elspeth Stuckey in *The Violence of Literacy,* has exposed the way literacy is used as a weapon in this society. But reform of the discipline does not necessarily translate into social change, change in the way that knowledge is produced and valued. Susan Miller makes just this point in *Textual Carnivals,* documenting the way that composition isolates the "low" texts produced by students from the "high" texts of literary studies. Not only does composition naturalize the exclusion of student voices from meaningful textual production, Miller argues that it reinforces the subjectivities that define authorship, the right of expert expression. What all of these critiques have in common is that they share, even when they wish to change or discredit it, an exaggerated sense of the importance of English. Indeed, as Widdowson remarked, the discipline has grown to undreamed of proportions at precisely the moment it finds itself in crisis. What is missing from these critiques of disciplinary practice is a way of explaining and exploiting the contrary realities of English.

Ultimately, radical critique preserves more of what Toulmin calls the "timbers of modernism" than it changes. Radical critique preserves a sense of intellectual

privilege and practice that all too conveniently substitutes for the hegemonic practices it calls into question. This form of critique does not move any closer to a new definition of language and aesthetics, one that honors the lived experience of the vast majority of people, and thus preserves a broader sense of culture. It does not construct a new way of understanding how we read, including the way that radical critique creates and privileges a whole new set of subjectivities. In short, radical critique has not built a new practice. It has changed the terms and focus of the theoretical component, but it has left the institutional practices that support it (and give this new clerisy tenure) in place.

In *Work Time* Evan Watkins develops a critique that evaluates the cultural role of English. While it is true that Watkins' own proscriptions are clearly radical and Gramscian in their scope, his analysis of English suggests a situation at once more troubling and potentially more exploitable. To exploit it fully requires more than Watkins is willing to offer, but his analysis opens a new line of critique, a new way of thinking about the crisis in English. Watkins is concerned with English as a site of cultural work. Criticism, theory, and publication are only the most obvious, and the most glorified, examples of what work in English is all about. Committee meetings, memos, comments on student papers, and letters of recommendation also find their way into Watkins' analysis. What emerges is a critique that focuses on "circulation," both in the sense of what circulates to and within English departments and the evaluations that circulate out of the department.

The multiple activities of work in English are all in one or another involved with 'value:' aesthetic, moral, political, social, critical, or whatever, work in

English, in this broad sense again, is ideological work. What is circulated

directly as a result of work in English, however, are not values but evaluations.

. . . What the workplace of education requires from the English instructor,

however, is the evaluation of the student. The 'concrete labor' of instruction

may - or it *may not* - reflect dominant cultural values, may or may not attempt

a massive critical 'deconstruction' of the 'very notion' of value, but it *will* be

passed on as an evaluation. (90)

What Watkins makes clear in passages such as these is that the "work" required of

English is not so much concerned with education as it is with evaluation. At least, the

educational role it fulfills is more engaged with the circulation of evaluation than

value. Ohmann noted in *English in America* that English lacked a coherent core, a

unifying method and theory that organized and condensed the knowledge of the

discipline. One way to read this is to simply imply, as Graff does, that the discipline

needs a new center, a clearer idea of what it is and does, or that the problem can be

solved. Another way to read this situation is that it is not a problem at all, that

English is an exact fit for the contradictory roles assigned to it. From this perspective

the crisis in English has less to do with factors within the discipline than it does with

the larger cultural definitions of education it serves. Watkins makes it clear that what

is expected of practitioners is not necessarily what they value or consider to be

important. He also makes it clear that even radical and oppositional practices are

tolerated, outside of an editorial jab from columnists and politicians, as acceptable

definitions of "work," as long as it can be evaluated.

It would be difficult to imagine an emerging discipline tolerating the

methodological disparity found in English departments. This situation could be an example of what needs to be fixed, or it could be a sign that more is at stake than the internal consistency of the discipline. Watkins refers to English an "intraeducational discourse," by which he means that our evaluations are not part of the production of cultural value or what Adorno called the "culture industry," they are not in any significant way public. Watkins wryly notes that no one asks prospective accountants about Shakespeare. No one cares if a job applicant thinks the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* is too improbable. In this sense, whether a student receives a B for a New Critical explication of "Frost at Midnight" or for a Marxist critique of Coleridge's theory of language is of no consequence. All that matters is the B.

> [I]n current circumstances, "public critic" names a no longer available potential
> of work to produce general, cultural values. Whether or not, historically,
> literary work ever engaged in such production with authority is less important
> than the fact it is now conceptually incapacitated from doing so. For rather
> than step into the cultural "vacuum" left by the fragmentation of knowledges
> across the educational structure of the university, criticism instead condemned
> itself to a voluntary suicide by collapsing attention to larger social and cultural
> ends back into an relentless proliferation ofspecialized techniques and
> methodologies of work. The result was supposed to look like other disciplines:
> instead, and quite rightly from its perspective, educational management treats
> literary study like a pseudo discipline, and students treat it as an easy grade on
> their way to more consequential things. (207)

Remarking that education is "a place where, with still very few exceptions, you learn

your place" (258), Watkins goes on to show how English plays into the hands of the dominant culture. From this perspective, his work bears less resemblance to Gramsci than to the French ethnographer Pierre Bourdieu. As an "intraeducational" discourse, English creates a certain kind of academic and cultural capital. What English provides is a site for creating, sanctioning, and circulating distinctions between students. The distinctions only have exchange value because the "pseudo discipline" that creates them is not connected to the creation of cultural value. In other words, English plays more of a role in the creation and maintenance of social distinction than in the production of knowledge.

As Ohmann observed almost twenty years ago, and as Watkins continually reminds us, the progressive nature of knowledge in English is an illusion. There is no use value to either the New Critical explication of "Frost at Midnight" or the Marxist critique of Coleridge's idea of language. Each can be taught and performed well or poorly, but neither can make a real claim to cultural significance. Indeed, the fact that the same department would tolerate or value both approaches is a sign that what is at stake here has more to do with social control than cultural value. The significant act is the act of evaluation, the grade given the student, and not the performance or its content. As Bourdieu points out, capitalistic societies depend on distinctions to function. The more invisible class distinctions are, the more important institutional evaluations become in creating apparently neutral and meritorious distinctions.

What this part of Watkins' critique does is to raise serious doubts about English as a site of any meaningful resistance to hegemonic constructs. Although I take his point to be that it is precisely this social sorting we can use our work to

resist and challenge, his own analysis makes that view problematic. If English is a site of cultural evaluation, even radical and resistant pedagogies eventually legitimize and reinforce that system with their evaluations. In fact, the more esoteric and radical theories, beside the glamor and recruitment potential Watkins recognizes in them, may harm exactly those students the theory seeks to advantage. *Work Time* extends two existing critiques of the limitations of literature. One of those critiques is the radical dismissal of the "literary" as a category of inherent value, as Terry Eagleton suggests in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. The other is Peter Burger's critique of the avant-garde. In both instances, the social dimensions usually attributed to literature are challenged and diminished. Watkins' critique opens the possibility that any work in English, and not just certain types of work in English, suffers from the same restrictions.

Zavarzadeh and Morton have made a case very similar to Watkins' by suggesting that the literary represents a category of containment. Part of this analysis is based on the identification of the "literary" with bourgeois subjectivity. In that form the argument is well known. What they suggest that might extend this analysis is that it also makes a political reading of other texts "non-knowledge," an inadmissible discourse. Combining this perspective with Watkins' raises the possibility that only discourses that produce differences, and not discourses or readings that promote equality, can produce knowledge. A version of this argument is made by Sandra Harding in her attack on the strong sense of objectivity (439).

Burger's critique of the avant- garde reinforces Watkins' analysis from another perspective. Burger argues that the "institution" of art has severed its ties, through the

self-critical avant-garde, to social production. While individual works may challenge dominant values, art as an institution is unable to do so. The individual works can be accepted or ignored, but because modern art is self-referencing, that acceptance or rejection has no impact on cultural values. Work in English, following Watkins' analysis, is similar to Burger's view of art. It marks a cultural space of tension and subjectivity, but not a site that can be used to challenge the hegemony of the dominant culture. This need not be read, as Fredric Jameson does in *Postmodernism or, The Logic of Late Capitalism*, to mean that all culture is determined by late capitalistic mass culture. It may simply mean that a whole area of abstract and excess labor is no longer connected in the way it once was to the emergent production of meaning. Instead, English and modernist art mark areas of production that produce only exchange value because they no longer engage the lived experience of most of those in society. They are no longer vital sites of cultural transmission.

From these perspectives, the crisis in English looks much different. The meltdown is not so much a product of the discipline as it is a material change in the location of production. More specifically, education has, as Watkins notes, passed by English in the search for more reliable and scientific forms of knowledge. By setting itself up as an oppositional discourse, English, and the human sciences in general, conceded the ground from which a meaningful resistance could be staged. It cannot now regain that ground without changing its own site and definition of work. At best, it represents a liberal relativism, and at worst an anachronism. If there was a parallel moment in the history of English studies, it might well have been the shift in power from the philologists to the literary critics, when literary studies displaced the

traditions of language study privileged by philology with literary formalism.

In a last chapter that never delivers the promised sense of resistance, Watkins tries to forge a sense of purpose for work in English. When he says, talking about the value of abstract labor in English, that "I can't think it worthwhile to give up that advantage (264)," his search is over. Watkins makes too strong a case against just the sort of resistance he suggests, denying his own analysis of the cultural space English inhabits. Instead of running from this conclusion, as Watkins does in his last chapter, there is much to gain by embracing it. What elevates *Work Time* above other critiques is the clear institutional position of English that emerges. English, as Watkins amply demonstrates, is no longer the site of cultural production it assumes itself to be. English is allowed to be such an unkempt discipline precisely because what we teach is not very significant: all that really matters is that we pass on reasonably discriminate evaluations that help "educational managers" sort students. That, in the end, is probably the best explanation of why we are allowed to teach such diverse and contradictory versions of our knowledge.

The same analysis applies to composition. Indeed, as Wallace Douglas and others have pointed out, composition was the foundation of English departments, and it is still what most of our colleagues and the public believe our primary responsibility to be. Stuckey and Brian Street, to name two recent and pointed attacks on assumptions about the value of literacy, have demonstrated that literacy still lags far behind race, gender, and class as predictors of social success. And Susan Miller and Lynette Hunter have argued that composition protects the academy by managing the number of students admitted to advanced education. Learning how to write is still, in

most places, a matter of learning language etiquette, not a matter of challenging what Dennis Baron calls the "linguistic equilibrium." Composition may be the most blatantly oppressive means in English of sorting students. This is particularly true in community colleges, where the death sentence of developmental writing is still a key element in what Brint and Karabel refer to as "managing ambition." Composition, according to Shor, helps impose a "culture of silence." Finally, while other disciplines are more than willing to pawn off the responsibility for teaching students how to write, they are unwilling, except in the most limited and prescriptive sense, to transfer authority for evaluating what constitutes an acceptable discourse to the English department.

Work Time provides a view of English that makes progressive and radical critiques, including much of Watkins' own, seem myopic in scope. Functionally, English is not part of the knowledge and meaning making formations of this culture: it is only part of the educational function. If that seems nonsensical, it is only because we fail to realize that the hegemony so many theorists speak of is no longer centered in the same institutions that ensured its dominance in earlier capitalistic formations. This is not to say that schooling is no longer a powerful form of socialization; it is, for it is still true that individuals will be influenced and perhaps even transformed through their contact with English studies, but that influence will not transfer as a disciplinary entity, as a discourse, to the larger social conflicts over what counts as knowledge. Even the boundaries of humanistic discourse, the dichotomies that focus on the human/animal, nature/culture, man/machine relationships are, as Donna Haraway points out, more of a detriment than an asset in understanding our current

situation. Being part of the educational project is only meaningful, in the way that both progressive and radical critics see their work as meaningful, if that work is situated in the culture industry, in the discourses that determine what is and what is not articulated, valued, and held as true. English is not so situated.

If English is to be more than an agency of social stratification it must accept its current condition, rather than wistfully pursuing the lost forms of culture influence from its past. It makes no sense at all, from the walled off corridors of English departments, to mount any "oppositional" discourse. English must first reorient itself around principles that change or at least challenge assumptions about education, the way schools teach and conceptualize knowledge and language. It must take stock of skills and practices that promise to be useful for an attack on educational (and social) structures now in place, and be willing to part with those practices and privileges that are no longer useful. Contrary to what Watkins assumes, *only* by changing the definition of "work" in English can the discipline play any role at all in cultural critique and production.

The English cultural critic Raymond Williams represents one way of supplementing Watkins' diminished view of culture. Williams was instrumental in the formation of Culture Studies and with it the intellectual framework for looking at the way language and literature function in society. Although his work is now cited only on occasion, even by those who owe their academic standing to his groundbreaking work, it is difficult to focus the present crisis in English without Williams' contributions. Because he never developed a theory, specifically one compatible with the current emphasis on late capitalism, and because his work included material

accessible to lay audiences, Williams is difficult for academics to appropriate. More to the point, perhaps, he does not require the quasi-religious referencing that Marx, for instance, still enjoys. Williams is so much a part of this debate that mentioning him is only occasionally necessary.

What is necessary, however, is to understand how Williams changed the nature and scope of the discussion about culture. He has been called, most notably by his prize student Terry Eagleton, a "left Leavisite"(C I 22). Just as F.R. Leavis waged a campaign for a "national culture," Williams situates his sense of politics and resistance in the role that a received and selective tradition plays in society. In *Culture and Society*, Williams explores how this tradition was constructed. His approach differs from Marxist critics in two ways. Unlike Georg Lukacs, for example, for Williams it was never just art (in Lukacs' case the novel) but the institutional uses of art that was important. Unlike more doctrinaire approaches, particularly those following an Althusserian bent, Williams never reduced art to ideology. He began teaching in the Adult Education programs following WWII and always made education central to his project. In his work, art and ideology are never free or universal abstracts, but are always socially engaged, part of a living culture.

By questioning and then challenging the way that literature functioned in a minority culture, Williams made it possible to ask the question at the heart of this debate: Who benefits by having English taught this way? Williams points out that one of his "keywords," Literature, is a creation of late origin. More to the point, he describes the advantage that Literature has over the older concept of literature (meaning all published work) in the formation of a hegemony intended to intimidate

and suppress open participation in society. In raising the question of *whose* culture, for *what* purpose, Williams helps frame many of the current debates in the discipline.

Key among those debates is the evolving difference between, in Williams' words, "indoctrination" and "education." His challenge to the more doctrinaire applications of the "base" and "super-structure" model of Marxist critique opened a window of inquiry that is concerned with the present and not just the past or a predictable future. One alternative that Williams creates is what he calls a "structure of feeling."

> If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have
>
> indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present, not
>
> only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the
>
> specificity of recent being, the inalienable physical, within which we may
>
> indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions, but not
>
> always as fixed products. (ML 128)

By concentrating on the "lived experience" of culture and not just a "selective tradition," Williams helps create a sense of practice that respects the students' "more basic right to define the questions"(PM 157).

It is that sense that should drive any attempt to rethink or restructure English studies. The goal is not to simply construct more specialized and esoteric positions, but to direct the consequences of theory, particularly theories of language, into the creation of a new intellectual practice. In Williams' view, an "emergent" field of practice clearly defined new responsibilities.

[T]aking the best we can in intellectual work and going with it in a very open

way to confront people for whom it is not a way of life, for whom it is not in

any probability a job, but for whom it is a matter of their own intellectual

interest, their own understanding of the pressures on them, pressures of every

kind, from the most personal to the most broadly political. (PM 162)

Williams brings a clear sense of the need for an intellectual practice and not merely a

new theory of language and culture. From this perspective, any attempt to critique

and reformulate English must address the way textual practice, including shifting and

contested definitions of literacy, education, and reading, matter in the lived experience

of all the people in the culture and not just in the professional experiences of an

interpretive elite or clerisy.

While a much more elaborate narrative of Williams' importance and

contributions is possible, his inclusion here is meant to position the questions he

considered important at the heart of the current debate. When Said calls for an

"oppositional" criticism or Widdowson promotes a "materialist" use of English they

are occupying a space Williams opened to critique. When Richard Ohmann or Jim

Merod accuse English of being complicit in the racist and imperialist workings of the

state, they are drawing on Williams' analysis. Even a call for a new consensus, such

as the one made by Gerald Graff, echoes Williams' condemnation of Cambridge

English as an institution "with only the past to win."

The issue here is not really the importance or impact of any theory or school.

While the effects of Marxist, Feminist, and New French Theory are significant,

concentrating on the theory obscures the question of what role English plays, as a

discipline and as a discourse, in the social production of knowledge. A theory may

well produce dramatic changes, bold new readings, or even innovative pedagogies, but all of those intellectual productions are still normalized by the institutional position of English. By the foregrounding Raymond Williams' concerns about the role English plays in cultural formations, the state of English is easier to analyze. It is, finally, what a society makes of the critical readings and the theories that produce them that matters.

It is instructive to note that Williams failed to revitalize Cambridge English. Even Culture Studies, which might be considered a significant break with traditional practice, failed to live up to Williams' expectations, if the essays published posthumously in *The Politics of Modernism* are any indication. It is unlikey that any critique of the discipline that leaves foundational assumptions about language and culture in place will have any greater success. Williams' work traces the limits of Marxist approaches that substitute one idea of minority culture for another, and it problematizes the relationship between theory and practice. Working from Williams' view of culture, it is more important to uncover and describe the interactions, interpretations, conditions, and resistances already in existence than to abstract and totalize those relationships in social theory. In short, the limits of Williams' success in promoting his own agenda underscore the necessity of making new definitions of language and culture fundamental to a new practice.

Watkins is right when he says in the introduction to *Work Time* that we cannot change the work of English by "simply rethinking the discipline." No amount of theoretical gymnastics can breach the barrier between English and the cultural production of knowledge. What has to change is the "work" itself. To clearly

understand the implications of that change, the role of language, intellectual privilege, and aesthetics have to be examined. One of the main contact points between Gramscian intellectual practice and Arnoldian humanism is the belief in intellectual privilege and transcendence. The traditional position is, in some variety or another, similar to the one Murray Krieger traces in *Theory of Criticism*. Krieger makes the case, which will be interrogated at length in a later chapter, that today's critic is the rightful heir to Coleridge and Arnold. The critics' role is to function as elite readers; they make up a priest class to provide the "control" that I.A. Richards was so concerned about. On the other side of the coin is the image of the modern intellectual vanguard, standing against the mindless corruption of mass society. Both positions assume a social function for art that can be appropriated by the critic/intellectual. This assumption, as we have seen, is problematic.

First, as Burger has argued, the autonomy granted to art in the modern period severed its ties to the larger community or society. Aestheticism, far from representing art as religion as Arnold might have hoped, marks the end of the social function of art. As art became a "portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding,"(48) and as the avant-garde pushed the self-critical and self-reflexive projects of modernism, art lost the cultural forum that literary studies still presumes on. Individual works may still exhibit social tension, but the "institution of art" has lost the ability to refer to anything other than art. In the consumer driven societies of "late capitalism" two options emerge in the treatment of art. Either it becomes ideologically determinate, following the path of Lukacs and, in a more sophisticated vein, Jameson, or it it becomes fragmented and individualized. In the first case, the critic/intellectual must

assume some "untranscendable horizon"(PU 10), to quote Jameson, against which the array of works, methods, and styles makes sense. Non-transcendable horizons are hard to come by in the postmodern era, and they are all exclusionary, at least in the sense that some readings have to be suppressed for the sake of the historical narrative. If the fragmented and individualized route is taken, all claims of cultural coherence are negated. In either case, art and literature lack the solidarity that humanist agendas such as the *Newbolt Report* in Britain and the Great Books initiative in American schools assumed. The point here is that by formulating itself as an oppositional discourse to science, literature, and the human sciences in general, lost touch with knowledge production in the culture. Progressive and radical critiques can only circumvent this situation by making the broader cultural test, and not individualistic and self-referential works of art, as the object of their work. In the same way, criticism that seeks to base Marxist or feminist theories in literature is eventually thwarted, not necessarily by the inadequacy of the theory, but by the cultural poverty of the site of the work.

