LITERACY, FREIRE AND THE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Literacy has become a popular topic for scholarly investigation in recent years. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, and educationists, among others, have contributed to the development of 'literacy studies' as a field of inquiry. This thesis concentrates on the conceptual and ethical dimensions of literacy. The central argument is that people ought to become *critically* literate. This idea is developed and defended through a detailed examination of the work of Paulo Freire, and applied in evaluating contemporary debates in First World universities.

The first chapter focuses on three broad literatures. A brief critique of adult literacy research is followed by a more extensive review of the wider literacy studies literature. Four areas are highlighted for comment: the oral-literate divide; the relationship between literacy and economic growth; literacy, reproduction and resistance; and postmodernist perspectives on literacy. A case for further conceptual and ethical work on literacy is advanced. Attention then turns to controversies over 'political correctness', canons and core curricula in higher education. The potential value of literacy studies scholarship for assessing debates in these areas is noted, and the merits of concentrating on Freire are considered.

Freire's ideas are outlined and analysed in chapter two. Emphasis is placed on the importance of contextualized, holistic, anti-reductionist, critical readings in approaching Freire from the First World. The major tenets of Freire's philosophy are summarized, and key features of Freirean pedagogy are discussed. Liberating education, for Freire, is critical, dialogical and praxical. An exploration of Freire's theory and practice reveals a multifaceted notion of critical literacy, built around the central theme of 'reading the word and the world'. Freire speaks of critically engaging both texts and contexts, and of transforming the 'text' that is social reality itself.

The third chapter addresses some of the conceptual problems signalled in chapter one. The chapter offers a framework for analysing definitions and constructs of literacy, and applies this in evaluating quantitative, qualitative and pluralist responses to the question 'What is literacy?'. Pluralist stances appear to have the most to offer in understanding the multiplicity of distinct social forms reading and writing assume. The chapter advances the view that literacies are non-neutral and not necessarily worthwhile. The value of a given form of literacy, it is maintained, can only be determined through reference to a substantive ethical position.

Chapter four responds to criticisms of the assumptions which underpin Freire's ethical and educational ideal. The notion of conscientization provides the central focus throughout the chapter. Freire's pedagogy is defended at some length against strong attacks from Berger, Walker and Bowers. Programmes of literacy education, it is argued, are necessarily interventionist. Freire's promotion of critical consciousness in his work with illiterate adults in Brazil, while not without its problems and contradictions, is ultimately supported. The chapter also considers postmodern critiques of universalist thought, and reaffirms the need for political commitment in times of dramatic change and uncertainty. An individualist reading of critical consciousness is rejected, and the concept of conscientization is reappraised in light of the postmodern recognition of multiple subjectivities.

The final chapter brings ideas from earlier parts of the thesis to bear on a discussion of battles over political correctness, 'Great Books', and the university curriculum. The chapter takes the position that Freire would oppose educational policies and practices premised on politically correct assumptions. This proposition is contingent upon a particular definition of 'political correctness': one which specifies intolerance of, or deliberate neglect of, opposing views as the pivotal criterion. Two main groups in the war over 'the canon' are identified:

traditionalists and reformists. After finding fault with ideas from both sides of the debate, an alternative position is articulated. Building on the discussion of conscientization and critical literacy in earlier chapters, a programme based on the in-depth, dialogical examination of a small number of texts from a range of perspectives is outlined.

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INTRODUCTION

Where in 1968 a prominent anthropologist could express surprise at the lack of interest shown by social scientists in literacy,[1] today it is scarcely possible to avoid hearing the word: 'literacy' - whether being written about, taught, scandalized, resourced, or underfunded - is everywhere. The academic study of literacy is flourishing, with hundreds of journal articles, conference papers, books, and reports devoted to the subject every year. While funding for adult literacy initiatives is still often woefully inadequate, there is at least now *some* recognition of the phenomenon of adult illiteracy among official agencies in many countries of the First World. Alleged declining standards in reading and writing among school children and university students have been periodically investigated, exposed and lamented. Media accounts of illiteracy in educational institutions and the workplace have captured the attention of politicians where academics and adult literacy workers pursuing quieter channels might not have. As a result, money and resources have been devoted to projects which might in the past have never seen the light of day. Literacy has become big business, in both the literal and the figurative sense.

As a burgeoning literature on literacy has emerged in the past fifteen years, assumptions about reading and writing which were previously taken for granted have increasingly been placed under a critical spotlight. The supposedly 'neutral' character of literacy, for example, has come under sustained attack. Literacy policies and programmes, it has been argued, are inescapably political in nature; that is, they are shaped by and serve competing interests, values, beliefs, and ends. Radical educational critics have come to appreciate, however, that literacy is a double-edged sword: it can serve to promote and entrench inequalities across class, ethnic, gender and other lines, but it can also be employed in resisting dominant ideas and repressive social structures.

While politicians frequently extol the benefits of creating and living in a literate society, attributing to literacy the development of a host of individual, social and national characteristics - rationality, social mobility, economic growth, etc. - is now considered by many scholars to be simplistic, conceptually misguided, and mythical. The rendering of 'reading' and 'writing' as unitary, essentially cognitive, individual processes has been found wanting in recent years as the social, cultural and historical dimensions to literacy have been increasingly revealed. There is, some theorists maintain, no single, universal phenomenon or set of abilities which can invariably and exclusively count as 'literacy'. Conventional definitions of literacy as 'the ability to read and write' mask the importance of differences between specific forms of reading and writing. Literacy, it has been argued, always entails more than simply the capacity to perform certain tasks or demonstrate particular skills. *Literacies* - i.e. practices and conceptions of reading and writing - are social, various and many.

With this advance in research, publication and understanding, 'literacy' has taken on a new face: theories of reading and writing have become both more complex and better informed. Yet, perhaps precisely because so much scholarly attention has been devoted to literacy in recent years, many hitherto unidentified theoretical problems have been unearthed. Far from exhausting all, or even most, avenues for productive theoretical and empirical inquiry, the recent torrent of intellectual activity has expanded prospects for further research on literacy. These opportunities have multiplied in tandem with the dizzying pace of technological change over the past two decades. A number of scholars believe we are poised on the edge, if not already in the midst, of an epochal reconstruction of social life. We have entered a new era: the postmodern age.

Among the myriad dimensions of transformation in postmodern times, those associated with systems of communication have been especially dramatic. The medium of print is being superseded, or at the very least complemented, by a plethora of *images* in many spheres of public and private life. Advertisers compete vigorously, ingeniously and ruthlessly for consumer attention through a variety of visual forms. Television has become a powerful instrument of political propaganda, with elections being won or lost on the strength of media impressions. Computers have become a linchpin in commercial and educational activity. Information is shared, shifted, sorted, and traded at lightening speeds and in vast quantities in an electronic global marketplace. These changes have prompted a re-examination of traditional notions of 'reading', 'writing', 'texts', and 'literacy'. Talk of 'online literacy' is becoming commonplace. 'Writing' often implies not pen and paper but a keyboard and a computer screen. Theorists now 'read' and analyse television, film and video 'texts'.

In some respects, though, the world has *not* changed. The brute realities of daily human suffering and structural oppression continue unabated in the postmodern era. In the Third World, in particular, poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, disease, and exploitation are as deeply entrenched as ever. Third World nations are also characterized by high rates of adult illiteracy. Some theorists see this as a 'cause' of the problems just mentioned; others see it as an 'effect'. Increasingly, widespread illiteracy is seen to both reflect *and* perpetuate or exacerbate broader structural inequalities. Whatever the explanation, national literacy programmes have been perceived by policy makers and politicians as a crucial aspect of Third World development.

Whether learning to read and write for the first time via an adult literacy campaign in the Third World, or attempting to negotiate the information highway under 'New Times' capitalism in the West, the challenges for literacy students, teachers and researchers are

formidable. In both Third World and First World contexts, perhaps the most important question of all is 'What *form(s)* of literacy should be fostered?'. The central thesis of this study is that people ought to become *critically* literate. More specifically, the argument is for the promotion of *Freirean* critical literacy in, through and beyond core university courses. The ultimate aim of the study is to evaluate contemporary debates over 'Great Books' and university curricula from a Freirean perspective. Addressing this objective demands that Freire's position on literacy first be outlined and analysed. Preliminary consideration also needs to be given to the reasons for concentrating on Freire: What does Freire have to offer that is distinctive among literacy scholars? This question is initially addressed at the end of chapter one. Chapter two attempts to give substance to the claims made in the first chapter by outlining Freire's ideas on literacy at some length. Chapters three and four reinterpret, rework and extend conceptual and ethical aspects of Freire's work. The ideas developed in chapters two to four are then applied to the question of what, how and why students ought to read in (and beyond) universities. In greater detail, the thesis develops as follows.

Chapter one reviews the literature on literacy and sketches some of the key dimensions to recent debates over canons, core curricula and political correctness. As this study is concerned with the reading practices promoted by and for adults in university settings, the literature on adult literacy provides a useful starting point. Research in this area is categorized under four headings: instructional, programme evaluation, individual case-study, and psychological. Five problematic features are noted: (i) the often largely uncritical or untheorized acceptance of the value of literacy; (ii) the excessive emphasis on skills and techniques; (iii) the lack of attention to questions of social structure as these pertain to literacy and illiteracy; (iv) the neglect of extended theoretical work in favour of more immediate practical concerns; and (v) the unnecessarily narrow conception of what counts as appropriate subject matter for adult literacy research.

These weaknesses are addressed in the broader literacy studies literature. Among the many themes explored in this field, four have been especially prominent: (i) the differences (and similarities) between literate and oral modes of communication as regards their 'nature' and 'consequences'; (ii) the link between literacy and economic growth; (iii) the relationship between (il)literacy and the reproduction of, or resistance to, inequities across class, race, gender, and other lines; and (iv) the impact of postmodernism on constructs and practices of reading and writing. Two areas in literacy studies merit further development. First, important conceptual questions pertaining to 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' remain undertheorized. Second, the relationship between literacy and ethics warrants deeper investigation.

Paulo Freire's work overcomes some of the key difficulties in adult literacy research, and is underpinned by a thoroughly developed ethical theory. Conceptual questions are not ignored by Freire, though much of what he has to say about the definition and 'nature' of literacy must be drawn by inference. The Freirean notion of critical literacy provides a helpful standpoint from which to evaluate recent debates over Bloom, the 'canon', and political correctness in universities. Some significant challenges to fundamental tenets in Freire's philosophy and practice must be addressed, however: some of these are signalled in chapter one and later explored in chapter four.

Chapter two situates Freire's approach to literacy within his wider philosophy and pedagogical theory. After a brief biography, some potential problems in reading, understanding and applying Freirean theory in First World settings are highlighted. Care is required if the dangers of decontextualized, fragmented, technocratic, or uncritical interpretations and applications of Freire's work are to be averted. Freire's theory of literacy and practice of adult literacy education are intimately intertwined with his ideas on human beings, knowledge, and the nature of reality. Key features of Freire's metaphysic, ontology,

epistemology and ethic are outlined in this chapter, while chapter four places elements of Freirean philosophy under critical scrutiny.

Chapter two also examines pivotal aspects of Freire's pedagogical theory. The classic distinction between 'banking' education and 'problem-posing' education in Freire's most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, provides a starting point for discussion, but in elaborating the Freirean educational ideal it is necessary to turn to the broader corpus of Freire's writings - especially those published in the past decade. If education is to be liberating, it must, from Freire's point of view, be critical, dialogical and praxical. This demands structure, direction, a strong sense of purpose, and high standards of academic rigour. Freirean liberating education stands opposed to both authoritarian and laissez-faire approaches to pedagogy.

The remainder of the second chapter is devoted to Freire's literacy work. Freire's approach to adult literacy education in Brazil is outlined in some detail, and brief mention is also made of his contribution to programmes in Chile, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tome and Principe. The Brazilian campaign was built around dialogical investigation of a small number of 'generative' words and employed a series of pictorial representations of everyday life. In his later theorizing on literacy, building on his practical experiences, Freire often speaks of the importance of linking 'word' with 'world'. Just as 'words' in the conventional sense can be 'read' and 'written', so too, for Freire, can we talk of 'reading' (interpreting) and 'writing' (transforming) the world. The ultimate 'text' to be read and written is social reality itself. The relationship between word and world is integral to the Freirean notion of critical literacy. There are three levels or dimensions to Freirean critical literacy: (i) critical engagement with - i.e. a 'rewriting' of - written texts, (ii) the linking of texts with contexts, and (iii) critical transformation of the social reality 'text' through 'speaking a true word'.

At the most basic level, Freirean critical literacy implies an attempt to *engage* the ideas presented in texts. Reading critically involves asking questions, posing problems, and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of an author's arguments. It demands an effort to 'get beneath the surface' of what an author is saying, probing layer after layer of meaning, while at the same time striving to maintain a global view of a book's structure and aims. Freirean critical literacy implies the adoption of a restless, curious, probing, investigative stance in the act of reading. At a second level, critical reading entails relating the material in one book to ideas presented in other texts, and placing an author's work in its social context. Freire speaks of texts providing the basis for critical reflection on social practices and structures past and present, actual and ideal, in both the reader's own society and in others. At a third level, texts, if engaged critically, can be brought to bear on the lived struggles and activities of daily life, such that reading and writing become acts of resistance in the process of social transformation. This is the process of 'rewriting' social reality through critical, dialogical praxis: collective reflection and action on word and world.

The third chapter takes up the challenge posed in chapter one for further conceptual work on literacy by addressing debates over the definition, nature and consequences of literacy. A framework for analysing definitions or constructs of literacy is proposed: this enables potentially ambiguous statements by Freire on 'reading' and 'literacy' to be interpreted in a new way. Three types of definition are delineated: stipulative, essentialist and prescriptive. These categories are then applied in analysing three approaches to the problem of defining literacy: quantitative, qualitative and pluralist. Freire's pronouncements on literacy generally fall within the qualitative realm, although elements of his work are also consistent with a pluralist perspective. I suggest that many *ostensibly* essentialist statements about reading and literacy by Freire (and others) are really prescriptive (normative) declarations about the forms reading and writing *ought* to take. The pluralist view on the problem of definition, while not

without its difficulties, appears to best capture the dynamism, fluidity and diversity of actual and possible *literacies*, especially in the face of rapid changes in systems of communication and patterns of daily life.

Chapter three also addresses questions pertaining to the 'consequences' and 'value' of literacy. From Freire's point of view, literacy is never neutral. Depending on the form it takes, literacy will be either domesticating or liberating. However, the view that literacies are non-neutral and not necessarily valuable must be defended against those who see literacy as a unitary skill or set of abilities. A number of influential scholars - Goody and Ong foremost among them - have characterized literacy as (facility with) the technology of writing. To this technology they attribute a whole range of desirable consequences, including the enhancement of critical, logical and analytical thought. Given the earlier discussion of pluralist approaches to the problem of definition, this view must be regarded as flawed. I adopt an alternative position, as follows.

'Literacy' has no absolute or final essence, though there are certain characteristics which *many* constructs of literacy and practices of reading and writing have in common. At the end of the day, however, we all become 'literate' in different ways. There are always 'consequences' in becoming and being literate, but these are not mechanical, 'cause-and-effect' outcomes. Conceptions, policies and practices of reading and writing are necessarily partial in the sense that they always favour particular worldviews, interests, systems of social organization, and so on. The 'consequences' of literacy vary according to the character of given practices of reading and writing. How we view the 'consequences' of literacies (as regards their 'value') - that is, as either desirable or undesirable - depends on the ethical assumptions we begin with. On several ethical positions - *including Freire's* - there are good grounds for describing some forms of literacy as 'harmful'; hence, the popular conception of literacy as necessarily

'valuable' is problematic. The notion that people ought to become literate in society where reading and writing are fundamental to everyday life is compelling, but it is vital that consideration be given to the *ways* in which people learn and practise reading and writing. This thesis supports the view that people ought to read and write *critically*, though it does not claim that this is the only worthwhile (i.e. ethically desirable) form of literacy.

Chapter four responds to work which calls crucial assumptions in Freire's ethic and pedagogy into question. The theme of conscientization is a central focus throughout the chapter. I begin by outlining the three levels of consciousness identified by Freire in his early writings on conscientization. This provides a reference point for the rest of the chapter. The major task in the first part of the chapter is to defend Freire's interventionism against a strong attack from Bowers, who seeks out the roots of cultural invasion in Freirean education. For Bowers, Freire is a 'carrier' of a Western mind set which has been thoroughly oppressive when applied in traditional or non-Western settings. Bowers, together with other critics such as Berger and Walker, sees Freire's approach to adult literacy as 'impositional' (and thus undesirable) in certain respects. I argue (i) that literacy programmes are *necessarily* interventionist, (ii) that Freire's pedagogy in Brazil was 'impositional' in particular ways, but not in the strong sense implied by Bowers, (iii) that elements of the codification and decodification processes in the Brazilian campaign were 'non-dialogical' (though not 'anti-dialogical'), but with justification, (iv) that the potential for criticizing and repudiating Freire's approach was built into the inner logic of his literacy work, and (iv) that when properly contextualized, a 'critical' consciousness was clearly ethically preferable - and in this sense 'superior' - to 'magical' and 'naive' ways of viewing the world.

These arguments are extended in the second part of the chapter, where I critique two essays which highlight some of the ethical difficulties for literacy educators (among others) posed

by the reorientation of 'meaning' and the demise of universals under postmodernism. In the first piece, Gee encounters (and creates) problems in attempting to reconcile a postmodernist perspective on meaning with principles of harm in deliberating over a moral dilemma. In the second, Ellsworth, in recognizing multiple lines of oppression among participants in an anti-racism course, reaches a state of what might be termed 'pedagogical paralysis'. While the hierarchical conception of oppression implicit in Ellsworth's account is found wanting, the postmodernist renunciation of metanarratives provides a powerful challenge to Freirean notions of oppression and liberation, and must be acknowledged.

This discussion leads usefully to a fresh interpretation of conscientization (and, by implication, critical literacy) in the final part of the chapter. I reject developmental and individualist accounts of conscientization, and draw an explicit link between conscientization and praxis. The postmodern recognition of multiple subjectivities renders the categorization of individuals into 'personality types' or single levels of consciousness problematic. People operate at an infinite number of levels, within a plethora of discourses. Consciousnesses shift constantly as people move within and between different discourses. I contend that conscientization can be conceived, broadly, as any process - including processes involving reading and writing - through which people expand the range of discourses within which they can reflectively, knowingly and actively participate. More specifically, conscientization can be interpreted as the moment of knowing which occurs when reflection is dialogically synthesized with action. If the original impulse of conscientization is to be retained, particular emphasis must be placed on enhancing reflective engagement with, and dialogical transformation of, discourses of oppression. Critical literacy entails continually engaging (and relating) 'word' and 'world' within an increasingly expansive 'discursive universe', with a view to promoting a better (more fully human) social world.

In chapter five ideas developed in the preceding chapters are applied in evaluating contemporary debates over political correctness, canons and core curricula in universities. The first section addresses the question: 'Where would Freire stand on issues of political correctness?' I note that the label 'political correctness' has been applied to a confusing array of different attitudes, practices and policies, and seek to clarify conditions for using the term. Following a discussion of the relationship between 'correctness' and 'criticalness' in Freire's work, I offer key criteria for defining political correctness from a Freirean point of view. Political correctness, it is argued, relates to intolerance of views other than one's own. In classroom situations, a charge of political correctness would be valid were a teacher to suppress questions and criticism, or fail to alert students to opposing positions in the full knowledge that such alternatives exist. Thus defined, political correctness stands opposed to the Freirean notion of critical consciousness and must be resisted.

In the second section I turn to the battle over canons and core curricula. Two main antagonistic groups are identified: traditionalists and reformists. The former wish to defend a traditional programme based on the reading of 'Great Books'; the latter wish to see the canon broadened to include more works by women, ethnic minorities, and other groups. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* has been pivotal in these debates, and provides a useful starting point for discussion. After an overview of Bloom's ideas and a brief discussion of the origins of 'Western Civilization' courses in the United States, consideration is given to two stances on the question of how texts ought to be selected for core reading lists. One view, advanced by Bloom but supported by many other traditionalists, holds that books should be chosen on the basis of their intrinsic literary and philosophical merits (which can be determined by writers of quality); the other position suggests that the gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or country of origin of the author should be a prime criterion for selection. Both positions are found to be problematic.

The final section offers an alternative approach to the problem of deciding what and how students ought to read in core university courses. Building on my discussion of conscientization in chapter four, I maintain that core courses for students at (or near) the beginning of their university studies have a potentially significant role to play in expanding the discursive universe within which students might participate. I propose that a small number of texts be examined in great depth - i.e. *critically,* in the Freirean sense - from a range of perspectives. I accept the view that there are certain questions of enduring human significance, and suggest that these provide a helpful focus for classroom dialogue. A programme of this kind offers ample scope for forging relationships between 'word' and 'world', and allows for critical reflection on not only texts and social contexts but the very process of reading itself. The objective is to foster a particular approach to reading (i.e. a specific mode of literacy), while enhancing the breadth of perspective necessary for further critical reading. This approach opposes political correctness and affirms Freire's emphasis on tolerance, diversity, questioning, and debate as indispensable characteristics of university life.

Note

1. Goody, J. 'Introduction', in Goody, J. (ed.) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p.1.

CHAPTER ONE

STUDYING LITERACY, FREIRE AND THE UNIVERSITY

In the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand people are surrounded by print. Print is employed in a multitude of different ways. Tax, insurance, and unemployment-benefit forms are produced on printed paper; supermarket products use printed labels; books are a vital part of schools, universities, colleges of education, and technical institutes; laws are encoded in print; information of current events is gleamed from newspapers; print is a key means of communication in business.

Literacy - typically (though not unproblematically) understood as the ability to decode print in reading and encode it in writing - has become interwoven with the very fabric of modern society. Literacy is assumed when writing reminder notes, reading road signs, writing letters to friends, or browsing in bookshops and at news-stands. Literacy is taken for granted by doctors and chemists writing and reading life-saving prescriptions, by children reading comics, by teachers giving lessons, by judges and juries deciding on the basis of printed evidence whether to incarcerate someone for life, by adults reading Stephen King novels.

There have been massive changes in communications technology in the Western world this century: television, computers and fax machines are now accepted by many people in Western societies as an integral part of everyday life. Modifications to systems of communication have been accompanied by transformations in organizational structures and social relationships in homes, educational institutions, government departments, and myriad spheres of industry and commerce. Yet with most advances toward ever more sophisticated forms of communication this century, the need for literacy has remained. Computer users and programmers rely on instructions in manuals and technical guides. Televisions project

written messages as well as pictures. Electronic mail is still mail that is *read*. Literacy, far from being under threat, seems to be a more vital part of contemporary life than ever before.

Given the importance of literacy as a means of communication in Western societies, the possibility that some adults may be *illiterate* in First World countries is perhaps cause for considerable alarm. In the past, it was commonly believed that the problem of adult illiteracy was largely confined to the Third World. Certainly in New Zealand it was routinely taken as given for many years that every adult knew how to read and write. In 1964, for instance, the International Bureau of Education reported (on the basis of information supplied by the Department of Education in New Zealand) that '[t]he proportion of illiterates in the [New Zealand] population fifteen years ago was between 1 and 2% and is still less now'. The tuition provided for adults was described in a single sentence: 'Adult education is mainly concerned with cultural activities and the use of leisure time'.[1]

The assumption of near 100% literacy among the adult population may have been based on the widely-held presupposition that any problems a person might have with print would be identified and addressed through the schooling system. If it was, it now seems that this confidence was misplaced: in New Zealand, as in many other areas of the western world, there are substantial numbers of adults experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. Recent estimates of adult illiteracy or functional illiteracy in the United States, for example, range from twenty-three million to almost eighty million people; in Britain the figure may be as high as six to eight million. Ten percent of Australian adults and 50,000-100,000 New Zealanders over the age of 15 have reading and writing difficulties.[2]

In the Third World, rates of illiteracy have been a matter for international concern for some time. Figures from 1980 suggest (adult) illiteracy levels of 60%, 37% and 33% for Africa, Asia

and Latin America respectively.[3] In the decade from 1970 to 1980, the total number of adult illiterates across the globe increased from 760 million to 814 million;[4] by 1985, one estimate put the figure at 889 million people.[5] Some expect the number to rise to 900 million by the end of this century.[6] Of course, all calculations of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' levels ought to be viewed with caution in light of the difficulties associated with adequately defining these terms.[7] Nonetheless, given the sheer number of adults in many countries who have been considered 'illiterate' by almost *any* definition, it becomes easier to see why one author was led to comment that 'the problem of illiteracy...[is] the most gigantic and demanding one of our generation'.[8]

Where the phenomenon of adult illiteracy has been recognized and officially acknowledged, millions of dollars have been spent on literacy programmes. Hundreds of different methods and techniques for teaching adults to read have been devised. Yet, people have seldom stopped to ask: What is all of this spending and commitment to adult literacy *for*? What does it mean to be 'literate' or 'illiterate'? Toward what social or personal end(s) should literacy initiatives be put? These questions lie at the heart of this thesis.

Clearly, these issues have relevance far beyond the specific domain of adult literacy; there is scope for exploration of the forms literacy might take in a variety of institutional and informal educational settings. This study, then, is concerned with theoretical questions about literacy in general as well as problems pertaining strictly to adult literacy. However, in light of (i) the interest adult illiteracy has generated among First World politicians and the media (albeit belatedly), and (ii) the centrality of adult literacy education to Freire's theory and practice, the literature devoted specifically to this topic provides a useful starting point. After a (very) brief overview and critique of work in this area, consideration is given to the broader literacy studies literature. A case for further investigation of conceptual and ethical questions

(pertaining to literacy) is advanced, and key dimensions of contemporary debates over political correctness, canons and core curricula are outlined. The distinctiveness of Freire's contribution is noted, and the direction of the rest of the thesis is signalled.

The Literature on Adult Literacy

While the literature on adult literacy can be examined from a multiplicity of angles, there appear to be four main categories within which many studies fall: instructional, programme evaluation, individual case-study, and psychological.

Instructional Material

A significant proportion of the literature deals with practical suggestions for adult literacy instruction. The emphasis here, to put it crudely, is on the 'how to do it' approach, and many articles under this rubric actually specify 'helpful hints' for adult literacy instructors.[9] Some authors pass on 'favourite techniques' based upon their own experience as adult literacy tutors,[10] or recommend a specific method or approach for improving the teaching of reading and writing skills. This might be anything from mnemonics, to the use of graphics, basic word lists, 'interest inventories', or everyday reading materials.[11] Attention has been paid to the ways in which family and friends can be 'utilized' to assist in literacy instruction for adult illiterates.[12] The role schools might play in helping parents who cannot read has likewise attracted some comment.[13]

Programme Evaluation

The second category comprises those articles, books and reports which are concerned with evaluating some form of adult literacy programme, policy or campaign. In the Western world, the Adult Performance Level (APL) programme in the United States attracted much attention in the 1970s and 1980s.[14] Efforts to recruit and instruct adult illiterates through television and other media have also been thoroughly evaluated.[15] The enhancement of reading and writing skills among factory employees and other workers in industrial and manufacturing sectors has been seen as a priority for some time, and in recent years a sizeable literature has developed on workplace literacy.[16] Similarly, with the growing influx of immigrants into Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the demand for literacy programmes which meet the specific needs of non-English speaking families has increased.[17] ESL (English as a second language) courses have mushroomed, and with the emergence of specialized training for teachers in these programmes a corresponding body of instructive and evaluative material on ESL has evolved.[18]

National literacy campaigns in Third World and non-Western countries have also been extensively evaluated.[19] The Nicaraguan literacy crusade of 1980 has become especially well-known. With its primer based on discussion of overtly political themes, its mobilization of large numbers of student volunteers, and its spectacular success in dramatically reducing levels of adult illiteracy in a very short period of time, the Nicaraguan crusade has often been compared to the Cuban campaign two decades earlier.[20] Of the other countries where large-scale literacy initiatives have been instituted, evaluative comment has been made on programmes in such diverse places as Ethiopia, Mexico, Vietnam, China, and Russia.[21]

Personal Case-Studies

A number of articles focus on individual case studies of adults who have experienced difficulties with reading and writing. These often include sensitive accounts of an adult's life history, with much credence being given to the student's own analysis of the reasons for his or her illiteracy.[22] Sometimes the person who has tutored a student will detail the methods used with that person to overcome literacy difficulties.[23] In adult literacy journals and newsletters, the case-studies are frequently autobiographical.[24]

Psychological Studies of Adult Literacy

Although most psychological work has focused on reading and writing for children, there is a small literature on the psychological study of adult literacy. Malicky and Norman, for example, have demonstrated that adults achieve better reading comprehension using grammatical clue strategies than phonics.[25] In other work the same researchers relate the reading stages identified by Chall in her account of the reading process for children to adult readers.[26] Strong correlational relationships have been found between metacognitive reading abilities and job performance in a number of technical fields.[27] Among adults experiencing difficulties with reading, oral reading accuracy and comprehension have been identified as important contributing factors.[28] Boyd and Martin have developed a methodology for the analysis of psychosocial profiles of adults with limited literacy skills.[29]

Adult Literacy Research: A Critique

The literature on adult literacy derives from a range of sources, including journals, books, adult literacy newsletters, pamphlets, and reports. A comprehensive critique is beyond the

scope of this thesis, but, with regard to the categories identified above, four brief comments are in order.

(i) The overwhelming (and predominantly uncritical) acceptance of the assumption that literacy is good, valuable and desirable - and that illiteracy is undesirable - is problematic. Few people would deny that literacy can open up many potentially worthwhile opportunities which are unavailable to those who are unable to read and write. As Jonathan Kozol cogently demonstrates in his classic study, *Illiterate America*, literate folk seldom appreciate the trauma experienced by those who are illiterate in a print-dominated society.[30] It must be acknowledged, however, that the value accorded literacy is dependent upon certain presuppositions about what is good, just and necessary in specific social settings, under particular historical circumstances. Literacy is worthwhile to the extent that it enables adults to do certain things, or to achieve certain goals, which they (or others supposedly speaking on their behalf) regard as desirable, at a given time and place.

It is also important to recognize that literacy takes many different forms, some of which can actually be considered *harmful* for human beings, rather than beneficial. Becoming literate opens people up to the possibility of manipulation through the printed word (e.g. by the media). Teaching the skills of reading and writing can, some have argued, become an exercise in social control if those learning these skills are not encouraged to question the material they are reading.[31] Programmes of literacy education, as Davis points out, often perpetuate the values of dominant groups.[32] A literate population, others have noted, is a population that can be governed: literacy allows people to read instructions, to follow written rules and regulations, to become compliant and obedient, and so on.[33] These ideas will be revisited later and need not be discussed any further at this stage. The key point is that the value of literacy in much of the literature on adult literacy has simply been taken for granted,

and the negative nature of illiteracy assumed uncritically, without sufficient exploration of the issue.

(ii) The emphasis on *skills* in much of the literature is also somewhat worrying. This is most explicit in the instructional material, but it is also highly visible in the psychological literature. There is talk not only of 'the skills of reading and writing' (which are to be mastered by those becoming literate), but also of the techniques to be employed by instructors in assisting the acquisition of literacy 'skills'.

The argument that people ought to learn whatever skills are necessary to gain employment, participate in educational institutions, and engage in recreational pursuits seems eminently reasonable. Indeed, in today's rapidly changing world, with daily advances in technology, the learning and re-learning of specific skills (in handling machinery, in dealing with complex business systems, in operating computers, etc.) is almost essential. The problem arises when experts and laypeople start to think of literacy *purely* in terms of skills.

This, for a start, might narrow one's view of what counts as literacy, with any definitions that speak of qualities beyond the technical aspects of reading and writing being pushed aside or ignored. More significantly, though, an excessive concentration on the teaching print-related skills, with little time on anything else, heightens the risk that adults may learn *how* to perform certain tasks but not know *why* they are performing them. This is where the trouble lies with much of the instructional literature: numerous techniques and methods have been devised for assisting adults in learning how to read and write, but rather less has been said about what these reading and writing skills might be *for*. They *may* be directed toward the enhancement of critical thought, literary appreciation, informed political comment, etc., but on the basis of what is discussed in most instructional material there is no way of

determining if this is the case. It is the skills themselves which become the centre of attention in the instructional literature, not what adults 'do with' these skills. Indeed, as a number of theorists have pointed out, the separation of skills and techniques from the social contexts within which reading and writing take place gives, at best, an incomplete picture of literacy. At worst, the view that skills have autonomy from their application is conceptually misguided and dangerously misleading.[34]

This is not to diminish the importance of continuing research efforts to find the most effective techniques for learning how to use the medium of print. It would be foolish, if not irresponsible, for scholars to ignore the very real requirements of teaching people how to decode written words, how to form the letters of the alphabet, how to construct sentences, and so on. Modern (and postmodern) societies demand an increasing degree of technical competence from their citizens, and it is imperative that those who wish to master the complexities of print are not denied the opportunity to do so.[35] In many respects, greater emphasis needs to be placed on 'how to' (methodological and technical) questions than ever before. The point is, however, that there is more to literacy than *simply* the learning of print skills.

(iii) This leads to a third criticism: insufficient attention has been given to the relationship between literacy, illiteracy and social structure in the literature. The studies of literacy campaigns in revolutionary societies (e.g. the Cuban and Nicaraguan crusades) are somewhat exceptional here. In these campaigns literacy was seen (and has been written about in these terms) as a crucial part of the overall process of structural change under revolutionary conditions. And Paulo Freire (to whom reference will be made below) has long stressed that literacy and politics are inextricably intertwined.

The neglect of structural questions is, once more, most evident in the instructional and psychological literature, where questions about the social context within literacy 'skills' are practised and acquired are typically left to one side. But the case studies also suffer from a lack of depth in this area. Student analyses of the reasons for their difficulties and their motivations for learning find ready expression in such studies. The trauma many people experience as illiterate adults in a literate world is at times vividly portrayed. But while the consequences of illiteracy for *individual* adult literacy students have often been made reasonably clear, the wider structural dimensions to illiteracy usually have not. In many cases, neither the student nor the author have made a reasoned link between what C. Wright Mills termed 'biography' (i.e. the student's personal experiences) and 'structure' (the organization of the society in which he or she lives).[36] Yet, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that illiteracy occurs in definite patterns, with ethnic minorities and the poor disproportionately represented among illiteracy statistics, reflecting wider social inequalities and divisions.[37] The case-study approach has abundant potential, and has been used to good effect in combination with a wider call for political action on adult illiteracy by Kozol, among others.[38] For the most part, however, the possibility of analysing individual experience of illiteracy in structural terms has not been realized.

(iv) More broadly, a review of the literature suggests that extended theoretical work *in general* has often taken a back seat to (what have been perceived as) the more pressing practical concerns associated with adult literacy instruction. This is not to suggest that theoretical analysis has been absent from *all* adult literacy work; such a claim, made without qualification, would obviously be ridiculous. Some of the programme evaluation studies in particular possess a great deal of theoretical depth. This is especially true of work on Third World countries, though theoretical analysis is also a strength in some of the First World studies.[39] It is, however, weak in others.[40] A number of the psychological studies of adult

literacy consider theoretical questions at length,[41] and there are exceptions scattered across other categories as well. But in much of the literature, *in-depth* theorizing about the nature of adult literacy and illiteracy has often been down-played.

In many ways, this is not altogether surprising. Adult literacy work in First World countries has traditionally been underfunded. In New Zealand, for instance, tutoring has for many years been largely carried out by volunteers, frequently working in one-to-one situations with adults experiencing difficulties. The primary aim of many adult literacy programmes in the western world has been to ensure that adults are given opportunities to attain a certain level of competence with print in order to achieve very definite goals. The objectives are often specified by literacy students, and might include anything from obtaining a driver's licence, to being able to write letters to relatives, to reading novels or magazines for entertainment and enjoyment. In many cases adult literacy workers, even if they might have had the inclination, have not had the time to pursue extended theoretical studies. Energy has been directed principally at a very practical problem: how to effectively assist adults who wish to learn to read and write.

This goal is, on the face of it, an admirable one - particularly given the trying circumstances (lack of funding, and lack of recognition that adult illiteracy even *exists* in western countries) under which many involved in adult literacy education have had to work. The fact that a small group of dedicated people have identified a 'problem' (adult illiteracy) and done something about it with very little in the way of support is indeed something which ought to be applauded.

Yet, difficult circumstances notwithstanding, the lack of detailed attention to questions of theory remains a cause for concern. Without a solid theoretical base, adult literacy work can

at best be informed by practical experience. At worst, instructors and programme planners may proceed with no special objective in mind (aside from merely teaching some rudimentary skills), unaware of the immense body of work on the historical, sociological, and political dimensions to literacy.

(iv) Finally, conceptions of appropriate subject matter for adult literacy research have been unnecessarily restrictive. When many educationists talk of adult literacy, they typically think of policies, programmes and issues pertaining to adults who are 'illiterate' or experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. The literature which purportedly deals with adult literacy reinforces this view. Consideration needs to be given, however, to forms of reading and writing practised by those (adults) who are 'already' literate, as well as those who are about to 'become' literate.

University lecturers (and teachers in other tertiary institutions) might legitimately claim as much of a professional interest in 'adult literacy' as those who work in community programmes of one-to-one instruction for adults with reading and writing difficulties. Tertiary teachers, after all, must make decisions about what adults ought to read for particular courses, and must assign and assess written work. Anyone responsible for producing, selecting, teaching, evaluating, or reading the written word for or with adults deals in some way with 'adult literacy'. Thus defined, the subject offers almost unlimited scope for research. This widening of horizons also encourages scholars to take the view that all adults who read or write (to whatever level) ought to critically reflect on the practices they engage in; as conventionally conceived, adult literacy research assumes that if there is a 'problem', it relates only to those who are 'illiterate'.