A second reason to be skeptical of the intellectual formations found in radical and progressive critiques has to do with the transcendence and privilege of their positions. Watkins' work, for example, is open to the same line of criticism that Jacques Rancière levels against Bourdieu. Bourdieu proved, quite convincingly, that the French system of exams was heavily biased in favor of the upper classes. While that hardly comes as a surprise, what Rancière objected to was that it was Bourdieu and not the oppressed students who benefited, just as it is Watkins, and not the working stiffs he patronizes in his last chapter, who reaps the rewards, such as they

may be, from his analysis in *Work Time*. In the same way that Mary Louise Pratt demonstrates that language gives the male gynecologist domain over his patient's bodies, over their own experiences, Bourdieu and Watkins own the experiences of the people they profess to help by illuminating their plight. Knowledge in this system is only a marker of exchange. No matter how sympathetically they situate themselves, radical and progressive critiques that foreground the critic/intellectual, produce "academic capital" but no real change. In English this situation includes the suppression of the experiences of the other(s) by censoring their voices and language.

The message that emerges from *Work Time* is that English must address the distance between its rhetoric and its practice. As an intraeducational discourse, English is most effective not by challenging social structures to which it is only weakly and tangentially connected, but by challenging the gap between itself and the sanctioning and production of knowledge. The obvious line of attack is language. In the theories of language that have emerged in this century, English has the tools to challenge rather than run from the hegemony of science. It has the tools to reclaim from positivist and supposedly objective discourses the right to critique and define what it means to know something. By reclaiming a project that once united scientists and poets, English can challenge the stranglehold of empirical and cognitivist systems.

Any attempt to address the crisis in English studies must begin by recognizing that the crisis is not internal, not limited to the methodology of the discipline: the very site and nature of intellectual work has to be changed. This means that appeals to methods that worked before are doomed to failure. The problem is not how to construct a new version of literary scholarship, the problem is how to construct an

entirely different sort of intellectual work, one that is not only viable but social and political. While some may shrink from that assessment, the critiques examined earlier warrant that conclusion. It is political to challenge the existing definitions of knowledge. At the same time, we need a new definition of political criticism. The intellectual privileges and historical determinism of Marxism are too confining and Hegalian for a postmodern landscape. What the theories of language developed in this century reveal is that with any knowledge based in language there is no authority that can deliver unambiguous meaning. Nor can knowledge and social practice simply be collapsed into the "text." There are material and historical relationships of power and privilege that any new method must interrogate and contest. In short, there should be a place for both political and ludic practice. The problem with both forms of critique is their insistence that they are the *only* form of critique.

The anathema of Enlightenment thought is relativity. We have been locked in a struggle to determine what system or authority should be transcendent. To avoid the social consequences of language, we have promoted a science devoid of all but the most functional language. Even that language, however, is too much. Science has to be held accountable for its own rhetorical moves, as Harding and Haraway have attempted. In the past, English and the humanities have tried to oppose science with an alternate, aesthetic, truth. That truth has been discredited, and it no longer marks anything of significance in our social landscape. A new opposition, one similar to feminist standpoint epistemologies and efforts to create a successor science, is needed. That effort will depend on very different intellectual practices.

English and the humanities can no longer try to match one set of truths against

another in some fragmented social consciousness. Instead, we have to engage the changes that Hayles details as the tools for a new model of thought, models based on complementary and complex systems. The way to do that is through the educational system, but the cost will be high. A postmodern practice grounded in these changes would contest rather than preserve literary distinctions, and it ought to abandon time-honored assumptions about aesthetic value. Finally, the intellectual privilege Watkins could not find it worthwhile to change must be surrendered. If the progressive and radical critiques of English prove anything, they prove the failure of clinging to old categories of knowledge in the face of new realities. Raymond Williams is worth remembering here, because in *The Long Revolution* he sketched the gradual changes that material and intellectual conditions made in education and democracy. By his telling, the story has been slow but positive so far. We are not guaranteed the next phase. Like monks in the eleventh century, the authorities we recognize have collapsed around us. Our choices are to continue doing what is familiar but unsuccessful or to forge, as the monasteries in the eleventh and twelfth century did, a new intellectual vision.

Examples of a new vision can be found in critiques that make language, cultural critique, education, and literacy narratives their focus. As such, while none of these critiques becomes what Widdowson calls the "hit man" of discipline, they all move the site and means of cultural transmission out of literature and composition and into a broader cultural context. In making this move, they identify one way that a postmodern practice can emerge by shifting the emphasis of study away from "selective" linguistic and textual practices which reinforce one form of social order

and toward the study of how language and culture are shaped by linguistic and textual practices. This move opens up the entire cultural arena rather than focusing on a rear guard action to defend one particular, problematic, and oppressive definition of culture. It also helps define ways to use and historicize the work already done in the field as part of this process.

Richard Ohmann's return to the issues that troubled him in *English in America* gives his second take on the subject in *Politics of Letters* a decidedly public focus.

> In an epoch when so much of the language students hear or read comes from distant sources, via the media, and when so much of it is shaped by advertisers and other corporate experts to channel their thoughts and feelings and needs, I think it a special pity that in English teachers turn students away from critical scrutiny of the words in their heads, especially from those that are most heavily laden with ideology. When in the course of clarity or liveliness we urge them toward detail, surfaces, the sensory, as mere *expansion* of ideas or even as a *substitute* for abstraction, we encourage them to accept the empirical fragmentation of consciousness that passes for common sense in our society, and hence to accept the society itself as just what it most superficially seems to be. (250)

Ohmann opens up a sense of cultural and social conflict that is more productive than Graff manages. Ohmann includes literacy myths, popular culture, composition, and critiques of mass culture that go beyond the bounds of literature or the "cultural text." He warns of the way that "in the cause of improving their skills we may end up increasing their powerlessness" (251). It is an argument anyone willing to teach the

traditional language arts should consider.

Henry Giroux develops many of these themes in *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*. Giroux sees the educational project as transformative, a place to directly contest the means and outcomes of teaching and knowledge production.

> Pedagogy is about the intellectual, emotional, and ethical investments we make as part of our attempt to negotiate, accommodate, and transform the world in which we find ourselves. The purpose and vision that drive such a pedagogy must be based on a politics and view of authority that link teaching and learning to forms of self-expression and social empowerment, that argue for forms of community life that extend the principles of liberty, equality, and justice to the widest possible set of institutional and lived relations. (81)

While there is sometimes a sense that Giroux believes that these changes can simply be called forth, his formations clearly outline what the struggle is about. From his perspective, it is obvious that better literature or composition courses will not address the way that language functions in the cultural and political struggles over more open access and definition of power. Giroux makes the political focus of postmodern practice, its debt to feminism, and the goals of a democratic pedagogy clearer.

In *Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics*, Michael Bérubé argues that the political dimension of cultural work is already badly neglected. In his telling of it, the consequence of seeing the struggle as one involving traditional sites of cultural production, and only those sites, is a gap between the claims and the reality of radical politics. As Bérubé puts it, "it's one thing to realize that intellectual

work is political, or can serve various political ends; it's another thing to think you've conquered hegemony just by talking about it" (154). Instead, Bērubē analyzes the way the extreme right has dominated the discussion and definition of political positions, making it crucial for leftist intellectuals to help maintain and redefine the center. This work preserves the distinctions between legitimate positions and give them room to struggle against and contest conservative rhetoric that collapses all distinctions into the "liberal left." For Bērubē, this accentuates the need for popularizing academic work.

> The popularization of theory, in other words, goes to the heart of contemporary academe's claims to intelligibility; and if our academic criticism cannot be popularized, then we who champion 'cultural studies' and 'interdisciplinarity' should give up the self-congratulatory claim to have broken with narrow specializations and arbitrary exclusions of academic disciplines. I'm making a Bakhtinian claim here: unless theory-speak gets translated into demotic vulgarisms *it don't,* as another Duke once said, *mean a thing.* It just doesn't signify at all. (164)

Bērubē makes Watkins definition of work in English even more problematic, pushing it closer to the public uncertainty Watkins describes in advertising. The key here is to see ways that shifting both the focus and site of critical practice creates a new space, one very different from the closed discourses of a selective tradition.

Postmodern societies not only create different, more confused and confusing, subjectivities, they create them in different ways and different cultural formations. Too many of the radical critiques of English studies simply ignore that fact or believe that talking about it changes it. Instead, a postmodern revision of the discipline must

engage the real and dynamic social forces that define public and political life. It must challenge the way that literacy, reading, and writing are part of the way education controls, or attempts to control, often for hidden interests, subjectivity and expression.

What follows is an argument for a practice informed but not limited by theory. In a postmodern era, the emphasis must be placed on the continual creation of meaning, an eternal return to the moment of empowered expression, and not on the systematic certainty of closure. English should evolve toward a textual practice that emphasizes the democratic urge for inclusion that Williams highlights in *The Long Revolution.* Just as writing and reading literary texts in the vernacular displaced an elite and more limited tradition of recitation in Latin and Greek, a postmodern practice would replace the bourgeois reading of the canon, the master's texts, with a broader cultural text and the promise of new textual production. To fulfill this promise, radical critiques of English must create a new genealogy, one more in line with Miller's carnivalized retelling of the roots of composition. A new practice requires a new legitimizing narrative, one willing to risk the assumed privileges of English and engage the issues of language, aesthetics, and intellectual practice in new ways.

Chapter Three

LANGUAGE AND THE SOCIAL

The question of language has always been at the heart of English studies, although practitioners of both Composition and Literary Studies have obscured the importance of the Enlightenment struggle with and critique of language in the formation of the discipline. Indeed, one of the ironies of the recent success of what Crews derisively refers to as the "new orthodoxy" of poststructuralism is that it reinforces the primacy of language critique over the inherently limited categories of composition and literature. The only way around the free fall of poststructuralism is the creation of an alternative theory of language that accounts for the conflicting strains of the Enlightenment view of language. This is a point all too often lost on those who would oppose the admitted excesses of poststructuralism by reinstating traditional or selective traditions that have their own problematic relationships with alternate branches of existing critiques of language.

In a century obsessed with failed systematic attempts to bring language to heel, there is no hope of addressing every theory or approach. The focus here will be on trying to tease out a new critique of language based on the primary areas of dispute, areas that reflect the deeply conflicted ways we envision not only language but subjectivity and culture. This genealogy will begin by trying to sort out the affiliations and lines of descent underlying the current tradition, particularly those from within the tradition of English and literary studies. But postmodern theories of language must also concern themselves with the radical changes in the material

conditions of communication, in the way languaging is extended through technology. A new critique of language must, finally, bring humanist intellectual practices in balance with the physical and biological sciences or risk becoming the latest version of a discredited scholasticism.

Trying to come to some clear understanding about the issue of language is essential for a number of reasons. Most obvious, perhaps, is the role language plays in the specialized functions of literature and composition, even though most practitioners in both fields have expressed no recognizable theory of language. One of the intriguing problems in trying to address this issue is the lack of any serious discussion about language in these fields. Most disciplinary histories pay little attention to the way literature and composition reflect positions on language and sociality. Beyond these issues, however, a clear understanding of language is central to any discussion of culture or cultural theory. The way we construct theories of language, the models we use and the assumptions we make, are critical to the way we understand what society is and what intelligent behavior within it entails. The attempts to treat language as a single field phenomenon, as a thing or a tool, undermine this inquiry as well as the social constructionist elements of postmodernism, to say nothing of the democratic potential they imply. Without addressing the issue of language, there is no way to defend our pedagogical practices, determine what our goals are, or assess our progress. Some (often unnamed) understanding of language supports any practice of 'English,' and only by exposing and altering that understanding is a productive postmodern practice possible.

It is easier, perhaps, to begin with the current conditions of language theory

and their manifestations than it is to jump back into the Enlightenment struggle with the subject. In both cases, however, the important issue is how a theory of language underwrites a theory of culture and naturalizes the site and means of communication. That is, if a positivist view of language and culture is in force, a view that argues, *pace* Locke, for a perfectible use of language and reason in public affairs, reading and writing become governed by rules and technologies of control. The goal in these versions of language and cultural theory is to control thought and public expression by controlling language. In the opposite direction, relativist claims of a social construction of language, such as those found in Rorty, leave us nothing more than strong but isolated readers with their own final vocabularies. This view can represent what McGowan refers to as negative freedom, the freedom of withdrawal, underwritten by a theory of language that makes incommensurability its main feature. Either view has consequences. Every time a composition instructor enforces her judgment of what constitutes 'good writing' or a professor of literature imposes her reading of a text, a theory of language and culture, of order and control, is in operation.

In this way, among others, theories of language are theories of social and cultural organization. If postmodernism represents, as I argue it does, a new way of thinking about order and culture, it must also represent a new way of thinking about the primary medium of thought and sociability, language. In the past, language represented either the means of social and institutional control or the medium of social and representational entropy. In 300 years we went from Locke's attempt to drive the devil out of the language to the Derridean spectacle of the impossibility of

signification. While these may seem to be radical opposites, they are connected by the Enlightenment urge to force language to serve an analytical function. Either those attempts were successful, leading to the rigid and arid codification of analytic philosophy, or resisted, leading to the apparent disintegration of language and referentiality, they share a systematic attitude and approach to the question of language that must be countered.

COLERIDGE AND THE ROMANTIC CRITIQUE

The roots of the systematic attempts to control language can be seen in the way three Englishmen, Sir Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, struggled to make language stand for and aid in the reformation of thought and knowledge. For Bacon, the need to purify or specialize language was part and parcel of the revolutionary agenda of the new science. In fact, it represents one of the clearest indicators of the social implications of the new science movement. Locke's struggle with language is evident in his long *Essay On Human Understanding* in which the whole third book is dedicated to the problem of words. His concern was to clarify language for common and rational use. Coleridge, both in his own work and his work with Wordsworth on the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, pursued a different version of the common language. It is this critical perspective, as appropriated by I.A. Richards, that underwrites the pretentions of institutional English studies.

This tripartite genealogy of language theory in the English tradition is the focus of two works by A.C. Goodson, *Verbal Imagination* and a later essay, "Romantic Theory and the Critique of Language." His sense of the importance of language theory to the study of culture and literature reinforces and advances a strain of thought

about language that both provides a platform for rethinking the assumptions and approaches we take toward language and makes the consequences of any theory of language clearer. He does this by providing a radical and strong reading of Coleridge's intentions and thoughts on the language question. Goodson's reading of the Coleridgean text is dedicated to the recovery of language and poetry as a social, and socially significant, operation and against formalist or linguistic reductions of these questions. He positions Coleridge's mature thoughts on the subject against the poet's earlier affiliations.

> Coleridge's distinctive approach to language emerges in his early responses to Hartley, Tooke, and Locke. Broadly speaking, his symbolic understanding represents an effort to save language from fealty to the images of nature, to save it for thinking. . . For Coleridge it was always a question of 'how language and the human mind act and react on each other.' The countervailing emphasis on the 'best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived' is what he contested forever after. (xiii)

Goodson thus sets Coleridge against the doctrine of association on one hand and the appropriation, led by Richards, with which we have become familiar on the other. Against the isolation of poetry and emotive language of Richards, Goodson crafts a reading of Coleridge committed to a common and social version of language.

Goodson finally grounds his version of Coleridge's theory of language in the etymologic of Raymond Williams, creating an alternative genealogy not only for Cambridge English but for critical theory. Williams's importance to critical theory has already been broached here, but the link between Williams and Coleridge emphasizes

the role language plays in the way Williams constructs his idea of culture. Goodson
sees Williams as the rightful heir to a theory of language that preserves the social
vitality of Coleridge's view of language and which stands against the reductive moves
of Richards.

> 'Language in history' readily became language as history in Williams's
>
> criticism, and it authorized a reading of literature as social documentary. .
>
> Learning to read in this belated moment meant recapturing the language so that
>
> the common reality could be seen for what it was and finally changed. (61)

It is important for Goodson to be able to find a modern version of the social vitality of
language, to find a situation in which "language ceases to be the property of linguistics
with its endless formalization and reverts to the common resource it has always been"
(74). Williams provides Goodson with a reading of the cultural text that validates the
latter's sense of Coleridge's practice and theory. That link is important, because
without it Goodson would have no lineage to mark its significance to the current state
of criticism and language critique.

Much of Goodson's attention in *Verbal Imagination* is directed toward the
possible survival of poetry after Richards, Leavis, and modern formalism have reduced
or obliterated the unmediated and vital sphere of public poetic expression. In what
Goodson himself refers to as "a plunge into the scholarly fine print(xiii)," Coleridge's
affiliations with Hartley or Tooke are as or more important than the larger spectacle of
the Enlightenment critique of language. That focus is reversed in his essay on
Romantic theory, however. Arguing for a broader view, that is, a view not limited to
a definition of Romanticism based on its putative refusal of extended intellectual

ambition, Goodson insists we "consider romantic theory as a stage of reflection on the condition of language, the essential means not only of poetry but politics" (3). In this view, romantic theory joins and participates in a critique of language which is:

> [A]n engine of enlightenment thinking, an essential means of social and epistemological observation that reaches from Bacon and Locke through to logical positivism and the language revolution of literary modernism. (4)

In this context Goodson is no longer just concerned with the reputation of the institutionalized Coleridge, the Coleridge appropriated by Richards, but with Coleridge's role in the broader discussion of language and cultural value. By weaving Coleridge's voice back into this dialogue, Goodson manages to recast romantic theory as an active political and intellectual, as opposed to a merely literary or emotive, expression.

> Pragmatic in temper if metaphysical in aspiration, Coleridge's critique of language reflects on a changing historical scene. It is committed to politics and progress as well as to poetry and theology. Philosophical in approach though not always in method, Coleridge points the way to new dispensations. (31)

In this narrative, both the importance of the romantic critique of language and Coleridge's role in articulating it become clear.

> Here is the crux of Coleridge's difference. Starting as he does from an empirical idea of language, with its public vocation in mind, he is committed with Bacon and Locke to a general reform, an **instauration** involving the progress of language toward increasing responsiveness to reason as well as to

human feeling. Coleridge's allegiance to a socially active rationality would associate him with Burke, and with the Shelley of the *Prometheus Unbound* and perhaps the *Defence*: political visionaries sacred and profane, joined by a conviction of the force and use of words. This is the party of eloquence. Coleridge's defense of the philosophical value of the **lingua communis** represents an extension of his commitment to instrumental reason. (39)

This version of Coleridge and the romantics clashes with the version that emphasizes, as John Stuart Mill does with the phrase "Germano-Coleridgian," a romantic sensibility rooted merely in 'feelings' and poetry. Instead, the struggle with language becomes a means to reconnect the disparate elements of Enlightenment thought, not in the manner Mill suggests as a "well rounded" but no less empirical perspective, but in something approaching a complex social whole. Goodson's reconstruction of that struggle suppresses the conventional connection with Kant's disinterested idealism and focuses instead on the vital social and philosophical implications, as his conclusion to the essay makes clear.

With Coleridge, romantic theory arrives at a defense of ordinary language, **lingua communis**, which is neither nostalgic about better tongues (and better times) nor satisfied with current terms and practices - with modern understanding as it descends from Bacon. Trying the Tartar's bow involves him in turning back on their informing example, limiting their authority while recognizing its lasting value for thinking about conditions. Coleridge's critical attitude is expressed most effectively and influentially in this line of work, which owes nothing to Kant's critical philosophy. The real authority of his

situation is associated with his practice of this socially sensitive line of

reflection on language, literature and culture . . . Wondering about words is the

sign of criticism's concern not only for language in its literary uses, but for

lingua communis and ordinary experience. (42)

The Coleridge that emerges from Goodson's revision of romantic theory is not, of

course, a postmodern or even a pragmatic language theorist, but his theories play an

important role in defining what a postmodern theory of language that is not limited to

nominalist excesses or binary oppositions might take as its starting point. It also

proves that such a theory does not have to appear *sui generis*. The integration of

linguistic, social, and intellectual forces in Coleridge's thought is a precursor of a

postmodern theory of language committed to reconceptualizing the relationship

between those elements. What Coleridge stands against may be even more significant,

however. By arguing for a common language, he makes the specialization and

rationalization of language suspect. Goodson points to the connections between Locke

and Habermas and their attempts to create a public sphere dominated by a rational and

instrumental version of language, a version that would suppress the poetic and

prophetic functions. Coleridge represents the refusal to make that move, the refusal to

make language transparent and rational by making it less, by thinking of the social and

intellectual as limited to the philosophical or scientific. In that sense, even though

pragmatism improves on the techniques of connecting language to social inquiry and

thought, it cannot improve, or perhaps even sustain, the creative energy of romantic

thought.

The connection between romanticism and pragmatism is not new. Cornel

West, for instance, has placed Emerson in a central role in the development of American Pragmatism. The importance of that connection to the question of language is significant because pragmatism, particularly in the work of Peirce and Dewey, extends the notion that language and thought are inseparable. As John Sheriff has noted:

> Peirce's theory of signs does not deny that 'from the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs,' but his definition does not separate the mind made world from the 'real world' in which we live, and move, and have being.(48)

Peirce's sense of the semiotic is expansive and natural. He turns to nature and the natural sciences to find grounding for his theories. As such, his views on language reflect the way signs are connected in the inquiry and life of communities, and not the arbitrary nature of signs. Peirce's triadic sign, unlike Saussure's binary sign, is always connected to what Williams liked to call the "lived experience" of the person or community expressing it. The power of language lies not in its exteriority but in its link to human intelligence, the will and ability to know and participate in our own surroundings, natural and cultural.

There is no nostalgia here for a time before language was corrupted. In its place are the emergent attempts to think of language not as a unified and external field of its own but within the complex and intricate web of social life. For Coleridge and Peirce language could not be removed from experience and thought, the linguistic equivalent of the mind/body split, or simplified into formulas and codes. In their view, there is no 'out there' from which to view the phenomenon because we are

always already inside the equation. From this perspective the spectacle of radical dissonance in signification, certainly the impossibility of signification, is a parlor trick of little importance. Signification is inevitable, and inevitably varied. Both Coleridge and Peirce stand at an alternative branch of modern thought that refuses the fragmentation of Newtonian science. What they bring to the discussion of language is the insight that language is not, at least in the empirical sense of the word, a thing. It is, as Williams says, "constitutive and constituting" of social life, the essence of sociability, and like all living systems resolutely varied. What they cannot bring to the discussion are models for capturing the complexity they insist is there. Peirce, of course, tried. He selected his models from the physical sciences of the last century, however, and that fact means he had to undercut and double-back on himself constantly. Like Blake, he can ultimately communicate only in a linguistic universe of his own making, as his tortured nomenclature attests. The way around nominalism starts here, but it does not find its fullest expression here.

Unfortunately, not all pragmatic attempts to come to grips with language sustain this effort. The neopragmatic alternative, as expressed by Rorty and Fish, make the modernist error of assuming that the 'social construction' of language leads either to the absence of order or the relative order of language games. Rorty recognizes the futility of trying to find a universal or neutral site to launch a critique of philosophy, but in the process he surrenders ground that is not under attack. As McGowan noted, social conventions and constructions are plenty strong, even if they do not lead to systematic closure. The idea that the "linguistic turn" can lead only to incommensurate language games or "final vocabularies" of strong poets is true only if

language is made to fit systems models that separate it from its living social function; that is, models that attempt to objectify language. It is interesting that Rorty has no trouble with the concept of individuals but cannot manufacture a social or community identity for the spoken word. Like Wittgenstein, Rorty's view of language allows for totally separate ideolects locked in a zero-sum game. The assumption is that language can be used in isolated contexts that do not depend on a more inclusive view of language for their vitality and validity. Language communities are not like a chess match; the rules are not entirely local or closed. Language communities are more like cells in a larger organism. They may appear to have a specialized function, but the function only matters in the context of the larger organism. Language communities cannot withdraw from the larger social arrangements which manifest them without losing the very reason for their existence.

In contrast to Rorty's radical and dispirited relativism, Fish applies the language game analogy to the advantage of institutional structures. As I discussed in the last chapter, Fish's view privileges the power relations already in place. In addition, unlike the more flexible and inclusive relationship between language and thought both Coleridge and Peirce champion, Fish's constructions act more like a disciplinary spin-off of the Sapir- Worph hypothesis, arguing that we can only speak and think within disciplinary strictures. In this sense he provides an image of language that is the equally flawed, mirror opposite of Rorty's position. Both language and thought are constructed within and return to a wider polity, a set of social relationships that are, in turn, impacted by expression. Fish's view of language at least tries to save a wider medium for expression, but in the process he creates new manacles for thought and

expression.

In precisely this way, the neopragmatism of Rorty and Fish replicates the failure of poststructuralism to conceptualize language as socially constructed without lapsing into theories that turn that construction into linguistic entropy. A large part of the problem lies in the models used to represent language, models based more on closed or mechanistic systems. To preserve the insights of Coleridge and Peirce and to chart a postmodern course for the study of language and culture, models that are more attuned to not only complex and chaotic but living systems must be applied. That is, the first step out of the prison house of language is a step toward recognizing that any view of language that is just language, just conventions and utterances, is inadequate. In their place we should use models that honor the triadic relationship that Peirce suggested and which conceptualize the inevitable drift in signification as a source of vitality and not entropy. Language must be in a continual state of disequilibrium in order to function, and no appeal to reason, even "communicative reason," or the hope of a new tongue purged of the old riddles of comprehension will be able to stem the structural drift between living organisms and their environment that drives the continual changes in the coordination's of behavior and the creation of perceptions that language involves. In short, language always involves the destruction as well as the creation of reality, and as such is never static, completely known, or predictable.

NEW MODELS

Before proposing a new model for thinking about language, a few qualifiers are in order. First, there is no intent here to suggest that a shift in models is anything like

a shift in paradigms, for two reasons. First, to return to Toulmin's cautionary emphasis, is the postmodern refusal to think about starting from scratch or staking out new territory. There is nothing in a new model of language that cancels out the value of work done in any number of linguistic and theoretical schools or programs. Instead, a model of language acts much the way Hayles talks about computerized fractal constructions, it allows one point of emphasis or focus but it necessarily leaves other elements out of focus. The second reason for avoiding the connection between a model and a paradigm is the suspicion, evident in the work of Donald Davidson, for instance, that the whole notion of a paradigm is misleading. As Kolb illustrated, and as Williams's views of the cultural dynamic emphasize, our experience is poorly understood by demanding the limited and totalizing perspective of a paradigm. Certainly, the twentieth century obsession with trying to systematize language should serve as a warning.

Instead, it is perhaps better to construct of a new model for thinking about language more along the lines of what Delueze and Guattari refer to as a "line of flight." In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they adumbrate a pragmatics that works against the tendency to totalize experience in "planes of consistency" or "plateaus." One way to avoid that, or to break it up when it does occur, is to construct a line of flight, a way to break out of the interior consistency by emphasizing multiple perspectives. In this view, a new model for thinking about language is more like a "war machine," a way of breaking down or "deterritorializing" the language question and the institutions that house it. It is a way to reshuffle the deck. The goal then is not so much to fully explain language as it is to shift our perceptions of it and questions about it. In the

process, we may finally be able to disengage from the entrenched positions taken up by realist and nominalist camps.

The problem with theories of language in this century has been their inability to account, except in negative terms, for the unpredictability of language without losing their sense of order and cohesion. Even the most advanced forms of structural semiotics or the most torturous moves within the analytic tradition can account for only small bits of language at a time. That does not mean that those methods are without merit or that they do not lend insight into the way language functions. They cannot, however, approach understanding of the polyglot of changing and variable utterances that make up the common tongue. They cannot, that is, be seen as a way to promote what Coleridge and Peirce saw as the social and imaginative properties of language. Throwing away any hope of understanding the social dimension of language and doubting the possibility of signification, on the other hand, is not so much a solution as an inevitable phase in attempting to think through the social dynamic of language. The negative semiotic can dissolve the bonds of the signifier and the signified, but it cannot explain the continued ability of even very small children to communicate within some boundary of social and linguistic play. The key to changing the way we talk about language is to change the way we think about the order and control of language.

Part of the shift in the way we think about language is foreshaddowed in the changes in scientific systems. The Newtonian and Cartesian views of the world, rooted in the categorization of simples and grounded in mutually exclusive categories, give us one way to think about the world. That view gives us any number of binary

oppositions - subject/object, mind/body/, signifier/signified - that are deeply imbedded in the way we think about and explain things. The problem, as Hayles has noted earlier(167), is that while science has moved away from these models, because they lack the flexibility and complexity to explain phenomena, the human sciences in general and language theory in particular have not. Not only binary oppositions but the space or 'gap' between them have become the preferred grounds of poststructural negativity. In either case, the models that these theories are based on have been supplanted in the sciences. Therefore, one early move in constructing a new way to think about language is to think about it as a structure of complementary rather than binary constructions.

Menas Kafatos and Robert Nadeau make this case in *The Conscious Universe: Part and Whole in Modern Physical Theory*. They explain the consequences of the Aspect Experiments and their relationship to the work of John Bell in explaining what Quantum Mechanics mean. Kafatos and Nadeau use the principle of complementary growing out of the work of Niels Bohr on the Copenhagen Interpretation as a way of explaining how categories that exclude each other in any particular action or example (particle/wave) are still linked in any understanding of the whole system at work. Kafatos and Nadeau apply this to the question of language.

> What is remarkable in our view is that virtually all of the original examples used by Saussure in support of his conception of the binary opposition between signifier and signified, and virtually all of the examples that have been subsequently used to support modifications and refinements of this opposition, could have and should have been viewed as complementary constructs. One

excludes the other in a given situation or act of cognition in both operational

and logical terms, and yet the entire situation can be understood only if both

constructs are taken as the complete view of the situation. (135)

They go on to extend the analysis to specifically refute the way Saussure's work finds

expression in deconstructive theories of language.

When deconstructionists raised the objection that binary oppositions between

signifier and signified are not bonded together as some structuralists had

suggested, they were correct in the sense that one tends to exclude the other in

any single act of cognition because they are complementary constructs. Since

the deconstructionists did not apparently realize, however, that they were

dealing with complementary constructs, they moved in another direction - they

posited the existence of a space or gap between oppositions. And it is this

rather disturbing notion advanced by figures like Lacan and Derrida that a

close examination of the structure of linguistic based constructions of reality

leads ultimately to the realization that the constructions reduce to a no-thing, a

nothing, or a void. The way out of this terrible solipsism is, in our view,

rather simple and direct - all one need to do is realize that the fundamental

feature or dynamic in all linguistically-based constructions of reality is, as Bohr

suggested, the logical framework of complementarity. (135)

Kofatos and Nadeau reinforce the earlier observations from Hayles that the attempt to

treat language either through unified-field field theories or to pronounce all order dead

on arrival because of nominalist pretensions both miss the point. The struggle to hold

the global and the local or the specific, context based utterance and a theory of

language together need not lead to the confusion and negativity it has. The poststructural semiotic has been invaluable to the genesis of postmodernism. It brought the social and creative power of language back into play, but it has collapsed under its own negative assumptions and constructions. It is not, ultimately, a place to pursue the common language. Physical science, either in Quantum Mechanics or Chaos Theory, is not an extension but a rebuttal of attempts to treat reality as textual play.

Here, again, Hayles makes it clear that the appropriations of complex and chaos theory into arguments about language and culture have often missed the point and played fast and loose with the theories that putatively form the basis of new linguistic models.

> The universalizing impulse in chaos theory is hard to miss. Surely, chaos theory would not have attracted the attention it has if it simply confirmed the obvious, that chaos is disordered. No! What makes it noteworthy is the discovery of order in the midst of disorder. . . that chaotic systems despite their inherent instability, share certain universal characteristics. . . As these scientists use 'chaos,' it connotes not the unpredictable aspects of disordered systems but their universal characteristics. (215-216)

The options are not just structural or poststructural. There are ways to think about systems that are both ordered and chaotic, that produce what Hayles calls "self-similar" and "iterative" patterns. In short, by updating the models we use we can honor the significant insights of poststructuralism without surrendering all but a ludic or ironic sense of order.

Two quick references to theories of language that seem to honor the notion that language is ordered through iterative but unpredictable forces is in order here. In both cases the emphasis is on the complementary nature of language, including impulses that are entirely local and unpredictable but still iterative and regular enough to be structurally coherent. The first example is developed early in *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari and is significant because it presents a pragmatics of variability, what they call "minority" languages. The second example is M.M. Bakhtin's work on heteroglossic and monoglossic texts. His work is somewhat more problematic to read into this narrative because it requires extricating Bakhtin from some earlier appropriations of his work.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the issues of complex and complementary structures are part of the struggle between "minor" and "major" languages and the attempt to construct a pragmatics capable of capturing the variability and multiplicity implied in those constructions.

But the scientific model taking language as an object of study is one with the political model by which language is homogenized, centralized, standardized, becoming a language of power, a major or dominant language. Linguistics can claim all it wants to be a science, nothing but a pure science - it wouldn't be the first time that the order of pure science was used to secure the requirements of another kind of order. . . Forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws. . . The unity of language is fundamentally political. There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language. . . The scientific enterprise of

extracting constants and constant relations is always coupled with the political

enterprise of imposing them on speakers and transmitting order-words. (101)

Deleuze and Guattari offer an alternative to what they call the "arborescent" schemes

of Chomsky and linguistic science in general by focusing on the variability, which is

to say the complex and chaotic nature, of language.

> The abstract machine of language is not universal, or even general, but
>
> singular; it is not actual, but virtual-real; it has, not invariable or obligatory
>
> rules, but optimal rules that ceaselessly vary with the variation itself, as a game
>
> in which each move changes the rules, (100)

The essence of language in this sense is its inability to be one thing, one field, or an

object of inquiry. Every move in language occludes, momentarily, some of its aspects

and intangibles in order to express others. Our problems, according to Deleuze and

Guattari, are caused by the scientific grid we have tried to place over language to

control it, a move that is characteristic of modernism at its most oppressive and

confused moments. As they note: "You will never find a homogeneous system that is

not still or already affected by a regulated, continuous, immanent process of

variation." (103).

> Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guatarri play with other

possible constructs - "nomads," "rhizomes," "body without organs," "abstract

machines" - that chip away at delimited and regulated visions of reality. Some of

their constructs are more interesting than others, but their attempts to think about the

variability of language represent one way of constructing a complementary dynamic.

> There are not, therefore, two kinds of languages but two possible treatments of

the same language. Either the variables are treated in such a way as to extract

from them constants and constant relations or in such a way as to place them

in continuous variation. . . Constant is not opposed to variable; it is a treatment

of the variable opposed to the other kind of treatment, or continuous variation.

So-called obligatory rules correspond to the first kind of treatment, whereas

optional rules concern the construction of a continuum of variation. (103)

We can use this perspective to construct what the authors might call a "war machine,"

a way to break up and break through either extreme of language theory. We can read

Deleuze and Guattari as more than just another nominalist position in the radical

negativity of the French semiotic. Their sense of the tension between variability and

consistency is more than a rejection of consistency, it is an alternative pragmatic.

M. M. Bakhtin's name has, of course, been central to the language question for

more than a decade, and while there is much of interest in his work, my focus here is

on the way his constructions reinforce the complementary nature of language. To do

so, however, is to read Bakhtin against his early appropriations. First and foremost,

reading Bakhtin into this narrative requires us to resist the temptation, which in

determinist models is a necessity, to force Bakhtin into a univocal position on

language. As Michael Bernard-Donals notes, even the most sophisticated of his

interlocutors "ultimately subsume most of Bakhtin's thinking under a totalizing term,

even if the subsumption takes the guise of 'dialogizing' the body of

Bakhtin/Voloshinov/Medvedev's work"(170). The effect is to render Bakhtin's work as

merely a more sophisticated, but no less determinist, model of social indeterminacy.

From the perspective developed in this chapter, however, it should be clear that

there is an alternate, and I would argue stronger, reading of Bakhtin's endlessly

shifting forces. My goal here is not a detailed analysis of Bakhtin's work, but a quick

glance at his most celebrated categories, heteroglossia and monoglossia. My argument

is that these conditions are more complementary than they are opposite or mutually

exclusive. The tensions that Bernard-Donals identifies as "phenomenological" and

"marxist" in Bakhtin's work are evident in attempts to valorize heteroglossia as an end

in itself. While the artistic merits of heteroglossia, the fact that novels that produce it

do a better job of replicating the fragmented linguistic pallet of modernity, can be

argued, extending that valorization to a social notion of heteroglossia is much more

problematic. More so than Deleuze and Guattari, Bakhtin's conception of the social

seems to demand some monoglossic, some "centripetal" force that is always in

operation. Without it, there is no background against which the utterance works to

bond the speaker and the other together. The poststructural urge to read chaos as

entropic, to free the utterance of its essential social grounding, weakens the impact of

heteroglossia. At any moment, an utterance tends toward one of these states, whether

we frame them, often inaccurately in a technical sense, as heteroglossic and

monoglossic or as centrifugal and centripetal. Each utterance can only be one or the

other at any given moment, but it is the reality of both together that makes either state

meaningful. Perhaps, the best way to read the tensions in Bakhtin is to read them as

complementary constructs.

I am not arguing that Bakhtin would have used these terms. He did not. But

he did refer to "Galilean" shifts in linguistics, and he did argue that he wanted to

reproduce the significant changes that had taken place in science. It is not a stretch to

read Bakhtin as having a post unified-field theory of language, one in which the "tensions" are not only unresolvable but essential to the dynamics of the system. There is an argument to be made that a chaotic and complementary reading of Bakhtin does more justice and provides more insight into the way he sees language operating as a cultural artifact than attempts, in Bernard-Donal's terms, to "unify" the disparate elements of his discourse.

The key point here is that principles of complimentarity and what Prigogine calls "dissipative" systems, systems that can spontaneously reorganize themselves, offer an alternative to the split between nominalist and realist positions. A postmodern theory of language that is not going to go aground on the question of social construction and free play must look for different ways of organizing and thinking about systems. As Jim Baggot notes in his review of what Quantum Theory means to the way we think about and configure reality, these systems replace "determinacy and certainty" with "indeterminacy and probability" (94). But they do not lead to the entropic free fall that poststructuralism always insinuates is on the horizon. Even the most cursory glance at the way the sciences construct systems can offer humanist intellectuals new ways to theorize and construct their practice.

As inviting as concepts from the physical sciences may be, it is the biological sciences that offer the most complex models that apply to the tensions and constructs of language, particularly the work of Chilean neurobiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Their work captures, in a way that models drawn from the physical sciences cannot, the social dynamic of language that Goodson finds so powerful in Coleridge and that permeates Peirce's triadic structures. For Maturana and Varela it

makes no sense to speak of the conflict between nominalist and realist positions because neither can offer a view of what they call the "structural dynamic" of language, a dynamic that makes language both individual and social. From their perspective, language is a biological function that concerns both the individual (ontogenic) and social (phylogenic) behaviors that construct and maintain human societies. Our consciousness is not, at least in their terms, understandable outside of this structural dynamic.

> [A]s a phenomenon of languaging in the network of social and linguistic coupling, the mind is not something that is within my brain. Consciousness and mind belong to the realm of social coupling. That is the locus of their dynamic. And as part of human social dynamics, mind and consciousness operate as selectors of the path which ontogenic structural drift follows. Moreover, since we exist in language, the domains of discourse that we generate become part of our domain of existence and constitute part of the environment in which we conserve identity and adaptation. (234)

For Maturana and Varela language is not a thing or a field unto itself but the essence of human life. Without it we are incapable of sustaining and coordinating the behaviors that define us as individuals and as a society.

> Every structure is compelling. We humans, as humans, exist in the networks of structural couplings that we continually weave through the permanent trophallaxis of our behavior. Language was never invented by anyone only to take in the outside world. Therefore, it cannot be used as a tool to reveal that world. Rather, it is by languaging that the act of knowing, in the behavioral

coordination which is language, brings forth a world. We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others. We find ourselves in this co-ontogenic coupling not as a pre-existing reference nor in reference to an origin, but as an ongoing transformation in the becoming of the linguistic world that we build with other human beings. (235)

In this version of the social dynamic of language the poles are reversed; it is not the social that creates the linguistic but the linguistic that creates the social reality.

Maturana and Varela contend that all biological organisms generate, at both an ontogenic and phylogenic level, an order that defines them against a background or environment. They call this self ordering "autopoiesis" and it both creates unity within the organism, including social organisms, and what they call "structural drift," which is the iterative break and dislocation between the organism and its environment. Life is the constant creation and adaptation to manageable states of disequilibrium. Language is the coordination of the recursive coming in and going out of sync with the background that conserves our social, and in the process our biological, functions. It is the ability to both conserve order and adapt that makes continued life possible.

To the degree that language is both a reflection and a creator of this dynamic, it, too, conserves and adapts. In a Chomskian sense, it conserves an order that insures its adaptability. To be human is to language, in its most complex, meaning seeking sense. But language cannot be constricted by rationality if it is to conserve its adaptability. We cannot stay put, individually or socially, and live. Adaptation

requires excess signification, the signification of prophecy, poetry, and imagination, that rejects preexisting mediations and rational prescriptions. Language cannot be caged, reduced to "order-words," without losing the adaptive quality that allows us to change, to drift, or in their terms, to "dance" with our environment. Part of the changing will be rational, technical, predictable, but part will not. Furthermore, even when changes we make, individually and culturally, are the result of a rational or technical move, the change will create a new structural drift that will have both expected and unexpected consequences.