The Literacy Studies Literature

In addition to the literature ostensibly devoted to adult literacy, there is a wide range of theoretical and empirical material which examines literacy as a subject in its own right. This body of work constitutes the broad area of inquiry often referred to as 'literacy studies'.[42] Recent collections of essays attest to the eclectic, multi-disciplinary nature of this field.[43] Educationists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have been especially well-represented in the literature, but economists, linguists, literary theorists, classicists, and communications analysts have also made significant contributions. Four themes structure the present review: the oral/literate divide; literacy and economic development; literacy, reproduction and resistance; and postmodernism and literacy.

The Oral/Literate Divide

Human beings have been communicating with one another through spoken language for approximately two million years.[44] Written communication, by contrast, is a relatively recent development. Of those who have looked at the evolution of different forms of writing, many are in agreement that writing emerged in a series of stages, with iconography, pictography and other forms of visual representation gradually giving way to more advanced systems of symbolic communication.[45] Hence, while rock pictures and the like have been dated to around 25,000 BC, the precursors to modern phonetic writing systems did not materialize for at least another 21,000 years.[46] There is some debate over the precise dates of successive developments, and opinions differ as to whether the claim to have been the first truly literate society rightfully resides with Greece, China, or India.[47] The relative importance of each stage in the evolution of writing is likewise a point of contention.[48] It is clear that the invention of alphabetic writing - first in consonantal form by Western Semites (ca.1500 BC) and later

with the addition of vowels by the Greeks (ca. 750 BC) - marked a great leap forward in the emergence of written systems of communication.[49] The arrival of the printing press in the fifteenth century, others have argued, had a similarly dramatic impact on the function and use of the written word.[50] In more recent times, it has been hypothesized that the introduction of computers and other forms of electronic media will revolutionize the way people understand and practice reading and writing.[51]

Almost from the beginning, written and oral modes of communication have been compared and critically evaluated. Plato, for example, viewed writing with some suspicion, noting that while spoken language allowed for conceptual clarification through dialectical debate, written words simply returned the same answer repeatedly when questioned. Written texts, Plato feared, could end up in the hands of those who were ill-equipped to properly understand them.[52] Among modern scholars, anthropologists have had much to say on the different ways in which orality and literacy influence the culture and social organization of a given society and the thought processes of people therein. In a pioneering and often-cited essay, 'The Consequences of Literacy', Goody and Watt maintain that writing encourages a more sceptical, critical, analytical approach toward the world than oral communication affords. The relative permanency of writing allows inconsistencies in cultural traditions and beliefs to be readily articulated. Writing, Goody and Watt argue, was influential not only in the development of the sophisticated forms of philosophical argument and logic found in the work of Plato and Aristotle, but in the very rise of Greek civilization itself.[53] These claims, together with others made elsewhere by Goody,[54] have been keenly debated over the past two decades.

Brian Street has been particularly forthright in his criticism of Goody's 'determination to attribute to literacy *per se* characteristics which are clearly those of the social order in which

it is found'.[55] This embracing of what Street calls the 'autonomous' model of literacy amounts to a version of technological determinism: literacy is seen as a technology which can be isolated from the social contexts within which it is practised, and studied in order to determine its consequences. The alternative Street proposes is an 'ideological' perspective, where literacy is conceived in terms of specific social (and necessarily political) practices of reading and writing. Instead of making generalized claims about the consequences of literacy, those adopting this point of view focus on the 'real significance' of given literacy practices for particular social groups. Rather than dividing literate and non-literate cultures, emphasis is placed on the overlap and interaction between spoken and written language.[56]

Street's position has received considerable recent support in the literature. His framework has been explicitly adopted by Lankshear and Lawler,[57] and the essential tenets of the ideological model are consistent with a growing body of work on the sociology of reading.[58] Hill and Parry have recently advanced a 'pragmatic' perspective on literacy in opposition to the autonomous model.[59] Graff has criticized Goody and others for drawing what he sees as erroneous or exaggerated causal connections between literacy and a host of cognitive and social changes,[60] and Bloch has found fault with Goody's theory of knowledge and communication.[61] Empirical research, too, has thrown some doubt on Goody's claim's about the relationship between literacy and different modes of thought. Scribner and Cole, for example, found in their research with the Vai of Africa that there were no significant differences between literate and non-literate adults in cognitive capacities such as verbal reasoning, logical operations and abstract thought.[62]

The debate has not been one-sided though. Walter Ong, for instance, asserts that writing is a technology which has a profound influence on the way human beings think. With Goody, Ong argues that complex philosophical analysis depends on writing. Ong sees writing as a

separating, artificial but liberating development, the effects of which are seldom noted given the deep interiorization of the technology into human consciousness.[63] Provocative support for Goody's claims has also been provided by Marshall McLuhan, who has postulated that the introduction of phonetic literacy altered the ratio between senses in the brain, shifting the emphasis from emotional, intuitive, symbolic, and artistic activity to analytic, controlled, rational, and abstract functions.[64] Similarly, David Olson has argued that there is a bias in written language towards 'providing definitions, making all assumptions and premises explicit, and observing the formal rules of logic'; oral language is 'a universal means of sharing our understanding of concrete situations and practical actions', but its potential for exploring abstract ideas is limited.[65] Alphabetic writing, Olson contends, releases the mind from the burden of memory, thus promoting the exploration of new ideas and allowing for critical reflection not simply on what is intended or meant (as is the case with spoken language) but on what is *said* in a statement.[66] The bias of written language, then, is toward 'literal meaning' - i.e. the meaning 'preserved' in the text.[67] While Willinsky includes Olson among a list of proponents of the 'great divide' between speech and writing,[68] Snyder maintains that this does not accurately reflect Olson's reassessment of earlier dualistic assumptions nor his move in more recent years toward a hermeneutical theory of knowledge and language.[69]

Literacy and Economic Development

With the enormous commitment of money and resources to education across the globe this century, politicians, 'manpower' planners, economists, and others involved in policy decisions have been anxious to see a direct, quantifiable return on their investment. As a result, there has been considerable debate over the link between literacy and economic growth.[70] Unesco has long subscribed to the view that literacy among the majority of a nation's population is

essential for improvements in economic efficiency, scientific advancement, and higher standards of living.[71] This aspiration has been shared by officials in numerous countries, especially under post-revolutionary or post-independence circumstances. In Algeria, for instance, illiteracy was regarded as a 'blemish' on the nation and an impediment to the management of resources for greater productivity following sovereignty in 1962; literacy was seen as a means of 'mobilizing the masses' and 'increasing the labour-force potential'.[72] Similarly, in 1979 the Director-General of Unesco spoke of the 'scourge' of illiteracy and highlighted the role of literacy in preparing individuals for participation in the development process.[73]

Both agriculture and industry have been seen as key spheres for economic improvement through literacy. As one commentator elegantly puts it, for many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the expectation is that there will be 'a direct and generative connection...between the literacy primer and the ploughstone'.[74] Economic planners assume that literacy will enable farmers to keep (better) records, employ and understand more up-to-date technologies, and facilitate and transmit further agricultural knowledge.[75] In industrial sectors, reading and writing are frequently perceived as necessary skills for operating and maintaining machinery, establishing effective lines of communication, and enhancing product handling and marketing.

Among estimates of the necessary levels of literacy for turning economies around, C. Arnold Anderson's hypothesis that the 'threshold' for economic development is a primary school enrolment, or an adult literacy rate, of forty per cent is perhaps the most well-known. His claim is that 'literacy of a large minority of males is a precondition for any significant transformation of an underdeveloped economy into one marked by sustained growth'.[76] Writing in the same volume as Anderson, Kahan holds that the demand for literacy among

factory workers early this century in Russia was a decisive factor in the improvement of urban educational facilities, especially in newly-developing industrial regions.[77] Further support for Anderson's thesis is provided by West, who draws a link between improvements in literacy during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and the beginnings of large-scale factory systems in England.[78]

Sanderson, by contrast, argues that the economic and social changes which accompanied the industrial revolution occurred *in spite of* modifications in literacy levels.[79] Eisemon and Nyamate, likewise, mirroring earlier historical findings,[80] conclude that in Great Britain, 'economic growth seems to have preceded rather than...coincided with the expansion of literacy'.[81] Research on Sweden suggests that there was a long delay between the achievement of widespread reading ability (virtually 100% by 1750) and subsequent economic growth.[82] In more contemporary times, Anderson's 'forty per cent' hypothesis has been borne out in only some parts of the developing world (notably, among a number of Asian economies), with many African countries, despite considerable investment in literacy programmes, showing 'declining per capita agricultural production, stagnant industrial growth, and endemic poverty'.[83]

Concern has been expressed by various groups at the often alarmingly high correlations between illiteracy and a host of economic and social problems (including stifled productivity, depressed trade, widespread malnutrition, high rates of infant mortality, and low life expectancy) in developing countries.[84] Others are quick to point out, however, that attempts at establishing *causal* links between illiteracy and 'negative indicators' such as economic stagnation, high crime rates, substance abuse, homelessness, and the like are as problematic as efforts to pinpoint causality in relation to literacy and its alleged consequences.[85] Illiteracy, it is argued, does not 'cause' disease, poor nutrition, low agricultural productivity, and

industrial underdevelopment any more than literacy independently overcomes these difficulties.[86]

As early as 1968, responding to Goody and Watt, Kathleen Gough stressed the importance of distinguishing between 'necessary' and 'sufficient' conditions in discussing the implications of literacy.[87] This point has been taken up by several critics over the years.[88] A number of commentators speak of the need to see both literacy and illiteracy as inextricably intertwined with (rather than as causes of, or direct outcomes from) economic and social changes. On this view, the relationship between literacy and economic development is seen as reciprocal and interactive, with investment in education and literacy both contributing to and being nurtured by developments in physical infrastructure, technology and communications.[89] While some theorists speculate that changes in social conditions and ideas precede the successful introduction of reading and writing,[90] others caution against placing either 'side' of the equation (one side being literacy, the other economic development) in front of the other. Carron and Bordia, for example, note that deterministic reasoning has either led to the overly-optimistic hope that increases in literacy levels will 'automatically result in more development' or the unnecessarily pessimistic view that 'literacy work does not make any sense unless the development process is already on the move'.[91]

Literacy, Reproduction and Resistance

Before the eighteenth century, access to literacy was for the most part restricted to an elite few. Even as late as the mid-nineteenth century, less than 10% of the world's population could read and write.[92] Given its exclusivity, writing has frequently held a mystical fascination among many cultures across the ages;[93] those who have possessed the ability to inscribe and interpret the mysterious signs on papyrus, paper or other surfaces have

sometimes been exalted as beings endowed with magical powers.[94] In a number of societies, there has traditionally been a strong connection between literacy, authority and religion.[95] According to Graff, temple priests in the great early civilizations of Babylonia and Egypt 'claimed that they alone held the right to teach reading, limiting access to the secrets of religion'.[96] This practice continued as Judaism, Christianity and Islam developed through the centuries; while the masses were denied access to literacy (by design as much as circumstance), a small group of religious guardians, fearful of the potentially subversive nature of reading, controlled the spread of scriptural dogmas.[97] The advent of moveable type allowed for much wider circulation of religious material: as Harman points out, the impact of Luther's 'Ninety-Five Theses' in challenging Roman Catholic doctrines would almost certainly have been diminished were it not for the printing press.[98] In Germany the subsequent proliferation of vernacular elementary schools increased literacy levels to the point where reading became a common activity for people from a variety of walks of life.[99] Recent scholarship suggests, however, that the founding of Protestant schooling, 'far from being a purely egalitarian force,...marked the generation of a new but equally hegemonic selective tradition of attitudes, beliefs, knowledges and competencies'.[100]

Those other than priests who learned to read and write were frequently granted privileged status and often acquired an aristocratic disposition,[101] though there is some evidence to suggest that in very early times literacy was less associated with power and riches than in later periods.[102] The prestige of the literati in China, Weber observes, rested not on nobility or wealth but on a knowledge of writing and literature. Plebians who managed to acquire the requisite abilities were accorded the same social rank as those from feudal families who did so. Weber concedes, however, that, given the complexity of the Chinese system of writing, the task was difficult for those who did not come from literary families.[103] Even classical Greece, so often described in glowing terms by historians of writing and literacy,

could not boast equality of access to the written word. With the development of the Greek alphabet, literacy became a useful 'shop' (commercial) tool for craftspersons, and Cipolla's claim that most Athenian citizens were literate during the fifth and fourth centuries BC seems plausible.[104] But inequities of access to literacy remained, between men and women, freepersons and slaves, and local and foreign residents.[105] Little had changed in the West by the time of the Renaissance: reading and writing were still practised primarily by the nobility, members of the clergy, officials, and a minority of townsfolk; women and the poor were systematically denied access to the forms of literate cultural capital which might improve their material conditions.[106]

With the shift to more modern periods, the relationship between literacy and the reproduction of existing inequalities across class, race and gender lines becomes increasingly complex. A survey of historical studies suggests that literacy has functioned as a 'double-edged sword'.[107] On the one hand, for William Lovett and, earlier, the London Corresponding Societies, the written word was a vital component in the struggle for working class liberation.[108] Some historians, thus, see a direct connection between the spread of mass literacy and 'the emancipation of the lower classes from intellectual dependence upon their social superiors'.[109] On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that literacy has also served as an instrument of colonialism and social control, with dominant groups seeking to instill the 'correct' attitudes and behaviours among the lower classes.[110] Graff's research on nineteenth-century Ontario, for instance, demonstrates that increased literacy levels did not correlate with an improvement in the conditions of working class people.[111] While (many) middle class people saw illiterate folk as a threat to the established social order, they were also fearful of the inflammatory potential of reading and writing.[112] The 'solution' was to teach the poor elementary print skills whilst simultaneously promoting passivity and discouraging opposition to existing hierarchies. In effect, the teaching of reading and writing

became a mechanism for cementing the status quo. The dominant classes sought control over both content and methods: rote learning was encouraged, compliance with strict standards of behaviour was expected, and the asking of questions was discouraged.[113]

From one vantage point, becoming literate in England between 1500 and 1750 meant buying into 'the values and social attitudes of polite metropolitan culture'.[114] Other studies of England from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century give weight to the notion that literacy levels paralleled the complex system of social stratification that existed at the time, with the level of competency for husbandmen being less than that of yeomen, and yeomen in turn being less literate than gentlemen. Although a small percentage of signatories from otherwise illiterate peasant groups could sign their names, only the sons of yeomen had much chance of joining those of higher social rank at a grammar school or university.[115] The first half of the twentieth century brought marked improvements in living conditions and educational opportunities for working class people in England, but, as Richard Hoggart points out, the corresponding cultural changes were less positive; in particular, the emergence of popular mass-production 'pulp' books and magazines promoted a trivialized, superficial understanding of social life, inhibiting 'a wisdom derived from an inner, felt discrimination in their [readers'] sense of people and their attitude to experience'.[116]

The tension between reproduction and resistance has continued to the present day. Issues of class, ethnicity, and gender have been extensively considered in the literature on literacy.[117] Sociologists and other researchers employing qualitative fieldwork techniques (including participant observation and interview methods) in schools and elsewhere have confirmed the polarised possibilities in literate activities. Recent work with students from non-English-speaking backgrounds shows some cause for optimism in creating counter-hegemonic modes of literacy education.[118] Other studies suggest, however, that while literacy affords certain

opportunities for free expression on the part of students, its ultimate impact in changing existing patterns of inequality along class, race and gender lines should not be overestimated.[119] In many situations, prevailing inequities have been reinforced through classroom reading and writing practices. A multiplicity of factors contribute to this process, including the teacher's assessment of student attitudes, student apathy and political acquiescence, and 'hidden curricula' in literacy programmes.[120] In some fieldwork investigations literacy has been found to be at once reproductive *and* resistant. Rockhill, for instance, in her study of the experiences of Hispanic immigrant women learning English, concluded that 'Literacy is caught up in the material, racial and sexual oppression of women, *and* [yet] it embodies their hope for escape'.[121]

There has been a surprising lack of attention paid to the interface between the sociology of knowledge and the sociological study of literacy. Exceptions to this trend are found in the work of Kretovics and Scott on critical literacy, Roth on literacy and the social construction of knowledge, and Donald on literacy, hegemony and resistance.[122] On the whole, though, as Levine points out, the sociology of knowledge remains a 'hitherto unexploited source of fruitful insights concerning literacy'.[123]

Postmodernism and Literacy

It has become increasingly clear in recent years that we are living in a period of profound economic, social and cultural change. Variously understood as post-industrial, post-colonial or postmodern, the current epoch has witnessed dramatic shifts in the way people work, communicate, and live in the Western world. Industrial, 'Fordist' capitalism (with its emphasis on large-scale, factory production of manufactured goods) is being succeeded by economies based upon services and information.[124] Multinational corporations are assuming

an ever more powerful presence on the international stage. New technologies and market forms replace existing methods of organization, accumulation, circulation, and consumption on an almost daily basis. 'Flexibility', 'diversity', 'choice', 'innovativeness', and 'entrepreneurialism' have become key words under 'New Times' capitalism.[125] Full-time, secure jobs are giving way to an expanding number of part-time, short-term contract positions (and unemployment). A growing number of responsibilities in education, health and social welfare are (ostensibly) being shifted from the state to the private sector.[126] Stability and certainty have been displaced by upheaval and uncertainty.

Accompanying structural modifications in this period have been dramatic and deeply unsettling challenges to the central tenets of modernist thought. In numerous disciplines and fields of study - sociology, social anthropology, philosophy, literary criticism, art, architecture, music, and education among them - assumptions which have persisted since (at least) the Enlightenment are being contested and overturned. The elevation of the autonomous, rational, unified, individual subject to a supreme position in modern thought is being supplanted by a view of human beings as constituted within multiple, sometimes contradictory, discourses of power.[127] Indeed, the very category of 'the individual', where 'the Cogito - the self-identical and fully transparent thinking subject - [is privileged] as *the* universal subject against all others (women, ethnic minorities, gay people, etc.)' is rendered problematic in postmodern thought.[128] The emerging postmodernist consciousness rejects all claims to transcendental, universalist or essentialist truth, distrusting 'metanarratives' such as 'the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth'.[129] The notion of Reason - the foundation stone of modern philosophy - has been deconstructed and found to be just one more oppressive, interest-serving discursive form among many others.[130]

The conception of history as an ordered, sequential, linear path of progress toward ever more liberating social forms has been shattered.[131] In place of (or, in some cases, in addition to) an ethic of unity through shared experiences, suffering and goals is a focus on 'difference', diversity and plurality.[132] If the modern age ultimately relied upon absolutist principles, the postmodern world is - frequently, at least - characterized by an unending (and celebrated) relativism. Nothing remains sacred in the postmodern period: all aspects of the human condition are seemingly now open to question, revision and replacement.

Literacy theorists have gradually started to come to grips with these epochal transformations in ideas and structures. While the literature which manifestly addresses literacy from postmodernist perspectives is still relatively small, literary critics (together with linguists and discourse analysts) have had much to say that is pertinent to this theme. Some of this work might more accurately be termed 'post-structuralist' than 'postmodernist' in orientation, though the two terms are used synonymously on occasion; more frequently, the latter is presumed to be inclusive of the former. Irrespective of the terminology used to describe the shift in scholarly focus, it is clear that literary criticism - at least in some quarters - has experienced a profound metamorphosis under the influence of thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes.[133] Following close on the heels of the 'death of the subject' has come the 'death of the author' and the 'birth' (or reappearance) of the reader.[134] Where earlier paradigms in literary criticism gave primacy to authorial intention[135] and the embeddedness of meaning in the text, contemporary perspectives celebrate the possibility of multiple reader positionings. Thus, instead of assuming that there is one 'correct' meaning - whether overt or hidden - to be uncovered by readers,[136] now it is taken for granted by many that texts can be interpreted in a multitude of different ways, none of which can lay an absolute or final claim to be the best or only legitimate reading. This 'indeterminacy thesis' finds its most extreme expression in deconstructionist approaches to criticism, where all declarations of

literary truth - whether by New Critics, phenomenologists, psychoanalysts, structuralists, feminists, or Marxists - are called into question.[137]

On a variety of critical positions, emphasis is now placed on the constructive processes involved in reading and writing.[138] Some theorists focus on the validation of meaning through interpretive communities,[139] while others draw attention to the elite economic and cultural interests served by particular readings of texts,[140] or the importance of context in shaping meaning.[141] From certain post-structuralist standpoints, prevailing canons of literary judgement are seen to have systematically favoured elite white middle-class European males whilst excluding a range of subjugated 'Others', including women, ethnic minorities, working class people, and homosexuals.[142] An important objective for those wishing to resist dominant interpretations, then, is to reassert the legitimacy of those perspectives which have been rendered invisible through traditional norms of literary criticism and institutional practice. For example, in recognizing that the literature of modernity primarily describes the public lives of men, feminists have endeavoured to bring to light the texts and experiences of women in both the private and public domains of modern society.[143]

Under the influence of deconstruction and a number of post-structuralist strands in discourse analysis, the concept of 'text' has taken on a meaning far beyond its traditional association with books; it is now possible to talk of television programmes, advertisements, films, billboards, paintings, rhetorical monologues, many-sided dialogues, human actions, and political policies as examples of 'texts'.[144] The term appears to be closely related to the notion of 'discourse', though the latter still retains some connection with conversation or human interaction in most cases. Discourses, in the broadest sense, are 'ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes'.[145]

The now-(in)famous Derridean maxim that there is 'nothing outside the text' has also provided grounds for a new conception of 'reading'. Derrida's intention, some theorists imply, was not to deny, diminish or dissolve the reality of lived experience and human suffering; his point was simply that human beings construct - i.e. give meaning to, or render intelligent - themselves, others and the world through 'reading' a multiplicity of signs.[146] 'Reading' here, then, includes the interpretation of not only written symbols on paper but also objects or parts of objects, all forms of visual representation, gestures, movements, actions, reactions, even signals through the brain from the nervous system.[147]

The emphasis in many postmodern applications of Derrida's ideas is on 'play' - on the dance within and between different modes of textuality - especially as this relates to processes of reading and writing. For some commentators, this signals nothing more than theoretical self-indulgence; books composed in this manner become virtually unreadable,[148] and deconstructionist readings of texts bear almost no resemblance to conventional or 'commonsense' interpretations. Literary criticism, philosophy, perhaps life itself: all become elaborate 'language games' played out in a chaotic world of signs with no absolute meaning.[149] If no sign system or discourse can ultimately be deemed superior to any other, definitive moral judgements can longer be made.[150] This means that there are no longer any absolute grounds for evaluating the worth of given practices (of reading and writing or anything else). Yet, as Gee points out, while postmodernists revel in the play of signs, the concrete realities of oppression and suffering remain.[151]

Literacy studies scholars have grappled with postmodern ideas in several (related) ways. There has been some thought given to the implications of changes in the nature of work under post-industrial capitalism for literacy generally and functional literacy in particular.[152] Attention has also been paid, more specifically, to the impact of computing technologies on

conceptions and practices of reading and writing. Peters and Lankshear, for example, theorize new possibilities for literate activity in the cyberspatial world of the digital text.[153] Drawing on the work of theorists such as Lanham, Landow, and Bolter,[154] Peters and Lankshear argue that the shift from print to electronic text forms affords greater 'flexibility and interpenetration of textual practices', opening up new possibilities for critical literacy.[155] The digital text has an almost infinite manipulability: it can be transformed into different mediums; documents can be endlessly rearranged and revised; and a whole web of interactive relationships between readers and writers across the globe can be created.[156] While wishing to transcend the enclosures engendered by modernist print forms, Peters and Lankshear also allude to a number of dangers in the postmodern world of cyberspace, including increased state surveillance, the potential for sabotage and system breakdowns, and the possible polarization between 'information rich' and 'information poor' economies.[157]

One critique of the prevailing (overwhelmingly positive) view of computer-based literacies highlights the commercial interests at stake in 'technologized' pedagogies, noting that while computers are often seen as ideal vehicles for the delivery of 'value-free, neutral literacy skills', the potential for manipulative control and standardization in new technologies must be acknowledged.[158] Another argues that postmodernists are opposed to the 'computerization of information'. Particularly objectionable is the idea that computer-generated knowledge has absolute validity: truth, whether produced by a computer or anything else, is always (for postmodernists) linguistically mediated and inseparable from interpretation.[159] Computerization has reified the dualisms of modernist thought, such that signs come to be seen simply as 'quantitative indices that depict events':[160] reading loses its 'expressive character', becoming instead a process of uncovering the truth inherent in the text.[161]

Some scholars confess a certain ambivalence in their attitude toward postmodernism. Kellner, for example, is critical of the 'pretensions and inflated bombast' of much postmodern theory, yet values the breaking down of barriers between high and low culture: this affront to tradition permits an expanded range of cultural 'texts' (e.g. cigarette advertisements as well as classic works of literature) to be seriously engaged and deconstructed.[162] Willinsky, likewise, stresses the importance of remaining 'selective, strategic, political, [and] committed'; it is in the critical, democratic, pedagogic, playfully utopian elements of postmodernism, he argues, that abundant potential exists for understanding how different forms of the written word dominate a culture.[163] Others are sympathetic to the postmodern critique of essentialism, particularly as this applies to models of reading, yet see a continuing strategic purpose in adopting progressive pedagogical principles as a means for resisting dominant ideologies and practices.[164]

Perhaps the most detailed effort to theorize literacy afresh in light of postmodern insights is to be found in the literature(s) on critical literacy.[165] Following criticism of appeals to universal principles of oppression and attacks on the unquestioning espousal of dialogue as an educational ideal,[166] radical educators have been forced to rethink many assumptions previously held dear. A closer examination of the micropolitics of the classroom has ensued. The (often contradictory) roles assumed by teachers in educative situations now come under more intense scrutiny, and multiple layers of oppression are frequently identified. As previously unspoken inequalities between different groups become more apparent, faith in dialogue as a means through which teachers and students might meaningfully learn from one another can no longer be taken for granted. The goal of transforming oppressive structures, practices and attitudes is not in question, but the dangers of silencing some by attempting to speak for all have been observed with acuity.[167]

For those interested in critical literacy, a prime goal has been to consider the liberating possibilities in forms of reading and writing built upon the principle of 'difference'. Giving 'voice' to students from disparate cultures and classes through recognizing diverse forms of written expression and multiple reader positions in interpreting texts becomes important.[168] Students are encouraged to bring their personal experiences to bear on (written and oral) discussions of exploitation, resistance and struggle. A number of theorists are quick to stress that this should not lapse into an 'anything goes' situation: as with books, experiences should be treated critically as well as respectfully.[169] The postmodern emphasis on the local and the particular is also viewed with caution by some: such an approach should not foreclose the possibility of points of unity and avenues for solidarity being identified.[170] While postmodern literacy educators wish to avoid speaking for or as others, they can nevertheless work *with* various groups in seeking a deeper understanding of how personal histories, positionings and experiences relate to wider patterns of domination and inequality.[171] Many advocates of critical literacy pay homage to postmodernist thinkers for dismantling crude binarisms and tyrannical universals, yet also wish to maintain the emancipatory impulse of radical modernist thought.[172]

Literacy Studies: Pivotal Ideas

While the enormity of the literature prohibits coverage of all themes explored in literacy studies scholarship, the preceding review should suffice to underscore several key points.

(i) The worth of literacy cannot be taken for granted: reading and writing *can* have great value for individuals and groups, but this does not mean that *all* literacy practices are worthwhile. This notion, which will be crucial to the argument in the chapters that follow, runs against the grain of conventional wisdom. In First World countries especially, it is

customarily assumed that the acquisition of reading and writing abilities is highly desirable. Literacy has a pay-off, it is believed, for both the individual and society. Literate folk are presumed to have greater chances for career mobility than those who are illiterate. Money is invested in literacy programmes in the hope that this will ensure higher local, regional or national economic returns. In addition, schools, universities and other educational institutions accent the value of literacy for opening up new avenues for aesthetic appreciation and literary enjoyment. Historical and sociological research suggests, however, that there are good grounds for judging certain forms of literacy as harmful. The discernment of 'harm' or 'benefit' in given cases requires a developed ethical position - obviously, that which is desirable under one set of ethical principles may be wholly undesirable under another. The significance of ethical questions for literacy studies will be considered below (and taken up in depth in later chapters). All that needs to be noted for the moment is that while certain practices of reading and writing have either been roundly condemned or unanimously applauded by theorists of differing political persuasions, other forms of literacy have been the subject of much debate.

The enforcement of arduous exercises in the rote learning of reading material (e.g. religious doctrines) in an environment where questions are actively discouraged and acceptance of an enforced ideological position is mandatory is unlikely to please either liberals or radicals.[173] The former might see such practices as impediments to rational autonomy and detest the obvious constraints to free choice over learning content and methods. Radicals would almost certainly take the view that activities of this kind serve to reinforce existing social inequalities by keeping learners 'in their place' and positively restricting opportunities for resistance. Even those of a conservative disposition might complain about the narrowness of such an approach and push for the reading of a range of canonical literary texts. On a broader theme, modernists and postmodernists alike might object to the confinement of reading and

writing to an elite few (be they among priestly, scribal, or leisured classes), and praise the flowering of literate activity among wider groups of people. Modernist theorists of various stripes wish to see access to literacy enhanced as a step toward a more egalitarian social order; postmodernists value the pluralism of different 'voices' sharing in multiple forms of literary engagement.

Most contemporary literacy policies and practices attract divergent evaluative comment. The Adult Performance Level study in the United States provides a good example of how disparate conceptions of worthwhile social goals come into play in assessing a given form of literacy.[174] For the authors of the report, the specification of a range of concrete objectives which enable adults to function as active citizens in a modern capitalist society constitutes a desirable end. Adults are to become literate through, for instance, learning about consumer economics, occupational knowledge, government, and the law. Within each of these content domains, particular skills are identified: thus, understanding tax and credit systems is an objective in consumer economics, while for occupational knowledge preparing job applications and becoming conversant with standards of behaviour for various types of employment are important skills.[175]

Such objectives would doubtless be seen by many as unquestionably valuable. As many adult literacy educators attest, students seeking assistance with reading and writing often stipulate similar aims to those identified by the APL authors in articulating their reasons for wishing to become literate. Attaining a drivers licence, learning how to write cheques or shopping lists, gaining the ability to read labels and signs, and being able to complete job application forms are all common goals. Many people in Western societies have lives which revolve around work, travel, and the consumption of goods and services. Promoting the competencies specified in the APL programme, it might be argued, opens up all manner of

choices which might otherwise be closed to adults. To this extent the APL approach can be seen as worthwhile.

Lankshear has argued, however, that the APL programme is likely to be *dysfunctional* for the adults who participate in it. In encouraging illiterates to learn skills associated with the consumption of commodities without simultaneously promoting critical reflection upon the social system within which this process takes place, the APL programme further inducts those who are already exploited or marginalized under the capitalist mode of production into the very practices, structures and relations which oppress them. Participants are encouraged to develop just enough skills to survive, to 'get by' in the world as it is. Lankshear's alternative model of 'functional literacy' is based on the Freirean notion of humanization: literacy becomes functional to the extent that it enables adults to engage in reflective, critical, dialogical action directed toward overcoming oppression.[176]

Underpinning these two perspectives are quite distinct ethical assumptions. Those who value competition for scarce economic resources, career and social mobility, and the accumulation of wealth are likely to support the APL authors. Those who advocate the redistribution of unequally divided wealth, an environment of dialogue and cooperation rather than unrestrained competition, and the development of a critical orientation toward the world are bound to be more sympathetic to Lankshear's position. While the ethics of the former reinforce capitalist ideals, the latter are compatible with democratic socialism. Of course, divisions between discordant ethical stances seldom fall into such neat ideological compartments. Moreover, in some cases theorists face a debilitating contradiction between the theoretical perspective which guides their understanding of literacy and their practical ethical principles.[177] But, crucially, it is precisely because the supporting ethical principles in judgements about the value of given reading and writing practices *matter* that such tensions

arise. It is in debating the complexities of political assumptions underlying specific forms of literacy that the ethical dimension to reading and writing is revealed.

(ii) The weight of opinion seems to favour the view that literacy is conditioned by the social, cultural and political circumstances within which reading and writing are acquired and practised. For an increasing number of theorists, this means that literacy does not have a fixed, autonomous 'nature'; rather, different *literacies* are forged within specific settings. This idea stems, in part, from a recognition of the myriad forms reading and writing have taken in the past: the very meaning of literacy for the literati in ancient China, it might be supposed, differs markedly from the literacy promoted by the Chartists hundreds of years later. Similarly, disparities between the reading and writing practices of the classical Greeks and those of Hispanic immigrant women learning English in the 1980s do not simply reflect discrete 'uses' of the same technology; they represent quite distinct forms of social practice, governed by very different conceptions of what it means to read and write.

(iii) Nevertheless, there is a considerable support for the notion that literacy has at least the *potential* (under certain conditions) to assist in the development of logical, critical, rational, philosophical thought. Many defenders of this thesis are prepared to acknowledge that literacy fosters these qualities of mind to varying degrees, depending on the individual talents and dispositions of learners and the social settings within which reading and writing abilities are acquired. They also wish to stress, however, that there are certain fundamental differences between oral language and written communication, and that these have profound implications for education. As far as other 'consequences' of literacy are concerned, the literature is ambivalent: there is some evidence to suggest a correlation between literacy and economic growth, but a causal link has not been conclusively established; literacy can assist in individual social mobility, but it can do so only in so far as social conditions permit.

(iv) Access to literacy has never been equal across all social groups. This was most overt in earlier historical periods, but the problem remains in contemporary times. The existence of large numbers of adult illiterates in print-dominated societies is part of the evidence here; but sociologists and others have also argued that different groups are afforded unequal opportunities to practise certain *types* of literacy (e.g. critical literacy as opposed to passive literacy). A primary objective for some literacy theorists, then, has been to champion forms of reading and writing which encourage learners to question and transform dominant ideologies and unjust social relations. On this view, reading and writing become overtly political activities, with proponents of this approach emphasizing that literacy cannot be neutral. Appeals to supposedly apolitical methods of literacy instruction, it is argued, invariably mask the real interests they serve; often, such claims are a thinly veiled disguise under which lies support for existing relations of oppression. However, literacy on its own can only do so much. Indeed, many now consider that there is no such thing as 'literacy on its own': reading and writing are always intimately intermeshed with other dimensions of social practice. Literacy can be an important *part* of wider social change, many want to claim, but it cannot in and of itself bring that change about.

(v) Conceptions and practices of literacy have changed over time, never more so than in the past two decades. This is a reflection, in part, of the dramatic reorganization of social life under late twentieth century capitalism. Computers have entered homes and workplaces, bringing a new language with them, together with a fresh set of reading and writing practices. Texts are now conveyed and constructed through images rather than printed inscriptions, and information is stored on disks instead of paper. Theorists such as Goody, Ong and Havelock have considered the changes in knowledge accumulation brought about by the introduction of writing; others have examined the impact of printing on the diffusion of written materials across Europe and other territories. Computers broaden the scope of

communication yet again: now a message written at a terminal on one side of the world can be read virtually instantaneously on the other side of the world. Information has become a global commodity, and 'literacy' is increasingly being defined not just as competency with print but as the ability to operate, understand and communicate with computers. The momentous impact of postmodern currents of thought in several academic fields has also contributed to changes in conceptions of literacy. 'Texts', 'reading', and 'writing' - all key notions in understanding literacy - have acquired novel meanings within post-structuralist and postmodernist thinking. In tandem with the development of new media forms particularly television - references to the 'reading' of visual 'texts' now abound in the literature.

With every demonstrable or perceived change in conceptions and practices of literate communication, there have been those who have resisted the new developments. Plato felt compelled to reassert the virtues of speech over writing; those who had control over the transcribing and circulation of sacred texts to an elite few worried about the unfettered spread of literacy among the masses with the advent of printing; now, conservatives complain about the decline in intellectual standards engendered by television and other new popular media forms. As one defender of a traditional liberal education based upon the reading of 'Great Books' put it: 'The latest item is computer literacy, the full cheapness of which is evident only to those who think a bit about what literacy might mean. It would make some sense to promote literacy literacy, inasmuch as most high school graduates nowadays have difficulty reading and writing'.[178] History has demonstrated, however, that innovations in communication - and the attendant transmutation of ideas about reading, writing and literacy they generate have persisted and eventually gained widespread acceptance despite criticism and active opposition.

Literacy, Conceptual Clarification and the Primacy of Ethics

The sweep of the preceding review has been necessarily broad: literacy is a multifaceted subject, to which scholars from a wide range of disciplines have contributed. Given its complexity, any attempt at understanding literacy in depth demands a certain breadth of perspective. In its current stage of development, the field of literacy studies is genuinely eclectic. While sharp disciplinary divisions persist (as exemplified in both departments and professional journals) in fields such as educational studies, there are at the moment no fully developed, largely autonomous, literatures on 'the philosophy of literacy' or 'the sociology of literacy' Historical scholarship on literacy has a long-established tradition (by comparison with work from other perspectives), yet the most productive literacy historians draw extensively on concepts from other areas of inquiry - in particular, sociology, philosophy, literary theory, and education - in their major studies.[179]

The field of literacy studies, then, embraces a rich, diverse and rapidly expanding literature. Many of the problems noted with respect to the literature on adult literacy - the relative neglect of structural questions, the predominantly uncritical acceptance of the value of literacy, and the lack of in-depth theoretical analysis generally - have been addressed in this body of work. This does not mean, of course, that the literature is free of weaknesses. Two areas in particular stand out as worthy of further investigation. First, there is scope for additional conceptual work on 'literacy' and related concepts such as 'illiteracy' and 'functional literacy'. Second, ethical questions pertaining to literacy merit greater consideration.