The sense of language that emerges from Maturana and Varela offers an alternative postmodern critique of language. This critique preserves, and possibly extends, the much heralded indeterminacy of language without constructing that indeterminacy as negative. This critique is thoroughly pragmatic, based as it is on the structural drift between individual and society and between society and the environment. Furthermore, a postmodern critique of language grounded in the work of Maturana and Varela establishes an ethics of communication that answers perhaps the most damning criticism of poststructuralism. From their perspective, all utterances are significant, or in Maturana's terms, "not trivial."

> Every human act takes place in language. Every act in language brings forth a world created with others in the act of coexistence which gives rise to what is human. Thus every human act has an ethical meaning because it is an act of constitution of the human world. This linkage of human to human is, in the final analysis, the groundwork of all ethics as a reflection on the legitimacy of the other. (247)

The goal, for Maturana and Varela, is what they call a "knowledge of knowledge," the recognition of how we know what we know and how what we know creates the world we live in. The key is to recognize both the limits and the potentials of the plasticity of the linguistic domain.

Maturana and Varela construct a different view of society and culture that the familiar Enlightenment scenario of rational and scientific growth, of a social world dominated by rational and positive programs advancing some increasingly technical and empirical view of reality. Even when this vision shatters, it continues to cleave, as Hayles notes, to a negative cohesion, the tyranny of the local. Maturana and Varela create multiple realities that are still related, similar to Sandra Harding's use of standpoint epistemologies, each conserving not only a different set of experiences but a different way of reasoning about them. In this model, an objective reality is, in Maturana's terms, a "command for obedience." As with Deleuze and Guattari and their "order-words," Maturana and Varela are interested in the multiple versions of reality that are hidden behind any attempt of a "major language" to impose order. What makes their take on the subject richer than the one found in *A Thousand Plateaus* is their insistence that multiplicity is a natural part of both cultural and natural formations. The postmodern move of throwing up a vale of multiplicities is unnecessary after all, the multiplicities are inherent in the conservation of behaviors needed to adapt to the different "structural drifts" we experience, both as individuals and as members of communities and societies.

The search for a way to understand how and why we construct alternate subjectivities is advanced by the realization that all subjectivities coordinate behaviors

that organize both our individual and collective identities against a variety of backgrounds. That is, there are structural limits to both the physical and linguistic domains that have to be honored, but they can be honored in a variety of ways, all recursive and tied into the cycle of drift and closure. Language cannot change material reality except by changing social reality, the interactions among and between the multiple, lived perspectives of individuals and groups. Therefore, language, like all systems with a living structural dynamic, evolves by changing and being changed by the conditions, both material and social, of its expression. The goal is to preserve a cooperative social domain that conserves both our position/identity and those of the others we encounter.

> Anything that undermines the acceptance of others, from competency to the
> possession of truth and on to ideologic certainty, undermines the social process
> because it undermines the biologic process that generates it. . . without
> acceptance of others, there is no social phenomenon. (247)

What makes their analysis so valuable to an alternative or strong version of postmoderism is that it both constructs an ethical and social dynamic of languaging and limits intrusions of rational, technical, and intellectual dominance. That is, it conserves and extends the notion of a common language. Language is made 'common' by its intrinsic involvement in the creation and modification of a social world, of a human society, and in the process it maintains, regardless of the technologies applied to it, all of its oracular functions, the ability to change, surprise, terrorize, and delight. It cannot be managed or controlled, except at the risk of losing its primary function. That does not mean that rational and scientific applications are

not possible or valuable, even critical, only that their value is directly related to the conservation of alternate and congruent applications. The problem with totalizing narratives, the bane of the postmodern critique, is that they limit adaptation; they destroy life. On the other hand, we cannot escape the structural dynamics of what Maturana calls our "bodyhood."

This view also creates an entirely different perspective for intellectual practice. From the standpoint of a "knowledge of knowledge," control is less important than congruence. For example, one of the critical flaws in Coleridge's vision of a common language grew out of his theological and nationalist demand for purity and superiority. His notion of a "clerisy" exemplifies what humanist intellectuals have promoted, in a variety of forms and functions, as the natural role of the cultural elite. Even, perhaps especially, leftist intellectuals promote their own reified interpretations of cultural reality as a "command for obedience." At the same time, it is important not to mistake this position for the uncritical celebration of diversity or individual experience. Intellectuals have a responsibility to use their considerable cultural capitol to clarify the political, material, and cultural conditions that support power relations that exclude some and privilege others, including themselves. But they can only do this by fighting the deracination of their own position and discourse by connecting it to the ethical, social, and biological imperative for congruence and cooperation. They must, in short, create a new path to close the structural drift between our ideals of community and the reality we play a leading and privileged role in perpetuating.

Thinking of language this way connects it to the postmodern practice discussed in the First Chapter. It is a model of languaging that has an ethical and pragmatic

trajectory grounded in more than abstract and often conflicting narratives about the liberal state. Only by thinking about the common language from a new perspective can we step away from the modernist extremes of making language everything or nothing. In this model, language creates the structural dynamic of social life. Only by exposing and examining that dynamic can we begin to understand how that increasingly complex matrix is constructed and what possibilities exist for changing it.

POMO IN THE CLASSROOM

A new model of language is crucial to any hope of moving English studies away from its current state of confusion. A new practice simply cannot be constructed around Literature and Composition. Neither sub-discipline can sustain any rationale for its existence that is not deeply implicated in an educational establishment predicated on the maintenance and reinforcement of dominant power relations. The attempt by radical poststructural critique to dislodge or reform current practice can provide an insightful definition of the problem but lacks any ethical or pragmatic trajectory of its own to help build a new practice, and it offers no sense of how specific theoretical mediations can avoid a descent into solipsism or relativism. Focusing on language, however, creates an entirely different scope and direction. Instead of adding to the hyperspecialization and fragmentation of knowledge, the deracination of intellectuals, and the reification of language etiquette as social distinction, a disciplinary practice rooted in the understanding, promotion, and creation of a common language can address the conditions that define postmodernism.

To begin with, shifting the focus to a common language inherently shifts the focus to social relations. As Maturana and Varela make clear, language both creates

and is changed by the social dynamic which allows us to conserve some behaviors and to modify others. One focus of a postmodern language critique anchored in this realization is how we go about moving away from the colonizing narratives of the modern state and toward a new cultural dynamic which, without collapsing into relativism, is more inclusive. That is, we must begin to talk about how languaging allows us to put phrase regimes, Lyotard's "differends," representing different experiential and linguistic realities together into something that resembles the kind of communities we want to live in and the kind of social relationships that will conserve that behavior. We cannot continue to argue that our choices are: 1. to follow Lyotard and other postmodern theorists down the blind alley of incommensurability that denies the need for social congruence, or 2. to hope to find a solution by continuing with the technical rationality that Habermas identifies with the Enlightenment project. Put another way, we need an alternative to defining reality as one thing and then demanding obedience to that definition, or defining it as many things that have no meaningful relationship to each other.

Part of the problem is that we have inherited a tradition that views language as a conduit of information or meaning that can be controlled by and reduced to reason instead of the structural determinant that creates a social consensus, a "coordination of coordination of behaviors," in Maturana's terms, about how meaning is created. Habermas, like Locke, would have us carry out this dialogue in a public sphere that admits only part of the structural dynamic. Language is more than rationality, it also transmits and is part of what Maturana and Varela call the "emotional domain," which characterizes much of our attitudes and experiences. As we grope our way

toward reordering the social world to reflect new realities, we need to express more than technical and rational perspectives. By putting language in the background, we have naturalized the power relations of modernity and conflated the Enlightenment project of emancipation with the liberal obsession with property and power. That is, we have been unable to use the language of rights, freedom, and democracy to create a new dynamic of meaningful inclusion. Instead, as both Toulmin and McGowan have observed, we have created a peculiar notion of freedom that exists only in a negative sense of withdrawal; we are free not to disrupt the liberal conservation of property and dominance. Additionally, our identities in this social construct are increasingly fragmented. We have a diminishing sense of social congruence, the essence of linguistic competence, and an increasing sense of being limited to interactions with isolated groups of people, whether that distinction is driven by race, gender, class, or the discursive practices of hyperspecialized professions.

Schools, of course, promote and support this obfuscation of the structural importance of language in the social domain. Instead of directing our practice toward understanding the way we use language to create the social environment, we focus our practice on the distinctions between communities of language users. These communities fall into two related but different categories. The first category is composed of natural language communities, what the Student's Right to Their Own Language resolution referred to as a "language of nurture." The other communities built and maintained on linguistic distrinctions are professional discourse communities. Before dealing with them separately, I think it is important to recognize that both types of communities add to the fragmentation of social discourse, sometimes

necessarily so and other times not, and both types of communities depend on linguistic distinctions for their identity.

Of the two types of communities, the one most abused by current practice in language classrooms are the natural language communities. They suffer at the hands of what John Mayher refers to as "commonsense learning," which is dedicated to controlling the learning environment of schools and limiting students' active engagement in their own language and learning. Mayher juxtaposes his notion of "uncommonsense learning," learning devoted to the active engagement of students in the production of their own knowledge, to the ingrained practices of most language classrooms. His analysis, which is built around the psychological theories of Kelly, Bruner, and Grice, emphasizes the transactional nature of language and knowledge production. His conclusions are similar to those promoted by Freire and other liberatory educators, promoting a view of language and education which is inherently social. The purpose of this type of analysis is to underscore the way that natural language communities become the grist for linguistic discrimination which results in Watkins's circulating evaluations. This creation and reproduction of distinction, most of it class and race based, continues to be the focus of the composition classroom in spite of repeated attempts to dislodge it.

Geneva Smitherman, one of the framers of the Student's Right proposal in 1974, reflects the frustration over the inability of linguistic research to displace the obsession with surface correctness.

Unfortunately, much of this important work by linguists is framed in the jargon and concepts of modern linguistic science, with terminology that is confusing,

technical and often unintelligible to those outside the field of linguistics. Thus,

despite truths now well over a century old, this vitally needed scientific

information has not filtered down to precisely the place where it could have the

greatest impact - the public schools. (TT 191)

Smitherman's appeal only reflects part of the problem, however. Not only is linguistic

science ignored, composition has its own social agenda. Susan Miller is only one of

the more notable and recent examples of a critique that grows out of Albert

Kitzhaber's oft-cited doctoral dissertation, *Rhetoric in American Colleges: 1850-1900.*

Miller cites the importance of composition, as opposed to rhetoric, to Eliot's reforms at

Harvard and the importance of the Harvard reforms to the development of

composition, which is the heart of Kitzhaber's criticisms. The point is that this view

of language is not about language at all; it is about social distinction and the

preservation of language policies that replicate those distinctions.

In other words, composition conserves a view of language that divides and

fragments rather than helping to unify or create a public sphere. Current practice

rejects, social constructionist apologists not withstanding, the attempt to adhere to what

Smitherman calls the "language of wider communication," the language of "power, not

mere 'correctness,' but the use of language to make the impossible possible" (LP 32).

A practice dedicated to the language of "wider communication," intelligibility, or a

common language must start by asking why this condition persists. Why does

composition pedagogy, no matter how much it twists itself in knots trying to deny or

avoid it, boil down to the evaluations, marks of social distinction, that Watkins remind

us circulate with their own logic and institutional mission? I think the answer must be

that we lack any clear sense of what language is or how it works. We lack the perspective that Maturana and Varela suggest of language as the essential element of the social dynamic. Therefore, instead of promoting a knowledge and understanding of language, we promote and conserve the linguistic distinctions of modern or late capitalism, distinctions that are at the root of the postmodern struggle to create a more populist and democratic society. Language communities represent an essential resource in that struggle, but their potential will never be realized in today's institutionally sanctioned set of practices.

At the very same time that the language of daily life is being extinguished at one end of the spectrum, at the other end the language of hyperspecialized discourse is racing away from the public sphere. Specialized discourse about language, whether it be the "jargon of linguistic science" Smitherman cited earlier or the specialties of composition, rhetoric, or literary theory, miss the mark if they fail to engage a public understanding about language. In slightly different disguises, these specialized discourses mark the path that Bacon saw for language, and it leads now, as it lead then, away from an expressive common language. That much of the problem is widely acknowledged. What is more difficult is negotiating the merger between these specialized discourses and a common, public language. Here again the postmodern response cannot be to wish away the specialization, to hope for clear ground. Instead, the challenge is to make what we know about language work toward a more inclusive social dynamic.

As a first step, it would help to make it clear that specialization itself is not the problem. Rather, it is the use that is made of specialized discourse that is in question.

The study of language, like any scientific or intellectual domain demands an impeccable and critical approach. Further, as Donald Macedo notes, the cultural capital that accompanies the study of language is valuable and not only worth maintaining but expanding. The problem is with the practices that support this specialization. As it currently stands, that practice isolates rather than connects language communities. The specializations associated with the study of language have not only failed to change, as in Smitherman's example, the practices of language education in school, they have reinforced it. These practices have, as Bourdieu and Passeron would have it, "reproduced" social distinctions by continuing the power of the school, the teacher, and the classroom.

In essence, both types of language communities are ill-served by current practice. Either we return to language communities already marked by social distinction or we work in specialized discourse communities that depend on isolation from daily life for their cultural capital. The knowledge that is created is either pushed aside as unsanctioned knowledge or absorbed by what Richard Peterson calls the "technologies of expertise." Neither of these alternatives helps construct a public and democratic sphere of language. Neither acknowledges what Freire calls the "gnosiological cycle of knowledge," which, he argues, is obscured in the schooling process.

> Knowledge is produced in a place far from the students, who are asked only to memorize what the teacher says. Consequently, we reduce the act of knowing the existing knowledge into the mere transference of knowledge...Then he or she loses some the necessary, the indispensable qualities that are demanded in

the production of knowledge as well as in knowing the existing knowledge.

(8)

It is this separation from the act of knowing, of producing one's own world, that make

the "technologies of expertise" so powerful and destructive. A postmodern language

practice should connect these disparate language communities by creating a common

language, one that first recognizes what language is and then negotiates the grounds

for a pragmatic practice.

The approach that Maturana and Varela take toward language could serve as

the foundation for precisely this type of new practice. Concentrating on how language

creates a social dynamic, what kind of relationships it encourages and conserves,

would sustain a practice that could borrow from existing efforts in rhetoric and

linguistics but provide a new focus. In this model, the idea of literacy moves from the

mastery of a dominant register or dialect to understanding, integrating, and mediating

between multiple registers, dialects, and materialities of communication. That is,

literacy is the awareness and ability to manipulate discourses to create understanding.

Understanding in this context is not the transferal of information or the dominance of

reason, it is, instead, the facilitation of coordinating behavior, as Maturana and Varela

note.

[E]ach person says what he says or hears according to his own structural

determination; saying does not ensure listening. From the perspective of the

observer, there is always an ambiguity in a communicative interaction. The

phenomenon of communication depends on not what is transmitted, but on

what happens to the person who receives it. And this is a very different thing

from 'transmitting information.' (196)

This idea of language promotes a version of literacy compatible with Freire's gnosiological cycle, a literacy focused on the social creation of knowledge and the ontogenic and phylogenic investment in that creation.

Obviously, this kind of literacy demands a different set of practices surrounding the teaching of reading and writing. Rather than demanding students learn the "order words" of the dominant dialect, this kind of postmodern language instruction examine and teach how to negotiate between dialects and language communities, including the negotiation of a public sphere that connected natural language communities and specialized discourse communities. Composition can aid in that negotiation by helping students understand how written language becomes intelligible, how it engages and changes the "social determination" of both the reader and the writer. It would have little to do with manufacturing social distinctions out of the minuscule differences between registers or dialects. As Dennis Baron argued in the wake of the Student's Right resolution, the whole focus of the composition classroom changes when intelligibility becomes the focus.

> The function of the composition teacher, then, should be to focus the student's attention on the intelligibility requirements of the written code, rather than to attack the student's use of language. The arbitrary standards of correctness must be ignored, the relative means of effectiveness must be stressed, the student must develop a self-confident attitude toward his language. (182)

The standards that Baron suggests are still rigorous. As Freire and Ira Shor argue in *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, The rigor of negotiating the standards of intelligibility may

be greater than those required to mimic a standard register. They certainly require a greater understanding of what language is and how it works than the mindless drill and practice of mandatory language etiquette.

Reading must also be separated from the demand to interpret the text correctly and the canonical demand to choose the correct text. Indeterminacy, which has long been a staple of reader-response theory, provides an answer. Louise Rosenblatt created one of the earliest and most influential views of an indeterminate reading process in the reader, the text and the poem. The key is that the reader must produce the reading.

> What each reader makes of the text is, indeed, **for him,** the poem in the sense that this is his only direct perception of it. No one can read it for him. He may learn indirectly about other's experiences with the text, and he may then be stimulated to attempt to call forth from the text a better poem. But this he must do himself, and only what he experiences in relation to the text is - again let us underline - **for him,** the work. (105)

Rosenblatt's formulas have one set of possibilities in a set of theoretical mediations concerned with preserving the text. They have quite another in a postmodern model of language where the indeterminacy exists not only within the text, but between the reader and the text and between different readers of the same text. In that context, there are no "efferent" readings, only "aesthetic" readings that each demand not only the competency to read but the will and desire to do so. In an antifoundational world, there is no appeal to authority, except in an oppressive move demanding obedience, that can close the text to other readers anymore than there is the possibility of

"transmitting information."

The real consequences of reader-response theory are only visible in a world in which multiple standpoints are arrayed in a perceptible pattern of power relationships. Postmodernism is built on the realization that such a condition already exists. Using language to connect, without trying to unify, those standpoints is the postmodern hope for a sense of community not based on dominance. Current language practices deny both the possibility and the value of trying to work through that process. Reading requires a connection between the reader and the text, Eco's "inferential walks." It also requires sufficient incentive to bridge the gaps between the multiple readings the text offers. In the postmodern moment, texts abound. Current practice either obscures them, as with television; denies them, as with the semiotic of consumer culture; or reifies them, as in the formation of the canon. Reading cannot be based on any preexisting cultural authority. Instead, reading is always the act of drawing and redrawing the contexts and operations of meaning both within and between communities.

The key to any new practice must begin with the realization that the creation of a common language demands a new approach to the connection between language and culture. It must promote multiple ways of negotiating between standpoints that can no longer be subsumed under a univocal authority. Reading and writing are critical to those negotiations, but only if they are freed from an educational project that uses them to produce and reify social distinctions. Part of this work is rhetorical, although the scope would seem more suited for a semiotic and pragmatic approach. In any case, language instruction in the classroom is an important part of the project.

MACHINE LANGUAGE

The final consideration in a postmodern model of language is the way technology has changed both the sites and means of cultural transmission. Languaging takes place in ways that continues the externalization of memory, plays to the reemergent pictorial nature of language, and challenges our notions of communication and relationships. My intent here is neither to bemoan nor glamorize technology but to point to the fact that languaging through machines creates and conserves different behaviors than does either oral or print culture.

Whether these concerns manifest themselves as Williams suggest *in Problems in Materialism and Culture* as a history of "communicative production," a process which is the concern of the first half of *The Long Revolution*, or what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer refer to as "materialities of communication," the central theme is the exteriorization of languaging. It may be, as Williams argues, that the changes in technologies of communication will continue their democratizing force, creating access to a public sphere more and more reflective of those potentials. It may be, as Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer argue, that the materialities of communication will bring us to the end of interpretation and hermeneutics, to the end of authority over semiotic production. What matters most is that any postmodern model for language must consider and problematize these forces.

In contrast to school, which seeks control over the supposed elite forms of expression, reading and writing, and ignores the others, the postmodern impulse is toward the understanding of all popular and emergent forms of communication. Already, it is an article of faith that the subject positions of modernity are fragmented,

pace Baudrillard, in the postmodern moment and that the control and autonomy of the modernist subject is lost to us. While Baudrillard's constructions have limitations of their own, he clearly shows that as both creators and objects of our own projections we have crossed a line that makes certainty about our status impossible. It is precisely these kinds of issues that a postmodern model of language must engage. If, as Maturana and Varela argue, we "exist in language," what are the consequences of the language existing in machines? Clearly, any definition of literacy must include these concerns as well as the ability to read not just the semiotic production of emergent technologies but the power relations that shape and control them.