(i) It is a modernist truism that informed discussion of a given subject demands precision in the defining of concepts and terms central to that subject. Before definitive comment can be

made on literacy policies and practices, therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that careful attention ought to be paid to the notion of 'literacy' itself. To a certain extent, literacy studies scholars appear to have taken this assumption on board. Hundreds of definitions of literacy have been advanced in the past fifty years.[180] There has been much debate over more specific constructs such as 'functional literacy'.[181] The 'nature' of literacy has been a matter for some dispute, particularly in the past decade.[182] Lankshear and Lawler, following Street, provide a powerful critique of essentialist approaches to understanding 'literacy',[183] and several formidable challenges to the traditional rendering of 'reading' as a unitary process have also been mounted.[184] There is space, however, for additional theoretical work.

First, the development of a framework for distinguishing between different *types* of definition might prove helpful in categorizing the myriad constructs of 'literacy' from the past half-century. With literally hundreds of definitions available - in policy documents, academic articles, programme reports, adult literacy newsletters, and so on - there is merit in finding some way of comparing one definition with another. This is important for at least two reasons. First, for anyone seeking to understand what literacy means or might mean, making sense of the plethora of different definitions available is likely to prove a daunting, if not overwhelming, task. A means for sorting or classifying the multiplicity of constructs seems imperative. Second, once a system for delineating one type of definition from another is in place, some useful distinctions can be made at not only a conceptual but, more importantly, a substantive level as well. For definitions obviously do not materialize in a contextless vacuum: they are developed for particular purposes, under given social and historical circumstances, for this or that audience or group of people, and serve specific ends and interests. Without a framework for delineating between different kinds or types of definition or construct, it is difficult to see how these issues might be meaningfully addressed.

Productive links might also be forged between critiques of essentialism which focus on 'reading' and those which deal with the broader notion of 'literacy'. Theorists such as Lankshear and Lawler obviously share concerns related to those addressed by people like McHoul and others working in the sociology of reading pedagogy. Lankshear and Lawler reject a unitarist, technologized conception of 'literacy'; McHoul deconstructs psychological models which depict 'reading' as a uniform mental process, and advances a view of *readings* as social practices.[185] Given the different foci in the two bodies of work, there is room for further exploration of the interconnections between 'reading', 'writing' and 'literacy'. 'Literacy' is normally understood to imply abilities in, or practices involving, *both* reading and writing: this needs to be taken into account in adopting insights from work in the sociology of *reading* pedagogy.

Additional conceptual work is needed in teasing out the assumptions behind, and ramifications of, competing views on the 'nature' of literacy, including those which contest the notion that literacy *has* a nature. Little analytical consideration has been given, for instance, to the question of what the terms 'literate' and 'illiterate' might mean under Lankshear and Lawler's view of literacy as 'the actual social practices and conceptions of reading and writing'.[186] Lankshear and Lawler's position can be contrasted with the conventional definition of literacy as 'the *ability* to read and write'. These may not exhaust the range of possibilities, though, for literacy can also be conceived as a *mode of being*. The different perspectives on what kind of phenomenon literacy is (or literacies are) have distinct implications for policy and practice. Clearly there is not space in a single study, let alone in one section of a single chapter, to theorize the ramifications of each view for every context (school classrooms, adult literacy programmes, universities, etc.); drawing some conceptual distinctions between the various positions, however, is a necessary first step.

The proliferation of references to innumerable new literacies (e.g. 'computer literacy', 'media literacy', 'green literacy', etc.) is evidence that pluralist conceptions of literacy are widespread.[187] As these constructs expand in number and scope, the connections between 'literacy' and traditional notions of reading and writing grow increasingly tenuous. While some may see this as a threat to established educational norms,[188] others are likely to embrace the new concepts precisely *because* they challenge prevailing orthodoxies on literacy. The reasons for describing given abilities, processes, or practices as particular modes of 'literacy' are not, however, always readily apparent. An important task for literacy studies scholars is to consider what limits (if any) might legitimately be imposed on the use of the term 'literacy' The justifications for limiting the domain of 'literacy' might be epistemological, ethical, political, educational, and so on. Similarly, if there are no restraints on the use of the term, the implications of this for rethinking conventional views of literacy need to be thought through.

Finally, literacy studies scholars have a continuing role to play in critically analysing popular statements by politicians, policy makers, newspaper editors, and others about the 'consequences' and 'value' of literacy. This theme has been debated at length in the literature already, but aspects of the debate warrant ongoing reflection in light of the changing face of reading, writing and literacy in postmodern times. For example, it has sometimes been claimed in recent times that computers usher in a whole range of new cognitive, social and economic outcomes. Conceptual work might usefully be undertaken in assessing assumptions about causality in such assertions, and in investigating the characteristics of reading and writing in the electronic age. Extending existing work in this area, attention could be paid to some of the positive *and* negative forms literacy might take in a computerized world. While this issue will not be investigated in depth below, it is hoped that the chapters which follow establish the principle that all assertions about the value of

literacy need to be qualified. We always need to ask: Valuable in what sense? For whom? Under what social circumstances or discursive conditions?

(ii) Literacy has conventionally been defined - in unitary terms - as 'the ability to read and write'. Recent scholarship, as has been noted, calls this view into question, positing instead a notion of *literacies* as social practices and conceptions of reading and writing. From either starting point, the case for addressing ethical issues is compelling. With respect to the first perspective, if one is literate then the potential exists for the abilities one possesses to be used in certain ways: the 'skills' of reading and writing, it might be said, can be employed toward varying ends, some beneficial, others harmful. From the second point of view, literacy can take many *forms*, some of which can be seen as more liberating, humanizing, or otherwise desirable, than others.

In deliberating over how to 'use' literacy (the first view), or what 'forms' of literacy to promote (the second view), certain assumptions about human beings and the world must inevitably be in place. Teachers, policy-makers, politicians, university lecturers, and adult literacy workers, whether they purposefully ponder principles of ethics or not, cannot avoid privileging some modes of being and acting over others. Decisions must be made about the content of reading materials, the number of texts to read or recommended, and the style of pedagogy to be employed (e.g. whether it is to be dialogical or monological). Criticism of texts can be encouraged or discouraged. Wide reading of works from a variety of authors, or an exclusive focus on one book, can be prescribed. Links can be made between what is being read and personal, local, national, or international concerns. People might be persuaded to write half-page shopping lists or thirty-page critiques of government policies. Whether making a decision by oneself, for others, or with others, considering what, how and why to read or write necessarily entails asking 'why do this rather than that?'. In more

recognizably ethical terms, the question becomes: What *ought* to be done? Of course, this does not mean that all adults who deal with the written word ask this question explicitly; the point is that a certain ethical stance has *already* been taken once any policy or practice involving reading and writing has been implemented.

In the burgeoning literature on literacy studies, educationists, historians and sociologists have demonstrated that reading and writing can be practised in a multitude of different ways. On the one hand, theorists have talked about the reinforcement of existing social inequalities, the withholding of access to knowledge and information, the domination of banking methods of teaching, and the systematic impeding of criticism. At the other extreme, reference has been made to the positive enhancement of critical reflection, the opening up of aesthetic experiences, the development of literary imagination, and the transformation of oppressive political structures. Ethical concerns are obviously of the utmost importance in such themes. Yet there has been a reluctance to *fully* explore the relationship between literacy and ethics. Theorists have also barely scratched the surface in considering ontological and metaphysical questions as these relate to literacy. An interest in such questions is *insinuated* in many studies, but not directly or thoroughly developed as an integral part of a wider theory of literacy.

The extent to which ethical questions have been addressed by organizers and instructors in adult literacy programmes is difficult to gauge. It seems likely that there has been a good deal of debate and soul-searching amongst adult literacy educators about problems which are at least *implicitly* ethical in nature. But the fact that policy statements and adult literacy newsletters do not offer much evidence of extended, explicit attention to ethical questions suggests that other matters pertaining to adult literacy have been seen as worthy of more urgent consideration. The significant expenditure of time and energy by voluntary adult

literacy tutors and programme organizers in the face of often minimal government (or other official) support is testimony to the perceived importance and value of literacy. This form of commitment implies at least a tacit acceptance of certain ethical principles, or an underlying conception of some form of human ideal. There is merit, however, in deliberately reflecting upon these guiding principles, for, as the review of the literature in this chapter has demonstrated, the stakes are high in becoming and being literate: throughout history reading and writing have (repeatedly) assumed *both* oppressive and liberating forms.

Conceivably, an ethical theory might serve as a guide in formulating policy documents on literacy issues, or in making day-to-day decisions about what, how and why to read and write. But if the dangers of lapsing into a purely speculative form of philosophizing are to be avoided, consideration needs to be given to the political context within which reading and writing take place. An understanding of the disparate forms reading and writing have taken in the past is useful in situating current ideals against the background of previous struggles and practices. Equally valuable is knowledge gained from active participation in adult literacy programmes. Of course, few people enjoy opportunities for engaging in both detailed scholarly investigation and extensive coordination or tutoring work. Under optimal circumstances, however, exploring the relationship between literacy and ethics demands a synthesis of theory and practice. The objective of *addressing* ethical questions, however, remains paramount in both theoretical and practical literacy work.

This is why the question 'literacy as what?' provides an indispensable starting-point for any endeavour involving reading and writing.[189] This question might conceivably be asked at every level of the education system (both formal and informal). From the selection of texts in teaching school children to the adoption of one style of pedagogy over another in assisting adults with reading and writing, the pivotal issues remain the same: in every instance

teachers and instructors are required to make decisions about which forms of literacy matter most - given the particular circumstances in which they find themselves - and act in accordance with these decisions. Of course their ability to institute forms of literacy pedagogy which are in keeping with whatever educational and human ideal they have in mind (however loosely defined this may be) is often constrained by influences beyond their control. A classic case in point is the school teacher, bound to a considerable degree by government-imposed syllabi, and given minimal latitude for testing unconventional reading and writing programmes. But adult literacy workers, too, must confront the enormous weight of political bureaucracy, frequently having to lobby vigorously to even have the existence of widespread illiteracy recognized and acknowledged. Inevitably, ideals must be played off against political (and other) impediments to effective action. Nonetheless, decisions about how to structure reading and writing programmes still need to be made. The process regularly becomes one of weighing up what one would *like* to do with appraisals of what (realistically) *can* be done. The question 'literacy as what?' gives literacy educators the scope both to contemplate questions about how reading and writing ought to be practised, and to interrogate and rework their ideals in light of observations of the limits to what is *possible* as far as literacy pedagogy is concerned in given social contexts.

Finally, any theory of literacy and ethics must, if it is to be complete, encompass more than ideas and arguments about reading, writing and the (ideal) individual; human beings live in a *social* world, and literacy is, at the end of the day, a social phenomenon. No one can learn to read and write without some connection with others, however indirect this may be. Ideally, an ethical theory in a work on literacy would take into account all of the myriad influences - social, historical, personal, parental, cultural, religious, political, etc. - which shape human life. But this is clearly asking too much of any one theorist or single piece of work! Ultimately, however, questions about what is ethically desirable and undesirable

cannot be adequately addressed without reference to humans as social beings. This suggests that one of the tasks for literacy theorists might be to contemplate the relationship between literacy and particular forms of social organization. Some research has already been conducted toward this end, though there is scope for additional work.[190] Against the background of world-wide discussions of literacy policies and programmes in recent years (e.g. in 1990, as International Literacy Year), this line of inquiry might be extended even further to include consideration of the forms of reading and writing appropriate for the emerging global economy. But such lofty realms are beyond the scope of this thesis and must for present purposes be put aside.

There are, of course, many other potentially productive avenues for theoretical investigation additional to those articulated in the preceding paragraphs. The above discussion should, however, give some indication of the significance of ethical questions for literacy in theory and practice. Paulo Freire's work is especially valuable in providing of a model of how a coherent ethical theory (supported by a developed metaphysic, ontology and epistemology) might both reflect and guide the practice of adult literacy education. Before turning to Freire, a concise sketch of debates over political correctness, Great Books, and core curricula in higher education will be essayed.

The University in Turmoil

If the late 1980s and early 1990s have been boom years for literacy, they have also witnessed a heightened interest among the public, and a furious clashing of ideas among academics, over higher education.[191] Debate over the nature of university education has been most intensely and visibly waged in the United States, though similar issues have also been discussed elsewhere in the Western world.[192] A number of high-profile critiques of university

life set (and documented) the agenda for the heated exchange of views in the United States. Riding a wave of popular conservatism, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* was by far the most widely influential of these texts, ending up not only on academic bookshelves but on top of national bestsellers lists.[193] Bloom's assault on cultural relativism in the academy was followed by other conservative works lamenting the encroachment of politics into university curricula and administrative policies.[194] The neglect of teaching in the face of an excessive emphasis upon specialized research has been criticized from both within and outside academia.[195] For some, the concentration on quantifiable indices of faculty performance is a direct outcome of the professionalization of the university. The ability to promote an understanding of and a passion for a subject is not rewarded; the publication of large numbers of articles in refereed journals is.[196] In this environment, the role of intellectuals in disseminating knowledge and engendering debate among the wider public has dissipated as academics chase a diminishing number of jobs and seek advancement in highly competitive professional fields.[197]

Of the various strands in the debate over university education, none have captured greater academic, media and popular attention than the issue of 'political correctness'.[198] Initially a term of approval used by Leninists to denote commitment to the party line, 'political correctness' was later employed with irony by the New Left to signify excessively strict or enthusiastic adherence to party dogma.[199] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, the term acquired a distinctly pejorative connotation. Labelling a particular practice or attitude 'politically correct' became a chief weapon of conservative and Right-leaning critics commenting on policy and classroom changes in universities, schools and workplaces. Other parallel descriptors emerged to describe the transformations: 'liberal McCarthyism' and 'the new fundamentalism' were two of the more memorable.[200] Some of the new developments were also heavily criticized by liberals and Leftists.[201] While the phrase remains highly

ambivalent, 'political correctness' has often been taken to mean the adoption, endorsement or favouring of a person, policy or practice for political reasons rather than on grounds of worth or merit. More specifically, it has served as a referent for favouritism towards particular groups on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.[202]

The battle over political correctness in universities has been fought at several different levels. Affirmative action policies, for instance, have drawn disparate reactions from academics, administrators, the media, and politicians.[203] Such policies have taken several forms, the two most common being the setting of quotas in selecting students to restricted programmes, and provisions for recruiting women and black academics to staff. There has been a further drive on some campuses to increase the number of women and ethnic minorities in positions of responsibility (e.g. as Deans). Similarly, in some cases, regulations require representation by women or blacks on committees, boards, working parties and the like.

Those who support affirmative action policies often adopt the argument that certain groups have been oppressed in the past and that measures such as quotas are necessary to redress imbalances brought about by this oppression.[204] Alternatively, some suggest that it is important for minority students to have role models in teaching institutions to whom they can turn for inspiration and appropriate guidance.[205] Finally, yet others maintain that overt efforts to bring particular groups into higher education (in both the faculty and the student body) are essential if the university is to promote the diversity of opinion it so highly values.[206]

Opponents of affirmative action usually appeal to the supremacy of merit as a criterion in selecting students and staff; any system while privileges race, class or gender over demonstrable abilities and fairly assessed achievements is seen as ethically and educationally

suspect.[207] As further grist to their mill, critics point to the failure of quotas and other forms of affirmative action by noting that students allowed entry under such policies often attain lower standards and drop out at greater rates than their peers.[208] Reference is made at times to the potentially divisive effects of affirmative action on campuses, and to the resentment experienced by those denied access in favour of minority applicants with lower grades.[209] Some critics also detect a patronising quality in attempts to deliberately recruit staff from particular ethnic, class or gender groups; academics appointed under these circumstances will inevitably been seen as inferior to colleagues appointed through conventional procedures.[210] The very process of intentionally seeking (say) a black professor opens up the possibility that colleagues will see the appointee as unable to win a position on normal competitive criteria. The same logic, for other commentators, applies to black students: their degrees become 'tainted' by policies of affirmative action and are viewed by employers with suspicion.[211]

The development of 'speech codes' on some university campuses has also been the subject of much discussion.[212] Originating in some instances as a direct response to racial slurs, crass jibes at women, and hateful taunts at homosexuals, speech codes have been perceived by some students, staff and administrators as a necessary device for curbing destructive and discriminatory attitudes and practices.[213] For others, they are viewed as a totalitarian impediment to the free expression of ideas. Proponents of the codes stress the importance of creating an environment where all students feel comfortable and able to concentrate on their work; their antagonists see a close link between the suppression of speech and the oppressive control of thought.[214] In essence, the question facing universities is whether the values of civility and community which are invoked in supporting speech codes ought to override the right to freedom of expression.[215] How this question is answered depends to a significant extent on who the president and other key administrators at a university happen

to be at any one time; there have certainly not been any fixed principles adopted nationwide on U.S. campuses.[216]

The most controversial site over which the 'culture wars'[217] have been waged has been the university curriculum. Concerns about political correctness in the curriculum have been closely related to debates over multiculturalism,[218] women's studies,[219] and the nature of liberal education.[220] Conservatives claim that the university classroom should be sacred: while students may wish to become involved in campus politics or support particular causes, their teachers ought to scrupulously avoid bringing their own political beliefs to bear on the content of their lessons. On the traditionalist view, the goal of the university is the disinterested (objective) pursuit of truth in an atmosphere free from political bias or interference.[221] In these politically correct times, conservatives charge, radicals have highjacked the curriculum and are now using it to foist their own ideological position and political vision on students.[222] Students are told what to believe, what to say and not say, and how to behave in and out of the university classroom.[223] They learn, in particular, that Western culture has been oppressive to marginalized groups, that it is the system which is at fault when ethnic minority students 'fail', and that white middle-class males are the perpetrators of much that is wrong in the world. Critics object most fervently when these (and other) ideas are forced upon students in an atmosphere where questions and objections are positively discouraged if not actively banned.[224] Objectivity, they believe, has been abandoned; students now operate in an environment of intimidation and indoctrination, where only those views compatible with the teacher's personal politics are accepted and rewarded.[225]

Those being accused of these crimes frequently hit back at their critics by pointing out that education has always been political;[226] conservatives are aghast at recent changes, some

suggest, primarily because they offend against their own politics. The very notion that education is neutral, reformists argue, is itself an interest-serving view which simply reinforces existing (oppressive) social conditions.[227] Traditionalists bemoan the investment of taxpayer funds and endowment monies in left-wing academic appointments and research projects, yet render invisible the powerful forms of financial and political support at the Right's disposal.[228] Despite their professed commitment to truth, there is convincing evidence to suggest that a number of conservative critiques of higher education have given a distorted and incomplete picture of recent events in some North American universities.[229] Defenders of curriculum transformations often openly admit their political opinions in course outlines and lectures, and confess their intention of using the curriculum as a vehicle for the empowerment of dispossessed groups.[230] In doing this, they frequently allude to the enormous body of work which demonstrates that certain groups have been oppressed, and note the persistent failure of mainstream policies to address social inequities.[231] Given that oppression has been shown to operate along class, race and gender lines (among others), these themes are useful organizing categories for classroom discussion. Any restrictions on criticism are there, reformists stress, for the protection of other students, and all changes to previous methods of assigning and assessing work are ultimately directed toward the pursuit of a better social world.[232]

Questions about what books students ought to read (and why) have been central to debates over university curricula.[233] This focus derives from a broader concern over what students graduating from universities ought to know. Traditionally, many institutions of higher education in the United States have offered a compulsory course on 'Western Civilization' or 'Western Culture', the aim of which was typically to introduce all students to the deepest, 'permanent' questions about the nature of human existence. Literary, philosophical and historical texts have often been considered the most suitable sources for accessing and

addressing ideas on these questions. Given the imposing breadth of potential subject matter and the very limited time available, conventional practice has been to select only those works which have attained the status of (Western) classics.[234] Among the philosophical greats, thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche would frequently appear; in literature, Tolstoy, Proust, Dickens, Joyce, and Melville might feature; historical scholarship might perhaps be represented by Tocqueville.[235] Reading a selection of 'Great Books' by these authors, it was felt, would provide students with a taste of the best that has been known, thought and written, giving them a sound educational base from which to launch further studies.[236] Moreover, it was hoped that these courses would play an important role in inspiring students to continue the pursuit of worthwhile knowledge beyond the completion of a degree, such that the intellectual habits cultivated in the university would endure throughout their lives.[237] While the overall structure of various degrees has been a point of contention almost from the beginning of the modern university system in the United States, for decades the value of a broad Western Civilization course for beginning students has been taken for granted by many academics and administrators.[238]

In recent years, there has been increasing criticism of the substance of such courses (and, indeed, of the very notion of a traditional liberal education). 'Great Books' programmes, some critics have argued, typically include few texts by women, Third World writers and authors from ethnic minority groups. Core courses built almost exclusively around the works of dead, white, European males, it is believed, are no longer adequate in contemporary multicultural America.[239] The United States embraces a diverse range of cultures, traditions and values, and this ought to be reflected in the curriculum.[240] Few commentators have called for the total abandonment of core courses;[241] rather, the move has in the main been toward restructuring previous programmes to capture a wider cross-section of perspectives

on the human condition.[242] At Stanford University, for example, in addition to reading texts by Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Rousseau, Marx, Melville and Freud, students now study Frantz Fanon, Rigoberta Menchu, Zora Neale Hurston, Sandra Cisneros and Juan Rulfo.[243]

Somewhat surprisingly, insights from the literacy studies literature have seldom been exploited in discussions of Bloom, political correctness, and the canon. There have been some exceptions to this,[244] but on the whole the two literatures have not come together to the extent that might reasonably have been expected. Comment on Bloom's book and the political correctness battle has been forthcoming from an extremely wide cross-section of individuals and groups, with representation from all positions on the political spectrum.[245] Yet given the centrality of questions about reading and books to these debates, thoroughgoing theorizing about the 'nature', 'consequences', and socio-historical contexts of reading, writing and literacy has been relatively scarce.

Literary theorists and English teachers have had much to say on the changes to core reading requirements. Gerald Graff's call to 'teach the conflicts', for example, has attracted widespread attention.[246] Few, however, have drawn on the extensive body of work on the history of literacy in developing their analyses. Yet, historical scholarship on literacy appears to have much to offer in situating current arguments for and against curricula transformations in the context of previous struggles over the written word.[247] Since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, conservatives have expressed reservations about changes to existing systems of communication and the educational arrangements built upon them. The emergence of popular literature was seen by many in the established elite classes as a threat to educational standards, and the harnessing of political and philosophical tracts by leaders of working class liberation movements was feared by those with an interest in maintaining

an unequal social order.[248] Battles over the literary canon, contrary to popular opinion, are not new; rather, they have a long history (the study of which is enlightening in viewing current controversies over what books students ought to read). There has never been total agreement over which books merit inclusion among those works listed as classics.[249] This issue, along with many others connected to reading, writing and books, has always been a contested one, with groups representing different ideological and structural interests striving for voice and political influence.

Antagonists in the controversy over the canon clearly believe there are certain consequences in students reading given books in particular ways. If participants in the discussion were not of the view that what was read *mattered,* it is unlikely that the discussion would have become so heated; it might perhaps have passed largely unnoticed in the wider public arena and been confined to internal squabbling between academic specialists. On the surface at least, it is consequences associated with becoming or being *literate* in certain ways which are at stake in the battle over the canon. Little recourse has been made, though, to the many studies pertinent to this theme from the debate over the nature of literacy. The precise reasons for favouring some books and modes of reading over others need to be more thoroughly explored; literacy theory has much to offer in this task.

This thesis attempts to address some of these issues, though obviously there is not space to explore all of the potential avenues for inquiry noted here. In analysing aspects of the debates over canons, core curricula and political correctness, I shall adopt a position derived in large measure from Freire. A critical study of Freire's ideas, I hope to show, provides a worthwhile perspective from which to assess the nature and value of particular forms of reading at university level. What, then, might Freire have to offer?

Focusing on Freire

Few educationists this century have exerted wider influence than Paulo Freire. Freire's literacy work is underpinned by a comprehensively developed metaphysic, ontology, and epistemology. Together, these strands provide the basis for the ethic of humanization which lies at the heart of Freire's philosophy.[250] The impact of Freirean insights on oppression and liberation has been particularly marked in the Third World, though Freire's work has enjoyed comparable popularity in many First World countries since the early 1970s.[251] Many adult educators and community workers in the United States, Canada, Britain and Australasia, and almost all scholars in the field of critical pedagogy, are deeply indebted to Freire.[252] References to 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education' are now so commonplace it would be easy to forget that they were first promulgated by Freire more than two decades ago.[253] Freire's theory of literacy[254] is supported by his practical contribution to adult education programmes in Brazil, Chile, Sao Tome and Principe, and Guinea-Bissau, among other places.[255]

Freire's work has attracted a good deal of criticism as well as praise. His pedagogy has been seen by some as culturally invasive, the concept of conscientization which underpinned his Brazilian literacy efforts has been attacked, and his notion of oppression has been criticized for its universalist trappings.[256] There are certain inherent tensions (as well as points of overlap) between the modernist assumptions underlying Freirean theory and postmodern currents in contemporary social thought.[257] Some critics lament the lack of attention to questions of class in Freire's work; others take Freire to task for concentrating on this theme at the expense of problems of gender and ethnicity.[258] Nevertheless, Freire's achievement in integrating philosophical (and especially ethical) concerns with theoretical and practical literacy endeavours remains unique among educationists and literacy theorists. In later

chapters some of the criticisms noted here are outlined and assessed, and omissions in Freire's literacy theory are addressed.

While the merits of concentrating on Freire in this study can only emerge as successive chapters unfold, several points are worthy of immediate note given the weaknesses identified in the preceding review of the literature.

First, Freire's approach to adult literacy avoids (to varying degrees) all of the problems identified in my discussion of adult literacy research earlier in the chapter. Freire does not take the value of literacy for granted. He upholds the worth of particular modes of reading and writing (those which are critical, dialogical and praxical), while criticizing others (e.g., those which are passive, manipulative, mythicizing, superficial, etc.). Literacy, from Freire's point of view, is never neutral. In teaching reading and writing to adults, educators cannot avoid promoting certain values and ideas, whether these are acknowledged or not. In every adult literacy programme, there is an implied (or explicit) theory of human beings and the world. The practices associated with, and the assumptions behind, certain forms of instruction in reading and writing (e.g. those based upon a 'banking' model of education) are, on the Freirean conception of ethics, thoroughly dehumanizing. Even where Freire speaks of humanizing forms of literacy, he is careful not to exaggerate the significance of reading and writing in social change. Oppressive conditions can only be transformed, he believes, through a multifaceted process of human struggle: literacy can play a part in this struggle, but it cannot 'itself' miraculously overcome unemployment, disease, malnutrition, poor housing conditions, a grossly unequal distribution of wealth, exploitation, and so on. Adult literacy programmes thus need to be seen as one dimension of revolutionary social practice: they are not the solution to all structural problems.

Freire's work also provides a critique of, and alternative to, skills-based approaches to adult literacy. To the frustration of some commentators (and the relief of others), Freire steadfastly refuses to furnish pedagogical 'recipes'. While Freire's approach to adult literacy education in Brazil has often been hailed as a distinctive and effective 'method', such praise, as I note in the next chapter, can distort his intentions. The question of 'how to do it', for Freire, never overshadows the question of 'why to do it'. It is not the techniques or skills associated with reading and writing but rather the formation of a particular orientation toward the world which is crucial. Freire does not neglect the 'technical' aspects of literacy acquisition but stresses that becoming literate always implies *more* than simply learning how to decode words, inscribe letters, and construct sentences.

Freire has always seen widespread illiteracy as a symptom, rather than a cause, of deep structural inequities. In Brazil, illiteracy reinforced, but did not on its own define, the 'culture of silence' among severely impoverished peasant communities. As illiterates could not vote, they were denuded of the most overt form of political power: the right to elect or reject those who supposedly represented their interests in office. Reclaiming the 'word', for Freire, was simultaneously a matter of reasserting the right to 'read' and 'write' the world. This is a dialogical process of transforming conditions of oppression. Neither 'literacy' nor 'liberation' are conceived by Freire in individualist terms. Freire's portrayal of both illiteracy and literacy as political phenomena necessarily enmeshed within wider structures and patterns of social (dis)advantage sets him apart from many adult literacy commentators. Still, his analysis of relationships between adult (il)literacy and social inequalities (across class, ethnicity, gender and other lines) is far from exhaustive, and can be usefully complemented by the wider sociological literature in literacy studies.

Theory and practice are dynamically intertwined in Freire's adult literacy work. This assertion has become almost a cliche among Freirean commentators, but it is no less true for that. Freire emphasizes the need for a synthesis of action and reflection in any educational endeavour. While his many publications on themes pertaining to adult literacy are testimony to the seriousness with which he takes the 'reflective' component, he has always insisted that his ideas have their origin in his actions, observations and practices. Reading Marx, for example, was important in the development of Freire's theory, but *'seeing'* Marx (that is, observing the essence of his thought in the concrete structures and practices of everyday life) on the streets of urban Brazil was an equally significant influence.

Freire has become famous for his work with illiterate adults in Third World countries. However, he does not limit his focus to those seeking to become literate for the first time. In later works, he discusses issues relating to reading and studying at tertiary level in some depth, exploring questions about how those who are 'already' literate (in the conventional sense) might become more critical in their stance toward both the word and the world. A number of areas in Freire's discussion of reading in universities remain underdeveloped: some of these are explored below, in the final chapter of the thesis.

Of the two avenues for further inquiry noted in the review of the literacy studies literature, the *prima facie* evidence from Freire's published writings suggests he has less to contribute to an investigation of conceptual problems than to questions of ethics. Freire has never developed a systematic, detailed conceptual analysis of key terms such as 'literacy', 'illiteracy', 'reading', 'writing', and 'texts'. Nor has he explicitly engaged debates over the 'nature', 'consequences' and 'value' of literacy. Arguably, however, there is a rich and original *implicit* view of 'literacy' and 'the literate person' in Freire's theory. In chapter three I comment on aspects of the Freirean view through a distinction between three different types of definition,

and the delineation of three major approaches to the problem of defining literacy. This framework allows Freire's statements on reading and literacy to be interpreted in a new light. Chapter three also comments on debates over the 'nature' and 'consequences' of literacy. When properly contextualized, Freire is closer to Street, Lankshear and Lawler, and Graff than Goody, Ong and Olson in his position on these issues: for Freire, literacy is non-neutral and not necessarily worthwhile. However, given the strong essentialist overtones in the language he uses when speaking about reading and texts, an element of tension between Freire and representatives of the first view remains and must be acknowledged.

Freire is unique among literacy theorists in the attention he pays to ethical, metaphysical, ontological questions. For Freire, ethical considerations are not 'tagged on' to his literacy theory; rather, they are integral to it. It is vital, therefore, that Freire's discussion of wider philosophical matters not be seen as something additional to or separate from his ideas on reading and writing. Freire's approach to literacy education is a manifestation of a particular orientation toward human beings and the world. What literacy '*is*' for Freire is largely a product of his ethical position (which, in turn, builds on his ontology, metaphysic and epistemology). Hence, when Freire discusses the differences between humans and animals, the relationship between objective and subjective spheres of reality, the process of knowing, the nature of oppression and liberation, and so on, he is also, in a sense, discussing literacy. This is made explicit in the form his writing about literacy takes in many places. In *Cultural Action for Freedom*, for example, philosophical ideas are interwoven with Freire's analysis of adult literacy education.[259] In chapter two, I argue that if Freire's ethical theory (or any other aspect of his philosophy) is to be thoroughly understood, his work must be studied holistically, contextually and critically.

Finally, the merits of concentrating on Freire in examining debates over canons and core curricula in universities warrant consideration. That these issues are contentious and of contemporary significance for educational policy might be sufficient justification for addressing them, but why link such an investigation with a study of Freire? There are several reasons. First, Freire's specific comments in later publications on reading in universities provide a distinctive point of view on crucial questions about the place of classic texts in higher education. Second, and more specifically, fruitful comparisons can be drawn between Freire and Bloom with respect to their statements on reading and books. Third, Freire's theory of liberating education offers a helpful framework for discussing pedagogical structures, processes and arrangements in core courses. Fourth, Freire's work in Brazil exemplified a particular approach (in both theoretical and practical terms) to adult literacy, from which much might be learned in confronting issues pertaining to reading and writing among adults in universities. Fifth, from a different angle, a study of the wider literature on Bloom, 'Great Books', and the university curriculum allows underdeveloped areas in Freire's theory of literacy to be reinterpreted and elaborated.

Concluding Comments

This thesis endeavours to better understand one dimension of adult literacy - the question of what, how and why university students ought to read - in light of insights from Paulo Freire, his critics, and other literacy theorists. The present chapter has highlighted several areas for further investigation. There is room for more in-depth theorizing, a less skills-driven approach, and a broadening of scope in adult literacy research; within the literacy studies literature greater attention needs to be paid to conceptual and ethical questions; and stronger links might profitably be forged between scholarship on literacy and discussions of

university curriculum content and processes. The work of Paulo Freire has something to offer each of these areas, some more directly than others.

Freirean theory and practice clearly stand opposed to the technocratic tendencies inherent in much adult literacy work, and Freire is without peer in his grounding of ideas about reading, writing and texts within a thoroughly developed ontological, metaphysical and ethical position. On conceptual matters relating to literacy, however, much of what Freire potentially has to say must be drawn by inference (and theorized in greater depth). Similarly, although Freire comments directly on the importance of a critical approach to reading in universities, he has not specifically addressed debates over canons, core curricula and political correctness. Later chapters attempt to flesh out some of the arguments implied but not explicitly developed by Freire. First, however, key elements in Freire's theory and practice need to be outlined: this will be the task in the next chapter.

Notes

1. International Bureau of Education, *Literacy and Education for Adults*, Paris, Unesco, 1964, p.108.

2. Lankshear, C. with Lawler, M. *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution*, London, Falmer Press, 1987, p.132.

3. Cited Carron, G. and Bordia, A. 'Introduction', in Carron, G. and Bordia, A. (eds.) *Issues in Planning and Implementing National Literacy Programmes*, Paris, Unesco, 1985, p.11.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Yarmol-Franko, K. 'Editorial Introduction', *Convergence*, vol.23, no.1, 1990, p.3.

6. See Carron and Bordia, *loc. cit.* According to Ahmed, the number of adult illiterates had already reached one billion by 1985. See Ahmed, M. 'Integrating Literacy and Post-Literacy Activities and Basic Services', in Carron, G. and Bordia, A. (eds.) *Issues in Planning and Implementing National Literacy Programmes*, Paris, Unesco, 1985, p.377.

7. This issue will be considered in some detail in chapter three. The need for consistent definitions becomes especially apparent when assessing literacy levels comparatively and historically. For a careful early consideration of this problem, see Schofield, R.S. 'The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England', in Goody, J. (ed.) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1968. Harvey Graff has repeatedly stressed the importance of consistency in defining literacy across time, and has identified a range of sources for measuring literacy levels in the past. These include census statistics, wills, deeds, marriage records, criminal records, and application forms. See Graff, H.J. 'Towards a Meaning of Literacy: Literacy and Social Structure in Hamilton, Ontario, 1861', *History of Education Quarterly*, vol.12, no.3, 1972, p.428, 'The Legacies of Literacy', *Journal of Communication*, vol.32, no.1, 1982, pp.13-15, 'The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Society and Culture', in de Castell, S., Luke, A. and Egan, K. (eds.) *Literacy, Society, and Schooling: A Reader*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986a, pp.64-68, 'The History of Literacy: Toward the Third Generation', *Interchange*, vol.17, no.2, 1986b, p.126.

8. Malmquist, E. 'Readings That Made a Difference', *Journal of Reading*, vol.23, no.5, 1980, p.396.

9. See, for example, Clark, J. 'So You're Afraid You'll Fail in Teaching Reading to Adults?', *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, vol.5, no.7, 1982.

10. See Richardson, J. and Harbour, K. 'These are a Few of our Favorite Things', *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, vol.6, no.1, 1982.

11. Compare, Giordano, G. 'Using Mnemonics to Improve Adult Reading', *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, vol.2, no.2, 1978; Sofo, F. 'A Different Approach to Literacy - Graphics', *Australian Journal of Adult Education*, vol.25, no.2, 1985; Taschow, H.G. 'The Usefulness of Five Basic Word Lists in Teaching Adults to Read', *Journal of Reading*, vol.20, no.5, 1977; Heathington, B.S. and Koskinen, P.S. 'Interest Inventory for Adult Beginning Readers', *Journal of Reading*, vol.26, no.3, 1982; Manning, D.T. 'Everyday

Materials to Improve Adults' Reading', *Journal of Reading*, vol.21, no.8, 1978.

12. Scoble, J., Topping, K. and Wigglesworth, C. 'Training Family and Friends as Adult Literacy Tutors', *Journal of Reading*, vol.31, no.5, 1988.

13. France, M.G. and Meeks, J.W. 'Parents Who Can't Read: What the Schools Can Do', *Journal of Reading*, vol.31, no.3, 1987.

14. Compare, Kazemek, F.E. 'An Examination of the Adult Performance Level Project and its Effects Upon Adult Literacy Education in the United States', *Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research*, vol.9, no.2, 1985a; Griffith, W.S. and Cervemo, R.M. 'The Adult Performance Level Program: A Serious and Deliberate Examination', *Adult Education*, vol.27, no.4, 1977; Clarke, R.V. 'APL: Basic Adult Education on Adult Needs', *Adult Leadership*, vol.25, no.8, 1977; Cervemo, R.M. 'Does the Texas Adult Performance Level Test Measure Functional Competence?', *Adult Education*, vol.30, no.5, 1980.