It is impossible to chart this path too far into the future. As Hayles has noted, the iterations of culture in which information has already been cut loose from context are more random than ever before. The solid, socialist confidence that Williams evoked is more problematic at a time when information, even in the political domain, fails to carry the same value or promise the element of control in the social dynamic it once did. The material conditions of postmodern languaging will create and conserve a new dynamic as it moves to close the drift in structural coupling that initiated it. It will both threaten and expand the potential of the structural determinants that bind all human society. It may be glib to talk of existing as and among "simulacra," of being "cyborgs," or living in a "cyberhood," but each of these visions are also conditions of social life. There is no hope here for Habermas's reasoned public sphere. There is hope, however, that with diligence and struggle void of what Pfeiffer calls "cultural nostalgia and technical euphoria (12)," we can create a common language, a language suited for inclusion rather than domination.

These concerns could form the basis of a revival of English studies. That is, the continuation of a language critique that has as its focus the creation and promotion of a common language is compatible with postmodernism in a way that even radical reforms in the discipline are not. A new critique requires new models for thinking about language and new terms and technologies for discussing it. It should concern itself with the social dynamic that language creates and brings into focus and the way knowledge is produced and communicated in that dynamic. This model cannot claim any selective cultural authority, it may not even be able to claim an interpretive dominance so much a part of the literary model of the discipline. It can, however, provide a project that has a future in ways that current practices do not. Finally, it provides a means of framing critical intelligence outside of hyperspecialized fields. It is a model of reflective practice and pragmatic promise.

Chapter Four

MULTIPLE OBJECTIVITIES:
AUTOPOIESIS, AESTHETICS, AND CULTURE

One of the important distinctions between the model of language discussed in the previous chapter and most postmodern theories of language is that an autopoietic model does not promote separation of the rhetorical and material domains. Unlike a postmodern theory of signs growing out of a linguistic or nominalist position, this model connects, as one complementary whole, the rhetorical and material. The consequences of thinking about language this way extend beyond linguistic concerns. For humanist intellectuals, it also changes the way that aesthetics, culture, and intellectual practice are constructed. This chapter will explore a pragmatic restructuring of aesthetics and culture consistent with the observations of Maturana and Varela developed in the last chapter.

The most important aspect of this model is that languaging coordinates the coordination of behaviors, the act of adapting and conserving both the ontogenic and phylogenic structures of identity. That is, it is only through languaging that we construct and live in the world. Language is not an instrument for truth seeking, except as truth seeking helps coordinate adaptation or conservation of behavior, and it is not a vehicle for describing the external world. Instead, language defines the dynamic through which human organisms, both individual and social, create and coordinate the interaction between the organism and a background or environment. Neither part of the equation, organism or environment, exists without or outside of

languaging. Because of this, because we create the world we live in, we must place objectivity, as Maturana puts it, "in parentheses." That is, there can be no appeal to a unified or consensual objectivity, except as it is negotiated and created through languaging. In one sense, this characteristic is common to multiple versions of postmodernism, including those based on a mentalist semiotic. What distinguishes Maturana and Varela's version of constructivist thought is that the material world is part of the formula. Rather than being lost in language, we are connected through it to the limits and potentials of the material world, including what Maturana calls our "bodyhood." This construction has much more in common with Pierce's notion of "thirdness" and Dewey's notion of experience and aesthetics than it does with French semiotics that grow out of or in resistance to Saussure. It is this connection to an aspect of pragmatism often lost in its more reductive and instrumentalist constructions that connects Maturana and Varela to a pragmatic postmodernism.

Maturana and Varela describe the integration of organism and environment as "autopoietic," or self-organizing. In human societies autopoiesis is also evident in the recursive and iterative drifts and couplings that define individual and social identity. In fact, it is only in this process of self-organization against a background, which is coordinated through languaging, that identity is possible. Identity involves an ongoing disequillibrium which is evident in a series of cultural drifts and co-ontogenic couplings that mark an organism's continual involvement in and creation of material and cultural domains. Knowledge is always an action or behavior which is consistent with these constructed domains. There are no "free particulars" outside of the social couplings which we create and which define our identity, and there is no objectivity to

adjudicate disputes in perception. That is, an individual or group will not, in fact cannot, think or act except in the context of their mutually constructed domains. These domains are not merely behaviorist because the environment does not cause behavior and because the external world is itself created in languaging. Nor are these constructions nominalist or mentalist. They do not and cannot exclude the dynamics of bodily and external structures. They are, instead, complementary.

Maturana speaks of our living in what he calls a "multi-verse," a series of adaptive and adapting couplings that create different "objectivities." His sense of difference is not like the postmodern sense of difference or diversity in which identity is a negative and marginalized space away from a putative hegemony. Nor does this view privilege the creation of difference. It has more in common with Harding's notion of "standpoint epistemologies," situated and situating spaces expressing overlapping and iterative but different perceptions of a shared reality. As such, these models or ways of thinking about language and culture support and adumbrate a sense of the postmodern as a condition of conscious and material specificity. That is, difference exits because we now share, in both material and social sense, the "objective" world with more, and more different, people. The need to construct a "knowledge of knowledge" is part of an adaptation to social couplings that have expanded to the point of imploding the old consensus-making institutions

One way of applying this model to humanist intellectual practice is to use autopoiesis as a means of interrogating and understanding aesthetics. An autopoietic model of aesthetics would emphasize the way that organisms conserve, in both ontogenic and phylogenic cases, their generation of and adaptation to a background. It

is only against this background that an organism, individual or social, can construct an identity. Aesthetics in this model is simply the process through which the organism constructs its identity. There is no distinction between material and rhetorical strategies of organization, or at least no distinction which is expressible. The aesthetic domain is the organism's construction of a background or field, defining not only its identity but the conditions of its knowledge production. This construction is intentional, taking place in languaging, even if its consequences are unintentional.

Early adherents of Maturana's work, particularly in family therapy, stressed the highly individualistic aspects his thought. Their examples tended to emphasize the distance between each individual family member's experience of the family unit and the incomensurability of those experiences. It is true that every individual has a uniquely constructed background, but it is also true that our social couplings thoroughly mediate those constructions. In many ways, Maturana's constructions are compatible with the way that Bakhtin and Mead talk about individuals being constructed and reconstructed in social interaction. For instance, as different as each family member's experience might be, it is still constructed in the interaction both with other family members and the society at large.

The key point is that languaging inevitably connects us to larger co-ontogenic or social structures, what Maturana calls "third-order unities." The social dimension is also part of an autopoietic aesthetic model, helping explain the iterative, diachronic, even redundant characteristics of aesthetically constructed backgrounds. That is, even allowing for individual and cultural difference, the structural dynamics that govern the construction and interplay create similar and overlapping experiences. This is

important because it reinforces the social dynamic involved in the construction of knowledge. In this model, knowledge is created and understood only in relation to the background against which the organism defines itself and the co-ontogenic couplings that sustain it and are brought into being through languaging.

Aesthetics, then, is both locally specific and generally social. It defines a fluid interface between both individual and social organisms and their background, part of which is the co-ontogenic couplings that define and mediate social existence. It is only through and in reference to this fluid interface that knowledge or thought is possible. That is, the background against which we define ourselves also defines the parameters and the specifications of what and how we think, including what we will accept as proof or evidence. Thus, all knowledge has an aesthetic and experiential component, which is another way of saying that the "multi-verse" of our perspectives is grounded in our own objectivity. Although science, communicative reason, or other discursive practices can mediate, through languaging, the constructions of our multiple objectivities, they cannot, and in fact do not, bring a universal objectivity into being, except in a command for obedience. This is not to say that science, or any other intellectual practice, is merely discursive or that it is unreasonable, only that science or reason are, in and of themselves, inadequate grounds to change the individual and social constructions of reality. This is demonstrably the case in our daily lives where religious, emotional, or irrational forces undercut and invalidate, even for some scientists, the "objective" claims of science and reason. Even the behaviorist assumptions about manipulating the stimulants in the environment are invalid, because the intent and importance of those stimulants still depend on linguistic affirmation to

bring them into the autopoietic construction of a background. The point is that any referent must be part of the field that constitutes the background to have impact and meaning. More forced education, government studies, or institutional demands will not change the background, although they may silence opposotional perspectives.

This view of aesthetics is compatible with both Dewey's emphasis on experience and Harding's on standpoint epistemologies. As Harding notes:

> However, there is not just one legitimate way to conceptualize objectivity, any more than there is only one way to conceptualize freedom, democracy, or science. Understanding ourselves and the world around us requires understanding what others think of our beliefs and actions, not just what we think of ourselves and them. (461)

The concept of a multi-verse, of an intensely experiential and aesthetically grounded notion of thought and knowledge, requires us to see these multiple objectivities as related, as standpoints that must be reconciled and combined to be objective. This view is also compatible with Dewey's emphasis on experience as "doing" and "undergoing." Experience, in his words, contains "no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in unanalyzable totality" (18). This excerpt from *Experience and Nature* provides insight into his pragmatic rejection of reality as a fixed and stable construction, as something "out there." The individual must experience, must "do" and "undergo," the consequences of her action. Of course, Dewey's faith in the science of his time creates its own limited sense of reason and order. His instrumentalism notwithstanding, however, there is a trajectory to his sense of inquiry and lived experience that is very much in line with Maturana and

Varela.

In all of these examples the mind/body split, the assumption of a stable,objective reality, and the adequacy of reason in expressing reality are overturned. Unlike postmodern position that theorize difference as merely aesthetic (in the classical sense), these constructions make aesthetic difference an integral part of a living dynamic and not just a problem of representation. At stake here are both the requirements and consequences of inclusion in postmodern culture. Inclusion must mean that our multiple objectivities, which is to say the separate aesthetic domains we inhabit, be brought into contact through the act of languaging. Unlike Habermas, however, the relation cannot be dictated by communicative reason. Instead, these objectivities or standpoints must negotiate, often in domains apart from the scientific or rational, "contact zones" and "borders" that will affirm their similarity and compatibility. In this model, there is no "real" world we can refer back to, and there is no scientific or rational method that command obedience, except as an act of oppression.

To think of aesthetics as part of the process of autopoiesis means moving away from specialized notions of the aesthetic, both in the positive sense that would supplant religion with art, and in the negative sense that would make difficult or "ugly" art resistant to capitalistic and Enlightenment totalities. Even a materialist end run around these positions, such as Terry Eagleton attempts in *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, fails to conceptualize the difference. Eagleton begins by fixing the historical implications of our struggles with the aesthetic as a contradictory force.

The aesthetic, then, is from the beginning a contradictory, double-edged

concept. On the one hand, it figures as a genuinely emancipatory force--as a community of subjects now linked by sensuous impulse and fellow-feeling rather than by heteronomous law, each safeguarded in its unique particularity while bound at the same time into social harmony.... On the other hand, the aesthetic signifies what Max Horkheimer has called a kind of 'internalized oppression,' inserting social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony. (28)

Eagleton will eventually argue, after careening through a series of commentaries on an eclectic group of thinkers who impacted our use and notion of the aesthetic, for a materialist, yet strangely individualist, aesthetic. Emphasizing "full participatory access," Eagleton situates the struggle over the aesthetic as a struggle between an "image of emancipation" and "ratifying domination" (411). In Eagleton's telling of it, this tension can only be resolved by a radical materialism that brings to the public sphere an open debate over identity, and that guarantees equal participatory rights to all.

This materialist view of aesthetics both changes and extends assumptions made in both negative and positive views of the aesthetic. The changes, mostly associated with the concrete particularity of individual bodies, form the basis for politicizing the aesthetic. In that sense, Eagleton argues, the material conditions of identity are a new "base" of radical cultural theory. This much is hardly original. The work of Foucault and countless feminists has already made the inscribed body the nexus of local political critique. Eagleton tries, to his credit, to drag the aesthetic into the fray, thus

disarming both the universalizing and naturalizing assumptions usually associated with the aesthetic. He fails, however, on two fronts.

First, in his vitriol against postmodernism, Eagleton tramples all over the seeds of his putative rebellion. His unrelenting and self-rightous political agenda always undervalues the role and importance of aesthetic difference in a politicized notion of the aesthetic. It is one thing to correctly point out the futility of merely celebrating difference; it is quite another thing to subsume those differences in a materialist politics. Eagleton is left with a psychological and erotic individualist aesthetics and a programmatic cultural aesthetic. Ultimately, and his late and continual appeals to Habermas confirm this, it is a rationally constructed and intellectually mediated aesthetic that emerges.

The second problem for Eagleton's aesthetic, and the one that keeps him connected to the tradition he seeks to overturn, is his insistence on constructing aesthetic consciousness as separate and marginal. In the end, what difference does it make whether the aesthetic is subsumed as a part of a hegemony of reason, negativity, or materialist politics? This is the essential problem with earlier constructions of the aesthetic: All of them view the aesthetic as something 'left over,' something, no matter how important, which is outside the scientific and rational. This is not to say that the aesthetic lacks significance, but it does seem to lack substance. When someone speaks of aesthetic values, even in university departments dedicated to defending them, no one may doubt the seriousness of the charge, but no one confuses them with the 'real' issues that will determine policy. In many examples of postmodern theory, aesthetics is little more than ergonomics or the bricolage and

pastiche of ad campaigns. The point is that the aesthetic is not an area of great concern, except in the conservative diatribe about cultural disintegration. Eagleton, too, is spite of the importance he places on individual participation and pleasure, relegates the aesthetic to a marginal supporting role in a materialist agenda.

The contrast between that position and an autopoietic notion of the aesthetic should be clear. First, an autopoietic aesthetic requires agency, or as M. Gottdiener puts it, "even popular culture is culture" (175). His point is that every cultural construction is intentional, an intelligent attempt to make sense of the world around us. This means that the aesthetic is both the framework for and the limitation of knowledge and action. It is this point that separates an autopoietic aesthetic from earlier constructions. All versions of the aesthetic attempt some reconciliation between the sensorial and a dominant epistemology, but for Maturana and Varela the equation is inverted. In this construction we can only know what we aesthetically define, through languaging, as knowable. Further, the act of knowing must conserve our adaptive relationship to our environment, making us resistant to radical dislocations of our aesthetic couplings. This means that we must aesthetically validate any attempt to influence or educate us. If the new input invalidates our aesthetic coupling, it is difficult if not impossible for us to accommodate without losing our own sense of being. That this process is aesthetic and not necessarily rational has obvious implications for the way we create and transmit emergent cultural knowledge.

The consequences of thinking about aesthetics this way are at once greater and more limited than much postmodern discourse would allow. They are more limited because they do not lead to the death of science or some version of what Lyotard

refers to as parology. They are greater because by demystifying the aesthetic and putting it at the center of knowledge making, the postmodern turn toward anti-foundationalism and pluralism takes on a deeper significance. Trying to articulate the consequences of an autopoietic model of aesthetics necessarily involves rethinking the focus of humanist intellectual practice and the assumptions we make about knowledge, culture, and language.

To begin with, it is important to note that Maturana, Varela, and Harding never even consider that relying on languaging or standpoint epistemologies would reduce the value of science. Maturana makes it quite clear that the observational techniques of science are valuable and that it is the job of the scientist to be "impeccable" in her execution of these techniques. As troubled as Harding is with the "strong sense" of objectivity, she still wants to preserve the notion that objectivity " is useful in promoting a way to think about the gap that should exist between how any individual or group wants the world to be and how in fact it is"(461). Just as Hayles debunks the notion that chaos is the enemy of science, these scientists see no inherent contradiction between good science and social construction. What they all attack, from different angles, is the notion that science is neutral, that it is beyond social or linguistic critique. For Maturana and Varela the key is that while science can claim impeccability it cannot claim to be universal. Science will not convince someone who does not operate in or agree to perceive the world through its observational domain that it is accurate. Nor can we argue, as Harding notes, that the findings of scientific research are neutral, that they are not part of the autopoiesis of scientists.

It is this problem, the problem of explaining how and under what conditions

acts of languaging and technologies of observation merge to create a new social coupling, that should drive a postmodern intellectual practice. We cannot simply throw our hands in the air, say that all acts of languaging and perception are relative, and walk away. On the other hand, we cannot privilege our professional discourses as universal or even particularly relevant to the various autopoietic structures of reality we encounter. We cannot, as Eagleton would have it, predetermine the priorities or touch points required or rule out specific acts of languaging, as Habermas does by separating aesthetic from rational discourse. The intellectual burden of autopoietic notions of thought, aesthetics, and culture is be both impeccable and inclusive.

We must also realize, in a way that theories promoting an aesthetic distance do not, that aesthetic responses to autopoiesis and drift require both elegant and inelegant energies. That is, not only do we require movements of elegance and synthesis, movements that bring, however temporarily, our couplings into sync with our surroundings, we have to also value the energies that create a new drift. In this sense there are no universal characteristics of aesthetic objects or fields. Instead, our aesthetic domains are in constant flux. This makes finding contact points more difficult and unpredictable, but recognizing this as part of a broader aesthetic field and cultural dynamic should prevent despair over the changes in institutions that promote and transmit cultural meanings. What is significant is not the particular form but the behaviors being conserved or adapted.

An autopoietic and pragmatic view of the aesthetic is, in Homi K. Bhabha's terms, performative. Rather than fixed categories, even categories as seemingly stable and tangible as race, gender, and class, we find ourselves working in and living

through multiple and unpredictable blendings, redefinitions, and reconstructions. As Bhabha puts it:

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced
>
> performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the
>
> reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of
>
> tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective,
>
> is a complex on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities
>
> that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (2)

Even if Bhabha's emphasis is shifted away from minority voices, the process is the same. It is the inability of tradition to signify identity that marks the postmodern moment. Self-reflexive to the core, subjectivity is no longer unified or unifiable. This is not to say that the traditional locations of power have been vacated or disabled. On the contrary, the likelihood of an inclusive and democratic sense of cultural synthesis may be determined by our ability to disarm those positions without making the result look like Bosnia or Rwanda. The key insight is that the situation is fluid; it is being acted out not just before us but among us. An autopoietic and pragmatic notion of aesthetics should explain how we coordinate our behaviors to conserve some and adapt others.

This sort of inquiry depends on a better understanding of languaging. The aesthetic is the source of the common language, the ability to bring all of our experiences and imagination to bear. Rather than focusing on a canon of works, our focus should be on a semiotic that may include a canon but emphasizes the performative nature of aesthetics. As Gottdiener notes, that semiotic requires both a

material and a historical sensibility, the ability to both understand how the signs being manipulated have emerged and the consequences of the struggle to reclaim them. The aesthetic, in this model, happens in real time across increasingly fragmented boundaries. What is being negotiated is how identity in an inclusive politics is possible, how it can be both reclaimed and performed within the structural dynamic of a particular cultural formation.

The history of intellectual involvement in cultural production is, however, dubious at best. The impulse of instrumentalist and modernist intellectuals is to freeze the interface and pre-determine the outcome. Lacking models for thinking about complementary and chaotic constructions and locked into professional discourses opposed to public access, humanist intellectuals have turned away, for the most part, from the fluid, the popular, and the everyday. In the past, the abandonment of all but the most reductive and selective notions of culture has taken three forms. The most traditional approach is often labeled as Arnoldian, but its most repressive incarnations have come in this century. Parallel to the first method, the second type of intellectual retreat is represented by the avant-garde and the negative formation of "mass" culture. The third and most recent method employs a leaden Marxist or materialist view of culture that deprives the masses of their agency, power, and intelligence.

What all of these approaches have in common is a disdain for mass culture. What differs is the way they position aesthetic impulses within the culture to defend selective traditions from contamination. After W.W.I, the first of these approaches sought to use a universal, Arnoldian view of the aesthetic to reposition a class consciousness devastated during the war and to fuel a new economy, much as Eliot's

reforms at Harvard were connected to a post -Civil War economic shift. While

Arnold, Leavis, and T.S. Eliot are oft-cited referents in this approach (the latter's

inclusion somewhat complicated by avant-garde tendencies in his poetry), perhaps a

more relevant focus is Lord Newbolt. Newbolt, a military hero, government official,

and popular poet headed a Board of Education committee examining the role of

education in England after the "Great War." Faced with what the report called the

"morbid condition of the body politic," meaning a more diverse and less gentrified

populace, the report encouraged the use of literature, Shakespeare in particular, as a

corrective. As Derek Longhurst summarizes, the report offered literary

recommendations in support of the "common good."

> To prevent 'lamentable consequences,' educational institutions should promote
>
> 'fellowship' through literature, as an embodiment of the best thoughts of the
>
> best minds, the most direct and lasting communication by man to man. (151)

What is significant is the educational focus of this approach generated by the historical

need to replenish an administrative class. The *Newbolt Report* makes the case, cited

in numerous forums, including current conservative back to basics reform movements,

that the right literature taught by the right people can improve social life.