15. Representative examples include Hargreaves, D. *Adult Literacy and Broadcasting*, London, Frances Pinter, 1980, and Rossman, M.H. 'Recruiting Illiterates Via the Media', *Adult Leadership*, vol.23, no.7, 1975.

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rebuild our country'; 'Sandino, guide of the Revolution'. The vast bulk of the volunteers in Nicaragua were young people known as *brigadistas*. A large number of brigadistas travelled to remote rural areas to work with *campesino* (peasant) families. For the five months during which the Nicaraguan crusade was in progress, there was hardly a person in the country who was not involved in the campaign in some way or another. In Cuba, over 100,000 boys and girls volunteered to serve as brigadistas. In Nicaragua adult illiteracy was reduced from 53% to 12% in less than six months. The figures are less precise when it comes to evaluating the Cuban campaign, but it is clear that if Castro's announcement in December 1961 that Cuba was a territory free from (adult) illiteracy was accurate, then the reduction had been one of at least twenty-five percent. For scholarship on the Nicaraguan crusade, see Angus, E. 'The Awakening of a People: Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign', *Two-Thirds*, vol.2, no.3, 1980/81; Cardenal, F. and Miller, V. 'Nicaragua 1980: The Battle of the ABCs', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981; Lankshear, C. 'The Dawn of the People: The Right to Literacy in Nicaragua', Auckland, Keynote Address, Auckland Reading Association Annual Seminar, 1985c, 'Adult Literacy in Nicaragua 1979-1990', in Freebody, P. and Welch, A.R. (eds.) *Knowledge, Culture and Power: International Perspectives on Literacy as Policy and Practice*, London, Falmer, 1993c; Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, chapter five. On the Cuban campaign, compare, Kozol, J. 'A New Look at the Literacy Campaign in Cuba', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.48, no.3, 1978; Morales, A.P. 'The Literacy Campaign in Cuba', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981.

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30. Kozol, J. *Illiterate America*, New York, Plume, 1986, especially chapters one to five.

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37. See Hunter, C. St.J. with Harman, D. *Adult Illiteracy in the United States*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1979, chapter two; Lankshear, C. 'Illiteracy, Improper Literacy and the Development of an Underclass', paper presented at 'Toward Successful Schooling': a conference sponsored by the Royal Commission on Social Policy, Wellington, 1988a.

38. Kozol, *op. cit.*, chapters one, four and five.

39. See, for instance, Kazemek (1985a), *op. cit.*, 'Necessary Changes: Professional Involvement in Adult Literacy Programmes', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.4, 1988; Griffith and Cervero, *op. cit.*

40. For example, Clarke, *op. cit.*

41. See particularly, Boyd and Martin, *op. cit.*

42. As late as 1981, Graff could note that '[t]he revision and reorientation of literacy studies, historical and contemporary, is a recent development. Systematic and critical research is not much more than a decade old'. See Graff, H.J. 'Introduction', in Graff, H.J. (ed.) *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.5. The situation has changed dramatically over the past decade. Computer data bases now throw up *thousands*, not hundreds, of references to literacy. For those seeking to understand the subject today, the difficulty is not one of finding suitable material among a paucity of sources but rather one of deciding what might be left out in reviewing the literature. A revised version of the following literature review is to be published in Roberts, P. 'Literacy Studies: A Review of the Literature, with Signposts for Future Research', forthcoming in *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, vol.30, 1995f.

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45. Reputable sources here include: Gelb, I.J. *A Study of Writing*, London, Phoenix, 1965; Diringer, D. *The Alphabet*, vol.1, 3rd edn., London, Hutchinson, 1968; Doblhofer, E. *Voices in Stone*, London, Paladin, 1973; Havelock, E. *Origins of Western Literacy*, Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976; Goody, *ibid.*, chapter one; Graff, H.J. *The Legacies of Literacy*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987a.

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113. See Graff (1979), *op. cit.*, chapters one and seven.

114. Thomas, K. 'The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England', in Baumann (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.121.

115. See Cressy, D. 'Levels of Illiteracy in England, 1530-1730', *The Historical Journal*, vol.20, no.1, 1977; Spufford, M. 'First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers', *Social History*, vol.4, no.3, 1979, pp.408-409.

116. Hoggart, R. *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1958, especially pp.318-346. The quotation is from page 339.

117. Compare, Freebody, P. 'Social Class and Reading', *Discourse*, vol.12, no.2, 1992; Temple, P. 'Experience of Literacy in Working Class Life', Worpole, K. 'Beyond the Classroom Walls': both in Hoyles, M. (ed.) *The Politics of Literacy*, London, Writers and Readers, 1977; Nelsen, R.W. 'Reading, Writing, and Relationship: Toward Overcoming the Hidden Curriculum of Gender, Ethnicity, and Socio-Economic Class', *Interchange*, vol.12, nos.2-3, 1981; Marshall, J. 'Literacy and People's Power in a Mozambican Factory', *Comparative Education Review*, vol.34, no.1, 1990; Youngman, F. 'Adult Literacy and the Mode of Production', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.4, no.2, 1985; Amin, S. 'Literacy Training and Mass Education for Development', in Bataille, L. (ed.) *A Turning Point for Literacy*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1976; Boudin, K. 'Participatory Literacy Education Behind Bars: AIDS Opens the Door', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.63, no.2, 1993; Simmonds, R. 'Alternative Literacy in South Africa: The Experience of Learn and Teach', *Convergence*, vol.23, no.1, 1990; Torrey, J.W. 'Illiteracy in the Ghetto', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.40, no.2, 1970; Martell, G. 'The Politics of Reading and Writing', in Dale, R., Esland, G. and MacDonald, M. (eds.) *Schooling and Capitalism: A Sociological Reader*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976; Shannon, P. 'Reading Instruction and Social Class', *Language Arts*, vol.62, no.6, 1985; Ballara, M. *Women and Literacy*, London, Zed Books, 1992; Stromquist, N.P. 'Women and Illiteracy: The Interplay of Gender Subordination and Poverty', *Comparative Education Review*, vol.34, no.1, 1990; Ramdas, L. 'Women and Literacy: A Quest for Justice', *Convergence*, vol.23, no.1, 1990; Parajuli, P. and Enslin, E. 'From Learning Literacy to Regenerating Women's Space: A Story of Women's Empowerment in Nepal', *Convergence*, vol.23, no.1, 1990.

118. See Singh, M.G. 'A Counter-Hegemonic Orientation to Literacy in Australia', *Journal of Education*, vol.171, no.2, 1989.

119. See, for instance, Sola, M. and Bennett, A.T. 'The Struggle for Voice: Narrative, Literacy and Consciousness in an East Harlem School', *Journal of Education*, vol.167, no.1, 1985; Nelsen, *op. cit.*

120. Compare, Gilmore, P. '"Gimme Room": School Resistance, Attitude, and Access to Literacy', *Journal of Education*, vol.167, no.1, 1985; Malmstad, B.J., Ginsburg, M.B. and Croft, J.C. 'The Social Construction of Reading Lessons: Resistance and Social Reproduction', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.4, 1983; Simon, R.I. and Willinsky, J. 'Behind a High School Literacy Policy: The Surfacing of a Hidden Curriculum', *Journal of Education*, vol.162, no.1, 1980.

121. Rockhill, K. 'Gender, Language and the Politics of Literacy', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol.8, no.2, 1987, p.165.

122. Kretovics, J.R. 'Critical Literacy: Challenging the Assumptions of Mainstream Educational Theory', *Journal of Education*, vol.167, no.2, 1985; Scott, B.A. 'The Decline of Literacy and Liberal Learning', *Journal of Education*, vol.168, no.1, 1986; Roth, R. 'Schooling, Literacy Acquisition and Cultural Transmission', *Journal of Education*, vol.166, no.3, 1984; Donald, J. 'How Illiteracy Became a Problem (And Literacy Stopped Being One)', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.1, 1983.

123. Levine, *op. cit.*, p.46.

124. Lankshear, C. 'Getting it Right is Hard: Redressing the Politics of Literacy in the 1990s', in Cormack, P. (ed.) *Selected Papers from the 16th ARA National Conference*, ARA South Australia, 1991a.

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126. See Peters, M. 'Individualism and Community: Education and the Politics of Difference', paper presented at the second AARE/NZARE joint conference, Geelong, 1992.

127. Compare, Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. C. Gordon, New York, Pantheon, 1980a, 'The Subject and Power', in Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 'Disciplinary Power and Subjection', in Lukes, S. (ed.) *Power*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986; Peters, M. and Marshall, J. 'Beyond the Philosophy of the Subject: Liberalism, Education and the Critique of Individualism', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol.25, no.1, 1993; Oliver, K. 'Fractal Politics: How to Use "The Subject"', *Praxis International*, vol.11, no.2, 1991; Heller, A. 'Death of the Subject', *Thesis Eleven*, no.25, 1990.

128. Peters, M. and Marshall, J. 'Education and "Empowerment": Postmodernism, Humanism and Critiques of Individualism', paper presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Wellington, 1989, p.3.

129. Lyotard, J-F. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p.xxiii.

130. Docherty, T. 'Postmodernism: An Introduction', in Docherty, T. (ed.) *Postmodernism: A Reader*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, pp.12-14.

131. Benhabib, S. 'Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance', *Praxis International*, vol.11, no.2, 1991.

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133. Among the many influential texts by these authors, compare the following: Derrida, J. *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press,

1976, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982; Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, London, Travistock, 1974, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, 'What is an Author?', in Harari, J.V. (ed.) *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, London, Methuen, 1980b, 'The Subject and Power', in Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982; Barthes, R. 'From Work to Text', in Harari, J.V. (ed.) *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, London, Methuen, 1980, *The Rustle of Language*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1986.

134. Courts, P.L. *Literacy and Empowerment*, New York, Bergin and Garvey, 1991, p.89.

135. An especially seminal text here was Hirsch, E.D. *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967.

136. As Owen points out, Straussian and deconstructionist critics, disparate though their political stances may be, both assume that there is something hidden in the text, awaiting exposure. See Owen, D.B. 'Interpreting Texts: The Structure of Ideas', *Educational Theory*, vol.39, no.3, 1989, p.231.

137. Raval, S. 'Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Literary Theory', in Marshall, D.G. (ed.) *Literature as Philosophy/ Philosophy as Literature*, Iowa, University of Iowa Press, 1987, pp.135-136.

138. On the question of how meaning is constructed from texts, see Rommetveit, R. 'On Literacy and the Myth of Literal Meaning', in Saljo, R. (ed.) *The Written Word: Studies in Literate Thought and Action*, Berlin, Springer-Verlag, 1988; Spivey, N.N. 'Transforming Texts: Constructive Processes in Reading and Writing', *Written Communication*, vol.7, no.2, 1990; Iser, W. 'Interaction Between Text and Reader', in Suleiman, S.R. and Crosman, I. (eds.) *The Reader in the Text*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980.

139. This notion originates with Fish, S. *Is There a Text in this Class?*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1980.

140. See, for example, Giroux, H.A. 'Reading Texts, Literacy, and Textual Authority', *Journal of Education*, vol.172, no.1, 1990.

141. See, for instance, Saljo, R. 'A Text and its Meanings: Observations on How Readers Construe What is Meant from What is Written', in Saljo, R. (ed.) *The Written Word: Studies in Literate Thought and Action*, Berlin, Springer-Verlag, 1988.

142. Cf. McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. 'Critical Literacy and the Postmodern Turn', in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993a, especially pp.386-387, 396-397.

143. Compare Morris, M. 'Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism', in Docherty, T. (ed.) *Postmodernism: A Reader*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993; Wolff, J. 'The Invisible *Flaneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol.2,

no.3, 1985.

144. Compare, for example, Bell, A. 'Meaning and Interpretation After Poststructuralism: Ways to Analyse Television Texts', *Delta*, no.45, 1991; Kellner, D. 'Reading Images Critically: Toward a Postmodern Pedagogy', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.3, 1988; Knight, J., Smith, R. and Sachs, J. 'Deconstructing Hegemony: Multicultural Policy and a Populist Response', in Ball, S. (ed.) *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 1990; Ball, S. 'What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes', *Discourse*, vol.13, no.2, 1993.

145. Gee, J.P. 'Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction', *Journal of Education*, vol.171, no.1, 1989c, pp.6-7.

146. Cf. Scholes, R. *Protocols of Reading*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989, pp.1-2.

147. Cf. *ibid.*, pp.2-6.

148. Agger, B. *The Decline of Discourse*, London, Falmer, 1990, pp.193-194.

149. Cf. Giroux, H.A. 'Postmodernism and the Discourse of Educational Criticism', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.3, 1988b, pp.12-13.

150. Gee, J.P. 'Postmodernisms and Literacies', in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993, p.291.

151. *Ibid.*, pp.291-292. Cf. McLaren, P. and Hammer, R. 'Critical Pedagogy and the Postmodern Challenge: Toward a Critical Postmodernist Pedagogy of Liberation', *Educational Foundations*, vol.3, no.3, 1989, p.33.

152. See, for example, Lankshear (1991), *op. cit.*, pp.209-219.

153. Peters, M. and Lankshear, C. 'Critical Literacy in Cyberspace', paper presented at the annual conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, Auckland, 1994b.

154. Lanham, R.A. *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology and the Arts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993; Landow, G.P. *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1992; Landow, G.P. and Delany, P. *The Digital Word: Text-Based Computing in the Humanities*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993; Bolter, D.J. *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, Hillsdale, Erlbaum, 1991.

155. Peters and Lankshear, *op. cit.*, p.2.

156. See *ibid.*, pp.11-14.

157. *Ibid.*, p.18.

158. Bigum, C. and Green, B. 'Technologizing Literacy: The Dark Side of Dreaming', *Discourse*, vol.12, no.2, 1992. The quotation is from page 10.

159. Murphy, J.W. 'Computerization, Postmodern Epistemology, and Reading in the Postmodern Era', *Educational Theory*, vol.38, no.2, 1988, pp.180-181.

160. *Ibid.*, p.177.

161. *Ibid.*

162. Kellner, *op. cit.*, pp.31-35.

163. Willinsky, J. 'Postmodern Literacy: A Primer', *Interchange*, vol.22, no.4, 1991, pp.57-58.

164. This is the stance taken by Green, B. 'Reading "readingS": Towards a Postmodernist Reading Pedagogy', in Baker and Luke (eds.), *op. cit.* See especially, pp.230-232.

165. For a range of contemporary perspectives on critical literacy and postmodernism, see Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993a. For helpful overviews, see Lankshear and McLaren's 'Introduction', 1993c, in the volume just cited; and Lankshear, C. 'Critical Literacy', occasional paper no.3, Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1994c.

166. Notably, by Ellsworth, E. 'Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.59, no.3, 1989.

167. Cf. Scholle, D. and Denski, S. 'Reading and writing the media: Critical Media Literacy and Postmodernism', in Lankshear and McLaren (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.299.

168. Cf. Brady, J. and Hernandez, A. 'Feminist Literacies: Toward Emancipatory Possibilities of Solidarity', in Lankshear and McLaren (eds.), *op. cit.*

169. McLaren and Lankshear (1993a), *op. cit.*, pp.406-407.

170. See *ibid.*, pp.411-415.

171. Cf. Giroux, H.A. 'Literacy and the Politics of Difference', in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.), *op. cit.*, 1993b, pp.368-369.

172. Cf. McLaren and Lankshear (1993a), *op. cit.*; Berlin, J.A. 'Literacy, Pedagogy, and English Studies: Postmodern Connections', in Lankshear and McLaren (eds.), *op. cit.*

173. On precisely this sort of approach, see Graff's (1979) work on nineteenth century Canada, *op. cit.*

174. Adult Performance Level Project, 'Adult Functional Competency: A Summary', University of Texas, 1975.

175. Cited Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, pp.64-65.

176. See Lankshear, C. 'Ideas of Functional Literacy: Critique and Redefinition of an Educational Goal', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, vol.20, no.1, 1985b, 'Humanizing Functional Literacy: Beyond Utilitarian Necessity', *Educational Theory*, vol.36, no.4, 1986.

177. See, for example, Gee (1993), *op. cit.*, pp.291-293.

178. Bloom, A. *The Closing of the American Mind*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988, p.341.

179. See, for instance, the work of Harvey Graff (1979, 1987a, 1987b), all *op. cit.*

180. Selected examples will be noted and categorized in chapter three.

181. See, for example, Levine, K. 'Functional Literacy: Fond Illusions and False Economies', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.52, no.3, 1982; Lankshear (1985a, 1985b, 1986), all *op. cit.*; Kirsch, I. and Guthrie, J.T. 'The Concept and Measurement of Functional Literacy', *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol.13, no.4, 1977-78; Adiseshiah, M.S. 'Functionalities of Literacy', in Bataille, L. (ed.) *A Turning Point for Literacy*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1976; Walters, K., Daniell, B. and Trachsel, M. 'Formal and Functional Approaches to Literacy', *Language Arts*, vol.64, no.8, 1987; Fisher, D.L. 'Functional Literacy Tests: A Model of Question-Answering and an Analysis of Errors', *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol.16, no.3, 1981.

182. Questions regarding the 'nature' of literacy obviously overlap with issues pertaining to the 'definition' of literacy. The former term is the broader of the two, and includes inquiry into the 'properties', 'characteristics', and 'value' of literacy. In exploring the nature of literacy, the concern is to ask not merely 'What *is* literacy?', or 'How can literacy be defined?', but 'What *kind of phenomenon* is literacy?'.

183. See Street, *op. cit.*, especially chapters one to four; and Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, chapter two.

184. Compare, Baker, C.D. and Luke, A. 'Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy: An Introduction', in Baker, C.D. and Luke, A. (eds.) *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy*, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1991b; McHoul, *op. cit.*; Green, *op. cit.*

185. McHoul, *ibid*. McHoul notes that his analysis of reading may have implications for an alternative perspective on 'literacy' (pp.191-192), but does not mention 'writing' in the same light.

186. Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, p.49.

187. Compare, Ewing, J.B. *et al*. 'Adult Education and Computer Literacy: A New Challenge', *Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research*, vol.10, no.3, 1986; Graham, R.J. 'Media Literacy and Cultural Politics', *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol.39, no.3, 1989; Shor, I. *Culture Wars*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, pp.189-190; Usang, E.N. 'Strategies for Green Literacy', *Convergence*, vol.25, no.2, 1992.

188. See, for example, Allan Bloom's caustic comments on 'computer literacy', *loc. cit.*

189. Compare, earlier discussions built around the question 'literacy *for* what?': Galtung, J. 'Literacy, Education and Schooling - For What?, in Bataille, L. (ed.) *A Turning Point for Literacy*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1976; Hill, C.G.N. 'Literacy for What?', *Delta*, no.23, 1978; Roberts, P. 'Adult Literacy Research: What Does Philosophy Have to Offer?', *Access: Critical Perspectives on Education Policy*, vol.11, no.1, 1992. I now regard this initial phrasing as problematic, for it suggests that literacy is a single 'thing'

which can be 'used' in different ways or put to different ends. We do better, I believe, to talk of the disparate *forms* literacy takes. See my comments on forms of reading and writing in chapter three below. Hoyles broadens the focus somewhat with his overtly political approach to literacy, asking 'literacy for whom? in what way? and for what purpose?'. See Hoyles, M. 'Preface', in Hoyles, M. (ed.) *The Politics of Literacy*, London, Writers and Readers, 1977a, p.7.

190. See, for instance, Goody, J. *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

191. Parts of this section are to be published in Roberts, P. 'Political Correctness, Great Books and the University Curriculum', forthcoming in *Sites: A Journal for Radical Perspectives on Culture*, no.31, 1995d.

192. For comment from scholars outside the United States, see Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. 'Contradictions in the Canon: Nationalism and the Cultural Literacy Debate', *Discourse*, vol.12, no.2, 1992; and Roberts, P. 'Philosophy, Education and Literacy: Some Comments on Bloom', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, vol.28, no.2, 1993b.

193. Bloom, *op. cit.* Interest in Bloom's book has been such that an entire text has been devoted to it: see Stone, R. (ed.) *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, Illinois, Chicago Review Press, 1989.

194. See especially, D'Souza, D. *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, New York, The Free Press, 1991; and Kimball, R. *Tenured Radicals*, New York, Harper Perennial, 1991.

195. Compare, Sykes, C.J. *ProfScam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*, Washington, D.C., Regnery Gateway, 1988; Smith, P. *Killing the Spirit*, New York, Viking, 1990.

196. See Wilshire, B. *The Moral Collapse of the University: Professionalism, Purity, and Alienation*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990; Agger, B. *The Decline of Discourse*, London, Falmer, 1990. A more polemical critique is provided by Paglia, C. 'Academe Has to Recover its Spiritual Roots and Overthrow the Ossified Political Establishment of Invested Self-Interest', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 8 May 1991.

197. Jacoby, R. *The Last Intellectuals*, New York, Basic Books, 1987.

198. A concise overview of the debate is furnished by Aby, S. 'The Political Correctness Debate: An Essay Review', *Discourse*, vol.13, no.2, 1993. Two wide-ranging collections of essays have been published: Berman, P. (ed.) *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, New York, Dell, 1992a; and Aufderheide, P. (ed.) *Beyond P.C.: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, Minnesota, Graywolf Press, 1992.

199. Cf. Perry, R. 'A Short History of the Term *Politically Correct*', in Aufderheide (ed.), *ibid.*, p.72; Berman, P. 'Introduction: The Debate and its Origins', in Berman (ed.), *ibid.*, 1992b, p.5; Whitney, D.C. and Wartella, E. 'Media Coverage of the "Political Correctness" Debate', *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992, pp.85-86.

200. For a discussion of the comparison with fundamentalism, see Berube, M. 'Public Image Limited: Political Correctness and the Media's Big Lie', in Berman (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.134-139. The 'new fundamentalism' tag comes from Taylor, J. 'Are You Politically Correct?', *New York*, 21 January 1991. Others, however, have made similar accusations: Bernays, for example, argues that 'women who demand that novelists toe the P.C. line-of-the-moment are no different from religious fundamentalists'. See Bernays, A. 'I Don't Want to Read a Novel Passed by a Board of Good Taste', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 6 March 1991, p.B3. The 'McCarthyism' label comes from Kramer, H. 'The Prospect Before Us', in Berman (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.320. The term 'left McCarthyism' has also be used (by Robert Hughes, in a *Time* magazine article): see Berube, M. 'Bite Size Theory: Popularizing Academic Criticism', *Social Text*, no.36, 1993, p.86.

201. Berman (1992b), *op. cit.*, p.1. For examples of penetrating criticism from scholars generally sympathetic to progressive university reform, see Epstein, B. 'Political Correctness and Identity Politics', Harvey, M. 'Politically Correct is Politically Suspect', Gitlin, T. 'On the Virtues of a Loose Canon': all in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*; Said, E.W. 'The Politics of Knowledge', in Berman (ed.), *op. cit.*; and Carey, J.W. 'Political Correctness and Cultural Studies', *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992.

202. Cf. Whitney and Wartella, *loc. cit.*

203. For a range of academic opinions, see Adler, F. 'Politics, Intellectuals and the University', Pan, D. 'Ivory Tower and Red Tape: Reply to Adler', Roe, E.M. 'Artificial Negativity and Affirmative Action in Universities', and Piccone, P. 'Artificial Negativity as a Bureaucratic Tool? Reply to Roe': all in *Telos*, no.86, 1990-91; Hacker, A. 'Affirmative Action: The New Look', *New York Review of Books*, 12 October 1989; Bunzel, J.H. 'Minority Faculty Hiring: Problems and Prospects', *The American Scholar*, vol.59, 1990; Glasser, T.L. 'Professionalism and the Derision of Diversity: The Case of the Education of Journalists', *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992.

204. See Piccone, *ibid.*, pp.131-135.

205. See *ibid.*, pp. 135-137.

206. See Pan, *op. cit.*, p.113.

207. Cf. Adler, *op. cit.*, pp.106-108.

208. Cf. *ibid.*, p.107.

209. *Ibid.*, p.108; Piccone, *op. cit.*, p.133.

210. See Roe, *op. cit.*, p.123.

211. Bloom, *op. cit.*, p.96.

212. For clear, concise introductions to this debate, see Hentoff, N. '"Speech Codes" and Free Speech', in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*; and Dennis, E.E. 'Freedom of Expression, the University, and the Media', *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992. For critiques of the discourse on political correctness and freedom of speech, see Burgoon, M. and Bailey, W. 'PC at Last! Thank God Almighty, We are PC at Last!', and Asante,

M.K. 'The Escape into Hyperbole: Communication and Political Correctness': both in *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992.

213. See Dennis, *ibid.*, p.79.

214. Hentoff, *op. cit.*, p.56.

215. This is how the debate was framed by Benno Schmidt, president of Yale University. Cited *ibid.*, p.57.

216. Hentoff, *ibid.*, p.56.

217. This term is taken from Graff, G. *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1992b.

218. Compare, West, C. 'Diverse New World', Gordon, T. and Lubiano, W. 'The Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus', Fernandez, E. 'P.C. Rider', Ehrenreich, B. 'The Challenge for the Left': all in Berman (ed.), *op. cit.*; Winkler, K.J. 'Proponents of "Multicultural" Humanities Research Call for a Critical Look at its Achievements', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 November 1990; Geyer, M. 'Multiculturalism and the Politics of General Education', *Critical Inquiry*, vol.19, no.3, 1993.

219. See the rigorous analyses provided by Andersen, M.L. 'Changing the Curriculum in Higher Education', and Aiken, S.H. *et al.* 'Trying Transformations: Curriculum Integration and the Problem of Resistance': both in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.12, no.2, 1987.

220. For a sampling of views, compare Costner, H. (ed.) *New Perspectives on Liberal Education*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1989; Howard, C.C. *Theories of General Education: A Critical Approach*, London, MacMillan, 1991; Orr, D.W. 'The Liberal Arts, the Campus, and the Biosphere', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.60, no.2, 1990; La Brecque, R. 'Liberal Education in an Unfree World', *Educational Theory*, vol.40, no.4, 1990; Schuster, M.R. and Van Dyne, S.R. (eds.) *Women's Place in the Academy: Transforming the Liberal Arts Curriculum*, New Jersey, Rowman and Allanheld, 1985.

221. See Newfield, C. 'What Was Political Correctness? Race, the Right, and Managerial Democracy in the Humanities', *Critical Inquiry*, vol.19, 1993, pp.314-315.

222. Kimball's (*op. cit.*) attack on humanities professors is perhaps the most well-known example of this hypothesis. See also, D'Souza, *op. cit.*, chapter 6; Kramer, *op. cit.*, pp.316-317; and Will, G.F. 'Radical English', in Berman (ed.), *op. cit*.

223. See Taylor, *op. cit*.

224. See Berman (1992b), *op. cit.*, pp.2-3.

225. See Tierney, W.G. 'Academic Freedom and the Parameters of Knowledge', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.63, no.2, 1993, p.144. Cf. Will, *op. cit.*, pp.260-261.

226. Aby, *op. cit.*, pp.47-48; Gates, H.L. 'Whose Canon Is It, Anyway?', in Berman (ed.), *op. cit.*, 1992a, p.195.

227. Cf. Bartlett, K.T. 'Surplus Visibility', in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.123-124.

228. See Messer-Davidow, E. 'Manufacturing the Attack on Liberalized Higher Education', *Social Text*, no.36, 1993; Weisberg, J. 'NAS - Who Are These Guys, Anyway?', Diamond, S. 'The Funding of the NAS': both in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*

229. Wiener, J. 'What Happened at Harvard', Beers, D. 'What Happened at SUNY', Brodkey, L. and Fowler, S. 'What Happened to English 306', Mowatt, R.V. 'What Revolution at Stanford?', Ehrenreich, R. 'What Campus Radicals?': all in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.* See also, Gagnier, N. and Goodland, M.E. 'Political Extremists, Postmodern Professors, and Other Politically Correct Bedfellows', *Social Text*, no.36, 1993.

230. See, for example, Gordon and Lubiano, *op. cit.*

231. Compare, Aronowitz, S. and Giroux, H.A. 'Schooling, Culture, and Literacy in the Age of Broken Dreams', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988, especially pp.183, 190-191.

232. Compare, Williams, P.J. 'Defending the Gains', Wilkins, R. 'Remembering the Bad Old Days': both in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*

233. Of the numerous relevant references here, the following indicate the breadth of opinions on this topic: Pollit, K. 'Why Do We Read?', Howe, I. 'The Value of the Canon': both in Berman (ed.), *op. cit.*; Gates, *op. cit.*; Said, *op. cit.*; Adler, M.J. 'Multiculturalism, Transculturalism, and the Great Books', in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*; Searle, J. 'The Storm Over the University', *New York Review of Books*, 6 December 1990; Murphy, J.S. 'Some Thoughts About Class, Caste, and the Canon', *Teachers College Record*, vol.93, no.2, 1991; Atlas, J. 'The Battle of the Books', *Dialogue*, no.84, 1989a; Aronowitz and Giroux, *op. cit.*; Adams, H. 'Canons: Literary Criteria/Power Criteria', *Critical Inquiry*, vol.14, no.4, 1988; Connor, W.R. 'Milton as Misogynist, Shakespeare as Elitist, Homer as Pornographer', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 December 1990; McMillen, L. 'Controversial Anthology of American Literature: Ground-Breaking Contribution or a "Travesty"?', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 16 January 1991; Cope and Kalantzis, *op. cit.*; Smith, *op. cit.*, chapter eleven; Kimball, *op. cit.*, especially chapter one; D'Souza, *op. cit.*, particularly chapter three; Banks, J.A. 'The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education', *Educational Researcher*, vol.22, no.5, 1993; Orwin, C. and Forbes, H.D. 'The Openness that Closes: Allan Bloom and the Contemporary University', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991. The question of what students ought to know and to read has also been debated in relation to pre-university education. See, for example, the collection of essays in Finn, C.E., Ravitch, D. and Fancher, R.T. (eds.) *Against Mediocrity: The Humanities in America's High Schools*, New York, Holmes and Meier, 1984.

234. Cf. Howe, *ibid.*, p.169.

235. See Bloom's many references to most of these authors, *op. cit.*; and Bennett, W.J. *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1984, p.11.

236. Cf. Searle, *op. cit.*, p.34.

237. Cf. Bloom, *op. cit.*, p.344-345, 369-370.

238. See Searle, *loc. cit.*

239. Compare, Bennett, P. 'Canons to the Right of Them', in Aufderheide (ed.), *op. cit.*; Rothenberg, P. 'Critics of Attempts to Democratize the Curriculum Are Waging a Campaign to Misrepresent the Work of Responsible Professors', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 April 1991.

240. See, for example, West, C. *op. cit.*

241. On the exceptions, see Pollit, *op. cit.*, p.204.

242. Compare, Gordon and Lubiano, and Murphy: both *op. cit.* Some who defend a more-or-less traditional version of a liberal education concede that certain works by minorities and non-Western authors merit inclusion in core reading lists. See, for instance, Howe, *op. cit.*, p.169; Searle, *op. cit.*, p.42; D'Souza, *op. cit.*, p.254.

243. Junkerman, C. 'Stanford's Philosophy is an Open Book', in Stone, R. (ed.) *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, Illinois, Chicago Review Press, 1989, p.367.

244. See, for example, Aronowitz and Giroux, *op. cit.*; McLaren, P. 'Culture or Canon? Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Literacy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988a; Browne, R.B. 'Popular Culture: Medicine for Illiteracy and Associated Educational Ills', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol.21, no.3, 1987, especially pp.11-15; Lankshear and McLaren (1993c), *op. cit.*; Roberts (1993b), *op. cit.*

245. See the edited collections by Stone, Berman, and Aufderheide, all *op cit.*

246. Graff, G., *op. cit.* Some of Graff's key ideas are succinctly conveyed in Graff, G. 'Colleges are Depriving Students of a Connected View of Scholarship', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 February 1991, and 'Teach the Conflicts', in Gless, D.J. and Smith, B.H. (eds.) *The Politics of Liberal Education*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992a. Support for Graff's position is provided by Berman (1992b), *op. cit.*, p.26. For a more guarded response to Graff's (1992) book, see Ryan, A. 'Invasion of the Mind Snatchers', *New York Review of Books*, 11 February 1993.

247. See Graff, H.J. Review of Bloom, A. *The Closing of the American Mind*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987c, *Society*, vol.25, no.1, 1987, especially p.100, 'Critical Literacy Versus Cultural Literacy - Reading Signs of the Times?', *Interchange*, vol.20, no.1, 1989.

248. See Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, chapter 3.

249. See Gerald Graff's comments in Atlas, J. 'The Battle of the Books', *Dialogue*, no.84, 1989a, p.24. Note also, Howe, *op. cit.*, p.160.

250. The major sources for Freire's metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, and ethical ideas are his earlier books: Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972a, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972b, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, London, Writers and Readers, 1976a. See also the collection of essays in Freire, P. *The Politics of Education*, London, MacMillan, 1985.

251. Compare, the various essays in the following edited collections: Grabowski, S. (ed.) *Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator*, Syracuse, ERIC Clearing House on Adult Education, 1972; Shor, I. (ed.) *Freire for the Classroom*, New Hampshire, Boynton/Cook, 1987b; McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993a; McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994a.

252. On the importance of Freire's work for critical pedagogy, see Weiler, *op. cit.*, p.450. Peter McLaren notes: 'Freire's work has been cited by educators throughout the world and constitutes an important contribution to critical pedagogy not simply because of its theoretical refinement, but because of Freire's success at putting theory into practice'. See McLaren, P. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, New York, Longman, 1989, p.194.

253. The classic reference point here is Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, chapter two.

254. In addition to those references which deal with specific programmes, see Freire's general comments on reading, writing, literacy, and books in the following: Freire, P. 'The Importance of the Act of Reading', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.1, 1983a, (1985), *op. cit*, pp.1-107; Dillon, D. 'Reading the World and Reading the Word: An Interview with Paulo Freire', *Language Arts*, vol.62, no.1, 1985; Freire, P. and Shor, I. *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, London, MacMillan, 1987, pp.10-12, 82-89, 135-137, 147-155, 182-183; Freire, P. and Macedo, D. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, chapters two, three, six and seven; Horton, M. and Freire, P. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations of Education and Social Change*, eds. B. Bell, J. Gaventa and J. Peters, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990, pp.21-37, 76-78.

255. See Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, pp.29-47, (1976a), *op. cit.*, pp.41-84, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, London, Writers and Readers, 1978, 'The People Speak Their Word: Learning to Read and Write in Sao Tome and Principe', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981; Freire and Macedo, *ibid.*, chapters four and five; Freire, P. and Faundez, A. *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1989, pp.101-140; Horton and Freire, *ibid.*, pp.83-95; Brown, C. 'Literacy in 30 Hours: Paulo Freire's Process in Northeast Brazil', *Social Policy*, vol.5, no.2, 1974; Sanders, T.G. 'The Paulo Freire Method: Literacy Training and Conscientization', in La Belle, T.J. (ed.) *Education and Development: Latin America and the Caribbean*, Los Angeles, Latin American Centre, 1972; Llyod, A.S. 'Freire, Conscientization, and Adult Education', *Adult Education*, vol.23, no.1, 1972; Bee, B. 'The Politics of Literacy', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980; Taylor, P.V. *The Texts of Paulo Freire*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993, chapters four and five.

256. Compare, Berger, P. *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change*, New York, Basic Books, 1974, chapter four; Bowers, C.A. 'Linguistic Roots of Cultural Invasion in Paulo Freire's Pedagogy', *Teachers College Record*, vol.84, no.4, 1983; Walker, J. 'The End of Dialogue: Paulo Freire on Politics and Education', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980; Weiler, *op. cit.*

257. See McLaren, P. 'Postmodernity and the Death of Politics: A Brazilian Reprieve', *Educational Theory*, vol.36, no.4, 1986; Weiler, *op. cit.*; McLaren, P. and Silva, T.T. da 'Decentering Pedagogy: Critical Literacy, Resistance and the Politics of Memory',

Giroux, H.A. 'Paulo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism', 1993a, Freire, P. and Macedo, D. 'A Dialogue with Paulo Freire': all in McLaren and Leonard (eds.), *op. cit.*

258. See Freire and Macedo (1993), *op. cit.*, particularly p.172. For a helpful analysis of Freire's ideas on class and revolutionary socialism, see Mackie, R. 'Contributions to the Thought of Paulo Freire', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980c, pp.104-115.

259. See Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*

CHAPTER TWO

FREIRE ON LITERACY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Over the past twenty-five years, the work of Paulo Freire has influenced countless scholars and practitioners across the globe. While Freire initially gained international recognition for his efforts in adult literacy education in Brazil and Chile, since the early 1970s his ideas have found increasing application in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand as well as throughout many parts of the Third World.[1] His writings have been studied not only by educationists and adult literacy coordinators, but also by political activists, development theorists, sociologists, women's studies scholars, counsellors, psychologists, social workers, health professionals, prison rehabilitation workers, linguists, and theologians.[2]

The primary focus in this thesis is on Freire's theoretical and practical approach to literacy. In the present chapter Freire's literacy work is situated against the background of his wider philosophy and pedagogy, while chapters three and four extend, rework, and defend central conceptual and ethical principles in Freire's theory of literacy. This chapter begins with a brief account of Freire's life, before moving to the question of how Freire's ideas ought to be approached by First World educationists. I argue for a contextualized, holistic, anti-reductionist, critical reading of Freire. This preliminary discussion provides a base from which discussion of the metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political dimensions to Freire's thought proceeds. Attention then shifts to key features of Freire's pedagogical theory. The final part of the chapter outlines Freire's approach to adult literacy education in Brazil during the early 1960s, explores pivotal ideas in Freire's subsequent theoretical work on literacy, and summarizes the relationship between literacy and ethics in Freirean theory.

Freire: A Brief Biography

Paulo Freire was born in Recife, a northeastern region of Brazil, in 1921. He came from a middle-class family, but, like many others, suffered a degree of hardship during the years of the Great Depression.[3] His father, who was an officer in the military police, lost his job and the Freire family moved from Recife to Jaboatao.[4] During these years Freire experienced real hunger for the first time, and resolved at an early age to dedicate his life to the struggle against poverty and oppression. Freire's parents, described in one commentary as 'bourgeois and of liberal attitudes',[5] were determined that he should have a good education, and enrolled their son in a private school. Freire experienced some difficulties with his school work (and was even considered mildly 'mentally retarded' by some of his teachers[6]) but made dramatic improvements as more food returned to the family table.[7] When his father died in 1934, Freire gave supplementary lessons in Portuguese to other young people to enable him to complete his secondary education.[8] After leaving school, he attended the University of Recife, taking courses in law, philosophy and linguistics.[9]

Freire married Elza Oliveira (whose influence and encouragement Freire has frequently acknowledged[10]) while in his early twenties, and moved from law to the field of education. He and Elza became involved with the Catholic Action Movement, but quickly rejected the social conservatism characteristic of the established church at the time. Freire became closely associated with the Basic Church Communities, a movement which had 'grown to accept the need for a clearer identification with the poor, and for a theology of liberation relevant to ordinary people'.[11] Through this association, he received an invitation from the Social Service for Industry to coordinate a popular education programme for working class adults. More than once he has noted that his contact with labourers, peasants and fisherman at this time was seminal in the development of his ideas.[12] Freire's emerging ideas on education and

adult literacy were presented in his doctoral thesis in 1959, and shortly after he accepted a chair in the history and philosophy of education at the University of Recife.[13]

Following the success of a pilot adult literacy project in Recife in 1961, Freire was appointed director of the Cultural Extension Service at the University of Recife.[14] In this capacity he developed the 'culture circles' which were later to become famous. The prominence of this work with illiterates in the northeast was such that in 1963 Freire became director of Brazil's National Literacy Programme. His goal from the start was that literacy should enable adult illiterates to learn how to read and write while simultaneously promoting a critical understanding of oppressive social conditions. The programme was highly effective in enabling adults to attain a basic competence with print in a very short period of time.[15] But with the overthrow of the Goulart government by the military in 1964 the campaign was brought to an abrupt halt. Freire's approach to adult literacy education was seen as subversive, and he was jailed (twice) for a total of 75 days.[16]

After a short stay in Bolivia, Freire sought exile in Chile, where he was to remain for five years. He secured a post at the University of Santiago, and became involved in educating extension workers for the Chilean Agrarian Reform Corporation.[17] During his time in Chile he completed *Education: The Practice of Freedom.*[18] In 1969, after receiving invitations from both Harvard University in the United States and the World Council of Churches in Switzerland, Freire decided to take up residence at the former for some months before moving to Geneva in February of the following year.[19] While at Harvard, he worked on the two essays which later became *Cultural Action for Freedom,*[20] and in 1970 the first English language version of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was released.[21] In his decade with the World Council of Churches, Freire was able to travel widely, visiting Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Australasia.[22] Throughout the 1970s, he

continued to contribute to adult education programmes in a number of Third World countries. His extensive involvement in adult literacy work in Guinea-Bissau in the mid-1970s provided the basis for *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, published in 1978.[23] Freire also played a substantial role in literacy activities in Sao Tome and Principe.[24] Additionally, he served as a consultant for the Nicaraguan literacy crusade of 1980 and for adult education initiatives in Grenada.

During the 1980s Freire was once again based in Brazil, teaching philosophy of education at two universities in Sao Paulo.[25] Freire has made periodic visits to the United States and other First World countries over the past fifteen years, conducting seminars, lectures and interviews. After a long period with no new publications of note,[26] Freire has recently become more productive in his writing than ever before, collaborating in a series of co-authored, 'talking' books with Ira Shor, Donaldo Macedo, Antonio Faundez, Myles Horton, and a group of Mexican university professors.[27] The late 1980s also witnessed the emergence of a new phase in Freire's contribution to Brazilian politics with his appointment as Secretary of Education for the city of Sao Paulo in January 1989.[28] A foundation member of the Brazilian Workers' Party, Freire supported Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, who narrowly lost the national presidential elections to Collor de Melo in 1989.[29] Freire resigned from his position in the Municipal Bureau of Education in 1991, convinced 'his real skills and ambitions...[lay] in being a political educator rather than an educated politician',[30] and has returned to his writing.[31]

From any account of Freire's life, it is clear that his prime commitment in education and politics has always been to the Third World. The roots of Freire's pedagogy - his theory of what it means to be human, his ethical position, and his views on oppression - are deeply embedded in his experiences in Brazil, Chile and other Third World countries. Since 1970

his ideas have been enthusiastically embraced by an increasing number of theorists and activists in the First World. Care needs to be taken, however, in interpreting and applying Freirean ideas in Western settings. The next section highlights some of the risks associated with this enterprise, and argues against the domestication of Freire's work.[32]

Approaching Freire From the First World

Western scholars have always enjoyed an ambivalent relationship with their Third World colleagues. On the one hand, the work of activists and intellectuals from Latin America and Africa (among other parts of the world) has been a source of fascination and inspiration for First World academics of a radical persuasion. Revolutionary leaders have been, if not revered, at least cautiously admired by many Left intellectuals struggling against dominant ideas (and social structures). There appears to be much that can be learned from Third World writers in seeking avenues for resistance in the First World. On the other hand, the problems which beset Third World countries are significantly different - sometimes if only in degree but often in kind - to those which confront the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. In applying the insights of Third World thinkers to First World settings, special care must be taken not to domesticate their ideas.

Certainly it can be claimed that within most First World countries there is - in effect - a Third World: the existence of genuine poverty in ostensibly 'civilized' societies has become readily apparent in recent years as an increasing number of people turn to food banks and other emergency sources in order to satisfy basic human needs. Unemployment (and underemployment) is now a seemingly permanent feature of most industrialized societies. While at one end of the social scale a growing underclass emerges, at the other multinationals and other large corporations seek to gain a stranglehold over the production and circulation

of essential goods and services. Legislative moves to lower wages and crush the power of unions - the Employment Contracts Act in New Zealand, for instance - have exacerbated existing disparities between the rich and the poor.

Freire speaks of both a Third World within the First World[33] and a First World within the Third World. From the Freirean point of view, the notion of a Third World is ideological and political, not (merely) geographic:[34]

> The Third World is in the last analysis the world of silence, of oppression, of dependence, of exploitation, of the violence exercised by the ruling classes on the oppressed.[35]

These conditions are clearly evident in Western countries, just as within so-called 'underdeveloped' nations elite groups enjoy a life of luxury and opulence. It could be suggested, moreover, that given the continuing growth of global networks of trade and communication, and the breakdown of the Cold War, the very categories of 'Third World' and 'First World' are now highly problematic.

There can be little doubt that the world is changing (rapidly and dramatically), yet the manifestation of gross inequities between nations is, I believe, still sufficiently self-evident to retain certain distinctions.[36] Hunger, exploitation and oppression are rife throughout the First World, but the difficulties endured by millions of people in the Third World (widespread malnutrition, diseases almost out of control, alarming rates of infant mortality, appalling housing conditions, staggeringly low or non-existent wages, etc.) are, in both scale and severity, of a magnitude few in Western societies could imagine. The Third World is a

different world, and any attempt to apply theoretical frameworks, methodological principles or innovations in practice from that world to the First World is fraught with danger.

Education is one area of human endeavour where the hazards of domestication have particular significance, and Freire's pedagogy seems to have been especially prone to this problem. As word of Freire's spectacular success in adult literacy work has spread his reputation as a man who has much to offer many people has been enhanced, but the risk of distortion in conveying his ideas has increased proportionately. Among other problematic tendencies, failing to consider Freire's work in its social context, fragmentation in reading Freirean texts, and reductionism in appropriating Freirean concepts, principles and practices, are especially common. To counter these possibilities, Freire should be read contextually, holistically and critically.

(i) *Considering Freire's Work in its Social Context*

Freire's pedagogy was forged within a particular social, cultural and historical context.[37] At the time when his ideas on literacy were being formulated (the 1950s and early 1960s), Brazil was characterized by immense inequalities in the distribution of resources, with a high concentration of wealth in the hands of a few elite landowners and grinding poverty among rural peasant communities and the urban poor. Inequities between different groups in housing, food and water supplies, and provisions for health care and education were glaringly apparent. Then, as now, Brazil was a deeply divided society, whose social geography was one of contrasts. Though he was careful from the beginning not to see literacy as a cure-all for Brazil's social ills, Freire believed widespread illiteracy was a symptom of deep structural injustices. For Freire, illiteracy did not 'cause' poor health or nutrition; nor did it 'explain' the sharp divisions between classes in Brazil. Rather, the high

rates of illiteracy among the poor reflected and reinforced wider imbalances in power and control. Patterned illiteracy, from Freire's point of view, was a direct consequence of political policies and an oppressive social order. Under these circumstances, becoming literate was always going to be about much *more* than 'simply' learning how to read and write: for Freire, literacy was inextricably linked with the broader process of social transformation. The very character of the literacy promoted by Freire was shaped by a particular conception of Brazilian reality and a distinct vision of life under more liberating social conditions.

As we shall see, in content and style the literacy campaign was profoundly Brazilian. The words and themes which formed the core of the programme were derived in large measure from the people with whom the literacy facilitators were working. The discussion of nature, culture, work, and human relationships which preceded what is sometimes (erroneously) called 'the actual literacy training'[38] was, according to one commentator at least, well suited to the willingness among Brazilians - when appropriately prompted - to talk about their world.[39] Although many of the issues problematized in Freire's culture circles were, he might claim, of universal human significance, the aims of the programme were quite specific: it was liberation from the particular forms of hardship and exploitation endured by the oppressed in Brazil during a given historical period with which Freire was concerned in the first instance.[40]

The risks associated with decontextualized analyses of Freirean concepts have been vividly displayed in certain interpretations of 'conscientization', some of which are considered in chapter four. Freire's depiction of three levels of consciousness ('magical', 'naive' and 'critical') in early works is ripe for philosophical interrogation. When this framework is divorced from the social situation in which it was initially grounded, however, difficulties inherent in the notion of conscientization are compounded. The translation of

'conscientization' into 'consciousness raising' is especially problematic, as is the systematization of Freire's three levels into distinct, sequential stages of pre-defined personality and behavioural characteristics.[41] Freire used the terms 'magical' and 'naive' to try and capture the essence of modes of thinking and acting among specific groups within Brazilian society during given historical periods. His theory of conscientization, as it was originally developed, was intended to explain (in the case of magical and naive levels of consciousness) that which already existed in a particular society; it was *not* meant to serve as a blueprint for categorizing individuals in *all* societies.[42]

While Freire welcomes critical engagement with all aspects of his work (a point I discuss further below), he positively urges readers to consider the context within which his ideas emerged when examining his texts. In a recent interview, Freire expresses dismay at the anger (still being) generated by his use of the male referent in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

> ...I received not long ago a letter from a young woman who recently came across *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for the first time, criticizing my *machista* language. This letter was very insulting and somewhat vulgar but I was not upset by it. I was not upset by her letter because, most certainly, she has only read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and evaluated my language as if this book were written last year.[43]

Freire is quick to point out that he is *not* making excuses for the sexist language in the book but simply stressing that his work must be viewed in light of his social and cultural background.[44] During his formative years, he 'did not escape the enveloping powers of a highly sexist culture'; in later publications, Freire insisted that those translating his books into English use non-sexist language.[45] He acknowledges his debt to North American feminists

in developing a greater awareness of issues of gender oppression. Both theoretical and social/cultural influences on an author's ideas (and his or her communication of them) need to be taken into account. Freire admits that his major focus when writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was social class. This reflected not only the visibility of 'incredibly cruel' class oppression in Brazil, but also the towering influence of Marx over Freire's intellectual development.[46] If Freire neglected questions of gender in his early writings, this can be explained (he claims), at least in part, by the lack of feminist works available to him at the time.[47] Were he to write *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* today, Freire notes, 'and ignore the immense world of information regarding sex discrimination and the level of awareness concerning sexism that both men and women have today, some of the criticism levelled against...[the book] would not only be valid but would be most necessary'.[48]

(ii) *Reading Freire Holistically*

Freire first gained widespread international recognition in the early 1970s. With the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in English, his ideas became the subject of much discussion amongst educationists, political activists, and social theorists in the West. Riding a wave of discontent with conventional teaching methods and state-funded systems of education,[49] Freire enjoyed a popularity most radicals could only dream of (assuming they wanted it!). The deschooling movement had taken off, and Freire was frequently seen as an ally of two of its most prominent spokespersons, Ivan Illich and Everett Reimer.[50] While a retrospective assessment suggests Freire's theoretical and political kinship with the deschoolers was rather more tenuous than formerly believed,[51] he shared with Illich and Reimer grave concerns about the formal educational institutions of the time, a commitment to improving the living conditions of people in Latin America, and a desire to enhance worthwhile modes of learning and being. Along with many other radical critics of education

- particularly, though not exclusively, Marxists[52] - Freire saw schools as (primarily) sites for reproducing existing social inequalities. Freire believed the alternative approach to education articulated in his books and embodied in his practice was not only unequivocally more liberating than traditional schooling systems but based on a deeper understanding of human beings and the learning process.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed became a bible for those dissatisfied with prevailing forms of pedagogy: 'banking education' emerged as an academic buzzword, and 'problem-posing education' quickly joined 'conscientization' and 'dialogue' as one of the least understood constructs in Freire's work. At seminar after seminar and in paper after paper Freire was compelled to explain what these terms meant in his philosophy, yet confusion persisted. The frustrations he experienced in trying to clarify complex concepts may have contributed to the dramatic decline in Freire's use of the most controversial of these terms, 'conscientization', in his writings after the mid-1970s.

While Freire has refined and reworked other key notions in his many publications following the release of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in English, many educationists and activists continue to base their understanding of his ideas on a reading of only very limited segments of his work. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is without doubt Freire's most famous book;[53] it is also perhaps the best concise presentation of his pivotal philosophical, political and educational principles. In any major study of Freire, this book is bound (and ought) to feature prominently in discussion. Yet, much has changed since the publication of this classic text, both in Freire's own thinking and in wider theoretical developments in education and other fields. Freire now has the added experience of extensive work in Guinea-Bissau behind him; he has returned to Brazil and (again) become active in national politics; and he has continued to reflect critically on earlier ideas in later publications. The succession of 'talking' books co-

authored by Freire in late 1980s and early 1990s have been especially valuable in providing a richer, more complex picture of his educational and political principles than the early works (on their own) afford.[54] The distinction between 'authoritative' and 'authoritarian' approaches to teaching, for example, is much clearer now than it was two decades ago; the importance of academic rigour at all stages of education has been driven home more solidly in recent publications than ever before; and the nature of Freirean critical reading has been widely explored. At the same time, certain aspects of Freirean theory have remained unchanged: Freire continues to depict 'oppression' and 'liberation' in largely universalist terms; he retains an unerring faith in dialogue as a pivotal means of communication between teachers and students; and the notion of a critically conscious, praxical Subject still lies at the centre of the Freirean ethic. In the current postmodern climate, these ideas have attracted considerable criticism, emanating in many instances from educationists (otherwise) sympathetic to the emancipatory impulse of Freire's pedagogy.[55]

Whether agreeing or disagreeing with Freire, it is vital that readers address his work holistically and in its social and historical context. Freire's influence has extended to a wide range of educational, political, community, and theological groups. From one point of view, this diversity is positive testimony to Freire's eclecticism and the broad appeal of his ideas. Yet, there is a danger here that Freirean theory may be spread too thinly. Freire cannot be all things to all people. More importantly, still, his work should not be turned into something it is not. Distortions of the Freirean educational ideal have resulted not infrequently from superficial and selective readings of mere fragments of Freire's work (in particular, chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) or, worse, from the passing of purportedly Freirean ideas from person to person in increasingly 'watered-down' form. In some cases, those who declare themselves Freireans possess, at best, a 'second-hand' knowledge of Freire's texts. Even a modestly careful reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* negates (for

example) the hypothesis that Freire supported a laissez-faire style of pedagogy; for an elaboration of the *reasons* behind Freire's rejection of such an approach, though, one must turn to later books. Given its enormous influence and widely acknowledged value as the most definitive statement of Freire's overall philosophy, it is hardly surprising that theorists and practitioners have paid so much attention to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. However, it is difficult to understand why some contemporary educationists continue to concentrate almost exclusively on this text while downplaying if not ignoring later works which flesh out many crucial points of detail in Freire's pedagogical theory.

A holistic approach to studying Freire not only encourages a fuller understanding of principles which have remained more-or-less consistent for the past 25 years, but also permits inconsistencies and shifts in Freire's theory to be more readily identified and analysed. For example, although Freire made regular (written) reference to the notion of conscientization for only a relatively brief period, during that time his employment of the concept varied considerably.[56] Similarly, Freire's interpretation of the relationship between education and politics has, by his own admission, moved through three discrete stages. The first shift in political position is sharply demonstrated in the contrast between the liberalism of *Education: The Practice of Freedom* and the revolutionary ethics of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Where in the former Freire 'did not speak about politics and education', in the latter he addressed the 'political aspects' of education. In his 1987 book with Ira Shor, Freire talks of a third moment, noting that he now believes 'education *is* politics'.[57]

Freire has always been a reflexive thinker, constantly restless in his search for a deeper understanding of social reality, and ever-prepared to re-examine and repudiate earlier assumptions where necessary.[58] It is to be expected of any theorist that some of his or her ideas might change over the course of a long career. Paradoxically, it is entirely consistent

with Freirean principles that inconsistencies of a kind occur from time to time. The critical reflection Freire advocates applies as much to his own work as it does to any other sphere of activity. In many cases, the impetus for this interrogation has been provided by others who have read and responded critically to his texts. Feminists provided the impulse for a change in Freire's written expression (and his perception of oppression); in more recent times, Freire has started to rethink fundamental ontological, ethical and political assumptions following postmodernist critiques of his writings.[59]

Freire has led a remarkable life and produced an extraordinarily rich body of published work spanning more than a quarter of a century. Educators who attempt to get to grips with his ideas through finding out about them 'second-hand', or by giving his publications only a very partial reading, run the risk of doing a disservice not only to Freire but also to those with whom they work. To take one example (which will be discussed in greater depth below), Freire argues that students will be no better served by unstructured, directionless courses parading (falsely) under the heading 'liberating education' than they would be by authoritarian 'banking' methods. The answer to excessive, 'dictatorial' control over teaching and learning content and processes is not an anarchic abandonment of all constraints, such that choices pertaining to reading materials and subject matter are handed entirely over to students. Teachers and other educators, Freire stresses, have a responsibility to provide structure, direction and rigour. They should also, however, always be prepared for students to challenge their readings of the world; indeed, if Freire's views are taken seriously, teachers ought to actively encourage critical engagement with all ideas. Of course, it does not follow that a fragmented reading or second-hand knowledge of Freire will necessarily result in the type of misinterpretation described above. Nevertheless, to judge by Freire's own comments, distortions of this kind are common.[60] On the question of valuing the experiences of learners, for example, Freire notes:

> My concerns with the respect due the local world of the educands continue, from time to time - to my dismay, again - to generate criticisms that see me adrift, caught with no means of escape, in the blind alley of the narrow horizons of localization. Once more, these criticisms are the upshot of a poor reading of me - or the reading of texts written about my work by someone who likewise has read me poorly, incompetently, or who has not read me.[61]

Freire has long championed the value of a well-rounded, global approach to texts.[62] While acknowledging, at least implicitly, the importance of not sacrificing depth in favour of breadth in reading, Freire would argue that any serious, comprehensive effort to understand a given theorist's thought demands careful, critical scrutiny of as many dimensions of that thinker's work as time and resources allow.

(iii) *Avoiding Reductionism in Applying Freire's Ideas*

Freire has always maintained that his pedagogy cannot be reduced to a set of techniques, skills or methods.[63] In his literacy work in Brazil, for instance, the 'mechanical' aspects of reading and writing (learning how to form and decode letters, words and sentences) were but one part of the programme, inseparable from the wider discussions of nature, culture, work and human relationships, and intimately connected with the enhancement of political consciousness among participants. Yet, as Aronowitz notes,

> Freire's ideas have been assimilated to the prevailing obsession of North American education, following a tendency in all the human and social sciences, with *methods* - of verifying knowledge and, in schools, of teaching, that is, transmitting knowledge to otherwise unprepared students.[64]

This propensity is one aspect of the wider trend - not only in North America but in Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand as well - to translate Freirean theory and practice into technocratic terms. The term 'pedagogy' - employed by Freire to denote a complex philosophy, politics and practice of education - has been narrowly conceived by some as merely 'teaching methods'.[65] This had led to a proliferation of supposedly 'Freirean' courses and programmes, where teachers, often with the best of intentions, have assumed that modifications in teacher-student roles and changes in subject matter suffice as examples of liberating education. Incomplete readings of Freirean texts serve to compound this problem. A misappropriation of Freire's list of characteristics of 'banking education' in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,[66] for example, might lead to the mistaken belief that the Freirean critique of dehumanizing pedagogical approaches can be *completely* summarized and explained in a list of ten methods and attitudes. Neither banking education nor problem-posing education can be encapsulated in a set of prescriptive rules.[67] Of course, there *are* certain attitudes, methodological principles and techniques (e.g. for teaching reading and writing) which contribute to the distinctive character of Freirean education; the point is, however, that Freire's philosophy and practice imply *more* than this. In particular, Freire builds his pedagogy on a deep understanding of social theory (especially those strands derived from Marx), and demands of educators a clear ethical and political commitment to transforming oppressive social conditions. The risks of such a stance have been lucidly highlighted by Freire's own experiences: he was jailed, exiled from his homeland, and savagely criticized. Others have been killed in their efforts to assist in the liberation of marginalized and exploited groups. Methods and techniques flow from revolutionary commitment, but they do not define it. Freirean pedagogy cannot be conveniently 'packaged' into a series of 'how to' techniques which can be transported and duplicated the world over.

A second (closely related) problem is that Freire has been used to justify or legitimate classroom practices which have, at best, only a limited or spurious connection with his pedagogy. In some cases the use of Freire's name as a banner for support is mischievous or positively misleading. For example, a teacher who describes him or herself as a 'Freirean' simply because he or she encourages students to discuss ideas among themselves or allows the political issues of the day to become a subject for student projects, unwittingly makes a mockery of the depth of Freire's theory and practice. Frequently, avowedly Freirean educators ask students to share their own experiences with others, working earnestly to set up a caring, supportive environment for this purpose. Yet many eschew the clear Freirean imperative to examine personal experiences *critically*; this demands reflection upon, rather than mere affirmation of, existing views and assumptions. Freire would have no difficulty with educators adapting or 'reinventing' his ideas to suit their own circumstances; indeed, he speaks of some efforts in this direction as 'exceedingly productive work'.[68] But he would (reasonably) object to his name being falsely invoked, and might be surprised at the number of programmes, courses, practices, and attitudes which are *purportedly* Freirean in orientation.[69]

There is a flip-side to this problem. Classroom processes have changed dramatically over the past two decades in many Western countries. Many of these changes bear a certain similarity to transformations suggested by Freire in his discussion (and implementation) of problem-posing education. Far from being excessively eager to call upon Freire's name, politicians, policy makers, and those responsible for training teachers have sometimes not even heard of Freire, let alone read his work. Just as Illich has long been forgotten in many references to the 'hidden curriculum',[70] so too is Freire often invisible in criticisms of 'banking' education. This problem reflects a wider ignorance of the history of educational thought. It is a matter for amusement as well as mild annoyance that students graduating from

colleges of education frequently make reference to the '*new*' interactive, experience-based approaches to teaching currently being promoted in schools, as if Steiner, Dewey, Freire and a host of other educationists had never existed. Of course, there are important differences between these theorists, and between their ideas and those being promulgated in new curriculum developments. But credit should be given where credit is due. Thus, on the one hand it is crucial that practices which only vaguely or partially resemble Freirean pedagogy be identified as such and described as, at most, 'reworkings' or 'revisions' or 'modifications' of Freirean ideas. On the other hand, it is equally important that past contributions to educational theory and practice be accorded the recognition they deserve, and that ideas which masquerade as original or ground-breaking developments in pedagogical theory be placed in proper historical context.

At a different level, reductionist tendencies in the application of Freirean theory are signified by the 'watering down' of complex concepts to a point where they lose their original force. This phenomenon is not confined to commentaries on and adaptions of Freire. Dale has noted that

> ...'the state' may be in danger of becoming an example of a vital concept drained of its original value through promiscuous use in exercises of theoretical painting by numbers, and consequently at risk of joining 'resistance' and 'critical'...on the shelves of theoretical banality. The danger is that, like them, 'the state' has come to be used to *name* the space where theoretical work is needed rather than to fill that space, and worse, by such naming, to apparently preclude the need for more theoretical work.[71]

The theoretical impoverishment of many contemporary discussions of 'empowerment' - an ideal often associated with Freire's work[72] - has also been the subject of some attention. Lankshear argues that the notion of empowerment is 'in danger of being trivialised through unreflective over-use and, consequently, of losing its semantic viability and persuasive force'.[73] Freirean concepts seem to be particularly susceptible to the problems identified by Dale and Lankshear.[74] The fate of 'conscientization' has already been noted. 'Dialogue', too, has frequently been reduced to a shadow of its former self in (mis)appropriations of Freirean ideas in First World settings. Almost any form of discourse between two or more people now appears to count in some educational arenas as an example of Freirean dialogue in action. Yet, as later discussion shows, Freire is adamant that educational dialogue should have a clear purpose, a sense of structure and a definite direction. (Freirean) dialogue is *not* an 'anything goes' affair: that is, it cannot be equated with (and indeed must be opposed to) mere 'idle conversation'. More than this, though, dialogue for Freire has an overtly *political* dimension: *all* of Freire's educative efforts are ultimately directed toward the goal of a better (more fully human) social world.

Finally, if Aronowitz's appraisal of the United States education scene is accurate (and indicative of trends elsewhere in the Western world), Freire appears to have often been viewed through distinctly atheoretical lenses. By this I do not mean that the self-proclaimed Freireans to whom Aronowitz refers bring no theoretical assumptions to bear on their interpretation or adaptation of Freire's work; this, Freire himself tells us, is an impossibility. Rather, it is a case of forgetting 'where Freire comes from' in not only the physical, social and cultural senses but the intellectual as well. Freire draws upon a wide range of intellectual traditions, and regularly refers to other theorists' ideas. His pedagogy is a *synthesis* of theory and practice: attempting to practice supposedly Freirean 'methods' in schools and other settings without examining Freirean theory denies this relationship.

(iv) *Reading Freire's Work Critically*

One of Freire's most striking characteristics is his humility. Despite the numerous official honours and collegial tributes bestowed upon him, he has never claimed to have anything especially original or insightful to offer;[75] instead, he prefers to think of himself as a 'vagabond of the obvious'.[76] When asked in 1974 why his books had become so popular and widely read, Freire replied: 'Mainly because they are saying obvious things, which a lot of people have inside them, but which they have not been able to express. They discover themselves when they read the books and think - "that is precisely what I thought"'.[77]

Freire has always acknowledged his indebtedness to numerous people, including not only his intellectual forbears, but also those with whom he has worked (as both a teacher and colleague) over the years.[78] The success of his literacy efforts in Brazil and Chile, together with the enormous impact of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, brought Freire international recognition and widespread acclaim. Freire provided the inspiration for fresh examination of pedagogy and literacy, and gave many educationists a model of how theory and practice might be dynamically intertwined. However, this sudden (if unintentional) catapulting into the limelight also had the effect of mythicizing Freire and his approach to education. 'Conscientization' quickly came to be perceived by some as some kind of 'magic bullet', capable of miraculously curing social ills overnight.[79] Freire was elevated to guru-like status and spoken of in reverential tones in some quarters. In the field of adult education, especially, Freire became almost an academic 'God'. His work had injected a scholarly rigour - supported by practical experience - into adult learning discourses, strengthening the legitimacy of the field as a serious area for inquiry within universities and other institutions. Such adoration has always made Freire nervous.[80] He resisted the efforts of others to turn

him into a myth, seeking instead to steadily continue his written work while furthering his commitment to the liberation of the oppressed.

Uncritical acceptance of Freirean principles has, from the beginning, been a contradiction of all that Freire stands for. As noted already, Freire actively *encourages* readers to be critical of his work. At the end of *The Politics of Education*, for example, he advises readers to reread his book, with the second reading being far more critical than the first.[81] The caveats noted earlier confirm rather than contradict this objective: among other features, a critical approach to texts implies reading them globally and in context.[82] Freire wants readers neither to reject nor accept anything he says at face value: in reading his books, as with all other books, an effort should be made to get beneath the surface, searching, as he would put it, for the 'raison d'etre' or essence which explains statements in his texts. He is fundamentally opposed to mythicizing activity, whether it involves himself or anyone else. From his earliest writings Freire has spoken disparagingly of the ideological misrepresentation of reality by dominant groups and urged educators and others to break myths down.[83] Of course, Freire is not 'perfect'. Nor is his theoretical work (within and across texts) free from flaws, significant omissions, inconsistencies, and even contradictions.[84] Freire has commented on occasion that when confronted with criticisms of his work, he avoids the temptation to assume the posture of a person 'wounded'; rather, for him, constructive criticism represents a positive invitation to examine hitherto accepted ideas afresh.[85] His pedagogy does not provide a panacea for oppression: Freire is careful not to overestimate the potential of education for bringing about social change.[86] Few theorists have more to offer in understanding relationships between education, literacy, oppression, and liberation than Freire. Freire would argue, though, that if scholars and practitioners are to find something of value in his work, they *must* (in both the logical and normative sense of 'must') approach it critically; anything less does him a disservice.

Conclusion

Since the early 1970s Freire has maintained extensive contact with educationists and others in First World countries. As was noted in the biographical introduction, for a decade Freire was based in Geneva with the World Council of Churches, and he has accepted a number of invitations to visit the United States over the years. He has conducted seminars and workshops the world over, and collaborated with Western scholars in publishing activities. After being exiled from his native Brazil he has received numerous international accolades. Yet Paulo Freire remains passionately and unmistakably a man of the Third World. Freire has often spoken of his longing for Brazil during the years between 1964 and 1980, and of the tension those in exile experience between the original environment of their homeland and the new world they inhabit:

> Your body is impregnated, as is that of any exile, with your original environment, with its history and culture. Impregnated with the dreams you dreamed there, the struggles you were involved in, your commitment to the working classes. Impregnated with your hopes and ideals for that world.[87]

Freire's willingness to take on the responsibilities associated with leading the Municipal Bureau of Education in Sao Paulo during the late 1980s and early 1990s is indicative of his continuing commitment to Brazil.[88] The challenges facing Freire were enormous. Torres talks of Sao Paulo's

> ...seemingly insurmountable problems of abandoned children living in the streets, growing poverty and urban violence, fiscal constraints, particularly

> due to Brazil's growing external debt, and the peculiarities of post-dictatorship Brazilian politics and electoral struggle.[89]

Freire has returned to his writing and books, but has reaffirmed his dedication to building a 'more open society': one which is 'less perverse, less discriminatory, less racist, less *machista* than the society we now have'.[90]

Freire's work, flawed though it may be, has much to offer First World theorists and practitioners in diverse fields and disciplines. Freire encourages Western educators to 'reinvent' his ideas in addressing the themes and tasks that characterize their own struggles. He also stresses, however, that this process of reinvention should be based upon a *thorough* reading of his works and an acknowledgment of the particular social circumstances under which his pedagogy was forged. In adapting Freirean theory to suit specific First World educative situations the risk of domesticating his ideas is ever-present. There *are* certain key ideas in Freire's theory which (he would argue) transcend national and cultural boundaries, but in order to comprehend the full significance of these principles *for Freire*, his work must be studied holistically, contextually, and critically.

This thesis attempts to remain true to these principles in interpreting Freire's ideas, while seeking to demonstrate the merits of applying a theoretical framework derived in large part from Freire to contemporary debates over higher education. One theorist cannot be expected to deal in depth with every aspect of a subject as complex as literacy. Chapter three builds upon and adds to the conceptual work on literacy already undertaken by Freire, while chapter four reassesses the Freirean project in light of a number of serious (related) criticisms. Allegations of cultural invasion, elitism and antidialogue in Freirean pedagogy are considered, and elements of Freire's modernism are placed under a critical spotlight. This

study is a *rereading* of the Freirean position on literacy, ethics and education. While based in large measure on Freire's work, insights from both Freire and his critics are acknowledged (and, where necessary, defended) in the chapters below, the end result being a synthesis of Freirean and non-Freirean views. Freire, then, provides the core around which major arguments will be built, but although most of his basic philosophical assumptions will be retained this thesis ultimately represents a reinterpretation and reworking (as well as an application) of the Freirean ideal.

Freire's Philosophy

Freire's theoretical roots are, it has often been said, eclectic: in his work we find strands of liberalism, existentialism, revolutionary socialism, and radical Catholicism.[91] The influence of Hegel, Marx, Dewey, Mao, Sartre, Mannheim, Buber, Memmi, Niebuhr, Marcuse, Fromm, Guevara, Fanon, and Cabral, among others, can be detected in Freirean texts.[92] Over the past decade Freire has frequently spoken highly of First World theorists such as Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, and Peter McLaren,[93] and has collaborated in publishing activities with a number of educationists based in North America.[94] In very recent times, he has started to rethink aspects of his theory in light of postmodernist critiques of universalist thought.[95] Despite the plethora of influences, and notwithstanding shifts in his political position, certain key features of Freire's ontology, metaphysic, epistemology and ethic have remained constant over time, and it is to these that I turn in this section.

Freire adopts a *dialectical* approach toward understanding the world. This statement has a dual meaning. In one sense, Freire conceives of reality *as* dialectical; in another sense, he *is* (or strives to be) dialectical in his style of social analysis.[96] In other words, Freire attempts

to *think* dialectically about a reality which is dialectical. Freire's understanding of the dialectic is informed by protracted readings of Hegel and Marx.[97] Hegel argues:

> Contradiction is the root of all movement and life, and it is only in so far as it contains a contradiction that everything moves and has impulse and activity.[98]

All things, in Hegel's view, are in motion; that is to say, all aspects of reality are constantly *changing*. The 'motor' for this change is negation. When two opposing forces, or two opposites, come into contradiction with one another, one negates the other and a new form is created. This is the basis of the classic interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic in terms of a thesis being negated by an anti-thesis, out of which something new - a synthesis - arises.[99] The essential movement of the dialectic, thus, is one of contradictions expressing themselves through negation, thereby creating change.

The emphasis in Hegel's work was on the dialectical movement of 'mind' or 'spirit'.[100] While Hegel ultimately saw material reality as a manifestation of mind, Marx concentrated on the way ideas are shaped by material conditions. In a well-known passage in the Postface to *Capital* (vol.1), Marx notes:

> My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of 'the Idea', is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but

> the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into the form of thought.[101]

Marx begins from the assumption that there exists a material, objective world, of which human beings are a part. In order to survive, human beings enter into a relationship with nature, appropriating the material products of the natural world in order to eat, obtain shelter, and so on. In using the products of nature, humans modify or alter materials from their natural state in order to improve their usefulness.[102] In so doing, they also change themselves - their ideas, their practices, and their relationships with one another.

For Marx, the Hegelian notions of contradiction and negation can be applied not only to the movement of thought, but to any social or historical form. The specific historical form with which Marx was primarily concerned, of course, was nineteenth-century capitalism. Marx identified two opposing groups in capitalist society: capitalists and workers. These two groups stand in a contradictory relationship to each other: one group, or class - the capitalists - own the means of production and extract a surplus value from the labour of workers; the other group, the workers (who do not own the means of production), are 'forced' to sell their labour-power to the capitalist in exchange for a wage.[103]

Freire likewise posits a dynamic relation between consciousness and the world. He explicitly rejects two positions which ignore the dialectical nature of this relationship: mechanistic objectivism and solipsistic idealism. The former reduces consciousness to a mere 'copy' of objective reality; the latter sees consciousness as the creator of (all) reality.[104] Objectivist views negate human agency since all human actions become merely a product of material or environmental influences. Mechanistic behaviourism, for example, sees human practice as analogous to the operation of a machine.[105] Human beings exist as material bodies (with

sense organs) who respond to stimuli. No human event could be other than it is. A human being could not act other than he or she does in any particular situation, given the combination of stimuli - past and present - to which he or she has been subject. For the extreme idealist, on the other hand, there is no world at all: material reality is simply an illusion, a construction of consciousness. Both stances deny the possibility of reality being transformed through conscious human activity.

According to Freire, all aspects of objective reality are in motion. Objective reality encompasses both the world of nature and socially-created material objects, institutions, practices, and phenomena. The world, for Freire, is necessarily unfinished and ever-evolving: '...the more I approach critically the object of my observation, the more I am able to perceive that the object of my observation *is not yet because it is becoming*'.[106] As reality changes, ideas, conceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs, etc. - in short, all the products of consciousness - shift also. This is not a sequential, lock-step, 'cause and effect' relationship, but a complex process of constant, multi-layered interaction between human beings and the world. From Freire's point of view, neither 'consciousness' nor 'world' are comprehensible without the other. Consciousnesses are constituted by the world, but without someone to say 'this is a world' there *is* no world.