While this approach runs aground on the basis of trying to impose an aesthetic

response and promoting an empty and obedient notion of reading, it is still at least

marginally inclusive. What is interesting is that the parallel development of an elite,

avant-garde aesthetic movement undermines the first approach from the start. Many

writers-- Eliot is a notable example-- worked both sides of the street during this

period. On one hand we have the promotion of a putative cultural salvation through

literary studies, on the other we have the conscious disparaging of "mass" culture and the creation of elite cultural institutions. The arrangement is as diabolical as it is clever, and it is still played out in almost every school curriculum in the country. The first phase is to create a market, to produce broad literacy skills that promote and validate the importance of literary texts. Once that market, an essential part of legitimizing literary culture, is in place, the second phase kicks in. In this phase, "difficult" literature, literature expressly not for, about, or by this newly educated public, becomes the standard bearer for literary culture. As John Carey summarizes:

> The intellectuals could not, of course, actually prevent the masses from
> attaining literacy. But they could prevent them reading literature by making it
> too difficult for them to understand - and this is exactly what they did. The
> early twentieth century saw a determined effort, on the part of the European
> intelligentsia, to exclude the masses from culture.... How deliberate this process
> of alienating the mass audience was is, of course, problematic and no doubt
> differed from case to case. But the placing of art beyond the reach of the mass
> was certainly deliberate at times. (16-17)

Carey's narrative makes intellectual involvement in culture problematic at best. The urge to reify a difficult, often "textual," definition of cultural production denies a broader semiotic and pragmatic approach.

Even when leftist intellectuals attack these constructions, two problems emerge. The first, as Bové points out, is that they do so within the institutions that privilege their positions. Bové's example is Edward Said, arguably the quintessential oppositional intellectual of our time, who is still limited in his opposition by the site

of his practice.

> Said, or any *other magisterial intellectual* modifies and perpetuates one central
>
> component of humanism: the sublime role of the leading - even if adversarial -
>
> intellectual whose work is able both to shake the order of forces and make
>
> possible a new accommodation -- an intellectual whose image as the
>
> empowered revisionist alone is attractive and authoritative within the otherwise
>
> anonymous network of discourse and representation. (31)

Bové's critique is echoed by Jacques Rancière, who faults Bourdieu's work on the

classist nature of the testing process in the French academy as benefiting Bourdieu and

not the students.

The second, closely related, problem is that leftist cultural criticism is itself

inaccessible. As Bérubé points out, most of the heat generated by leftist cultural

critique is felt in a few elite graduate programs, while the public arena is dominated

by right wing parodies of that critique. Part of this is a function of what Watkins

refers to as the "recruiting " function of theory, its appeal as a glamorous and esoteric

calling. Part is the need for any profession to protect its discourse and methodology

or risk losing the patronage of its supporting institutions. But a large part of the

problem is that leftist intellectuals abhor the "masses" and see themselves, just as

Eagleton does, holding the keys to their political, economic, and cultural salvation.

None of these versions of culture is aesthetic in an autopoietic sense. None are

even what Williams would called "constitutive," seeing culture as "the *signifying*

system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is

communicated, reproduced, experienced, and expressed" (SC 13). Non extends the

intelligent and intentional act of cultural reproduction to non-intellectuals, unless it be in the negative sense of false consciousness. This point is important because if the aesthetic is a normal and necessary part of our individual and cultural identity, then cultural theory must honor it as multiple and not institutionally dominated. Further, a postmodern theory of culture should track not only the fragmentation of subjectivity and the shift in sites and means of cultural reproduction, but also the emergence of new forums of consensus. That is, both the drifts and closures of cultural couplings need to be understood if a true picture of how cultures act as complex systems is to be obtained. The goal here is not the descent into relativism that postmodernism is so often accused of, but a deeper understanding of how the multiple energies, technologies, and subjectivities of culture negotiate and authenticate their identities.

To begin with, although culture is intensely ontogenic in our experiencing of it, it is the diachronic nature of our behaviors and couplings that give culture its specific function and gravity. Maturana and Varela emphasize what they call the "transgenerational stability of behavior patterns ontogenically acquired in the communicative dynamics of a social environment" (201) in their definition of cultural behavior. That is, though we experience our behavior as unique and individual, and to some extent it is, we also rely on "transgenerational stability" to orient us. This, again, is McGowan's point about the strength of social construction. While our own experience is limited, coordinating behaviors in a stable field of experiences and behaviors creates a cultural dynamic. Raymond Williams points out that our selection and arrangement of those points of stability changes over time.

The selective tradition thus creates, at one level, a general human culture; at

another level, the historical record of a particular society; at a third level, most

difficult to accept and assess, a rejection of considerable areas of what was

once a living culture.... In a society as a whole, and in all its particular

activities, the cultural tradition can be seen as a continual selection and re-

selection of ancestors. (TLR 51-52)

In other words, culture is always different from and less than "lived experience," to

use Williams's term. As periods emerge and recede the contents and perceptions of

the transgenerational behaviors change.

The key to a progressive sense of postmodern culture is to realize that the

"lived experience" or the ontogenic forms of cultural expression and coupling now

play a greater role in the performative selection of cultural traditions. This is simply

another way of saying that the local, aesthetic groundings of individuals and groups

have emerged to fragment and break apart earlier traditions. Not only the traditions,

but the institutions created to perpetuate them, from national governments, to museums

and universities have, for the moment at least, lost the power to force the selection of

particular definitions of behavior. Instead, we live in a cultural period when aesthetic

(in the autopoietic sense) distinctions multiply rapidly and are diffused more rapidly

into a cultural setting unable to absorb or re-couple them. Like the computer

generated fractal constructions Hayles describes, these cultural expressions lack any

one, coherent point of focus. Even the sites and means of production have shifted to

such a degree that the transgenerational stability is in question.

One response to this situation is to argue that academics have been reading too

much Nietzsche and the "problems" we have result from a loss of traditional values(or

points of focus). Given McGowan's observations and the importance of transgenerational stability, it would be a mistake to underestimate the power of the this interpretation. The political right in all Western societies has gained untold power and influence promoting versions of this agenda. This response assumes that by returning the focus, or process of selection, to its traditional sites and means that the crisis will pass. It assumes, that is, that the crisis is not the result of a more fundamental drift between old institutions and new conditions.

The contrary attempt to merely celebrate difference and diversity simply overlooks the autopoietic urge toward closure. This culture, and other nationalist cultures in the first and third worlds, will eventually close the current drift. As insightful as it is to realize, pace Baudrillard, that the drift invalidates traditional subjectivities and technologies of self, it is foolish to think that the drift is permanent. If it were, the culture would die, having no way to sustain its own structural dynamic. Much more likely, and historically probable, is the attempt to close the drift through repressive means.

As I argued in the first chapter, an alternate response is to see the drift as a critical reconfigurement of the basis for cultural selection. Toulmin, for instance, argues that the focus on nation states must be replaced by a complementary construction of local and global politics. Humanist intellectuals are particularly at risk in this period because the base of their cultural capital is anchored in the very institutions called into question by the current sense of drift. They cannot engage in closing the gap without abandoning their current conditions of patronage and practice, but even that brings no guarantees. Cultural theory emerges as critical at precisely the

point where rethinking language and knowledge making, the metaphors of thinking about thinking, come into contact with the new attempts to make sense out of what appears to be darkly chaotic and to construct multiple and complementary points of focus.

Constructing a theory and practice to honor and utilize these multiple objectivities is problematic on several fronts. First, our models for talking about culture are as bound to the need for categorization and consistency as our models of language are. Even if the most egregious oversimplifications, such as Newt Gingrich's appeal to an "American civilization," are set aside, cultural theory still assumes the existence of a coherent cultural matrix. Constructing that matrix means categorizing and ranking spaces and practices with the cultural dynamic, or what Bourdieu calls the habitus. Even though these approaches often leave those with a strong political agenda of their own, such as Eagleton, uncomfortable, the systems still provide a privileged objectivity to academic practitioners. Second, this project is impossible to implement unless we abandon the idea of the "mass." As both Carey and Bové recognize, and as Williams noted as early as the conclusion to *Culture and Society*, the concept of the "masses" is primarily a legitimizing trope for intellectual pretense. Finally, there is very delicate balance to be struck between maintaining the rigor of intellectual practice and relocating that practice in cultural sites currently impervious or hostile to it. The first two concerns will be the focus of the rest of this chapter, and the third will be the focus of the next.

The question of models has already been discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, it is the need to more accurately and inclusively understand languaging that

makes a new model for talking about culture necessary. The goal here is to not merely reduce culture to a "text," which first Richards and later the poststructuralists accomplished, but to maintain a broader semiotic and performative focus. Here, again, a pragmatic sensibility infused with models and metaphors of post-quantum theory science is a large part of the solution, but culture implies, even more strongly than language, a Western bias toward order and a deep sense of Gnostic truth seeking. Even the most amateurish of interpretations seeks to cloak itself in the mantle of cultural synthesis. This tendency grows out of the need to construct stable forms of order. David Hall addresses the shift in emphasis from stable to process or pragmatic models of thinking, and his summary is worth quoting at some length:

> The traditional understanding of harmony in contrastive terms tacitly assumes the priority of consistency, conjunction, and unity over their opposites. This tacit assumption is both cause and consequence of the belief that norms, or pattern criteria, exist independently of the flux of passing circumstance and function as forms of togetherness characterizing the harmonies we objectively experience
>
> In the truest sense process understandings must have the notion of insistent particularity as both ground and goal. Process and particularity are mutually implicative. If there were but one kind of entity, uniformity would be complete and the varieties of logical order (the sole object of enjoyment in such a world) could be enjoyed in abstraction from the entertainment of any actually living thing. Any item in such a world could serve as the surrogate for any other. Total stasis would be the rule. In a world of inconsistent

particularities persistence is less valuable. Items and their complex unities

must move off the scene to make way for other items and complexes

impossible with regard to the former. Particularity argues for process if the

fullest values are to be realized.And process, if it is to be more than a shifting

of components and patterns (whose *possible* existence is thought to be as rich

as the actualities so patterned), requires particularity. (E&I 133)

One example of particularity is the multiple objectivity imbedded in third-order unities

brought forth in languaging. That is, our lived experience of the culture is neither

interchangeable with anyone else's nor reducible to expert summary or observation.

The goal is not to essentialize these standpoints but to find the emerging points

of contact between them. That is, if we accept the muti-verse as an increasingly

accurate picture of a postmodern democracy, then we also need to be able to create

and identify the new touch points of that democracy, the new sites of consensus

building. These sites and means of reproduction are unlikely to look like the

modernist institutions that relied on controlling and legitimizing information and

information technologies to create and maintain identity. This is so because

information in the computer age is no longer contextualized, as Hayles notes.

Humanist intellectuals cannot depend on specialized discourse precisely because it is

this specialization that disconnects them from a public discourse that is structured

around aesthetic concerns, much like Williams's "structures of feeling," that are not

experienced or communicated as technical specialties. As a consequence, these newly

aestheticized cultural reproductions are not just unconventional material for academic

discourse, they are entirely different aesthetic couplings that have their own logic and

semiotic consistency. Progressive political thought cannot predetermine the site, means,or outcome of the performative interactions needed to both study and work within these constructs, no matter how "right" their analysis of the situation may seem.

One possible scenario for future cultural analysis would abandon the totalizing notion of culture in favor a more organic model, one that recognizes multiple levels and forms of disequillibrium and uses its analytic powers to identify and create new points of focus. Instead of a dominant and overriding view of culture, one that emphasizes paradigms, epochs, and historical trends, the alternative would emphasize the way that these multiple objectivities could communicate with each other. It would bring these perspectives into a linguistic and co-ontogenic coupling, including the specific material conditions needed for this to happen. This does not mean that they have to agree or communicate across a broad range of cultural representations, only that they find a mutual means of recognition. There is no reason that a large part of this effort could not include a great deal of the critical and materialist analysis commonly associated with cultural studies. There is no reason, for instance, to exclude material and historical critiques of current and former products of cultural reproduction. The mistake is to assume that the sites of cultural reproduction we inhabit will influence objectivities disconnected from them, or that the current field is already comprehensive. Instead, we must construct a model of culture and cultural studies that emphasizes multiple sites and means of communication.

Given this analysis, it would seem that bringing new models of language and aesthetics into the classroom would be a central part of this undertaking. Further, honest pursuit of this goal would reconstruct our whole notion of theory and practice.

Instead of promoting yet another 'back to basics' revival or encouraging some revised version of the *Newbolt Report*, politically progressive intellectuals should offer an alternative to business as usual. That alternative could start with the changes in language education discussed in the last chapter, and it should include a revision of the way aesthetics is constructed and taught. The focus should be on providing an understanding of how communication is, in Williams's terms, "constitutive and constituting," and of how an aesthetic dynamic could extend democratic potentials in emerging social formations. As Williams notes, every culture is in the process of selectively reorganizing itself, of choosing some sites and means of cultural reproduction over others. In a postmodern culture those selection processes are more profuse and diffuse than in modernist institutions, and there is no reason, other than nostalgia, to believe that the sites and means currently studied would some how be privileged in new constellation of cultural practices. In other words, the focus has to be on the lived experience of the students, the way they construct, and are constructed by, their aesthetic domains.

This approach would signify a change in the relationship between theory and practice because it would put practice first and return theory to a reflective role. That is, instead of predetermining the order of events and the priority of focus, this approach would emphasize the performative aspect of culture, the point at which identity and understanding are constructed. Theory becomes a point of reflection and contemplation, what Hall refers to as "theoria." Both elements are critical. The behaviors associated with cultural production require an observer, a point Maturana and Varela continually stress, and that observation, the techniques of its practice, can,

if properly performed, provide insights into the context of the production. But the observer cannot impact on the observed behaviors without interacting with the participants, without entering their aesthetic domain and they his. The last point is critical because it challenges the concept of distance assumed by a universal observer, an uninvolved objectivity. For understanding, a new coupling, to take place it is not enough for the theory, the explanation of the behavior, to stay within the observer's experience, it must also circulate and interact with the experiences of the observed. They may resist and reject it. This is similar to ethnography in some ways, but it challenges the objectivity of the observer. It challenges, as Rancière does in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, any technology that reduces the observed to inactive and uninvolved subjects.

This sort of program has to value the everyday because that is the only legitimate site of cultural reproduction for most people, and is *a* site of cultural reproduction for everyone. Unlike theoretical mediations that limit the performative aspects of culture, this approach preserves the agency and intelligence of the participants instead of reducing them to unthinking pawns. Agency is critical because it explains the vitality and importance of our ongoing, autopoietic reconfigurations of our individual and cultural identities. Popular culture offers, in fact it demands, the continual rewriting and restructuring of identity in real time. A selective tradition only offers the opportunity to do so against a limited, historically fixed background. Only by focusing on the everyday can the complexity and intensity of aesthetic activity be understood and contrasted to the more limited and restrictive aesthetic distance common to academic practice. Instead of trying to predetermine the outcome of

cultural production, ignoring in the process the lived experience of most of the members of society, the goal here is to create some understanding of what takes place and what is conserved or adapted in the process.

Models of the everyday, such as those found in de Certeau and Fiske, emphasize the progressive and resistant aspects of everyday or popular culture. For deCerteau concepts such as "poachings" and "guerrilla raids" convey both the agency and the resistance of the popular. Fiske, building on de Certeau's analysis, explores these elements in shopping malls, movies, and jeans, for example, and the way these elements form complex interactions. Fiske has been attacked for essentializing these resistant elements at the cost of losing critical and political perspective. While there is merit in raising a cautionary or corrective flag on that question, it is equally important to preserve some direct interaction. If we look at cultural and aesthetic practices in what Edward Hutchins might call "the wild," in the real time construction and experiencing of them, then we must also look at the way these practices conserve and constitute a cultural site. We need to think about what the consequences of our practices are on the environment that sustains and surrounds them. What academic criticism is too likely to conserve is a judgmental distance between the observed and the observer. What we should be concerned with conserving are new practices of agency, positive freedom, and democracy.

Hutchins develops one possible model to use in thinking about a cultural studies program grounded in the everyday in his book, *Cognition in the Wild.* Hutchins, a cognitive psychologist working for the US Navy, studied the way navigational teams on Navy vessels performed their tasks. By "in the wild," he means

cognition as it takes place in real situations, not in a laboratory or artificial environment. What he found was that rather than one clear, or predetermined procedure, each team, acting with and through items such as tools, communication systems, rank, procedures, and history, created its own medium of operation. Further, cognition took place not just among the crew members but in and through the medium. That is, the medium also "learned," or became more or less intelligent and adaptive. In that sense, cultural formations "in the wild" are not inert systems. We learn and act within a cultural medium that either expands or limits our intelligence and adaptability, conserving some behaviors over others. Either way, the medium is part of the picture. The challenge for humanist intellectuals is to think of how emergent sites might promote this sort of adaptability and intelligence, particularly as part of an educational practice. Instead of promoting a weak sense of relativism, difference and diversity play a role in defining and promoting the adaptability of new behaviors. Transferring critical perspecives and knowledge may prove difficult, however. As Williams notes, the relationship between dominant and emergent is often problematic.

> Privileged Institutions: This interlocks with the sociological detail of the privileged cultural institutions, such as universities. These not only protect certain unsubordinated standards and procedures of culturalwork, but under stress protect them differentially. They often have full effect in residual areas (e.g. classical scholarship) by the recognition of relative distance. They usually have functional effect in dominant areas (e.g. applied science) where internal standards and procedures can be accepted as the conditions of effective service.

But quite often they have minimal effect in emergent areas (e.g. critical

sociology) where the conditions of privilege may be threatened by their

practice, and where the received 'standards' can even be evoked *against* new

interests and procedures. (SC 225)

Williams confirms the difficulty of bringing a new intellectual practice across the

borders that separate a privileged intellectual class from everyday and popular

formations. Unless that transference is possible, however, the aesthetic backgrounds

against which each community organizes its identity cannot be brought into contact or

dialogue.

Obviously, the notion of "masses" or "mass culture" is antithetical to this sort

of revised practice. There is no sense of intentional or intelligent agency in these

concepts. Instead, they promote an elite privilege in these areas while assuming

observational domain of the rest of society. Any performative and complex model of

culture has to abandon these categories to pursue its goals. As simple as that may

sound, it is difficult to even trace evolution of the term intellectual without reference

to the masses as an oppositional and defining construct. Inherent in this construction

is the notion that public affairs can be better managed by elite and specialized

intellectuals, whether their specialty be science, humanities, business or government,

than by the populace at large. In some areas that is no doubt true. But intellectuals

working within these dominant institutions cannot translate their knowledge across

aesthetically diffuse structures, and as a result have failed to make the cultural medium

more intelligent and adaptive. It is impossible to locate or develop a means for

dialogue and interaction necessary to perform the task of changing our practice using

"mass" as a category of cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

It is important, in conclusion, to reposition this view of culture and aesthetics within a broader constellation of critical practices. To begin with, even though this approach is based in language it is not mentalist or nominalist. Instead, this approach has more in common with a view of language that can be traced from Coleridge to Pierce that is grounded in the material as well as the linguistic nature of the sign. In that sense, it is part of a pragmatic response to the pluralistic and antifoundational characteristics of postmodernism. From this perspective, the question is not how to recognize or create diversity but how diversity becomes part of a cultural dynamic intent on preserving multiple voices and objectivities without essentializing them. Beginning with an understanding of languaging and the aesthetic that makes the material part of an adaptive and autopoietic structuring of personal and social identity frames the problem in new ways. It returns us to the pragmatic search for communities of inquiry, and it focuses the need to negotiate the sites and means of cultural reproduction.

Nothing in this project denies the validity or importance of cultural critique pursued through other theoretical approaches. It does, however, question how effective those approaches can be in changing an emerging cultural dynamic utilizing dominant or residual sites and means of transmission. Put simply, the question is how to take the work done by progressive intellectuals in the academy and make it part of a broader social and educational dialogue. This approach argues that any dialogue that moves across boundaries of identity must recognize and honor the aesthetic dimension

of understanding, including the recognition that all cultural production is intentional and intelligible, which is not to say it is critically acute. This approach challenges intellectuals working in the humanities to change their orientation from modernist strategies of control and domination and explore how a postmodern democracy might create and recognize emerging sites of transmission, including a revision of educational institutions and practices.