Freire, like Marx (and Mao[107]), places particular emphasis on contradictions in the social world. The most important of these in Freire's ethical and political theory, as we shall see later in the chapter, is the contradiction between oppressors and the oppressed. Oppressors can only exist *as* oppressors in the presence of their opposite, the oppressed. The two groups stand in an inherently contradictory relationship, irrespective of how either group perceive themselves.[108] The possibility of oppression being negated through an act of (liberating) revolution is always latent if not made manifest.

Thinking dialectically involves seeking out contradictions in social reality; it implies a penetration beyond and beneath surface appearances. A dialectical approach demands that social phenomena and problems be understood not in abstract isolation but as part of a totality, and theorized in global terms. A true dialectician is always striving to relate one aspect of world to another, and is always seeking to more deeply explain the object of study by contrasting it with that which it *is not*. Thinking dialectically is, for Freire, equivalent to thinking *critically* (see below): it means being constantly open to further questions, and to the possibility indeed, probability - of current assumptions being revised, repudiated or overturned. There are obvious similarities here with Giroux's view of the dialectic as 'a critical mode of reasoning and behaviour, one that represents both a part as well as a critique of conflicts and solutions that define the nature of human existence'.[109] In an interview with Carlos Alberto Torres, whom Freire describes as 'a man who thinks dialectically and doesn't merely talk of dialectics',[110] Freire gives an example of this orientation toward engaging social problems:

> Today I live the enormous joy of perceiving with every passing day that the strength of education resides precisely in its limitations. The efficiency of education resides in the impossibility of doing everything. The limits of education would bring a naive man or woman to desperation. A dialectical man or woman discovers in the limits of education the raison d'etre for his or her efficiency. It is in this way that I feel that today I am an efficient Secretary of Education because I am limited.[111]

Freire's epistemology can be seen as an extension of his ideas on the dialectical nature of reality.[112] We come to *know* through our interaction with an ever-changing world.[113] Knowing, for Freire, necessarily implies transformation: it is the task of human subjects

encountering a world dynamically in the making.[114] Knowledge arises not from abstract thinking or theorizing, but from human practice. The ordering of moments in the process of knowing is important in understanding Freire's philosophy. Freire is adamant that theory never precedes practice: 'First of all I have to act. First of all I have to transform. Secondly I can theorize my actions - but not before'.[115] Freire talks of thinking becoming *authenticated* only when it is 'concerned with reality',[116] 'generated by action upon the world',[117] and carried out through communication with others.[118] Authentic thinking constitutes an act of knowing. Freire's position here is consistent with the fundamental tenets of dialectical materialism, one of which is that 'the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is *at first* directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men'.[119]

Given that all aspects of reality exist in a constant state of change, it follows that we can never know *absolutely*: we can, at best, come *closer* to knowing the '*raison d'etre* which explains the object [of study]'.[120] Knowing involves searching for the reason for (or behind) the existence of an object or fact.[121] Knowledge, on the Freirean view, is necessarily incomplete:

> ...knowledge always is becoming. That is, if the act of knowing has historicity, then today's knowledge about something is not necessarily the same tomorrow. Knowledge is changed to the extent that reality also moves and changes.[122]

Knowing for Freire is a permanent process of discovery - of searching, investigating, inquiring, and probing. To know is not to have reached a pre-determined destination; rather, it is a manner of 'travelling' - a way of being in, and interacting with, the world (through dialogue with others). It is precisely through recognizing that they know little that people strive to know more. Freire speaks of knowing as a *praxis*, implying both a reflective and an

active component. Knowing demands a curious, attentive, restless attitude toward, and interaction with, social reality. From Freire's point of view, there can be no 'final' act of knowing. If absolute knowledge could be attained, the possibility of knowing would disappear for there would no longer be any questions to ask or theoretical problems to address.[123] All statements about 'knowledge' and its opposite, 'ignorance', must be qualified: these terms only make sense when defined in relation to something specific. On the Freirean view, neither knowledge nor ignorance are complete: 'No one can know everything, just as no one can be ignorant of everything'.[124] This insight provides the ground, by implication, for a redefinition of conventional constructs of 'the intellectual'. As Giroux points out, Freire regards all men and women as intellectuals in the sense that every person constantly interprets and gives meaning to the world.[125]

The distinctiveness of Freire's view can be elucidated through a comparison with the Platonic conception of knowledge. Plato distinguishes between true knowledge and mere opinion. Opinion pertains to the visible (physical, practical, material) world: knowledge is confined to the supersensible, intelligible realm.[126] At its lowest level, opinion takes the form of 'illusion', by which Plato means simple impressions of the world, or perceptions of objects as they appear in their material form. Given their focus on images and outward appearances, such impressions provide an inherently distorted view of reality.[127] A higher level of opinion is 'belief', which is manifest in 'commonsense' ideas about 'matters both moral and physical, which are a fair practical guide to life but [which] have not been fully thought out'.[128] Neither illusion nor belief can provide genuine understanding of the nature of reality, since both remain tied to that which can be perceived by the senses. The sensible world deals with particulars, is always changing, and as such is never truly knowable. The world of ideas or forms, by contrast, is unchanging: it is the realm of universals from which the particulars we observe derive. Mathematical (deductive) reason participates in this higher intelligible realm.

The pinnacle of pure intelligence, however, is dialectical reason, which Plato describes as follows:

> [I]t treats assumptions not as principles, but as assumptions in the true sense, that is, as starting points and steps in the ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle of everything; when it has grasped that principle it can again descend, by keeping to the consequences that follow from it, to a conclusion. The whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world, but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms.[129]

The highest level of knowledge, Plato argues, is knowledge of the form of the good.[130] The good is 'the end of all endeavour, the object on which every heart is set'.[131] The form of the good 'gives the objects of knowledge their truth and the knower's mind the power of knowing'.[132] Attaining knowledge, for Plato, is a matter of 'remembering' or 'recovering' that which existed in the soul before its incarnation in a body. Knowledge has a divine origin: the capacity for pursuing it - i.e. recalling what is already there - is 'innate in each man's mind',[133] though few progress beyond mere opinion to the higher forms of intelligence.

Freire's position is precisely the opposite. 'True' or 'authentic' knowledge for Freire arises not in some realm beyond the sphere of objective reality; to the contrary, knowing is thoroughly grounded in the material world. The origins of knowledge lie not in some form of celestial divination but in the day to day transforming moments of human activity. As Freire sees it, knowledge is not recollected through philosophical thought but *created* through reflective action in a social world. Freire, like Plato, wants to go beyond a mere apprehension of appearances, but speaks of searching beneath the surface of the object of study as an intensely practical endeavour. The path to knowledge is not to be found in some form of

abstract, inner, individual activity, but in active, communicative relationships with others. Knowing through dialogue does not transcend, but rather is mediated by, the (material) world. For Freire, there is no world of 'forms' to be known. Dialectical thinking is elevated above other modes of understanding for Freire, as it is for Plato, but the modes of knowing implied by each theorists' conception of the dialectic are quite distinct. From Plato's perspective, dialectical reason is distinguished by its complete separation from worldly particulars; for Freire, dialectical thinking is defined by its focus on interrelationships between concrete particulars within a social totality. Goodness and knowledge are closely connected for Freire, as they are for Plato. But where Plato speaks of the good as the supreme form from which all particular acts of goodness in the world derive, these acts (i.e. those which are praxical), from Freire's point of view, *are* the supreme good and it is through them that knowing occurs.

Freire is not an epistemological 'relativist'. As McLaren and Silva point out, he does not believe all ideas are of equal merit.[134] On the Freirean view, some ways of thinking, some theories, some appraisals of the nature of reality, are better than others. As we shall see shortly, this line of argument applies to Freire's ethic as well: certain ways of living one's life, of acting toward others, of being in the world, are, according to Freire, superior - i.e. ethically preferable - to others. On the other hand, Freire's theory of knowledge is not absolutist in the Platonic sense: there are no static, unchanging, truths which transcend time and space. Instead, Freire argues that ideas 'must be understood contextually as historically and culturally informed discourses that are subject to the mediation of the forces of material and symbolic production'.[135] On the Freirean view, knowledge is *constructed* rather than derived or bequeathed: it is forged within particular social relations, is reflective of (and partially constitutive of) given ideological and political formations, and is always grounded - whether directly or indirectly - in human practice. Certain constructions of reality, though, are better

than others: a dialogical and critical reading of the world, for Freire, affords a deeper understanding of the object under investigation than antidialogical or passive stances allow.

As humans, we have the capacity to reflect on the very process of knowing itself - on (our) consciousness and its relationship with the world. We can not only know, but know that we know.[136] For Freire, the essence of human consciousness is intentionality toward the world. Humans can 'stand back' from the immediate reality of their material existence and reflect upon it. Freire speaks of this as a crucial moment in human evolution: what Teilhard de Chardin calls 'homonisation' - the shift from instinct to thought.[137] Only human beings can engage in reflection. Humans have the ability to problematize not only the object of attention but the process through which this problematization takes place. This, then, is a form of 'meta-awareness' - an awareness of our conscious efforts to understand ourselves, others and the world.

Just as Freire sees knowledge as necessarily incomplete - as always evolving - so he sees human beings as always in a state of 'becoming'. The human ideal Freire espouses is one of humanization, or 'becoming more fully human'. One can never, on the Freirean view, become *fully* human - one can, at best, become *more* fully human. Humans are necessarily imperfect, unfinished, incomplete beings, who exist in and with an ever-changing world.[138] Humanization, which Freire sees as both an ontological and an historical vocation of human beings, is opposed by dehumanization which, although an historical reality, is not an ontological inevitability. Humans pursue their vocation of becoming more fully human when they engage in authentic praxis, through dialogue with others, in a critically conscious way.

The Freirean concept of an ontological vocation can be explained through reference to the ancient Greek notion of human beings having a 'function'.[139] Plato suggests that the 'function'

of a thing is 'that which only it can do or that which it does best...everything which has a function [has] its own particular excellence'.[140] For every distinctive excellence there is a corresponding defect. Hence, if the function of the eyes is to see, the eyes perform this function well when X has perfect vision, but perform their function poorly if X suffers from blindness.[141] Plato's intent in this line of inquiry is to establish grounds for arguing that a just society is one in which each person performs his or her proper role in accordance with his or her particular function. Different individuals in Plato's ideal society have different functions: philosophers have one function, military experts another, shoemakers yet another, and so on. Aristotle, however, wants to know whether there is a function all human beings have simply through being human: 'Just as we can see that eye and hand and foot and every one of our members has some function, should we not assume that in like manner a human being has a function over and above these particular functions?'.[142] Aristotle's concern is to discover that which is *uniquely* human. It cannot be the 'life' generated by nutrition and manifested in growth, for plants share this with us; nor is it our 'sentient' life, for animals possess this quality too. It must, Aristotle concludes, be our capacity for practical *reason* which sets us apart from all other beings or things. The function of humankind, thus, is 'an activity of the soul in accordance with, or implying, a rational principle'.[143] Whether one reasons well or poorly, the function remains generically the same: *all* human beings are distinguished (from other beings) by their reason. A function is 'performed well when performed in accordance with its proper excellence'.[144] For Aristotle, happiness - the 'best, the finest, the most pleasurable thing of all'[145] - is the ultimate end to which human actions are directed.[146] A good, truly happy, ideal human life is one lived (properly and well) in accordance with the highest human virtue, namely, reason.

Freire's notion of an ontological vocation can be understood in a similar light. According to Freire, what makes us distinctly human is our ability to engage in praxis. Praxis is 'reflection

and action upon the world in order to transform it'.[147] Only human beings can engage in praxis. While animals alter aspects of the material world in the process of adapting to it - by, for example, digging a burrow, or making a nest - their modification of objective reality is purely instinctive.[148] Human beings, however, have the ability to consciously and intentionally transform the world. Freire states:

> ...of the uncompleted beings, man is the only one to treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of reflection; this capacity distinguishes him from the animals, which are unable to separate themselves from their activity and thus are unable to reflect upon it.[149]

Animals are submerged in reality: they cannot stand back from the world and reflect upon it. Humans, by contrast, have the capacity to reflect on the world and to transform it in accordance with this reflection.[150] Only human beings *work* in the sense of engaging in *purposeful* activity: consciously directed action on and interaction with the world.[151] Animals simply react to stimuli from the environment; humans, by contrast, perceive and respond to challenges in the world.[152] These ideas resonate strongly with Marx's often-cited example of the differences between the activities, respectively, of architects and bees:

> [A] bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax.[153]

Animals are creatures of contacts; they simply adapt to the world. Humans, on the other hand, can become both adapted to the world and integrated with it. Animals are merely *in*

the world. Humans are both *in* the world and *with* the world. Animals have no conception of time; they live in a permanent 'today'. They cannot 'confront life', give meaning to it, or become committed to it.[154] Humans, though, are historical beings, aware of a past and able to conceive of a future. Humans, unlike animals, *make* history (and in so doing confirm their temporality) in consciously transforming the world around them.[155]

For human activity to be praxical there must be a synthesis of reflection and action. Action which is not accompanied by reflection (e.g. blindly following a charismatic revolutionary leader in an act of violence) amounts to nothing more than activism; reflection without concomitant action (witness: 'armchair revolutionaries') is mere verbalism.[156] Action which is praxical 'envelopes the whole being of the actors - their emotions, their feelings, their "language-thought-reflection"'.[157] This does not mean that reflection ought to *always* be followed by action: sometimes, Freire notes, action is not 'feasible'.[158] Critical reflection is also a form of action.[159] The 'feasibility' of action in any given situation can only be determined by reflection through communication with others.

To live well, on the Freirean view, is to transform the world through reflective, critical, dialogical action. The vocation of all human beings is to realize this capacity in the fullest way possible. The pursuit of humanization is a quest to become more profoundly what we already are as humans: i.e. beings *of* praxis.[160] Freire states: 'Only men *are* praxis - the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is the source of knowledge and creation'. Not all forms of praxis, though, are humanizing. Freire distinguishes, for instance, between 'revolutionary praxis' and 'the praxis of the dominant elites',[161] the former being humanizing and the latter dehumanizing. The crucial element (fundamental to the first form of praxis but absent in the second) is *dialogue*.

The pursuit of humanization can never, in Freire's view, be an isolated, individualistic activity.[162] Humans, as communicative beings, enter into relationships with one another, and create a *social* world. In participating in this process, humans simultaneously re-create themselves.[163] Just as it makes no sense (in Freirean terms) to talk of pursuing one's humanization in isolation from others, so too is it nonsensical to think of having (sole) responsibility for one's dehumanization. We humanize ourselves through dialogue with others. This goes to the heart of what it means to be human for Freire.

Where Descartes theorized self-identity in his famous dictum 'I think, therefore I am',[164] for Freire an 'I think' is only comprehensible in the presence of a co-existing 'We think'. Freire does not deny that individual human beings are unique - that they understand and respond to the world and to others in distinct ways but argues that it is only through intersubjectivity that individual existence makes sense. The existence of an 'I' is only possible because of the concomitant existence of a 'not-I', where 'not-I' implies both others and world. For Freire, the 'we exist' explains the 'I exist': 'I cannot be', he observes, 'if you are not'.[165] The 'I exist' does not precede the 'we exist' but is fulfilled by it.[166] Knowing, on the Freirean view, cannot be a purely individual process but is only possible through dialogue - through a relationship with others, whether this is direct (face to face) or indirect (e.g. via texts), mediated by the objective world.[167]

In Freirean philosophy, praxis and dialogue are closely related: genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis. Dialogue is 'the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world'.[168] 'Naming the world' is the process of change itself: the human quest to understand and transform the world, through communication with others. This naming is a continuous process of creating and recreating: the world, once named, always presents itself afresh as a problem demanding a new naming.[169] Freire claims that

humans have a *primordial right* to 'speak their word'. It is in speaking a 'true word' that human beings name the world and thereby transform it.[170] A 'true' word is an authentic, dialogical synthesis of reflection and action.[171] Ultimately, 'no one can say a true word alone...'.[172] To 'speak a true word' is to enter the historical process as a Subject, changing (objective and subjective) reality through consciously-directed action, informed by critical discussion with others.

If it is to be humanizing, dialogical communication must involve a 'love' of the world and of other human beings. This in turn demands a certain sense of humility. Faith in the ability of others to 'name the world', together with trust between participants, and a hope that dehumanization can be overcome, are necessary. Finally, Freire stipulates that critical thinking is vital if dialogue is to become a humanizing praxis.[173] When these conditions are satisfied, and where two or more people communicate with one another in seeking to understand a common object of study, there is, Freire would argue, a true dialogue and an authentic, humanizing praxis.[174]

While humanization through critical, dialogical praxis represents the ethical *ideal* as far as Freire is concerned, historically the pursuit of humanization by certain groups and individuals has been impeded by the actions of others. Where this occurs - when 'A objectively exploits B or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person'[175] - the situation becomes one of oppression. To prevent someone from engaging in praxis - either through limiting the range of possible actions open to that person, or through inhibiting his or her ability to think critically - is to dehumanize that person. Hence, oppression, as Freire sees it, is dehumanizing. In dehumanizing another, one also - albeit in a different way, and with different implications and consequences - dehumanizes oneself.[176] To deny someone else's humanization is also to deny one's own, since, for Freire, humanization is a *dialogical*

process. Those who dehumanize others practice a profound form of anti-dialogue, and thus cannot be engaged in the task of becoming more fully human.

Humanization and dehumanization are both concrete possibilities for human beings, but only humanization is an ontological and historical vocation. The vocation of becoming more fully human is what defines us as human beings; it is the *essence* of being human. Humanization is an historical, as well as ontological, vocation because it calls us to act (on the basis of critical reflection) in the objective world of lived social relations. Dehumanization represents a distortion of this vocation. Freire stresses that dehumanization arises from specific (oppressive) *social* practices: it does not, therefore, constitute a given destiny. If human beings have *created* social structures, living conditions, and modes of thinking and acting which are oppressive, it follows that humans can also change these circumstances.

The task of those who are oppressed is *liberation*. For Freire, liberation is not a psychological process: something which occurs (purely) as a shift in consciousness, or as some form of inner transformation.[177] Rather, liberation takes place in the transformative action of human beings on the world, within specific historical and social circumstances.[178] Freire is thoroughly Marxist in his stance here.[179] As Marx and Engels state in *The German Ideology,*

> [I]t is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means...people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. "Liberation" is a historical and not a mental act.[180]

For Freire, liberation is a form of critical, dialogical, praxis directed toward overcoming oppression. The oppressed cannot be liberated by their oppressors, but must liberate both

themselves *and* those who oppress them. Paradoxically, only the 'weakness' of the oppressed is strong enough to liberate the oppressor.[181] Freire believes that '[b]ecause it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against them who made them so'.[182] He asserts that no one is better placed than those who experience oppression to understand the significance of an oppressive society and to recognize the necessity for liberation.[183] Yet Freire also points out that the oppressed have often been so dominated by the oppressors that many have taken on the oppressors' view of the world: they see oppression as inevitable. This does not necessarily mean that the oppressed have no awareness of their oppression - they know what it means to be oppressed through their *experience* of oppression. But, Freire notes,

> ...their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression... their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify involvement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction; the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole.[184]

There is a danger, where this perception of reality prevails, that the oppressed, in fighting against their oppression, will themselves become oppressors. The model of humanity presented to the oppressed by the oppressors portrays a vision of the (oppressor) individual as the ideal. Under these circumstances, 'to be' (human) is to be like the oppressor.[185] The problem of confronting the ideology of the oppressors is compounded by what Freire, drawing on the work of Fromm,[186] calls the 'fear of freedom'. The oppressed 'are afraid to embrace freedom...[whereas] the oppressors are afraid of losing the "freedom" to oppress'.[187] Freire regards freedom as an 'indispensable condition for the quest for human completion':[188] liberation *requires* freedom if it is to be authentic. Freedom implies autonomy and

responsibility, and must be *won* by the oppressed: it cannot be given to them.[189] Freire speaks of revolutionary action by the oppressed against the conditions which oppress them - and this may include violent struggle - as an act of 'love'. The violence of the oppressed, though, is 'not really violence at all, but a legitimate reaction [to an oppressive situation]'.[190] In many countries, especially within the Third World, conditions are so intolerably dehumanizing for the oppressed that the violence of revolutionary struggle is justified (Freire argues) where it is the only means for overcoming the greater violence of oppression.[191]

Freire warns that the oppressed, having internalized the view of the oppressors, are likely to have little consciousness of themselves as a class.[192] This works against the possibility of effective revolutionary action and serves as a prop for continuing oppression. Freire is socialist to the core in the stress he places on unity, solidarity and a shared sense of commitment among the oppressed to a better social world. Echoing the immortal (but now, in postmodern times, somewhat unfashionable) call by Marx and Engels at the end of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* for working people of all countries to unite,[193] Freire argues: '[t]he universal solidarity of the working class is far from being achieved, but it is essential and we must struggle for it'.[194]

Liberation, Freire concludes, 'is thus a childbirth, and a painful one'.[195] The struggle for liberation must be ongoing - a permanent process of reflection and action - as social reality changes and new forms of oppression unfold. This is an explicitly social process:[196]

> I don't believe in self-liberation. Liberation is a social act...Even when you individually feel yourself *most* free, if this feeling is not a *social* feeling, if you are not able to use your *recent* freedom to help others to be free by

> transforming the totality of society, then you are exercising only an individualist attitude towards empowerment or freedom.[197]

In any given historical epoch in a given society there will be a complex array of (often-conflicting) ideas, values, hopes, and challenges which, in their concrete representations, constitute the *themes* of that epoch.[198] Critical examination of these themes reveals a set of *tasks* to be carried out. Freire terms impediments to critical thought and transforming action 'limit-situations'. The tasks implied by limit-situations require 'limit-acts'.[199] Freire speaks, for example, of the economic dependence of Third World countries on the First World as a limit-situation: those countries subject to this relationship become 'beings for others'. In order to become 'beings for themselves',[200] such societies require limit-acts directed toward revolutionary independence and political sovereignty.[201] In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire maintains that 'the fundamental theme of our epoch...[is] *domination*';[202] its opposite is liberation (which is both a theme and a task). Overcoming domination or oppression (Freire uses these terms synonymously) entails negating those aspects of an oppressive reality which limit the oppressed. Hence, within a single society where the dominant theme is oppression, there will be whole range of limit-situations which characterize that oppression. In the Third World countries in which Freire worked, these might have ranged from the poor living conditions endured by peasants, to the payment of low wages to workers, to the broader limit-situation of national economic dependency. While the ultimate task of the oppressed in such situations is liberation, the pursuit of liberation calls for the negation of each of the limit-situations which (together) form an oppressive reality. Freire notes:

> [E]pochs are fulfilled to the degree that their themes are grasped and their tasks solved; and they are superseded when their themes and tasks no longer correspond to newly emerging concerns.[203]

In times of transition, as in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s, '[c]ontradictions increase between the ways of being, understanding, behaving, and valuing which belong to yesterday and other ways of perceiving and valuing which announce the future'.[204] In the Brazilian case, the movement was from a 'closed' society to one in the process of opening.[205] With this shift, themes such as 'democracy', 'popular participation', 'freedom', 'property', 'authority', and 'education' were invested with new meaning. The transition from one epoch to another is a dynamic mix of 'flux and reflux, advances and retreats',[206] filled with confusion and uncertainty, but also the hope and anticipation of impending change.

To summarize, the ontological and historical vocation of all human beings is humanization, or becoming more fully human. We pursue this ideal when we engage in critical, dialogical praxis. Constraints imposed by one group to the quest for humanization by another group indicate a situation of oppression. An oppressive reality is dehumanizing for both the oppressed and the oppressors. Oppressive social conditions are negated by a praxis of liberation. Human beings are necessarily incomplete; we can never become *fully* human, only *more* fully human. Humanization is thus a continuous, unfinished process.

Freire on Pedagogy

I turn now to the theory of pedagogy which flows from Freire's wider philosophy on human beings and the nature of reality. As literacy is the dominant theme in the present study, my account of key Freirean educational principles will be brief and necessarily incomplete.[207] Of course, any distinction between the two dimensions of Freire's work ('literacy' and 'pedagogy') is somewhat artificial: both ultimately depend on each other for their intelligibility. I shall concentrate on those aspects of Freire's pedagogical theory which are especially helpful in understanding his practical adult literacy work and his views on reading

in universities. The implications of Freire's ideas on education for children or for schools, while an important area for investigation, will not be a major concern in this study. Pedagogical issues will be further discussed in chapters four and five.[208]

The distinction between 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education' is one of the best known (and most widely misunderstood) aspects of Freire's work. The classic reference point here, as noted earlier in the chapter, is chapter two of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Given its extraordinary influence, this portion of Freire's written work merits particularly close attention.

Freire argues that education is suffering from 'narration sickness'.[209] Whether inside or outside schooling settings, the relationship between teacher and students tends to be overwhelmingly monological: the teacher narrates the subject matter to students who are expected to passively receive, memorize and (if requested) repeat the content of the narration. This is the basis of the 'banking' model of education: teachers 'deposit' ideas into students, who become receptacles or 'depositories' waiting to be filled with the knowledge the teacher is assumed to possess.[210]

In the banking system, knowledge is perceived as a 'gift' to be bestowed by teachers upon voiceless, patient, ignorant students.[211] Banking education is inherently oppressive: it regards students as 'adaptable, manageable beings',[212] it is fundamentally anti-dialogical, and it systematically impedes the development of a critical orientation toward the world. Students are treated as acquiescent 'automatons',[213] to be controlled in both thought and action.[214] Knowledge becomes static and lifeless, the teacher assumes an authoritarian role, and social reality is trivialized or mythicized.

Banking education reflects, reinforces and perpetuates wider inequalities and injustices, serving the interests of oppressors 'who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed'.[215] A paternalistic process of domestication and assimilation is evident.[216] The banking approach stifles the creativity - the critical imagination - necessary to address oppressive structures, and poses explicit constraints to liberating praxis. The whole system is thus (from Freire's point of view) thoroughly dehumanizing.

In opposition to banking education Freire advances a theory of 'problem-posing' (or 'authentic', or 'liberating') education. Problem-posing education begins with the resolution of the 'teacher-student contradiction'.[217] Teachers become both teachers *and* students (and vice versa): the relationship is one of 'teacher-student' with 'students-teachers'.[218] Dialogue becomes the pivotal pedagogical process: instead of issuing communiques, the teacher communicates *with* students, and in so doing learns (and re-learns) with them. The relationship between teacher and students, then, is 'horizontal' rather than hierarchical. Participants in the educative situation come to know *through* dialogue, *with* others, *mediated* by the object of study.

Where under the banking system ideas are 'deposited' by teachers in a pre-packaged, inert form, in liberating education learning takes place through 'the posing of the problems of men in their relations with the world'.[219] Knowledge is constantly 'in the making': it is always in a process of being created as students and teachers seek to unveil - through critical reflection - successive layers of reality. The object of study is not 'owned' by anyone; rather, it becomes the focus around which all participants seeking to know gather to reflect and pose problems.[220]

Problem-posing education is concerned with 'the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality'.[221] Through critical, dialogical investigation, participants begin to understand their world in a depth hitherto unknown to them: that which was once hidden, submerged or only superficially perceived begins to 'stand out' in sharp relief from other elements of awareness.[222] Students (and teachers) begin to think holistically and contextually. A new conception of the relationship between 'consciousness', 'action' and 'world' emerges through critical dialogue. Where under the banking system social reality is posited as a fixed inevitability, through problem-posing education students confront, explore and act purposefully upon a dynamic, ever-changing world.[223]

As participants enter into dialogical relations with others and discover the dialectical interaction between consciousness and the world, they begin to sense that dominant ideas can be challenged and oppressive social formations transformed. Problem-posing education, Freire suggests, is 'revolutionary futurity': it 'affirms men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future'.[224] A pedagogy built on authentic dialogue, conscientization and revolutionary praxis can never serve the interests of oppressors;[225] to the contrary, it is openly supportive of the struggle *against* oppression. Problem-posing education re-affirms human beings as Subjects, furnishes hope that the world can change, and, by its very nature, is necessarily directed toward the goal of humanization.

In hindsight, the popularity of this account of banking education and problem-posing education is hardly surprising. Apart from the fact that it is from Freire's most famous book, the attractiveness of its arguments for Western educators is readily apparent. The pedagogical core of problem-posing education dialogue carries strong positive

connotations, and was seen by many in First World countries as complementary to, or compatible with, emerging 'child-centred', 'interactive', 'problem-solving', and other ostensibly progressive approaches to education during the 1970s and 1980s. In reality, the connections between these movements and Freire's educational ideal are highly dubious if not utterly misleading.

Child-centred education, while notoriously ill-defined, tends in most cases to be overwhelmingly individualistic in orientation; Freire, on the other hand, explicitly promotes collective action and structural imagination. Supposedly 'new' interactive methods in science education (related in many instances to the move toward a constructivist epistemology in understanding scientific concepts) bear some resemblance to problem-posing education, but lack the overt Freirean imperative to relate classroom knowledge to wider political issues and the ontological vocation of humanization. 'Problem-solving' approaches - whether in mathematics and science education, or 'consciousness raising' groups - are in tension with the dynamism of problem-*posing* education.[226] Freire avoids talk of 'problem-solving', for this term suggests there is always a solution to every problem. From Freire's point of view, however, this is not always the case. In one sense this is a necessary consequence of the political nature of Freirean education: when confronting problems of homelessness, mass illiteracy, poverty, exploitation, and so on, clearly there are no simple solutions. At a deeper level, however, it is in the very act of posing problems that participants pursue their liberation: beginning to perceive contradictions in ideological positions, institutional structures, and everyday practices is one element in the process of revolutionary change. This critical, problematizing activity is necessarily ongoing and incomplete: as the social world changes, new problems arise, requiring further reflection and action. One does not 'find' the solution, then move on to the next problem: rather, the next problem is being

created as the present one is being addressed. Often the original problem persists, though in a metamorphized form.

For teachers and other practitioners searching for a fresh way of organizing classroom life after the rigidity of traditional 'rote learning' methods of instruction had become intolerable Freire seemed to have the answer: dialogue was seen as the key to happier, more fulfilling, more effective learning. Freire's explicit situating of dialogue within the context of an overtly political process of conscientization and a revolutionary mode of praxis was often forgotten in all of this. Dialogue came to be seen as a pedagogical *method*, to be juxtaposed against oppressive monological 'methods'.[227] Yet when the links between 'dialogue' and other key principles in Freire's pedagogy - conscientization, praxis, oppression, liberation, etc. - are ignored or downplayed, the very meaning of problem-posing education is lost. The discussion of dialogue in the second chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* needs to be read as one part of an integrated whole, and can only be thoroughly comprehended by reference to Freire's other writings.

The wider corpus of Freirean texts is particularly helpful in clarifying differences between problem-posing education and a 'laissez-faire' approach to pedagogy. Similarly, Freire's position on 'authority' and 'authoritarianism', while *implicit* in chapter two of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, emerges in greater detail elsewhere. In his later publications Freire also explores the nature of dialogue, the role of experience, and the process of teaching in some depth. In the discussion that follows, four features of the Freirean educational ideal will be stressed: structure, purpose, direction, and rigour.

Freire has repeatedly stated over the years that education is never neutral.[228] Learning never takes place in a vacuum. Whether in formal or informal settings, learning always occurs

within a social context, under particular political conditions. The socio-political context sets limits on what can be achieved by educators, but also leaves spaces for resistance. Individual teachers or coordinators, moreover, cannot but bring certain attitudes, values, beliefs, and predispositions to bear on the educative process. Whether recognized and acknowledged or not, the assumptions educators begin with structure and shape their pedagogical activities. Every decision, policy, or practice in an educational setting implies a particular conception of human beings and the world and a specific ethical position.[229] Teachers do not need to have explicitly asked 'What *ought* I to do?', or 'What political views do I support?' for their educational activities to be non-neutral: a certain ethical stance is already assumed in any consciously directed, deliberate action in an educative setting. Declaring oneself 'neutral' is, Freire claims, a profoundly political statement: those who purport to be 'apolitical' often provide, either wittingly or unintentionally, support for the status quo.[230] An educator, then, is always, in effect, 'taking a stand', whether openly or implicitly. Freire observes:

> This is a great discovery, education is politics! After that, when a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the teacher has to ask, What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, In favor of whom am I being a teacher? By asking in favor of whom am I educating, the teacher must also ask against whom am I educating.[231]

Shor notes that for Freire the entire fabric of educational activity is political. This is revealed in myriad features of educational life, including: the selection of subjects for a syllabus; the means employed in deciding upon course content; the form of communication between teachers and students; the type of tests and grading policies used; the physical structure of classrooms; the attitudes toward different kinds of speech; the equality or lack of it in funding levels; and the links between educational institutions and the business community.[232]

Freire is explicit in declaring his ethical and political position: his concern is to work toward the liberation of the oppressed. Of course, not all teachers, policy makers and politicians share this goal: Freire believes, however - given his conception of humanization - that all teachers who are *against* the kind of dehumanization fostered through banking education ought to 'side with' the oppressed in pursuit of a better social world. Teachers who do not themselves come from the ranks of the oppressed must be 'reborn' as educators and join with the oppressed in their struggle against dehumanization. Freire speaks of this process as a form of 'Easter experience',[233] and adopts from Amilcar Cabral the notion of teachers from bourgeois backgrounds committing 'class suicide':[234] this implies *renouncing* the oppressive elements of one's class of origin whilst simultaneously *announcing* one's commitment to the liberation of the oppressed through dialogue, the problematization of social reality, and political transformation. Regardless of the stance taken, education is (for Freire) an inescapably non-neutral enterprise. In formal educational institutions and programmes, this non-neutrality manifests itself in the *interventionist* role played by teachers or coordinators. Teaching, on the Freirean view, is a *necessarily* interventionist occupation, implying a commitment to a given ethical and political position, from which pedagogical principles and practices derive.

Freire does not, then, advocate an 'anything goes' style of pedagogy. Liberating education, contrary to popular misconception, is structured, purposeful, directive, and rigorous. In later works, Freire distinguishes between three approaches to education: the authoritarian (or manipulative, or domesticating), the laissez-faire (or spontaneous), and the liberating (or radical democratic). The first and third of these correspond, in general terms, to 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education' respectively. Freire argues that (liberating) teachers have a responsibility *as teachers* to be directive. The liberating teacher does not 'wash his or her hands of the students',[235] leaving them to structure and direct educative situations

as they see fit. To hand all decisions regarding reading material, teaching style, and curriculum content over to students is not to promote freedom but to grant licence. While Freire retains the notion of all participants in a problem-posing dialogue being both teachers and students, this does not mean that teachers and students assume exactly the *same* role in the educative process. The liberating teacher gives structure and direction to learning, while encouraging and enhancing academic rigour. The teacher has a responsibility to provide constructive, critical feedback on written work, and should always have 'a plan, a program, [and] a goal for the study'.[236] His or her role is to 'direct' in the sense of *guiding* (but not forcing) students through a course of study.

The term 'facilitator' (rather than 'teacher') is often used by adult educators who espouse a commitment to Freirean principles. This notion seems to capture the directive essence of liberating education: the educator's responsibility rests precisely in his or her duty to *furnish the conditions* for effective (by which Freire means critical, dialogical and praxical) learning to take place. The term must be employed with care, however, if it is to accurately convey Freire's intentions. Indeed, in his book with Myles Horton, Freire states that the educator 'cannot be a mere facilitator'.[237] Certainly if being a 'facilitator' means minimizing the educator's involvement to the point where he or she is no longer an essential *participant* in the dialogical process, but merely a bystander, Freire would oppose the term (and its embodiment in practice!). The educator's active involvement in dialogical investigation with students is essential: the teacher's role, as noted earlier, is defined by its interventionist character. If, however, the term is used in the stronger sense - that is, to indicate a move away from the traditional, 'banking' idea of teaching - Freire would have no objection.

Freire is adamant that teachers not only *cannot* avoid, but *ought* not to avoid, bringing their own political beliefs to bear on their educational practice. Teachers have a duty to disclose

their intentions and discuss their 'dreams' (of how the world ought to be) with students. This implies being open about what one regards as ethically desirable and ethically undesirable. It also suggests that teachers have not only a right but a responsibility to respond honestly when confronted with student views they disagree with:

> My role is not to be silent. I have to convince students of my dreams but not conquer them for my own plans. Even if students have the right to bad dreams, I have the right to say their dreams are bad, reactionary or capitalist or authoritarian.[238]

This does not mean, however, that one should *impose* one's views on students. Students should never be compelled or coerced to accept the teacher's political position; to the contrary, the teacher's ideas should always be open to question. This principle applies to *all* participants in the educative situation.

Freire's discussion of the differences between authoritative and authoritarian approaches to education in later works is instructive here. A democratic teacher, Freire argues, 'can never stop being an authority or having authority'.[239] This authority derives from the educator's knowledge of his or her subject,[240] and from the responsibility he or she has for coordinating, structuring, and facilitating the educative process. The teacher's authority is necessary for freedom to develop. This, for Freire, is only an apparent paradox. Where teachers renounce or deny their authority, freedom becomes licence; where they forget the freedom of students altogether, authority becomes authoritarianism.[241] The differentiation between 'freedom' and 'licence' here is not a conceptual distinction but a substantive (normative) one.[242] The key to understanding Freire's position lies in the *purpose* of exercising authority, namely: to promote the appropriate conditions for allowing others to liberate themselves. If authority is

completely relinquished, the structure, direction and focus necessary for rigorous dialogical reflection upon a common object of study is missing. Without *purposeful* dialogue, liberation is impossible. The pursuit of liberation is similarly compromised if opportunities for *any* form of dialogue and critical reflection are deliberately suppressed.

For Freire there is a close connection between authoritarianism and manipulation. A manipulative approach to pedagogy is one in which the educator says (directly or implicitly) to students, 'you *must* believe this because I say it'.[243] This is a form of domination where students are expected to believe X or Y irrespective of the evidence in favour of X or Y. That is, students are required to accept the teacher's view *without question*. Indeed, one dimension of manipulation is the systematic impeding of a curious, interested, creative, questioning orientation toward the world. For Freire, asking questions is an essential part of the learning process. The liberating educator welcomes questions as a sign of the students' critical engagement with the object of study; the authoritarian teacher tends to regard questions as an attack on his or her professional authority.[244] The defensiveness of the authoritarian teacher when faced with challenging questions springs from a fear of the answers such questions might give rise to.[245] The manipulative teacher has no intention of unveiling reality, or of penetrating surface appearances. Manipulation denies, distorts and mythicizes reality: it represents an attempt to turn the world into something it is not and to enforce compliance with this falsification.[246] This process can be deceptively subtle: 'We can be authoritarian in sweet, manipulating and even sentimental ways, cajoling students with walks through flowery roads, and already you know what points you picked for the students to know'.[247]

Freire speaks of an 'inductive moment' in the educative process. This is the moment, he says, 'where the educator cannot wait for the students to initiate their own forward progress into

an idea or an understanding, and the teacher must do it'.[248] Should students spontaneously 'put all the knowing together',[249] so much the better, but where this does not occur the educator ought to intervene and assist in moving critical discussion forward. An authoritarian teacher attempts to retain total control over the students' learning by 'monopolizing' the inductive process, while a liberating teacher *starts* the process when necessary but always with a view to transcending the inductive moment to allow students to continue critical investigation themselves.[250] The teacher's role, thus, is to step in - to initiate, redirect, or give a focus to, dialogue and study - with the express purpose of creating the possibility for *others* to give direction to the educative process. Paradoxically, then, deliberate assistance (in keeping dialogue moving in a critical direction) at *certain* points is necessary if these intervening moments are to be minimized. As Freire puts it: 'It's impossible for me to help someone without teaching him or her something with which they can start to do by themselves'.[251]

If educational dialogue is to be liberating it requires a clear, though not *rigid*, structure. Freire does not advise teachers to adhere to a programme of study dogmatically, or simply for the sake of following a prescribed syllabus. The purpose of structure - the provision of a framework within which meaningful, directed dialogue can occur - should always be kept in mind. Slavish devotion to a set plan or course outline can be counter-productive: important opportunities for deeper interrogation of the object of study can be missed, and student enthusiasm can be dampened. Without some form of structure, however, the goal of liberating education can be similarly compromised: dialogue needs a definite focus, and the learning process needs to cohere around a common objective.

The wider purpose of liberating education is, as the name suggests, *liberation*, through the posing (and addressing) of problems. It is liberation *from oppression* with which Freire is

primarily concerned. This point cannot be over-emphasized: it is not dialogue around just any themes which lies at the heart of Freire's pedagogy, but rather dialogue which directly addresses particular forms of oppression. Of course, each educational programme has, or ought to have, more specific purposes: for example, learning to read and write, acquiring knowledge in a given subject, discovering how to perform particular tasks, and so on. Moreover, in any liberating educative effort, the concern is to address *this* oppressive situation, or *that* one, not some abstract notion of 'oppression in general'. (While all of the programmes with which Freire has been involved had different problems to be confronted, thematized and acted upon, Freire tends to be abstract and universalist in his *theorizing* about 'oppression' and 'liberation'. This propensity, as we shall see later in the thesis, has drawn sharp criticism in recent years.) The purposeful character of liberating education also relates to the Freirean concept of an ontological vocation: the 'purpose' of all human beings, simply through *being* human, is humanization, and all liberating educative efforts are ultimately directed toward this end.

Freire insists that if dialogue is to be politically transformative, it 'implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, [and] objectives'.[252] Dialogue does *not* signify the necessary abandonment of existing knowledge. Ideas are constantly *re-examined* in a dialogical setting, but this does not mean there is no stability or continuity in what participants know over time. Freire notes:

> [B]y discussing dialogue every day with students, I am not changing every day my understanding of dialogue. We arrive at the level of some certainty, some scientific certainty of some objects, which we can count on. What dialogue-educators know, nevertheless, is that science has historicity. This means that all new knowledge comes up when other knowledge becomes old,

> and no longer answers the needs of the new moment, no longer answers the new questions being asked. Because of that, all new knowledge when it appears waits for its own overcoming by the next new knowledge which is inevitable.[253]

Teachers, Freire stresses, should not withhold what they already know of their subject area from students; indeed, they have a duty to share this knowledge, just as students have a responsibility to *engage* the ideas presented by the teacher. Students should not be compelled to 'speak up' in problem-posing education, but nor should they be permitted to subvert the dialogical process for other students who wish to make a verbal contribution.[254] All contributions to an educative dialogue should be treated with respect. This principle springs from Freire's conviction that no one is ignorant of everything, just as no one knows everything: all participants are capable of contributing helpfully to the educative engagement. At a deeper level, respect for others - in the sense of listening to, and reflecting upon, what they have to say - follows simply from the fact that they are fellow human beings. *All* human beings have the same ontological vocation, an essential dimension of which is the formation of dialogical relationships with others. All human beings, then, have a 'calling' to engage in dialogue: dialogue is a fundamental part of being human. From Freire's point of view, there are no 'stupid' questions or final answers, though some questions and answers may be more naive than others. The educator's role is not to squash the inquisitiveness of students, or to impede the 'inner movement of the act of discovery'.[255] Instead, even when a question seems to be poorly articulated or 'wrongly formulated', the teacher should not ridicule the student but assist him or her to 'rephrase the question so that he or she can thereby learn to ask better questions'.[256]

This does not mean that all contributions - whether in the form of questions, comments, or responses - should be accepted uncritically. *All* views - whether embedded in texts, advanced by the teacher, or developed by students - ought to be open to question in a liberating educative situation. The teacher plays an important role in structuring the critical process here. He or she must strive to foster 'respectful' rather than 'destructive' criticism. For Freire, a critical attitude is necessarily respectful: to critically engage the ideas of another implies the existence of something *worthy* of engagement. Destructive criticism reflects, or is compatible with, an authoritarian attitude where the object is to crush the creative process. In a liberating educational environment, criticism is coupled with listening and reflection; in an authoritarian situation, teachers and students merely *react* to the views of others. The liberating teacher has a directive responsibility to ensure dialogue does not lapse into either an arena for abusive attacks or an artificially tolerant atmosphere where all views are accepted unconditionally. Freire believes that in examining any object of study some ideas are better than others, but he is always open to the possibility that his conception of what is or what ought to be might be wrong.

Liberating education demands - of both teachers and students - the highest standards of academic rigour. Freire is concerned to counter the myth that authoritarian education is somehow more rigorous than liberating education.[257] From his point of view, the tables should be turned here: intellectual rigour, as Freire conceives of it, is absolutely fundamental indeed, indispensable to problem-posing education, while banking education systematically impedes rigour. Teachers, Freire repeatedly states, must be thoroughly conversant with the literature pertinent to their domain of study, and must seek to continuously 'relearn' their subject. As the latter part of this chapter reveals, 'reading' for Freire implies the fullest possible engagement with texts, not simply a skimming of content matter. Studying for Freire is an inherently difficult and demanding process.[258] In his view,

it is not meant to be easy, nor could it be - at least not on the conception of 'study' and 'knowledge' implicit in problem-posing education. This does not mean that the act of study should be unenjoyable; quite to the contrary in fact. Reading and studying are potentially joyous processes: this joy, as Freire depicts it, arises precisely from the attempt to apprehend the object of study critically. Study requires discipline, though this does not imply a *disciplinarian* stance on the part of the teacher: it is the self and collective discipline of teachers and students investigating the object of study through purposeful, directive, structured, *critical* dialogue to which Freire refers. Study, in short, is *work*: it demands great effort and a mustering of intellectual energies such that learners transcend mere awareness and penetrate beneath the surface of the subject under investigation. In this sense, studying represents an extraordinary or *exceptional* state: a mode of being beyond (or at least in contradistinction to) that which typifies everyday conscious activity.

Liberating education is thus a profoundly *serious* endeavour: this is in keeping with the seriousness of the situation the oppressed find themselves in. This does not mean that the liberating classroom should be sombre or devoid of humour. In *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, Freire draws a distinction between 'humour' and 'just laughing':

> A humorist is not just a smile-maker, someone who makes people laugh. No! Even sometimes, good humor leads you *not* to smile or laugh. But, on the contrary, good humor does not make you laugh as much as it makes you seriously think about the material. Humor is Chaplin. He unveiled all the issues he tried to describe, to live with in the cinema. In the shows, he revealed what was behind the situations.[259]

Problem-posing education is not a theatre for superficiality, nor does it represent a mode of entertainment.[260] Nonetheless, where opportunities exist to incorporate humour into dialogue as a means for enhancing serious engagement with the subject at hand rather than trivializing it, educationists should make the most of these. As Shor notes: 'Humor is not a mechanical skill you add to dialogical methods like icing on a cake. It has to be part of our character and the learning process'.[261]

Freire is careful to point out that his criticism of authoritarian education is not directed at individual teachers; rather, his concern is with the *system* of banking education, the attitudes which underpin it, and the wider social relations in which it is enmeshed. In his discussion of banking education and problem-posing education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire raises the possibility of teachers adopting a banking approach unknowingly: there are, he says, 'innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize'.[262] Indeed, one of his most important messages is that we need to break away from individualistic thinking and begin to problematize reality in holistic, structural terms. He advocates *collective* action against oppressive social formations (of which banking education is one example). Freire speaks of the oppressive effects of 'divide and rule' policies, and highlights the dangers associated with splintered, disconnected, overly-localized struggles. If teachers act as Freire believes they should, they are, he would argue, worthy of our deepest respect. The teacher in Freirean education is invested with awesome responsibilities, and must be supremely committed to dialogue, the act of knowing, and social transformation.

It was suggested earlier that Freire's pedagogy cannot be reduced to a set of methods, techniques or skills. Liberating education represents a particular *approach* to processes of teaching and learning (and a specific orientation to the social world). Freire does not deny

the necessity of learning how to perform certain tasks, or of developing the requisite skills, in given fields of study. Doctors obviously need to learn surgical techniques; pilots must learn how to operate complicated instrument panels; logicians cannot analyse arguments without knowing the fundamentals of syllogistic and other forms of reasoning. Freire would also be quite happy to admit that in *teaching* students in these and other subject areas, educators must employ particular methods and draw upon certain skills.

If the approach to teaching and learning about a subject is to be liberating, though, it is not the methods, skills and techniques which define it as such; rather, these things *flow from* a specific ethical and political stance. The essence of banking education is not monological teaching methods but a distinct orientation toward human beings and the world: people under the banking system are regarded as adaptable, manageable objects to be manipulated into the existing (oppressive) social order. Monological and authoritarian methods reflect, reinforce and help perpetuate this view of the world. Problem-posing education begins from different assumptions: humans, for the liberating educator, are praxical beings - Subjects who, as Freire would put it, 'make' history and culture - who ought to be given maximal opportunities to transform the world through reflective action. Methods such as encouraging students to ask questions in class, setting problems to be pursued rather than simply giving answers, allowing time for discussion, and promoting reflection on personal experiences are what might reasonably be expected from a teacher committed to the Freirean view of humanization through praxis: these techniques do not themselves demonstrate the character of liberating education.

If it is an approach or an orientation toward human beings and the world with which we are dealing, then specific 'how to' questions can only be addressed in context. That is to say, the best methods in one situation may not be the best methods in another. Teachers must take

into account not only the social and political context within which learning occurs but also the experiences and existing forms of knowledge among participants. To reduce liberating education to a methodology, or a set of classroom techniques, is to *de*contextualize it. Methods ostensibly transcend culture and history. Surgical procedures are the same irrespective of the hospital or country they are performed in; systems of mathematical proof remain consistent over time; 'reading recovery' programmes rely on similar methods whether developed in New Zealand or the United States; syllogistic logic is the same for contemporary analytic philosophers as it was for Aristotle; and so on. In some spheres of human activity, it is assumed that methods not only can but *must* be duplicated in the same way regardless of the context: any deviation from the precise techniques or practices associated with a particular method will reduce its effectiveness. Certain methods of sports coaching, giving birth, and teaching skills to youngsters fall into this category.

If Freire's work is conceived purely or primarily in methodological terms, one implication is that his approach to literacy education in the Third World should be readily 'transportable' to the First World as a 'prepackaged' set of clearly defined techniques. An avowedly Freirean educator might concede that specific details of 'the method' would have to be changed (e.g. aspects of the syllabic recombination process, in light of the differences between Portuguese and English), but believe that apart from features clearly ruled out in particular contexts Freire's techniques should adopted 'to the letter'.

Freire would be vigorously opposed to this line of thinking. Every educational situation presents a *distinct* challenge to be addressed. The first question an educator ought to ask is not 'What methods should I use?' but 'What human ideals do I (or we) wish to promote?'. From this starting point, more specific questions follow: 'What are the limits and possibilities in seeking these ideals within *this* situation (at this time, in this place, subject to these

political constraints, given these social relations, within this structural framework, etc.)?'; and 'What overall goals and strategies are appropriate in light of the ideal and the situation?'. Only after these concerns have been addressed (i.e. theorized - critically and dialogically) can the question 'What methods would be best?' be authentically answered. Of course, this is not meant to imply some sort of lock-step, rigid, sequential procedure: the whole process of deciding what ought to be done in any educational setting should, Freire would say, be thoroughly dialectical. But Freire is adamant that the first *priority* for an educator is to confront questions about human beings and the world, after which methodological problems can be addressed.

This suggests an important distinction for those commenting on or attempting to apply Freirean ideas. As we shall see shortly, in his literacy education work in Brazil, Chile and other Third World countries Freire adopted certain procedures: he encouraged discussion and active participation rather than silent compliance and the mechanical repetition of words from the teacher; he used pictures depicting aspects of everyday life as a focus for dialogue and critical engagement; he produced discovery cards with words broken down into syllabic families; and so on. It seems perfectly consistent with Freire's position to talk of these as 'methods' - used in specific programmes, at particular times, within several different social contexts, and developed in accordance with a substantive and overt ethical and political stance.

It is quite another matter, however, to speak of Freire's whole approach to pedagogy as 'a method'. This is blatantly distortive. Freire has pedagogical *principles* but these, at most, suggest parameters within which methodological decisions can be made. Principles are not equivalent to or synonymous with methods; nor does a *set* of principles amount, in total, to *a* method. If this distinction is legitimate, the dangers of referring to '*the* Freirean method',

'Freirean methodology', or even 'Freirean *methods*' (if such a phrase is employed in a decontextualized way) should be readily apparent. This sort of language directs attention away from the very dimensions Freire regards as most significant in any pedagogy: a conception of human beings and the nature of reality, an epistemological theory, an ethical position, and a political stance - from which broad (not fixed) underlying principles are derived.

To be a liberating educator implies a certain clarity and conviction in one's ethical and political position, coupled with a willingness to participate in the process of change. This applies, though in a different way, to students as well. Freire makes it plain that students in the liberating classroom should expect neither 'spoon feeding' by the teacher nor a completely 'free rein' to do as they wish: dialogical education requires participation, commitment, and effort from all participants. Liberating teachers, Freire argues, ought to work *with* students in a joint struggle to transform unjust social structures. This challenge must be continuously confronted afresh as the world - in its myriad social, cultural and political dimensions - ever evolves.

Freire's focus in chapter two of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is on two pedagogical approaches: 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education'. The distinction between two clearly opposing forms of education has an immediate appeal: it permits definite lines to be drawn between that which is liberating and that which is oppressive, and allows educators to declare their own intentions and allegiances with unwavering conviction. A teacher is *either* humanizing *or* dehumanizing in his or her pedagogical stance. Binary oppositions of this kind have been problematized in recent times by postmodernists, and Freire's proclivity to using them as a major theoretical device leaves him especially vulnerable to criticism. While Freire's written works are replete with dichotomous theoretical constructs ('active' vs.

'passive'; 'integrated' vs. 'adapted'; 'liberation' vs. 'oppression'; 'humanization' vs. 'dehumanization', etc.), his later writings suggest there is no *single* antithesis to 'liberating education'. For Freire, liberating education stands opposed to *two* pedagogical approaches, one authoritarian, the other laissez-faire. At one end of the scale, the teacher is invested with total authority and exercises this in a disciplinarian and oppressive manner; at the other pole, the teacher relinquishes (or is stripped of) *any* authority, and students do as they please. Both are in tension with the ideal of humanization. Authoritarian education is blatantly anti-dialogical, while laissez-faire approaches diminish the *purposeful* character of education and human struggle.

Freirean Adult Literacy Education

Freire's approach to literacy is intimately linked to his wider philosophical position and his pedagogical theory. In this section I give an account of the approach taken by Freire and his co-workers in Brazilian adult literacy initiatives in the early 1960s. Mention will also be made of Freire's contributions to several other literacy and adult education programmes in the Third World. Discussion in the next section is devoted to an examination of some of the key elements in Freire's theory of literacy - a theory which was developed in large part through his involvement with adult illiterates in Brazil (but which continues to be refined and reworked to the present day).[263] Freire's ideas on reading in universities are considered in the last part of the thesis.

Freire describes his literacy work with Brazilian adults in some detail in *Education: The Practice of Freedom*.[264] His appointment in 1963 as Director of the National Literacy Programme was preceded by more than fifteen years of experience in the field of adult education, in both urban and rural areas. He recalls that while he experimented with many

different pedagogical methods and means of communication during this formative period, his one overriding conviction remained the same: '...only by working with people [says Freire] could I achieve anything authentic on their behalf'.[265] The sponsorship by Miguel Arraes of an adult literacy programme in Recife in 1962 provided Freire with the platform to launch his now-famous 'culture circles'.[266] In the culture circles illiterate adults were invited to participate in a process of critical reflection on the social conditions in which they found themselves. Freire abandoned many elements of traditional teaching in the project, replacing lectures with dialogue, the teacher with a coordinator, and the term 'pupils' with 'group participants'.[267] Encouraged by Freire's achievements in the Recife programme, President Joao Goulart appointed Freire Director of the National Literacy Programme. The military coup d'etat in 1964 brought the campaign to an abrupt halt and Freire was detained in jail for a total of 75 days. However, the approach Freire adopted to adult literacy education in Brazil has been well-documented, and was later to be re-worked and applied (by Freire and others) in several Third World countries from the 1960s to the 1980s.[268]

Freire's literacy work in Brazil comprised three related stages:

(i) An investigation of the social situation of the adult illiterates, and the preparation of materials and agendas.

(ii) An introduction to the concept of culture through the analysis of a series of pictorial representations of aspects of Brazilian life.

(iii) The utilization of a small number of 'generative' words for assisting in the process of reading and writing.[269]

(i) *Investigative and Preparatory Work*

Freire identifies five phases in this stage of the programme. In phase one, adult literacy workers researched the vocabulary of the people with whom they were working. From informal interviews, and in some cases from periods spent actually living and working with families in rural and urban communities, lists of 'charged' words were built up. Investigators, Freire comments, were to search for words which were infused with emotion and meaning for the adult illiterates: the words were chosen on the basis of their centrality in the daily lives of those in the community, and were laden with 'longings, frustrations, disbeliefs, hopes, and an impetus to participate'.[270] Freire is careful to point out that the words selected in this early phase emerged from the adult illiterates themselves, and did not merely reflect the literacy workers' predispositions about what was important as far as a reading vocabulary was concerned.[271]

Once the process of informal interviewing and investigation had been completed, fifteen to eighteen 'generative' words were selected for each area covered by the campaign. This was the second phase of the preliminary work. Words were generative in two senses. First, they were imbued with existential meaning - i.e. they corresponded to the most fundamental concerns, ideas and practices of the adult illiterates' lives - and were thus pregnant with possibilities for discussion of daily life in political, social and cultural context. In this sense, then, the adopted words generated reflection on lived, everyday reality, and offered the potential for a deeper, more critical understanding of that reality. Words were also selected on the basis of their phonemic richness; specifically, an effort was made to find words which could be broken down into syllables, combined with vowels, and re-formed to generate new words. Freire further stipulated that 'the words chosen should correspond to the phonetic

difficulties of the language, [and should be] placed in a sequence moving gradually from words of less to those of greater difficulty'.[272]

Phase Three was the creation of 'codifications'. These were pictorial representations of generative words. Frequently, the pictures would encapsulate situations from the daily lives of the adult illiterates. Generative words were embedded in the codifications, and graduated in terms of their phonetic complexity. A generative word might embrace the entire situation depicted in the picture, or it might be relevant to only one aspect of the situation.[273]

The fourth and fifth phases of the investigative and preliminary stage of the programme consisted in the explication of 'agendas' (i.e. the style, methods and content of the programme) for culture circle coordinators, and the production of discovery cards with the breakdown of generative words into phonemic families.[274] Six hundred coordinators were requested at the start of the programme, and more than 30,000 applications were received. A two-page test was administered in a football stadium, and coordinators were selected on the basis of their answers to questions such as these: 'Brazil is largely a marginal society. How shall we get out of this situation?'; 'What do you think of the condition of education in Brazil at the present moment?'; 'Why did you decide to apply for this job?'.[275] Freire observes that as far as informing coordinators of the nature of the programme was concerned, the difficulty lay not with instruction in the technical aspects of the method employed for teaching reading and writing, but with the inculcation of a particular orientation toward the learning process. Coordinators were called to abandon traditional narrative, 'banking' approaches to education in favour of a pedagogical system based upon the principle of dialogue.[276]

(ii) *An Introduction to the Concept of Culture*

After all of the initial preparations had been put in place - the existential situation of the participants explored, generative words selected, posters or slides of codifications made, and coordinators given their agendas - the next stage in the programme could commence. In Brazil, this second stage - an exploration of ideas about nature, culture, work, and human relationships - occupied up to eight sessions of the overall programme.[277] The conditions which prompted the introduction of this second stage in the Brazilian programme are neatly captured by Bee:

> The task of motivating the Brazilian people was a difficult one. They were apathetic, downtrodden, and fatalistic in their attitudes. In order to change this demoralising situation into something more positive and responsive Freire and his team needed to convince the people of their own worth, to show them that no matter how denuded of dignity they considered themselves to be, they were in fact makers of culture, of history, and subjects in life, not merely objects of manipulation.[278]

Toward this end, Freire commissioned the services of the Brazilian artist Francisco Brenand in putting together a series of pictures designed to introduce the notion of 'culture'. The pictures were made into slides and projected on to the walls of houses where culture circles met.[279] There were ten pictures in the original sequence,[280] each intended to initiate dialogue based around a particular theme. These visual representations were deliberately ordered, such that later pictures and their respective themes built on ideas discussed in earlier pictures.

The first picture showed a peasant man standing beside a well and a tree, holding a hoe and book, with a pig in the foreground and a house in the background. All aspects of the picture (apart, perhaps, from the book) were familiar to those participating in the programme. Coordinators were instructed to begin by asking 'What do you see in the picture?'. Once the various aspects of the scene had been identified, participants were asked such questions as these: 'Who made the well?'; 'What materials did he use?'; 'Who made the tree?'; 'How is the tree different from the well?'; etc.[281] From this problematization of the reality depicted in the picture, adults in the programme began to distinguish between nature and culture, between objects which exist in the natural world and those which are created by human beings.

The second picture depicted a man and woman standing together, surrounded by a variety of farm animals. Discussion in this case centred around the differences between animals and human beings. Participants worked toward the notion that humans are beings of communication, capable of entering into dialogue with one another, mediated by the world of nature.[282]

The third, fourth and fifth pictures, taken as a group, each represented different variations around the theme of hunting. The third and fourth pictures showed a child using a bow and arrow and a man using a gun. A contrast was drawn between the two different types of hunting, the former (i.e. making and using a bow and arrow) being passed on as a skill from father to son without the aid of writing, the latter (shooting) involving a tool so complex that written instructions were necessary for its construction.[283] After ideas about the differences between oral and literate culture, the transformation of materials from nature to culture, and the implications of education for technological development had been thoroughly investigated, participants were presented with a picture of cat preying on mice in order to sharpen earlier distinctions between humans and animals. Dialogue focused on the concept

of humans as conscious, reflective, knowing beings. Seen as a whole, the collection of representations in pictures 3, 4 and 5 'produced a wealth of observations about men and animals, about creative power, freedom, intelligence, instinct, education, and training'.[284]

The sixth and seventh pictures were also closely related, picture 6 illustrating two people at work making clay pots, and picture 7 displaying a finished clay pot being used as a vase. In the vase were flowers, and on the vase was a picture of flowers. With the sixth picture, the theme of transforming the products of nature through work was discussed. The introduction of the seventh picture served as a bridge between earlier pictures and the final three which followed. Participants, for the first time, saw a graphic representation of an object - the flower on the vase - demonstrating the transformation of nature into a symbol.[285] This idea was extended in the eighth picture, which showed a book, opened to a page with a particular arrangement of written symbols. After the coordinator had read what was shown on the page of the book, members of the group quickly recognized it as a poem, and the ensuing discussion revolved around the different expressions of culture exemplified by the vase and the poem. Members of the group were also encouraged to debate issues raised in the poem itself.[286]

The ninth picture depicted two cowboys from separate regions in Brazil. Participants talked about the differences in their (i.e. the cowboys') clothing and possible behaviour. They also discussed the way in which traditions initially develop in response to a need, but sometimes persist after the need has passed.[287]

Finally, in the tenth situation, members of the group saw themselves portrayed in visual form. The picture showed a group of peasants assembled in a culture circle, with the coordinator at the front of the room pointing to one of the earlier pictures. This was an

important moment in the process of self-reflection, and the first step along the road to critical consciousness.[288] The group conversation concentrated on themes such as 'culture as a systematic acquisition of knowledge' and 'the democratization of culture'.[289]

By the time this stage of the programme had been completed, Freire attests that participants were highly motivated to continue learning. He summarizes his thoughts on the significance of this part of the literacy process thus:

> Literacy makes sense only in these terms, as the consequence of men's beginning to reflect about their own capacity for reflection, about the world, about their position in the world, about the encounter of consciousness - about literacy itself, which thereby ceases to be something external and becomes a part of them, comes as a creation from within them.[290]

The intellectual advances demanded of participants in examining the series of pictures can be described as follows. In broad terms, the movement is from lesser to greater complexity, from the more familiar to the less familiar, and from the concrete to the more abstract, as the sequence progresses. The representations deal with themes which correspond to fundamental tenets in Freire's ontology, metaphysic and epistemology. The discussion moves from 'nature' to 'culture, and from the 'unlettered' to the 'lettered' world. The notion that men and women are beings of relationships who transform the world is constantly reinforced. Initially transformation is related to 'work': this arises logically from a consideration of familiar daily tasks and activities. In the middle pictures, participants are required to draw some sharper distinctions between humans and animals. In the last representation, participants deal more directly with political transformation - with the prospect of building more democratic social structures. As participants move through the sequence, then, they are increasingly

encouraged to 'step back' from their daily reality, to examine the familiar and the concrete in a new light, to reconsider their relationships with others and with the world. The rhythm of the sequence mirrors the movement of the programme as a whole. The starting point in both cases is the existential situation of the participants, which then becomes the focus for close investigation, leading to a simultaneous reading of words and 'rereading' of the social world.[291]

(iii) *Syllabic Combinations Through Generative Words*

Up to this stage, there had been no attempt to teach participants how to read and write in the traditional sense of encoding and decoding print symbols (i.e. forming and interpreting letters, words and sentences): the programme thus far had been devoted to discovering as much as possible about the world of the illiterates, and to fostering discussion of anthropological, social and political issues. It was not until these tasks had been completed that the more conventional expectations of a literacy programme were addressed. Even at this point, the learning of syllabic combinations was preceded by discussion of a pictorial representation in which the generative word from which the combinations were derived was embedded.

After a group had exhausted analysis of the codified situation encapsulating the first generative word, the word itself was introduced. Participants were encouraged to visualize (but not to memorize) the word, and with the aid of the codification, to establish the semantic link between the generative word and its object of reference.[292] The word was then displayed without the accompanying codification and broken down into its component syllables. The syllables of the word, once recognized by the members of the group, could be paired up with vowels and re-combined with other syllables to make new words. This technique, as Sanders

notes, was greatly aided by the fact that Portuguese is a syllabic language, with 'little variation in vocalic sounds and a minimum of consonantal combinations'.[293] Although different generative words were chosen for each area covered by the programme, the first word was always trisyllabic, with each of the three syllables consisting of one consonant and one vowel.[294] The purpose of beginning this way is made apparent in Freire's often-cited example of the generative word, 'tijolo'. This word - which in English means 'brick' - was the first generative word used in a culture circle in Cajueiro Seco, a slum area in Recife.[295]

After the word had been thoroughly discussed in its codified setting, it was introduced on its own and its syllables 'ti' 'jo' and 'lo' were read aloud by the coordinator of the group. The first syllable was then presented in a sequence of consonant-vowel combinations, in the following manner: 'ta-te-*ti*-to-tu'. Although participants recognised only 'ti' in the first instance, they quickly moved to the observation that 'while all the syllables begin the same, the end differently'.[296] In this way, the basic vowel sounds were rapidly grasped, and the coordinator could proceed with the introduction of the other two syllables in the generative word, building up this sort of pattern on the discovery card:[297]

ta-te-ti-to-tu

ja-je-ji-jo-ju

la-le-li-lo-lu

After sounding out each of the syllables, participants were given the opportunity to form new words from the 'pieces' depicted on the discovery card. Hence, the possibility emerges of illiterates creating words such as 'tatu' (armadillo), 'luta' (struggle), 'loja' (store), 'juta' (jute), and 'lote' (lot).[298] Freire was not concerned if participants formed combinations of syllables which were not actual words; it was the discovery of the mechanism of phonemic

combination - and the 'naming' of words as an active, creative process - that was important. More important still, though, was the discussion which surrounded the introduction of each generative word. In the case of the word 'tijolo', the theme of urban reform became the subject of debate; with the generative word 'favela' (slum), groups deliberated on problems relating to housing, health, food, and education; 'terreno', the Portuguese word for 'land', stimulated discussion around such subjects as irrigation, natural resources, and economic domination.[299]

Freire and his co-workers found that 15-18 carefully selected generative words for each group were sufficient to bring formerly illiterate adults to the point where they were 'reading newspapers, writing notes and simple letters, and discussing problems of local and national interest' in six weeks to two months.[300] It was hoped that this achievement could be consolidated, and political transformation intensified, with a post-literacy stage. Freire regards the post-literacy phase as crucial in any programme of education and national reconstruction. While the literacy work concentrates on generative *words*, a key element in the post-literacy stage is generative *themes*. These themes are drawn from the problems, issues, struggles, conflicts, and politics of national, regional and local life. Through critical exploration of these issues, the limit-situations confronting participants are identified and (when necessary and where possible) negated with limit-acts.[301] However, plans for the establishment of 20,000 culture circles across Brazil in 1964 were crushed by the military coup, and Freire was forced to extend his adult literacy efforts elsewhere.

The attitude of the Brazilian government toward Freire after his forced exile is clearly (if implicitly) revealed in an article published in the *Journal of Reading* in the mid-1970s.[302] In this piece, Arlindo Lopes-Correa, the then-president of MOBRAL (the Brazilian Literacy Movement), outlines the methods used by the Brazilian government to overcome functional

adult illiteracy. In a remarkable act of plagiarism, Lopes-Correa runs through a literacy process involving generative words, syllabic families, discovery tables, and pictorial codifications without once mentioning Freire's name. (The author of the article even uses Freire's classic example of the breakdown of the generative word 'tijolo'.) Freire's work is not listed in the bibliography. References to conscientization and praxis have been removed, and Freire's call for literacy to be a means through which illiterates attain a deepening political awareness is replaced by the expressed hope that 'pupils' - a term Freire avoided as far as possible - develop 'an interest in continued self-learning through reading'.[303] The 'technical' aspects of Freire's literacy method have been appropriated almost to the letter (with their source of origin left unacknowledged), but the radical, critical force of Freire's work has been placed to one side.[304]

Further evidence of the treatment afforded Freire by Brazilian authorities more than a decade after the military coup can be gleamed from comments made in one of a series of conversations at the University of Massachusetts and Harvard University in the 1980s. Freire reveals that the well-known 'Declaration of Persepolis'[305] - a concise statement of aims for adult literacy work formed at the conclusion of a conference with representatives from across the globe - was signed by all participating countries *except* Brazil. The Brazilian delegates protested Freire's presence and left the meeting.[306]

Freire's Involvement in Other Literacy Programmes

While a comprehensive account of Freire's post-1964 literacy endeavours is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important, I think, to mention some of the major adult literacy programmes with which he has been involved, and to note some of the similarities and differences between these programmes and the Brazilian campaign.

After a short stay in Bolivia following the Brazilian coup, Freire spent five years working in Chile. His involvement with the Chilean Agrarian Reform Corporation, though not without resistance from sections within the Frei government of the time,[307] was extensive and Freire was able to extend both his theory and practice of adult literacy education considerably. There were some differences, though, between Freire's Brazilian programme and his work in Chile. Llyod notes that while many of the coordinators in Brazilian culture circles were students, the programme in Chile had to rely on paid instructors, many of whom were primary-school teachers who experienced some difficulties in changing from traditional (monological) teaching methods to a dialogical approach to education: 'Despite training in dialogue and the Freirean method, paternalistic attitudes and patterns persist[ed]'.[308] After overcoming the political and pedagogical hurdles, Freire's system became an official programme of the government, and Chile was recognised by Unesco as one of the five nations most effective in overcoming illiteracy.[309] Freire incorporated discussion of the concept of culture into the 'generative words' stage of the programme in Chile, instead of devoting a series of separate sessions to this task. This was because '...the Chilean, unlike the Brazilian who liked discussion about himself as a creative, cultural being, tended to lose interest if he did not begin to learn immediately'.[310] The generative words and codifications, of course, were different in the Brazilian and Chilean campaigns, but the fundamental techniques for learning how to form words (through syllabic combination) were the same.

Freire was briefly involved with adult education work in Tanzania in the early 1970s, but his chief commitments in the decade following his departure from Chile were to literacy programmes in Sao Tome and Principe, and Guinea-Bissau. Both of these programmes have attracted a measure of criticism as well as favourable evaluation; Freire's work in Guinea-Bissau, in particular, was fraught with operational difficulties.

The major problem that emerged was a difference in opinion between Freire and the government of Guinea-Bissau (for whom he was working) over the issue of the Portuguese language. Freire felt that the country could never lift the yoke of colonial oppression completely until it abandoned the language of the colonizers (the Portuguese) and adopted the native Creole dialect. The government insisted that Portuguese remain the official language of Guinea-Bissau, and an impasse was reached. In his own appraisal of his achievements in Guinea-Bissau, Freire concedes that the degree of technical competence with print attained by adults in the programme was not high, but argues that emergence of a new form of political awareness amongst participants outweighed this.[311] He attributes the 'failure' of the campaign to promote an adequate command over the alphabet to the persistence of the authorities in wanting to uphold the Portuguese language.[312]

In Sao Tome and Principe, Freire made a significant break from earlier practices in supporting the use of a primer for literacy learning. From his earliest experiences with adult illiteracy in Brazil, Freire had steered clear of primers, basing his mistrust on the belief that they 'set up a certain grouping of graphic signs as a gift and cast the illiterate in the role of the *object* rather than the *Subject* of his learning'.[313] Adult education efforts in Sao Tome and Principe were organized around books called 'Popular Culture Notebooks'. The first primer in the series - 'Practice to Learn' - was employed in the literacy phase. Additional material was introduced in the post-literacy stage.[314] 'Practice to Learn' was a workbook with sets of words and sentences for illiterates to tackle, coupled with codifications and themes for discussion. The primary notion presented in the early part of the book was the idea that people learn through (social) practice.[315] As learners worked their way through the book they were introduced to progressively more complex themes and ideas relating to national independence, work, knowledge, exploitation, and colonialism. Learners were given opportunities to write words and sentences of their own in each part of the workbook.

The programme was, in Freire's terms, successful, though not without its difficulties. Most of these were tied to wider problems in the overall process of national reconstruction following the country's independence in 1975. Freire mentions obstacles such as the following: international fluctuations in the price for cacao (the main product of Sao Tome and Principe); a lack of 'national cadres' able to deal with the tasks of post-colonial rebuilding of the country; and a shortage of trained personnel and material resources for adult literacy work.[316] Lately, the campaign in Sao Tome and Principe has been criticized, notably by Gee, for the contradictions it embraced between, on the one hand, wanting to encourage people to become independent thinkers and yet, on the other hand, telling them what it means to 'think correctly'.[317] All in all, though, Freire's work in Sao Tome and Principe has not been marked by the same controversy which accompanied the programme in Guinea-Bissau, perhaps largely because, as Freire himself points out, he and his wife Elza found themselves absolutely at one with the government in its articulation of national goals.[318]

Reading the Word and the World: Freirean Critical Literacy

In more recent years, Freire's central theoretical construct (as far as literacy is concerned) has been the notion of 'reading the word and the world'. This theme will be given preliminary treatment here and revisited in the next chapter.[319] In his essay, 'The Importance of the Act of Reading',[320] Freire discusses the way in which his early experience of learning to read words and books was preceded by a certain awareness or growing understanding - i.e. a form of 'reading' - of the world around him. Freire describes the house in Recife where he grew up, with its bedrooms, hall, attic, and terrace. He talks about his backyard, his mother's ferns, and the trees surrounding the house. It was in this world that he first learned to walk, to talk - and to read.