The demystification of the aesthetic changes the grounds for meaningful intellectual work, making it necessary to both include alternative standpoints in the formation of any project and to communicate the outcomes to standpoints with different aesthetic groundings. This reality makes the creation of a common language at once more challenging and more rewarding. Most importantly, it means that intellectuals cannot simply replicate their internal discourse and expect institutions to translate it to a broader public, unless, of course, they are content to endorse the modernist program of unity through oppression. This is not the first time that intellectuals (although they would not have been called that) have faced the challenge of a changing cultural dynamic, one that invalidated previously sanctioned knowledge and created new sites of cultural production and new guardians of emerging technology. In this case, the emergent formations are undercutting, both through technology and scientific metaphors and models, the naturalized assumptions of work in the humanities. In this setting, even an updated version of a clerisy is no longer appropriate; they no longer speak to the conditions of valid cultural work.

Hall argues in his conclusion to *The Uncertain Phoenix* that this kind of cultural vision is properly polytheistic, a reversal of a tradition that sought order

through the denial of chaos. The Gnostic echoes of that tradition are found in foundational intellectual practices today. Changing the models we use to understand language, aesthetics, and culture is one step toward revitalizing our practice and bringing it in line with an emerging cultural determinant: post-unified field theory science. Like everything in the postmodern world, it is likely that the change will be scattered among a multitude of practices and sites. What they are likely to have in common is the creation of a more adaptive and intelligent cultural dynamic, one that honors and learns from previously excluded voices and standpoints. Ultimately, it will require that we change our definition of intellectual practice, probably even our definition of intellectuals.

Chapter Five

POST - INTELLECTUALS

Ultimately, if, as Hayles argues, postmodernism is a response to a new cultural determinant that involves rapidly changing conditions, including changes in the way we think about order, then intellectual practice should reflect that shift. That is, postmodernism must be explained in relationship to modernist intellectual sites and practices and not just as a radical freefall within isolated intellectual or artistic communities. The question is what adaptations should be conserved and which have outlived their usefulness, or how do current practices either promote or inhibit a postmodern expansion of agency and intellect. The grounds for making these decisions, of course, depend on how postmodernism is defined and what it means to say we live in a postmodern age or society.

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to sketch what I have called a strong sense of postmodernism, one grounded in a material and pragmatic sense of practice. It is my contention that postmodernism can best be understood as a shift in both the conditions and metaphors of cultural reproduction, at once including positions and voices previously silenced and encountering a new sense of order in the material and social world. Part of that new sense of order grows out of a performative and complementary understanding of language, aesthetics, and culture which problematizes the modernist assumptions about intellectual practice and both the goals and means of knowledge production. In simplest form, the question is whether institutions and practices designed for one form of social and cultural order can be revised to fit

another, in some ways very different, set of assumptions.

There has, of course, been a lot written about the plight of intellectuals, almost all of it by card-carrying intellectuals. Most of it, even when airing specific grievances, naturalizes the site and function of intellectual practice and is optimistic about the position of intellectuals. Most of it is produced and consumed within university communities. If there is a postmodern sense of intellectual practice, however, it must be more than an elite discourse. It must instead address the state of democracy, education, and cultural reproduction in a broader public arena. In that sense, I would argue, much that has been written about intellectuals by intellectuals is largely self-congratulatory and not terribly relevant to the question of what a postmodern intellectual practice, or even a post-intellectual practice, might become. This is so both because intellectuals, both humanist and scientific, have become entrenched in institutions of limited postmodern value and, as Bové argued, they have often defined themselves in opposition to the broader emancipatory sense of agency and intelligence that marks the postmodern.

Several versions of radical or progressive intellectuals have emerged. Of the versions critical to current intellectual self-perception, none is more salient than that of Antonio Gramsci. Key terms of his critique, including "traditional" and "organic" intellectuals, "war of position," and "hegemony," are deeply situated in current discussions about intellectual practice. Gramsci recognized the function of intellectuals in sustaining and challenging the operational, and largely invisible, cultural consensus by virtue of their leading roles in institutions. But he also held the view that only parties could stage the required revolution, and parties required leaders.

For Gramsci, the true focus of the organic intellectual was the party and its purpose was to educate the populace, what he called the "people-nation," from the intellectuals' position within emerging institutions. Current appropriations of Gramsci often overlook the party, postulating instead a loose affiliation of university intellectuals as organic or, in Said's term, "oppositional." They also do not take into account the historical and material inability of so-called organic intellectuals to control the institutional sites of their practice. From this perspective, it makes no sense to talk about resisting or overthrowing hegemony. Gramsci was quite clear that the goal was a "counter-hegemony," and that a culture without some form of hegemony probably was not a culture at all. The point is worth making because it refutes what McGowan describes as the "negative" sense of freedom promoted by intellectuals who see freedom as separation and exception from social order. Finally, Gramsci precedes Williams in inverting the base/superstructure model of vulgar Marxism, causing a strong emphasis on the sites and means of cultural and not just economic production. Gramsci said that "every hegemonic relationship is essentially pedagogical" (1331), recognizing the role that intellectuals of either stripe played in the construction of a political and cultural formation.

> One cannot make politics-history without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and the people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectuals and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relations of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectual becomes a caste or a priesthood. (1323)

What Gramsci describes is precisely the balancing act faced by modernist intellectuals

with a social conscience: how to lead without alienating or losing one's followers. In a postmodern democracy, that problem is overwhelmingly complex.

Gramsci provides a starting point, a way of beginning an interrogation of intellectual practice. His program was both elitist and utopian, believing in the power of an emergent intellectual class to create a new social order, which is to say, a new hegemony. As Luciano Pellicani has noted in his analysis of Gramsci and the PCI, even though Gramsci sidesteps a naked materialism, such as that of Lenin, his constructions still fall close to the quasi-religious notion of vanguardism promoted by more instrumental or vulgar forms of communism. The historical record, as Pellicani, a noted Italian socialist himself, reads it is that the balance described above never materialized. For current intellectuals Gramsci offers a mixed bag. His concepts of organic intellectuals and war of position are appealing, and hegemony is a useful concept in explaining cultural reproduction, but their appropriation is problematic in current practice. It is questionable whether individuals who work within the university system can rightfully think of themselves as organic intellectuals. At best, as Bovē noted, they can gain control of the institutions of state dominance. Further, I would argue, it is dishonest to attack hegemony without clearly explaining the counter-hegemonic position being proposed. Not to do so is perpetuates a negative sense of freedom. What should be noted is how traditional Gramsci's view of intellectuals is in the final analysis. He proposes a view of politically astute, educational class with hopeful but extremely problematic relations with the common folk.

The alienation that Gramsci feared is confirmed and reconfigured by Alvin Gouldner in *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of a New Class.* For Gouldner,

the key is to "not focus on what intellectuals think but how they think" (58). The "culture of critical discourse," or "CCD," becomes the defining characteristic of intellectual practice.

> CCD is radicalizing partly because, as a relatively situation-free speech variant, it experiences itself as distant from (and superior to) ordinary languages and conventional cultures. A relatively situation-free discourse is conducive to a *cosmopolitanism* that distances persons from local cultures, so that they feel an alienation from all particularistic, history-bound places and from ordinary, everyday life.

> The grammar of critical discourse claims the right to sit in judgment over the actions and claims of any social class and all power elites. (59)

The price university intellectuals pay for these powers may be alienation, but this distancing is also the source of what Gouldner predicts will be the gradual rise to power of this new intellectual class.

Gouldner's constructions may seem more accurate in describing intellectuals in the technical and scientific areas, intellectuals that become the managerial class of what Stanley Aronowitz calls the "technoculture," but humanist intellectuals are implicated, at least to the degree that they claim the privilege of intellectual practice. For either class of intellectuals, the issue of patronage is central. As Aronowitz points out, even scientists breach the rules of autonomous and independent discourse to defend state and industrial patronage, exactly the claim Harding makes in reference to objectivity. What is illustrative about Gouldner's analysis is that while preserving the and expanding the critical elitism found in Gramsci, though certainly not on Gramsci's

terms, Gouldner can already recognize deracination rather than solidarity as the telling characteristic of intellectual practice. That is, even though Gouldner's analysis is fraught with problems defining autonomy and privilege, he clearly represents the failed hope for an "organic" intellectual practice growing out of the dominant cultural institutions of the modernist state, which is not to say there could have been a moment between the wars when those institutions might have emerged differently. Instead, those institutions, notably the research university, provide a site of authority and distance, serving as a legitimizing agent of professional intellectuals.

The point is not that Gouldner and Gramsci have the same view of intellectuals; clearly, they do not. The point is that given their disparate focus and grounding of intellectual practice, key areas of convergence emerge. In both schemes, intellectuals occupy a leading or "pedagogical" role that separates them, Gramsci's hope for a contrary outcome notwithstanding, from ordinary people and everyday life. The confluence is telling precisely because it represents a broader point of focus: the deracination of intellectuals. Whether their separation occurs as a failure to connect with the "feelings of the people- nation" or is willingly sought as the condition of autonomy and the will to power, it is a material condition of their professional identity. Given the fact of their deracination, intellectuals must occupy sites, specific and material and cultural spaces that legitimize their cultural production, which are not a consequence of who they are. Even when "oppositional" or "transformative" intellectuals attempt to ground their work in their own specific circumstances, in their own race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, the work is subsumed by the site of intellectual production. For both Gouldner and Gramsci, although for entirely different

reasons, that is an acceptable risk or condition of intellectual practice, whether in the pursuit of a socialist utopia or as a phase in the emergence of a new dominant class. Outside the institutional site, and the patronage it implies, there is no defensible concept of intellectual authority.

This is not to say that intellectual practice is a black hole which absorbs all potential social and political benefit of progressive or radical thought. Obviously a number of social movements (civil rights and feminism are compelling examples) have been constructed out of a blending of intellectual production and cultural values. The critical agency and practices of that production, however, have not filtered into the ordinary or everyday, perhaps one reason that decades of progress in those areas seem so vulnerable today. Instead, as Peterson noted in his criticism of the "technologies of expertise," a "passive political sensibility (36)" has become part of the intersection of intellectual and technological practices that thwart critical agency in the culture. Thus, even when the goal of intellectual practice is politically progressive and personally grounded, even when it is successful in influencing the cultural dynamic, it is still not part of a broader, more democratic and performative sense of critical agency or an enhanced public intelligence.

Jurgen Habermas, cited by both Aronowitz and McGowan in the arguments for a more involved practice, is, of course, one of the most prominent and influential proponents of a theory and practice designed to enhance the public sphere. I have criticized Habermas for relying too much on reason to bridge the gap between competing or uncoupled linguistic and political structures. Yet, I think it is also important in this specific context to grant the power of his communicative reason.

Even if it misses the mark on identifying how and under what circumstances cultural couplings are possible, it still provides an attempt to think about how adaptive structures and cultural production can be combined. Habermas provides what is perhaps the last, best chance for modernist intellectual practice to coexist with democratic sensibilities. Aronowitz identifies the adaptability of that model as one of the strong features of a progressive practice.

> Where 'problem solving' mechanisms no longer suffice because the rules of the game do not encompass the class of actions in question, society tends to reduce the problem to manageable proportions, thus eluctably occluding or excluding issues that cry out for collective address. The intellectuals, whose main activity can be described as providing noninstrumental knowledge through the invention of new language games, ought to be able to intervene in the affairs of both state and civil society to represent the new questions as well as their solution, even as class-based or work based knowledge remains ensconced in particular interests. . . . The real criterion of a dynamic society is whether new, noninstrumental knowledge is genuinely valued, not only as an art, but as the basis of social decisions. (OI 34)

Even allowing for the emancipatory element of Aronowitz's analysis, which echoes McGowan's claim that the common language is the medium of political revitalization, this construction still specializes the production of intellectuals and marks it as somehow superior. Why must intellectuals be the ones to formulate new language games, and how do those games change the dynamic, if not through the power apparatus of the state?

Peterson's account of the role intellectuals play in the culture sets out to address some of those issues. It emphasizes the division of labor, not just in critical agency or intelligence but in the new and ever expanding technologies of political imaging and communication. His call for a "specifically democratic political sense making of the social world (33)" is linked to the limitations of expert or technical knowledge. There is much here that moves beyond Aronowitz and McGowan, especially his willingness to put political consensus above purely technical or intellectual expertise.

> [A] democratic alternative to the division of labor is one in which such knowledge does not have the last word in social choices and the bearers of such knowledge do not derive political authority directly from their cognitive capabilities. (47)

What remains, however, are those technical and intellectual sites of dominance which may be denaturalized and neutralized by the kind of examination and resistance from within the academy Peterson calls for, but then again may not. The question raised here and in Aronowitz is how intellectuals place themselves in "the wider social debate," to use Peterson's terms. That is, can intellectuals leave the sites that define them as workers in the modernist state and still function as intellectuals, their desire to do so notwithstanding?

Foucault's "specific intellectual" offers an affirmative answer by separating the functions. That is, he seeks to delineate intellectual work within a specific discipline from individual political activity.

The work of the intellectual is not to shape others' political will; it is through

the analysis that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again

what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb peoples' mental habits, the way

they do and rethink things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to

reexamine the rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblematization

(in which he carries out his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the

formation of a political will (in which he has a role as a citizen to play). (PPC

265)

Whether one's response is to applaud, as Harpham and Rajchman do, this position as

an "ethics of resistance," or to replicate Said's skepticism of the political quietude

represented, this is a thoroughly odd construction. It promotes not only deracination

but schizophrenia. What remains, however, is the firewall between intellectual

production and ordinary experience. In that sense it does not so much answer as beg

the question. What Foucault does evoke is the chilling effect intellectual work can

have on the "formation of a political will" by suggesting that there is a manipulative

exterior discourse shaping the dimensions of the public sphere. As with Peterson's

refusal to grant technical and intellectual positions the final word, Foucault reserves a

somewhat different cultural space apart from politics for intellectual work.

McGowan, who has a much more favorable view of Habermas, contends that

intellectual work and politics are only tangentially related.

Does the preceding vision of social interaction and democratic norms provide

humanist intellectuals with a specific social and political role? Certainly not, if

intellectuals expect either to have some privileged role to play in society's

adoption of norms and making of decisions or to have their distinctive

activities as intellectuals validated as, in themselves, politically efficacious

and/or necessarily on the side of the angels. . . . Intellectuals may, it is true,

form a recognizable subgroup that pushes particular points of view in various

social disputes, but nothing they do as intellectuals will differentiate their input

practically from the input of other social groups. (274)

Here, again, is the claim that intellectual work and politics can be separated.

McGowan's own statement indicates how problematic that is. He describes

intellectuals as a "subgroup" or "social group." Setting aside for the moment the

homogenizing effects of these labels, these are precisely the markings of a political

class. Not only do they have recognizable interests and identity in this formation, they

have a unified and specialized discourse. Further, they, and other technical experts,

frame the parameters of social and political debate. Finally, it is impossible to

separate intellectual practice from the political sphere when intellectuals play such a

dominant role in defining what is and is not political. That is, any separation of the

intellectual and the everyday, including McGowan's, is already an intellectual

distinction.

Even when intellectuals try not to be intellectuals, inhabiting contrary and

alternative cultural sites, they still function as a separate and elite group. Andrew

Ross, for instance, writes about the "white hipster intellectual" of the fifties and sixties

in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, as "each trying to outdo the other in

their articulation of a correct white hipness" (68). The resulting argument over

"authenticity," or trying to balance intellectual coolness and distance with a popular

anti-intellectual heat and sensualness, dictates not a popular or "organic" cultural site

but a temporary intellectual site which subsumes the popular or hip as intellectual capital, in much the same way that Bourdieu does. Ross is too "hip" not to realize this, coolly measuring the distance between extremes.

> Even with today's interest in a common culture, at once more demotic and informed - a culture which is undeniably part of the postmodern agenda - the dialectical character of the relationship between intellectuals and the popular retains its organizing power over our daily cultural experience. In fact, in a society that is increasingly stratified by levels and orders of *knowledge*, the powerful antagonisms traditionally generated out of the wars of cultural taste are likely to be sharpened by new kinds of disrespect even as they multiply to reflect the endlessly flexible and fissionable creation of new hip categories of taste. (231)

This observation from Ross's closing essay frames the conflict well, and the idea of disrespect between the "levels and orders of knowledge" provides an appropriate postmodern twist.

At the end of *The Tree of Knowledge*, Maturana and Varela tell a little fable about an island people who live entirely on cabbage. Horribly bored and depressed by the situation, one of the islanders finds a new, uninhabited island (no colonializing fable, this) that provides a cornucopia of edible delights a swimable distance away. The response? The islanders refuse to leave without their cabbages. As self-serving as little fables tend to be, the point applies to intellectuals and postmodern conditions of knowledge production. Intellectuals, even those intensely aware of the conflict between a deracinated intellectual elite and a democratic and performative notion of

culture, want to take their cabbages with them. That is, they want to hold on to the modernist construction of the intellectual while trying to blend with emergent sites of cultural production antithetical to the concept.

Even if the construction is explicitly "radical" and socially oriented, as in the case of Ben Agger, and openly questions the validity of the division of cultural labor, the problem persists.

> The radical intellectual in this sense begins to live the revolution by becoming less isolated, refusing to stay within the narrow confines of the academic role. It is the multidimensionality of role-playing that I contend is transformative, challenging the very essence of technocratic society that counsels people to only consume (commands and commodities). It would-be hypocritical to preserve the role of the traditional intellectual while counseling others to destroy their division of labor. (268)

Rather than an institutional practice, Agger calls for changes at the local level, in the "ways people do things" (275). While this matches the spirit of a postmodern practice, the ways intellectuals do things makes it difficult to imagine how it could be accomplished.

In all of these constructions, the emergence of a postmodern practice can be seen. It exists in the call for communicative reason, in the rejection of privilege, in the recognition of disrespect, in the call for democratic rather than expert priorities, and most importantly in the pervasive need to move intellectual practice out of its institutionally grounded sites. The problem is that the modernist concept of intellectual is simply not compatible with the broader and multiple cultural practices of

postmodernism. That is, knowledge in a postmodern culture is not necessarily

specialized, as in Gouldner's constructions of the intellectuals as the thinking members

of the society, existing in decontextualized and diverse conditions and sites. It travels

not only through institutionally sanctioned channels, but through the permeable borders

of aesthetic couplings, absorbed, transformed, and accelerated along the way. Further,

the postmodern impulse toward pluralism and inclusion values these emerging sites

more. The very idea of the intellectual is a hindrance in this context to the idea of

critical agency, which is already making the leap from modernist institutions and

linear graphing to the liquid contexts of instant information and endlessly fragmented

and fragmenting forms of consumerism. The problem, then, is not a better intellectual

practice but the need for a post-intellectual practice.

Of all the modernist institutions and practices, intellectuals may be the least

adaptive to a postmodern turn, a truly ironic condition given the role intellectuals

played and still play in its creation and promotion. If postmodernism is seen as a shift

in the specific conditions and definition of agency, of the role that ontogenic and co-

ontogenic couplings of local particularity, and not abstract institutions, play in

constructing and maintaining a cultural matrix, then intellectuals, as site based

practitioners in those institutions, are of little value. This does not mean that specific,

knowledge producing discourses and practices are unimportant. Nor is this an

argument for a defeatist sense of relativism. The point is that for any progressive

political vision to take root it has to penetrate beyond the legitimizing function of

intellectual and technical expertise. It has to become part of the everyday dynamic in

which people ground themselves and bring forth a world they share with others. It

cannot be passive or sanctioned by institutions far removed from the aesthetic coherence, which may be grounded in any number of languaging and observational strategies, of individuals and groups. We need a practice which is not so much anti-institutional as it is extra-institutional, a practice that substitutes the organizational patterns of modernism for those at once more organic and performative. Serious and rigorous work can only influence this dynamic from the inside out, by finding points of contact in actual dialogue and in real time, not in the sterile theater of university departments.

It is also important to recognize the benefits to intellectuals. A post-intellectual practice should reverse Ross's notion of disrespect and promote mutual recognition and solidarity. Post-intellectuals would have greater latitude and creativity and less sense of coercion and conformity. As a pragmatic construction, post-intellectual practice should avoid the deracination of intellectual practice, as well as the obligatory disdain for ordinary experience. At the same time, there is an organic and urgent sense of responsibility to post-intellectual work.

The evidence for this change is visible in the balancing acts cited earlier, each trying to balance between emerging conditions that seem beyond the scope of current practice and the privilege of that practice. It is evident in the increasing flight to interdisciplinary studies (culture studies is a prime example) to escape even a little of the stifling air of specialized discourse. Even, perhaps particularly, in the sciences, practitioners struggle to find new methods and models to talk about what they find that are simply not available to them in their home disciplines. Most importantly, for humanist intellectuals, who are, in Watkins's terms, "intraeducational" workers, it is

evident in the increasing disrespect for their practice in both public and institutional settings.

The analysis Peterson applies to politics could be applied to all modernist institutions, especially education. Citizens are not just disenfranchised in the political arena, they learn to be disenfranchised in school. Every bit as much as they modeled the Taylorism of the industrial workplace, schools promote a passive and undemocratic sense of learning and participation. While Peterson is on point in reference to the effect that technologies of expertise have on pacifying the electorate, the same sorts of technologies have been applied in schools. In fact, it is likely that school was the first point of contact with them. It should not surprise us that students educated in a system that strangles their creative participation mature into adults who feel they have nothing to contribute to our shared social domain. Nowhere is "disrespect" a more accurate description of the problem. The convenient fiction that this passivity is new or the result of television simply overlooks the reality of classroom experience which is only now, and only occasionally, emerging from the dullness and repression of behaviorist pedagogies. Schooling has not, and will not as presently constituted, make the cultural dynamic more adaptive or intelligent. In all of these challenges the postmodern intensification and localization of agency is evident, and it draws itself closer to a sense of cognition "in the wild."

Education is not, at least in any postmodern sense, an institutional function. That is, it does not take place exclusively or even primarily in schools. In modernist schemata, schools house and train intellectuals, primarily in disciplines. The postmodern rejection of modernist institutions includes rejecting school as a neutral or

ahistorical practice and insists on expanding critical intelligence and agency beyond both the walls of the school and the discourse of the discipline. Rather than looking toward schools or intellectuals to lead some sort of educational reform toward a more adaptive and intelligent cultural medium, we need to think differently about the problem. We need to think of post-intellectuals contributing to but not leading the effort to see knowledge creation, and not just some limited sense of transferable skills, as taking place throughout the society. No culture can ever learn to be adaptive or intelligent enough to face increasing complexity if it institutionalizes the site and means of knowledge production. Nor can we depend on a specialized class of workers to exclusively engage in that work. Instead, the whole complex field of learning and knowledge production must be moved into "the wild," and attempted as a constant and continuing reflection of lived experience.

Some attempts, of course, are already in progress. Henry Giroux, who refers to teachers and intellectuals as "cultural workers," shifts his long concentration from pedagogy to cultural practices in *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education.*

> Over the past decade, most of my writing has been concerned specifically with schooling. Within this context, I worked within a political project aimed primarily at reforming the sites of teacher education, public schools, higher education, and certain aspects of community education. While I still believe that these sites are crucial for encouraging students to be educated for critical citizenship, that is, as political subjects capable of exercising leadership in a democracy, I no longer believe that the struggle over education can be reduced

to these sites, nor do I believe that pedagogy as a form of political, moral and social production can be addressed primarily as a matter of schooling. (1) Giroux's sense of focus here matches both a postmodern sense of culture, which he refers to repeatedly, and a post-intellectual sense of practice, which I think he would resist. Clearly, he sees the need to move out of sites limited to schooling and draw a broader line of flight, one that has more to do with knowledge production than certification.

Giroux's strategy is to move critical practice out into the culture at large while maintaining a certain transformative power of intellectual work.

[C]ultural studies provides the basis for understanding pedagogy as a form of cultural production rather than as the transmission of a particular skill, body of knowledge, or set of values. In this context, critical pedagogy is understood as a cultural practice engaged in the production of knowledge, identities, and desires. As a form of cultural politics, critical pedagogy suggests inventing a new language for resituating teacher/student relations within pedagogical practices that open up rather than close down the borders of knowledge and learning. Disciplines can no longer define the boundaries of knowledge or designate the range of questions that can be asked. (165-166)

Here Giroux's acute sense that cultural practices of knowledge production are extra-disciplinary and extra-educational is clear. His sense of expansion, of changing the dialogue, and the metaphors that govern it, between teacher and student, of including more voices, is clearly in line with a postmodern sense of plurality. In this sense his work echoes other attempts, such as Seyla Ben-Habib and Diane Dubose Brunner, to

include more voices in educational practice. Just as with Peterson's suggested repositioning of philosophy in the real politick of democracy, Giroux's constructions meet one part of the postmodern and post-intellectual condition, the need to expand practice beyond institutional and discursive borders. What is less clear is how this expansion is communicated. To whom do Giroux's cultural workers and Peterson's reconstructed philosophers intend to speak, on whose turf, and in what language? For Giroux, that answer is problematic. He returns in his concluding essay to the connection between "cultural workers" and "public intellectuals" who transform their educational practice into democratic "discourses of possibility." While the thrust of this shift is laudable, there remains a hint of the Gramscian intellectual, a true believer predetermining the outcome.

A much politicized look at the postmodern take on education is provided by William E. Doll, Jr. in *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum*. Doll lacks the acute sense that Giroux has that schools themselves might be part of the problem. Ironically, his failing on that point leads him to the heart of the issue, the sense that the process of knowledge making is already in the hands of the students. As does Giroux, Doll calls for a reconstitution of the dialogue and relationship between teacher and student, going so far as to suggest that the relationship itself may have outgrown its usefulness.

> In a reflective relationship between teacher and student, the teacher does not ask the student to accept the teacher's authority; rather, the teacher asks the student to *suspend disbelief in that authority*, to join with the teacher in inquiry, into that which the student is experiencing. The teacher agrees to help

the student understand the meaning of the advice given, to be readily confrontable by the student, and to work with the student in reflecting on the tacit understanding each has. (160)

In the phrase "suspend disbelief in that authority" Doll captures the essence of Ross's "disrespect," of a radical rupture in shared experience or aesthetic coupling. When Giroux approaches much the same issue, he uses phrases such as, "the need for educators and other cultural workers to fashion (241)," which crystallizes the difference in agency. The point here is certainly not to vilify Giroux, who is widely considered an exemplary radical educator, but to pin- point the importance of agency in a postmodern educational perspective.

In *Empowering Education*, Ira Shor, drawing on his long association and working relationship with Freire, develops what he calls "generative themes," themes that grow out of the words and experiences of his students. In other words, they represent what Doll referred as the students' experiences. So as not to misrepresent Shor, he blends these with "social" and "academic" themes, but my point of interest is in the Freirian emphasis on the students own words and experiences. His strategy, part of a larger program of teaching and modeling democracy in the classroom for students who do not know what it is or what it requires, is to begin the dialogue with the student. The dialogue should evolve to a critical and rigorous phase, but only in connection with the students' interests and language. The issue is not just inclusion but respect. Post-intellectual practice is committed, in a way that intellectual practice seldom, if ever, is, to letting those without academic capital make the first move, of listening to them and trying to address their issues first. If a postmodern democracy,

one not dominated by technologies of expertise, is to emerge, it will start with concerns and voices that are not only seldom heard in the current construction but which bear little resemblance to political discourse in this century.

An expanded notion of agency and its importance in a complex and performative model of culture also means we must realize that both the expression and development of agency are nonlinear. That is, agency, in politics or education, cannot be systematically developed, nor can the multiple points of contact between and among emerging standpoints be predetermined. Instead of programs that define learning, teaching and knowledge making as site based activities, the challenge is to identify all the other places they emerge and the acts of languaging that bring them into being. The same is true of politics. There are no answers to the problems that confront us except those that grow out of the lived experiences of those making the change. The order that emerges is more likely to be iterative and redundant, in a word postmodern, than it is to look like a traditionally structured discipline or curriculum. People, unfortunately, do not go to school to be able to interrogate the conditions of their life; they go to be interrogated.

Here, again, models are important. Intellectual practice assumes a fixed site governed by discursive and theoretical principles that predetermine both the content and form of any likely outcome. There is reason to doubt the validity of both in a post-intellectual practice. Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen provide one possible way of formulating a critique of these practices in *Imagologies: Media Philosophy*. Their critique sits at the intersection of work by Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard, and deconstructionists such as Gregory Ulmer and Michel Serres. The thrust of this

criticism or, as Ulmer calls it, post-criticism, is to see critical and intellectual thought as it is influenced by the same relationships that separated modern art from representation. That is, Taylor and Saarinen look at intellectual practice after electronic media have raided it, picking over the carcass for images rather than ideas. Intellectual practice, just as literature or painting before it, loses its ability to speak for itself and is instead the site of emergent practices that seek to bread it down, Ulmer actually uses the word "compost," to form a more immediate yet mediated experience.

This line of inquiry has a lot of different dimensions and surfaces, but the one of importance here is how the speed and fragmentation of electronic communication changes our notions of intellectual work. It is a fair question to ask how much of what we call intellectual practice depends on libraries, universities, book publishers, and museums, and if the ability of new forms of communication to call the future, at least as dominant institutions, of these formations into question does not do the same for the practices connected to them. If the media move too fast for theory, they move too fast, and in too many cultural sites, for intellectual control. The issue for intellectuals is how they can continue to play a cultural role grounded in the control of information when the information is out of control. Taylor and Saarinen offer a series of aphoristic commentaries, such as "expert language is a prison for knowledge and understanding. A prison for intellectually significant relationships"(8) to emphasize the shift they see taking place. Emphasizing concepts such as "speed" and "amplification" as keys to imagology, they try to explain how intellectual work is transformed by collaborative and interactive networks. On the other side of this shift, the work is post-intellectual, lacking both the ownership and credentialling power of

modernist practices.

One of the reasons that postmodernism demands a post-intellectual practice is that intellectual practice simply cannot keep pace. As we move toward mutiversities, profs on CD, and networked forms of distance learning, not to mention the explosion of free information available, intellectuals will lose much of their cultural and economic cover. Like artists on the world wide web, they will find an audience less interested in completed products and more interested in being part of the process. Web artists, such as Brian Eno, who create design parameters or algorithms that people download and finish may foreshadow what a post-intellectual practice can expect as an operating context. It is not just the technology, however, that challenges intellectual cultural sites. Before the technology, in fact central to the development of the technology, was what Hayles calls the "decontextualization" of information. The "information revolution" depends on this first step of separating information from its context and treating it as a problem of energy and not meaning. She tells us the "the disappearance of a stable, universal context is the context of postmodern culture" (272). In this world, "context becomes a construction rather than a natural result of shared activities" (272).

For intellectuals, this decontextualization means the loss of any coherent site of cultural production. Instead, we are likely to be faced with not just overdetermined but overloaded information sites from which temporary contexts are constructed and then deconstructed. Only a more fluid, post-intellectual practice can move or flow with a decontextualized cultural dynamic. Even neo-luddite attacks against the technology, while they make some valid claims, miss the point that there are already

no stable modernist contexts to return to. Where do cultural workers go when they want to influence the political process? They may just likely, and with greater ease and more success, move their message from a web site or MTV than in front of a congressional hearing, especially now that C-Span has made congressional theater vulnerable to the same electronic logic. As Taylor and Saarinen would say, the "image," and not the data or idea is the critical touchstone in negotiating between related, iterative but unconnected objectivities. The high seriousness of modernist intellectuals is a burden in cyberia where playfulness and fluidity are the dominant norms.

Much of this goes back to the teacher/learner problem in education. Students simply do not need teachers to find information. They do need teachers to help them build and understand the temporary contexts they use to organize it, but only in an atmosphere that respects the students' control of the process. The decontextualization of information creates new versions of learning, teaching, and education that will have to struggle to find new metaphors and new values. This must start with the everyday, because it is the ordinary contexts of everyday life that must be enhanced, made more adaptive and intelligent, if critical intelligence is to be more than a "school" behavior. Agency is crucial to a post-intellectual practice in which the intellectual can no longer do the thinking or leading for the masses. That is, post-intellectual practice must redefine and relinquish control.

In *Out of Control: The Rise of Neo-Biological Civilization*, Kevin Kelly gives one view of how what he calls "vivisystems" frame this issue. In the ongoing collision between "the made and the born" a fusion of biological, mechanical, and

electronic models creates not just Harraway's cyborgs but a new landscape and logic to go with them.

> This is the universal law of vivisystems: higher-level complexities cannot be
>
> inferred by lower-level existence. Nothing - no computer or mind, no means
>
> of mathematics, physics, or philosophy - can unravel the emergent pattern
>
> dissolved in the parts without actually playing it out. (13)

Kelly's vivisystems are companion constructs with the view of languaging found in Maturana and Varela, the post unified field theory physics that Hayles describes, and a postmodern pragmatism. It is one thing to understand the principles in operation; it is quite another to exercise distance and control in relationship to them.

> In the realm of recursive reflections, an event is not triggered by a chain of
>
> being, but by a field of causes reflecting, bending mirroring each other in a
>
> fun-house nonsense. Rather than cause and control being dispensed in a
>
> straight line from its origin, it spreads horizontally, like creeping tide,
>
> influencing in roundabout, diffuse ways. Small blips can make big splashes,
>
> and big blips no splashes. It is as if the filters of distance and time were
>
> subverted by the complex connecting of everything to everything. (72)

In these sorts of systems more intelligence and rigor does not translate into more control. The situation must still be "played out", but more complex models can lead to a better understanding of what is actually happening.

> Kelly covers the waterfront from artificial intelligence to evolutionary genetics,

and the process reveals how all of the emergent sites share in complex and evolutionary systems thinking. To the degree that these models emphasize portability

and intense localization, they reflect a post-intellectual practice that is highly situtational without becoming institutional. Kelly's work itself is an example of how someone can occupy a cultural site, build a temporary context, and not attain the status of a modernist intellectual. He can cross borders, look for new combinations, and create a new cultural synapse without the credentialing and discourse restrictions of intellectual practice. In these cases, rigor is both a methodological issue and a matter of timing. Rigor, at least in a post-intellectual practice, must occur in real time; it must connect and adapt to diffuse and emerging contexts.

Post-intellectualism, a site-free, institution-free critical practice, is an essential part of postmodern cultural work. In a discipline that concerns itself with the cultural reproductions created in languaging, it places praxis in the middle of the struggle to create new social couplings that recognize the aesthetic dynamic of both material and linguistic domains. It will work not just to bring new voices or standpoints into the cultural selection process; we must also increase understanding of how that process works. Unlike its modernist predecessors, post-intellectual practice will not promote or serve the modernist agenda of a false meritocracy by trying to adjudicate linguistic interaction in the name of standardization. It is more concerned with how cultural reproduction works "in the wild," in the way people choose to conserve some adaptations and abandon others. None of this is possible from within institutions that limit contact with the ordinary and the everyday. Post-intellectuals may conserve some of the vestiges of the current patronage and resulting privileges, but they will have to abandon others. These choices will be multiple and will have to be "played out" in local and specific material contexts. Some form of intellectual practice will

undoubtedly continue, just as modernist institutions will, but they are likely to become residual rather than dominant. Operating as a cultural worker will require a new constellation of sites and means of production.

CONCLUSION

A post-intellectual practice is a critical element in trying to describe how English studies might function as a postmodern cultural site. Even if we developed more pragmatic, complex, and complementary models of language, the shift toward an autopoietic aesthetic and cultural model requires a shift in practice, specifically an end to site-based intellectual dominance. A postmodern version of English studies would situate itself in the same kind of place Giroux and Peterson describe, at the intersection of emerging democratic practices, practices that bring politics in line with a more diverse set of people and experiences. It has been my contention that only this sort of response will adequately reflect the deeper cultural changes that postmodernism stands for, changes that expand beyond concerns about textual practices and toward issues about knowledge production and the legitimization of experience and representation. As such, we must be prepared to respond to multiplicity by first reconstructing our understanding of order and then by realizing that the multiple sites and means of cultural reproduction are not connected rationally but aesthetically.

How English departments respond to this challenge is another question. Perhaps no other discipline has so much invested in the modernist technologies of cultural containment. The most telling example is composition, but literature and even cultural studies are constructed on a model that requires intellectual and academic

mediation of experience. What gets obscured in this practice is any real understanding of how languaging works to create a world, a sense of how things work and how we come to know things. In their daily operation, English departments are a cog in the modernist program of creating a meritocracy, of creating the illusion that through both language etiquette and literary tastes language can be used as the basis of keeping most out and letting some in. While these obviously bourgeois practices are part of a larger economic and educational program, they are particularly ingrained in English departments. Even radical attacks upon them, as long as they maintain the status of the department and make difficulty and distance a measure of selection, leave the sorting mechanism, Watkins's circulation, intact.

Additionally, a post-intellectual practice has to be performative; that is, it must work without and against the distancing of bourgeois institutions. In English studies both composition and literary studies create distance through textual analysis which naturalizes the right to analyze - to judge instead of interacting. The literacies of modernist institutions are literacies of control, zero-sum games managed from a distance. The literacies which English departments, operating as part of a larger institution of schooling, promote legitimize some voices or standpoints while silencing others. Literacy thus becomes a barrier to overcome and sanctions the voices of experts in place of the "illiterate" voices that fall outside the institutional domain. In other words, English departments manage the act of enfranchisement, creating barriers that mark speakers as acceptable or unacceptable in line with economic conditions. At some points the flow of "qualified" and "literate" students is increased to respond to economic pressures, but in the last three decades that flow has been reduced to a mere

trickle, corresponding to the lack of jobs for qualified candidates.

A postmodern practice would promote a different kind of critical literacy, one rooted in the recognition that every social coupling demands a "literate" and "intelligent," which is to say appropriate, response. In this sort of literacy the voices speak for themselves instead of being spoken for. The goal is not to destroy or lower standards but to create standards of intelligibility. This approach denies distance as a condition of production, emphasizing instead the aesthetic and immediate nature of real communication. This sort of literacy welcomes specialized knowledge concerning how this might be accomplished, but it does not specialize the notion of literacy. The point is that in a postmodern democracy critical practice must respect aesthetic dynamics that are not attuned to it, not merely as subjects of research but as participants in the process. This is so because only a more intelligent cultural medium, and not expert practice, is inclusive enough and fluid enough to deliver on the promise of a participatory and performative cultural dynamic. Critical literacy cuts both ways, challenging the expert position as much as it challenges the position subordinated in current practice. In both cases, the goal is to achieve some level of mutual recognition and to use that recognition to connect more, and more different, standpoints.

The conditions and practices that facilitate connection rather than distance will still require rigor. Every speaking environment requires some sort of rigor for there to be any understanding at all. The difference between modernist and what I have been calling postmodern practice is the point of emphasis of the rules that govern communication and what happens when languaging breaks down. The modernist

assumption, based on a social context emphasizing difference and an economic structure that differentially rewards those distinctions, is that the rules must sort out and rank dialects and the speakers who use them. This focus is as much grounded in the Enlightenment transferal of religious principles to national and scientific activities as it is in economic conditions. Marxists, who have no love for either the religion or the economic system, still demand a unified outcome, a right answer. Postmodernism rejects not just the practice but the underlying assumption, which I have referred to as Gnostic, that there is an objective, singular reality there to find. For that reason, inclusion, or in Hall's terms, polytheism, becomes a new standard. In the postmodern view, the emphasis is on intelligibility, or how one position can mutually engage another.

Those situations only occur in everyday, ordinary experience, and they occur along aesthetic and not rational polarities. We can study, and I think it is entirely appropriate to do so, specialized discourses in captivity, modeling the linguistic strategies that allow access and competency. The creation of new cultural mergers, however, always happens "in the wild," and only a practice geared to those conditions can claim a critical perspective. The other part of the problem is that the contact points between and among these standpoints require fluidity on the part of both or all standpoints involved. That is, both positions become modified in the negotiations that have to be "played out" in the creation of intelligible couplings.

Whether English is capable of brokering a place for itself as a postmodern practice is problematic. My claim is not that English departments are going to disappear, although Bérubé and Cary Nelson paint a pretty alarming picture. Nor am I

naively claiming that English studies can just decide to change in an academic and political environment already hostile to faculty and universities. But real engagement with what postmodernism promises cannot be managed by a few new textual practices, exotic theories, or minor pedagogical corrections. Postmodernism in its strong sense is a sea change in the way we look at the structures around us, both cultural and material. It penetrates to the roots of a religious, scientific, and philosophical system of thought that pits order against chaos. Science has overturned those assumptions. The Bell experiments proved that God plays dice, and that only complex, chaotic, and complementary systems are sophisticated enough to keep score. The dominant practices of another era are destined to go aground on those realities sooner or later. If it is later, the discipline will gradually find its way to a new cultural site and practice. If it is sooner, however, and the speed of cultural reproduction and the decontextualization of language argues it will be, then we need to understand the depth of the changes before us and begin to construct a practice that faces rather than dodges the implications.

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