> Truly, that special world presented itself to me as the arena of my perceptual activity, and therefore as the world of my first reading. The *texts*, the *words*, the *letters* of that context were incarnated in a series of things, objects, signs. In perceiving these, I experienced myself, and the more I experienced myself, the more my perceptual capacity increased.[321]

Freire paints a picture of a rich world of early observations and activities. He speaks of the songs of the different birds in his area, of the movements in the sky, of the changing of the mango as it ripens, of the habits of the family animals, of the 'ghosts' which were said to haunt the neighbourhood. All of these experiences formed a deep impression on Freire. His reading of this world - his emerging interpretation and understanding of his surroundings - was accompanied by a form of 'writing' reality.[322] For it was not only the trees, the animals, the clouds, and the ghosts which imprinted themselves on Freire's inner world of experience (and which remained with him as he grew older); Freire himself, as a young boy growing up in his house, his backyard, his neighbourhood in Recife, played a part in shaping, or 'writing', that world. Freire expresses this process as follows:

> ...reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but a certain form of *writing* it or *re-writing* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work.[323]

When it came time for Freire's parents to introduce him to the world of print, his learning of the *word* was a simultaneous extension of his reading of the world. He recalls,

> I learned to read and write on the ground of the back yard of my house, in the shade of mango trees, with words from my world rather than from the wider world of my parents. The earth was my blackboard; sticks, my chalk.[324]

Of course, Freire does not claim that his reading of either the word or the world at this stage was an especially critical one; indeed, he makes it plain that his encounter with these early forms of experience 'did not make...[him] grow up prematurely, a rationalist in boy's clothing'.[325] But the seeds were sown for the development of his later work with illiterate adults. Reading and writing, Freire discovered at an early age, only make sense when they relate to something within the realm of a person's lived experience.[326] It was the expression of a *curious* attitude toward the world which characterized Freire's reading of his childhood environment. This curiosity forms the basis of a deepening restlessness - a searching - which is essential for the formation of a critical approach in reading the word and the world.[327]

Reading the world, Freire argues, is always *prior* (both epistemologically and chronologically) to reading the word.[328] Freire's conceptualization of the sequence of experiences - reading the world first and the word second - has an anthropological and historical basis. Human beings first learned to act on their environment, using and modifying the products of nature, altering the material world. Freire conceives of this transformation of the objective world as a form of 'writing reality'.[329] As humans began to change the natural world, the reality they had created through conscious practical activity 'acted back' on them, modifying their ideas, conceptions and attitudes.[330] From this process of continual reciprocal transformation, human beings emerged as 'writers' and 'readers' of the world - long before they became writers and readers of the word.[331] The same ordering of moments in human experience occurs within the individual human being. The child first learns to relate to his or her environment, then to speak and communicate with others. It is only at this point - once a complex but as yet

incomplete relationship with the world and others has been established - that the child becomes ready to learn to read and write. Freire's preference for basing literacy on the lived history, experience, and social reality of the learners, then, is grounded in an understanding of human evolution and development.

Freire makes it clear that he is opposed to a mechanistic approach to reading and writing. Simply learning how to copy words, combine syllables, form sentences, or structure paragraphs, becomes - at best - a lifeless exercise in drill and memorization. At worst, such a strategy represents a manipulative exercise in domestication: it signifies an attempt to impede the possibility of dealing critically with words, and it effectively precludes the possibility of moving beyond the words to a critique of (social and political) reality. For Freire, a mechanistic approach to the written word - where learners are encouraged to repeat phrases, to memorize words, to learn the techniques for making sentences, without at the same time going beyond mere technique and memorization to a critical engagement with the text and the world - does not constitute an act of *knowing*.[332] Knowing, as we saw in an earlier section, demands a conscious effort to get beneath the surface of the object of study - whether in the process of reading the word or in the act of reading the world - to uncover deeper and deeper layers of meaning. Reading is 'not walking on the words; it's grasping the soul of them'.[333] (This betrays a certain essentialism in Freire's theory of reading, which I shall take up as a theme in the next chapter.)

Taking a critical approach to reading involves 'seizing' the text and 'wrestling' with its themes, ideas and complexities: 'The thing is to fight with the text, even though loving it...To engage in a conflict with the text'.[334] Adopting such a stance requires a (considerable) degree of intellectual discipline, which Freire believes can only be acquired through practice.[335] Banking education is by nature antithetical to critical reading: it depends for its very

existence on passivity in the act of study.[336] While under the banking system the student waits to be 'given' the meaning, the answers, or the message behind a text, under problem-posing education active *engagement* with an author's ideas is encouraged from the very setting up of a 'problem' to be (dialogically) investigated in the first place.

From Freire's point of view, a reader ought to assume the role of a *Subject* in approaching a text. He or she should never simply *accept* what has been presented in a book, as though 'mesmerized by a magical force'.[337] The act of reading demands a 'permanent intellectual disquiet':[338] a curious, restless, probing, searching, questioning approach to study. A reader must be ready to not only *be* challenged by what he or she is reading, but also *to challenge* the text. Seeking a global (rather than fragmented) view of a book is important. This entails, among other things, identifying, ordering and structuring the major themes in a text. Fulfilling this requirement, Freire notes, is often easier on the second reading of a book than on the first.[339] Without losing sight of the 'total picture' presented by the text, it is worthwhile for the reader to respond to specific passages which trigger 'deeper reflection on any topic'.[340] For Freire, a critical posture in the act of reading and studying also requires a sense of modesty. The imperative to challenge the text notwithstanding, a reader ought to be humble enough - and sufficiently *critical* - to recognize (and respond to) to difficulties in interpretation and understanding.[341]

Freire consistently underscores the importance of linking 'text' with 'context' in critical reading.[342] This entails not only attempting to grasp something of the historical, social, political, and cultural conditions under which a text is produced, but also striving to relate the content of the text to *our* - i.e. the reader's - context.[343] Books ought to be studied not as empty abstractions, nor as works which deal with ideas unconnected to our own struggles, issues and problems; instead, a definite effort should be made to relate what is being read

to something in the realm of our experience or social life. We ought to read a text, Freire informs us, in order to understand a certain context. To be able to do this requires some knowledge of the person who wrote the book and the historical conditions under which the text was authored:[344]

> I cannot just suggest the students read Gramsci. I feel obliged to say something about the time and space of Gramsci. I cannot just translate Gramsci into Portuguese because in order to make this translation, it's necessary for me to understand the context in which he wrote and thought.[345]

Freire is critical of the artificial separation of 'word' and 'world' in North American schools. Economic crises, discrimination, struggle: all of these things, Freire points out, are a feature of the social world, but rarely do they become the object of critical reading, study and debate within the school.[346] Students seldom transcend a surface-level understanding of either the word (i.e. school texts) or the world (i.e. social and political reality outside the classroom). The emphasis in schooling is on description rather than interpretation or critical understanding. This tendency reinforces the split between the word and the world for those responsible for teaching the students, with teachers and academics becoming ever more pre-occupied with concepts and increasingly less interested in social transformation. Freire gives the example of theorists who call themselves Marxists, but who 'have never drunk coffee in the house of a worker'.[347] The gulf between theory and practice in such cases is, for Freire, intolerable. Dealing with the word-world relationship in this way, Freire claims, amounts to nothing more than theoretical 'play': theorists become 'Marx experts' but not 'Marxists'.[348]

Freire is similarly scathing in his attack on the myth of neutrality in the teaching of reading and writing. Working with texts is, in Freire's view, never a neutral process. Students are

often encouraged to simply *describe* what they see in a text, in the belief that if they are to be 'scientific' (or 'objective') they must avoid *interpreting* the material.[349] The better one is able to avoid clouding investigation with 'political' questions, so the argument goes, the better scientist one is taken to be. The influence of positivism generally, and those strands derived from the natural sciences in particular, is obvious here. Scientists, it is thought, should deal *just* with the text, not with the text in its social, political, cultural, and historical *context*. Freire objects to this and argues that nothing can be written, taught, read, or studied in a neutral manner. *All* forms of textual engagement - literary, scientific, philosophical, sociological, etc. - are structured and informed by presuppositions about the way the world is and ought to be. This is also true of any mode of teaching and learning which involves the written word: deciding what, how and why texts should be read is a necessarily non-neutral, political, interest-serving process.

In later works, Freire has touched on the possibility of reading being an 'aesthetic' experience. Whether reading a novel, a poem, Marx, or Gramsci, encountering a text ought to be a loving event. Reading should be a joyous, if demanding, activity.[350] The beauty of the text - or, more precisely, of *reading* the text - lies in the possibility of reading becoming an act of knowing:

> ...I have to grasp in between the words some knowledge that helps me not exclusively to go on in the reading and in *understanding* what I'm reading, but also to understand something beyond the book I am reading, beyond the text. It is a pleasure.[351]

Finding the aesthetical moment in reading the text does not come easily. Getting started on the task of reading - reading seriously - is especially difficult.[352] Part of the reason for this

is that reading implies *risking*.[353] To engage a text is, among other things, to risk 'being convinced by the author' and 'being angry'.[354] Reading critically is demanding because it necessitates facing up to these 'risks' and confronting them by re-writing not only the word (through interpretation) but also the world (through transformative action inspired by the text). This responsibility is fraught with dangers and fears, and is charged with emotion. For Freire,

> Knowing...is not a neutral act, not only from the political point of view, but from the point of view of my body, my sensual body. It is full of feelings, of emotions, of tastes.[355]

Freire recounts his experiences with books as a young man, reading and studying into the early hours of the morning, and remarks that he had '...an almost physical connection with the text'.[356] This, exactly, is the moment of joy, of happiness, of knowing - of being *critical* - that signifies reading as an aesthetic, loving event: it is the moment of *entering into* the text, curious, searching, and exploring, all the time linking the word in the text to the wider text that is the world itself.

Freire also speaks of the need for writing to be beautiful. He challenges the notion that the only place for elegance and beauty with the written word is in literature. Scientists, too, must take hold of the 'aesthetical moment' in language and write beautifully.[357] A written text, whether by a novelist, a scientist, or a philosopher, should embrace a clarity and simplicity (without being *simplistic*) which aids understanding. Writing should become a 'noble form, as serious as science'[358] (though, interestingly, Freire says of his own work, 'I do not write beautifully').[359]

The value of books abides in their potential - realized only through critical reading - to serve as vehicles for re-creating practice. Freire insists that a dialectical unity be maintained between theory and practice, between reflection and action.[360] Reading books allows one the opportunity of 'remaking' one's practice theoretically.[361] That is, the act of reading - when it moves from a mere 'walking over the words'[362] to the active, critical engagement with the text which is necessary for theorizing, encourages one to re-examine or 're-read' one's practice and, if necessary, to change ('re-write') it. Of course, it is important not to overestimate the significance of reading in transforming human practice. Reading may be central in shaping the lives and activities of, say, academics; for others, face-to-face discussion, critical media studies, meditation, various forms of community involvement, etc. may be more important.

Literacy and Ethics: Summarizing the Freirean View

Freire's theory and practice reveal a complex relationship between literacy and ethics.[363] Freire's ethic cannot be understood apart from his metaphysic, ontology and epistemology, nor can its significance be appreciated without an examination of the literacy programmes with which he has had major involvement. This section summarizes key elements of Freire's ethic and relates these to Freire's literacy work. Before beginning, however, three pivotal features of Freire's philosophy bear repeating.

(i) All aspects of reality are constantly changing.[364] This idea, which reflects Freire's dialectical approach toward understanding the world, permeates every dimension of Freire's philosophy. From its starting point in his metaphysic (where Freire speaks of change within and between the objective and subjective dimensions of reality), to his epistemology (where it is assumed that knowledge is never fixed nor absolute), to his ontology and ethic (where he argues that human beings are necessarily incomplete and always in a process of

becoming), the principle remains the same: our world - in its myriad material, social, and personal spheres - is a world of change, of interaction, of incompleteness.

(ii) Freire assumes a certain essence to the human condition. Humans, unlike animals, are conscious, temporal, historical beings. Most importantly, for Freire, all human beings, simply through being human, have an ontological vocation of humanization. In this sense, while Freire acknowledges the educational significance of differences across class, race and gender lines, there is nevertheless an implicit assertion in his work that there is something about being human which transcends these differences.[365]

(iii) Humans interact with objective reality (altering it and modifying themselves in turn) and enter into relationships with others. We live in a *social* world, and any attempt to consider how the world *ought* to be must take this observation into account. It makes little sense to talk of Freirean ethics purely in terms of certain ideal qualities in, or modes of conduct for, the *individual*: liberation as a dialogical, collective process of struggle.

What, then, can we say specifically about Freire's ethic? In keeping with point (iii) above, two related facets of Freirean ethical theory must be addressed:

> (a) At one level, Freire upholds the notion of human beings becoming critical, praxical Subjects, in control - as far as this is possible - of their own destinies as creators of history and culture (and thus of themselves).
>
> (b) At another level, Freire's theory points toward a vision of a social world characterized by relations of liberation rather than oppression - i.e. a world where *all*

people have the opportunity to engage in humanizing praxis, through dialogue with others.

This framework suggests five dimensions to what might be called the 'ethical imperative' in Freire's work:

(i) People ought to pursue their ontological vocation of becoming more fully human (through engaging in critical, dialogical praxis).

(ii) No person or group of people ought to knowingly constrain or prevent another person or group of people from pursuing the ontological vocation; that is to say, no person ought to oppress another.

(iii) We ought (collectively and dialogically) to consider what kind of world - what social structures, processes, relationships, etc. - would be necessary to enable (all) people in a given social setting to pursue their humanization.

(iv) All people ought to act to transform existing structures where critical reflection reveals that these structures serve as an impediment to the pursuit of humanization (by any groups within a society): this is the task of liberation.

(v) Educators and others who assume positions of responsibility in the social sphere ought to side with the oppressed in seeking to promote a better (more fully human) world through their activities.

The five dimensions are tightly intertwined, for the pursuit of the ontological vocation by one person inevitably depends on the affording of an opportunity for this pursuit by others (and by the structures, institutions, attitudes, practices, etc. of the world in which one lives). In all cases, the processes involved in fulfilling the Freirean ethical imperative are continuous and necessarily incomplete: we can, it will be recalled from earlier discussion, only ever become *more* fully human, never *fully* human; similarly, the task of creating a better social world must be renewed each time that world takes on a new face (with a new set of themes and tasks to be confronted).

Where does literacy fit into all of this? The link between Freire's ethic (which is inseparable from his metaphysic, ontology, epistemology, and political theory) and his literacy work is complex. On the one hand, Freire is adamant that learning to read and write does not 'in itself' or 'on its own' liberate an individual or group, or transform a society. On the other hand, Freire clearly does not want to deny the humanizing potential of particular forms of reading and writing. (The theoretical issues which bear on these points will be addressed in the next chapter.) Five points are apposite here as a summary of the relationship between literacy and humanization.

(i) Literacy must be understood contextually. Reading and writing always take place under specific political conditions, within given social contexts. Any attempt at setting up a literacy programme must (if it is to be humanizing) involve an examination of the culture of the region within which literacy educators are working. A literacy initiative will never be successful, Freire claims, unless it recognizes the nature of daily life - and the social structures which, in (large) part, determine the limits and constraints of everyday activities - for participants in the programme. This is why Freire insisted from the beginning that the

preliminary stage of his practical literacy work in Brazil - the investigation of local themes, practices and conditions - was so important.

Literacy, for Freire, is always a *political* phenomenon. This is so from the moment at which a person is invited (or coerced, as in compulsory reading at school) to learn to read the written word. The decision to encourage someone to become literate is a political one, just as the denial of literacy is also a political decision. (Witness the direct correlation between illiteracy and being denied the vote in Brazil in the 1950s and early 1960s.[366]) But, more than this, the *way* in which someone becomes literate and practices reading and writing thereafter, is undeniably a question of politics. As far as Freire is concerned, the options are to either institute a form of literacy pedagogy which aims to domesticate and adapt people to accept an oppressive set of social circumstances, or to foster forms of reading and writing which seek to challenge these conditions.[367]

(ii) Extending this point, the words which form the beginning of any literacy programme must be based on the experience(s) - the lived reality - of participants. Freire's literacy work in Brazil provides a classic illustration of this principle. A series of generative ('charged', emotive) words corresponding to aspects of everyday life in Brazil provided the foundation for the programme. Freire argues that the same principle should apply at all levels in the educational spectrum, whether it is adults or children with whom one is working. The first words for any person learning to read and write must be *their* words: words from their world.

This does not mean that personal experience should represent the end-point of a literacy programme. Education, Freire would be quick to say, ought to challenge people to go *beyond* their current understanding of the world (whether this is through reading and writing, or any

other form of social practice), by challenging them, by demanding something more of them in their thinking than they have been accustomed to, by extending their existing critical capacities, and so on. Freire's point is that each person has unique access to at least one domain of knowledge - the reality of their lived experience. No one knows *my* world - my perceptions, feelings, longings, sufferings, activities, etc. - quite the way I do. A literacy programme (indeed, *any* educational programme) cannot succeed if learners are unable to relate in *some* way to what educators or coordinators are saying.[368] The stronger the connection with existing knowledge and experience, the better (other things being equal) learners will be able to proceed with further learning by building on this base.

Freire would regard a literacy campaign which left participants with no better understanding of the world at the end of the programme than that which they had when they started as a failure. But in the process of being challenged to go beyond 'where we are now', it is necessary to constantly relate back to the 'old' (or the existing) in order to understand what is being encountered in the 'new'. In fact, a crucial element of Freire's literacy work was the *reinterpretation* of existing conceptions of reality in light of new experiences. When Freire discusses 'experience', he is referring to the whole web of practices, relationships, activities, and interactions with material phenomena from which a person's understanding of their world derives. This form of understanding provides an indispensable route through which to meet new ideas, but it should not be accepted uncritically as the final or most accurate reading of reality.[369]

(iii) The crucial bridge between existing and new forms of knowledge and experience in any educational endeavour (a literacy programme being one example) is dialogue. Dialogue is the means through which one person gains access to the world of another person - as far as this is possible - and comes to recreate his or her own way of being in and with the world.

As Freire sees it, dialogue is intrinsic to the literacy process. Learning to read and write implies a relationship between two or more people: it is inconceivable, from a Freirean standpoint, to talk of becoming or being literate alone. This idea springs from Freire's recognition that language is necessarily social and shared (this is akin to Wittgenstein's point about private language being impossible). This is the *starting point* for Freire's notion of dialogue, though it does not reveal the particular form Freire believes dialogue should take in educational settings.

In the most fundamental sense, dialogue speaks to what we are as humans: beings of relationships.[370] In developing this idea, Freire's debt to Buber becomes obvious.[371] For Buber, as for Freire, the essence of dialogue is a communicative relationship between human beings. This, in Buber's view, is not confined to conversational communication: dialogue can occur without speech and even in the absence of sound and gesture. At its most basic level, dialogue is the experience of, and more particularly the acknowledgement of, an 'other': a being through which the self is defined. Buber's notion of 'inclusion' is important here. Inclusion comprises three elements: first, a relation of some kind between two (or more) people; second, 'an event experienced by them in common, in which at least one of them actively participates';[372] and third, 'the fact that this one person, without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other'.[373] This is not to be confused with 'empathy'. Buber notes that empathy implies a movement from one point to another: a transposing of oneself into something else. In an empathic relationship one 'glides' with one's feelings into another formation, structure or being, consciously striving to 'trace' the object of contemplation from within.[374] This excludes one's own concreteness: the actuality of objective life is displaced by 'pure aestheticism'.[375] Inclusion, by contrast, extends the concreteness of being, and affirms the complete presence of the reality in which one participates.[376] Conversation, Buber argues,

becomes genuine through consciousness of inclusion, and can be 'real' and 'effective' only when it derives from an *experience* of inclusion - 'of the other side'.[377] Buber notes:

> A dialogical relation will show itself...in genuine conversation, but it is not composed of this. Not only is the shared silence of two such persons a dialogue, but also their dialogical life continues, even when they are separated in space, as the continual potential presence of the one to the other, as an unexpressed intercourse.[378]

Freire talks of intersubjectivity, or intercommunication, as a *primordial* human characteristic.[379] The human world, for Freire, could not exist without communication.[380] No human being can think, act, or *be* alone. This point has profound implications for the way education and literacy are conceived. Freire states:

> At the moment in which educators carry out their research, when as cognitive Subjects they stand face to face with a knowable object, they are only apparently alone. Not only do they establish a mysterious, invisible dialogue with those who carried out the same act of knowing before them, but they engage in a dialogue with themselves too. Place [sic] face to face before themselves they investigate and question themselves. The more they ask questions the more they feel that their curiosity about the object of their knowledge is not decreasing. It only diminishes if it is isolated from human beings and the world.[381]

The immediate *physical* of other human beings, then, is not a prerequisite for all forms of dialogue. (I revisit this idea briefly in the next chapter.) Thus it becomes possible to speak

of dialogical relation between readers and texts. Books, from Freire's point of view, ought to be actively *engaged*: this means entering into a relationship of a particular kind with the text, allowing, in a sense, the text to 'talk' to us while we simultaneously 'talk' to it. Readers, then, ought to both apply the ideas they encounter in books to their own struggles and material circumstances, *and* bring their personal experiences to bear in interpreting and 'rewriting' texts. Reading, for Freire, means 'seizing' or 'grappling' with the text, both challenging it and being prepared to *be* challenged by it. The respect for others necessary for Freirean dialogue is retained - indeed enhanced - here: to tackle a text critically is to indicate the worth of engaging an author's ideas.

With regard to *education*, and, more specifically, pedagogy, Freire talks of dialogue as a process of communication between two thinking Subjects seeking to know, mediated by the object of study, within a given social context.[382] Educational (or pedagogical) dialogue is always *purposeful* communication: the object of dialogue is to critically investigate a specific subject, problem or theme, with a view to seeking the *raison d'etre* which explains the object of study,[383] and to 'naming' the world. Dialogue in liberating education is structured and rigorous, and demands a certain directiveness on the part of teachers and coordinators. In this sense, pedagogical dialogue *presupposes* communication and inclusion, but goes beyond this to a deeper relationship between *knowing* Subjects.

Dialogue provides a 'way into' the world of the illiterate (or the world of any learner in an educative situation) for teachers or coordinators; indeed, there is no other way of properly 'tapping' the unique world of each learner's knowledge and experience apart from dialogue - although the process may be assisted by other processes (e.g. participant observation). Equally, and this point is often forgotten, dialogue is the means through which learners can enter the (lettered, literate) world of the coordinator. The purpose of dialogue in a literacy

programme is to not only facilitate the acquisition of reading and writing abilities, but also to promote a critical comprehension, and transformation, of the participants' social world. This objective applies (though in slightly different ways, as the discussion of education earlier in the chapter indicated) to both coordinators *and* participants, both of whom are involved in the process of reinterpreting and remaking that reality. Freire's assumptions about dialogue in the process of adult literacy education are examined critically in chapter four.

(iv) The overriding feature of all of Freire's literacy work is his emphasis on the importance of being *critical* in reading and writing. In both his practical work with illiterate adults and his numerous theoretical statements on literacy, Freire has always upheld the worth of a critical approach toward both the 'word' and the 'world'. This applies not only to adults, but also to children: 'No matter the level or the age of the students we teach, from preschool to graduate school, reading critically is absolutely important and fundamental'.[384] Even where he talks about the aesthetic moment in reading, the beauty of books, or the emotions involved in literate activity, these things are defined against the dominant theme of becoming critical.[385] Reading is 'joyous' to the extent that it becomes an active, dialogical, critical process; books become 'beautiful' when critically engaged. Unless it is critical, reading cannot become an act of *knowing*.[386]

In Freire's earlier work, the critical aspect of literacy was defined in relation to the concept of 'conscientization'. (This highly contested notion will be discussed in depth in chapter four.) In the literacy programmes with which Freire was involved, the aim was for illiterate adults to move from a state of either magical or naive consciousness toward (an ever-evolving) critical consciousness.[387] More specifically, Freire's goal was '...to make it possible for illiterates to learn quickly how to write and to read, and simultaneously learn also the reasons why the society works in this way or that way'.[388] In later theoretical work, Freire

constantly stresses the need for a certain attitude in the literacy process. We are advised to approach texts in a searching, questioning, curious, restless manner.[389] It is the *quality* of reading, not the number of books of read, that matters.[390]

Becoming, and being, critically literate in the Freirean sense implies the development of a particular orientation toward the world. Reading *texts* critically, from a Freirean point of view, necessitates, and is only possible through, a critical reading of a given *context*. 'Word' and 'world' become dynamically intertwined in Freirean critical literacy. Critical reading involves a constant interplay between text and context. Contextualizing a text demands, for example, that the author's historical circumstances be taken into account in analysing a book; on the other hand, a text can allow the reader to reinterpret aspects of his or her world. The aim, then, is to develop a more critical understanding of text *and* context through interrogating one in relation to the other.

At a deeper level, however, the conventional distinction between 'text' and 'context' can be collapsed in understanding Freirean critical literacy. While 'texts' can be taken as the equivalent of 'books' in many of Freire's discussions of reading, there is also a much broader notion of 'text' in Freirean theory. Freire talks of praxis - reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it[391] - as a process of 'speaking a true word'.[392] 'True words' represent the dialectical synthesis of theory and practice, action and reflection, word and world. The 'text' to be 'read' and 'written' or 'rewritten' in speaking a true word is social reality itself.[393] Freirean critical literacy, thus, must be seen as a form of, or an aspect of, transformative, reflective social action. More specifically, critical literacy implies a conscious, practical, dialogical attempt to understand, challenge and change oppressive social structures.

Hence, the Freirean view of critical literacy is inclusive of, but also goes beyond, the notion of (merely) critically analysing and evaluating books. Freire does not deny the value of dissecting an author's arguments, identifying key themes and ideas, questioning and problematizing pivotal assumptions, etc.; in fact, he explicitly recommends that readers adopt such practices. But there is more to the Freirean notion of critical literacy than this. For Freire, critical literacy is a mode of discursive practice: a way of 'being in (and with) the world'. To read and write critically is to engage in a form of dialogical praxis: it is to enter history as a critically conscious Subject, naming and transforming both the word and the world. Critical literacy, therefore, is one element of the struggle for liberation from oppression. Learning to read and write (in the conventional sense) does not in itself bring about the overthrow of oppressive attitudes, practices and structures, but it can play a *part* in this process.

In Brazil Freire encouraged adults to reflect on a series of codifications (pictorial representations of daily life) through dialogue with their peers, and to challenge prevailing explanations of political reality. Embedded in the codifications were 'generative words', which were imbued with emotion and saturated with existential meaning. The first words in learning to read and write, therefore, were drawn directly from the world of the illiterates, and formed the starting point for a re-examination of that world; from this process of reflecting on reality, new words emerged: these provided the basis for a further re-examination; and so on. This dialectical relationship between 'word' and 'world' is never static, for social reality is constantly changing. The Brazilian programme saw the *beginning* of Freirean critical literacy, but its full flowering in a post-literacy phase was stifled by the military coup in 1964 and Freire was forced into exile. While the struggle to transform oppressive social conditions met with only limited success, the essence of critical literacy was revealed. 'Texts' emerged from, and were turned back upon, contexts; the reading of both

words and the world was an ostensibly dialogical process;[394] and new modes of thinking, acting and being were nurtured.

The Freirean notion of critical literacy, then, is concerned with the development of a particular mode of *being* and *acting* - not simply a way of dealing with books. Reading is just one of the myriad activities and processes in life toward which a critical approach might be taken. This is where the real significance of Freire's construct of 'reading the word and the world' lies. Critical literacy, for Freire, has to do with much *more* than reading and writing in the conventional (technical) sense: in many ways, the actual reading of texts is secondary to the emerging, deepening understanding of the world Freire argues ought to be part of a literacy programme. (The Freirean notion of 'literacy' will be analyzed in greater depth in the next chapter.) Texts are not humanizing: people humanize themselves - *in part*, through engaging books and other written texts, but, more profoundly, through reading (i.e. interpreting, reflecting upon, interrogating, theorizing, investigating, exploring, probing, questioning, etc.) and writing (acting upon and dialogically transforming) the social world.

(v) It follows from this point that Freirean critical literacy represents a form of (humanizing) *praxis*. With regard to his initial adult literacy work in Brazil, Freire has acknowledged in more recent years that he was naive in his thinking at the time in not taking sufficient account of the political impediments to transformation.[395] In retrospect, Freire has attained a very clear picture of the conditions necessary for a truly successful literacy programme (that is, one which is humanizing): '...programs of adult literacy have been efficient in societies in which suffering and change created a special motivation in the people for reading and writing'.[396] In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Freire speaks of the success of the Nicaraguan literacy crusade in these terms:

> Literacy in the case of Nicaragua started to take place as soon as the people took their history into their own hands. Taking history into your own hands precedes taking up the alphabet. Anyone who takes history into his or her own hands can easily take up the alphabet. The process of literacy is much easier than the process of taking history into your own hands, since this entails the 'rewriting' of your society. In Nicaragua the people rewrote their society before reading the word.[397]

This statement reflects (and encapsulates) Freire's special sense of 'literacy'. On other conceptions of literacy, the quotation might appear contradictory: it seems odd, on the surface, to talk of writing or rewriting society before one is 'able' to read and write. But, for Freire, *all* human beings are 'readers' and 'writers' of the world (though some are more critical than others in this). Reflecting upon ('reading'), and transforming ('writing', or 'rewriting'), reality has been a feature - indeed, the defining characteristic - of humankind for thousands of years. In a society such as pre-revolutionary Nicaragua, however, the impediments to liberating social transformation were enormous. The 'rewriting' of Nicaraguan history, culminating in the insurrection of 1979, represented a momentous struggle to reclaim the 'word' by changing the world. Freire would say that the Nicaraguans who participated in this process spoke a 'true word', through the communicative 'word' of dialogue, thereby furnishing the conditions for learning the written word. In 'taking up the alphabet', Nicaraguans acquired the means to continue 'rewriting' their society in the sense of (literally) rewriting the history of Nicaragua.

There is, Freire asserts, a very direct correspondence between the revolutionary transformation of a society and success in adult literacy work.[398] Where people have struggled against concrete forms of oppression, in a critical and dialogical way, they have

already engaged in humanizing praxis. To introduce the learning of reading and writing in the context of revolutionary national change is to build on this praxis, and in so doing create a liberating (and, hence, humanizing) form of literacy education. The key to the success of literacy initiatives in revolutionary societies is that people have already reached a certain state of (critical) consciousness before embarking on the programme, and have already become praxical Subjects, taking (increasing) control of their own destinies. The themes introduced in literacy campaigns following national revolutions have invariably been based on issues addressed during the revolutionary process itself (including such subjects as oppression, colonialism, freedom, the revolutionary leadership, health, education, etc.).[399] People are strongly motivated to learn to read and write because they can see (and have seen) definite changes in their social environment and daily lives.

In one sense, therefore, we can speak of reading and writing playing a *part* in the wider process of social transformation. At a deeper level, however, literacy - as a reading and writing, which is to say a 'naming', of both 'word' and 'world' - is the transformative process itself. Literacy is humanizing to the extent that it becomes critical, dialogical, and praxical. For Freire, liberating adult literacy education implies both the learning of letters, words and sentences, and the development of a particular orientation toward the world. Becoming (and being) literate thus entails more than merely acquiring print skills; it demands, in Freire's view, an attempt to challenge prevailing conditions of oppression and the (dominant) ideas which support oppressive circumstances. The commitment to critical reflection and action in reading and writing must be constantly renewed afresh, given an ever changing social world.

Notes

1. Compare, Shor, I. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987a, *Empowering Education*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992; Alfred, D. 'The Relevance of the Work of Paulo Freire to Radical Community Education in Britain', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.3, no.2, 1984; Barnes, B. and Boshier, R. 'Andragogy of the Oppressed: A Perspective on the Relevance of Paulo Freire for New Zealand Adult Education', *Continuing Education in New Zealand*, vol.8, no.1, 1976; Findlay, P. 'Conscientization and Social Movements in Canada: The Relevance of Paulo Freire's Ideas in Contemporary Politics', Lister, I. 'Conscientization and Political Literacy: A British Encounter with Paulo Freire': both in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994; Finlay, L.S. and Faith, V. 'Illiteracy and Alienation in American Colleges: Is Paulo Freire's Pedagogy Relevant?', Fiore, K. and Elsasser, N. '"Strangers No More": A Liberatory Literacy Curriculum': both in Shor, I. (ed.) *Freire for the Classroom*, New Hampshire, Boynton/Cook, 1987; Hickling-Hudson, A. 'Toward Communication Praxis: Reflections on the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Educational Change in Grenada', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.2, 1988; London, J. 'Reflections Upon the Relevance of Paulo Freire for American Adult Education', in Grabowski, S. (ed.) *Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator*, Syracuse, ERIC Clearing House on Adult Education, 1972; Selander, N.S. 'The Case of Freire: Intellectuals and the Transformation of Ideas Notes on Ideology and Context', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol.22, no.6, 1990.

2. For a sampling of views, see Alschuler, A.S. 'Creating a World Where it is Easier to Love: Counseling Applications of Paulo Freire's Theory', *Journal of Counseling and Development*, vol.64, no.8, 1986; Frankenstein, M. 'Critical Mathematics Education: An Application of Paulo Freire's Epistemology', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.4, 1983; Rivage-Seul, M.K. 'Peace Education: Imagination and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.57, no.2, 1987; Rivage-Seul, M. and Rivage-Seul, M. 'Critical Thought and Moral Imagination: Peace Education in Freirean Perspective', Frankenstein, M. and Powell, A.B. 'Toward Liberatory Mathematics: Paulo Freire's Epistemology and Ethnomathematics': both in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994; Schniedewind, N. 'Feminist Values: Guidelines for Teaching Methodology in Women's Studies', in Shor, I. (ed.) *Freire for the Classroom*, New Hampshire, Boynton/Cook, 1987; Shor, I. 'Working Hands and Critical Minds: A Paulo Freire Model for Job Training', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.2, 1988; Elias, J.L. 'Paulo Freire: Religious Educator', *Religious Education*, January-February 1976; O'Hara, M. 'Person-Centered Approach as Conscientizacao: The Works of Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol.29, no.1, 1989; Burstow, B. 'Conscientization: A New Direction for Ex-Inmate Education', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.8, no.1, 1989; Kilian, A. 'Conscientisation: An Empowering, Nonformal Education Approach for Community Health Workers', *Community Development Journal*, vol.23, no.2, 1988; Graman, T. 'Education for Humanization: Applying Paulo Freire's Pedagogy to Learning a Second Language', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.4, 1988; Faltis, C. 'Spanish for Native Speakers: Freirian and Vygotskian Perspectives', *Foreign Language Annals*, vol.23, no.2, 1990.

3. Mackie, R. 'Introduction', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980b, p.3.

4. Bell, B., Gaventa, J. and Peters, J. 'Editors' Introduction', in Horton, M. and Freire, P. *We Make the Road By Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990, p.xix.

5. Cited Taylor, P.V. *The Texts of Paulo Freire*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993, p.14.

6. Bell, Gaventa and Peters, *loc. cit.*

7. See Freire, P. and Shor, I. *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, London, MacMillan, 1987, p.29.

8. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.15.

9. Collins, D.E. *Paulo Freire: His Life, Works and Thought*, New York, Paulist Press, 1977, p.5; Taylor, *ibid.*

10. See Freire, P. *The Politics of Education*, London, MacMillan, 1985, p.175.

11. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.22.

12. See, for example, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.175-176; Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, pp.29-30.

13. Mackie, *op. cit.*, p.4.

14. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp.23-24.

15. See Brown, C. 'Literacy in 30 Hours: Paulo Freire's Process in Northeast Brazil', *Social Policy*, vol.5, no.2, 1974; Sanders, T.G. 'The Paulo Freire Method: Literacy Training and Conscientization', in La Belle, T.J. (ed.) *Education and Development: Latin America and the Caribbean*, Los Angeles, Latin American Center, 1972.

16. See Mackie (1980b), *op. cit.*, p.5; Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.180. There is some uncertainty about exactly how long Freire spent in jail: a number of commentators believe it was 70, not 75, days. See Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp.27-28.

17. Taylor, *ibid.*, p.28.

18. Freire, P. *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, London, Writers and Readers, 1976a. This book has also been published as *Education for Critical Consciousness*, New York, Seabury, 1973.

19. Freire, P. and Faundez, A. *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1989, pp.11-12.

20. The most widely circulated version is Freire, P. *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972b. This comprises two essays, initially published in the May and August issues of *Harvard Educational Review* in 1970.

21. Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1970. The Penguin edition, from which all citations in the present study will be taken, is the best known: Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972a.

22. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.13.

23. Freire, P. *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, London, Writers and Readers, 1978.

24. See Freire, P. and Macedo, D. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, chapter four.

25. Montero-Sieburth, M. 'A Rationale for Critical Pedagogy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.55, no.4, 1985, p.463.

26. Apart from his interview with Donaldo Macedo and the Introduction by Henry Giroux, all material in Freire's *The Politics of Education* (1985, *op. cit.*) had been previously published.

27. Freire and Shor, Freire and Macedo, Freire and Horton: all *op. cit.*; Horton, M. and Freire, P. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, eds. B. Bell, J. Gaventa and J. Peters, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990; Escobar, *et al. Paulo Freire on Higher Education: A Dialogue at the National University of Mexico*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994.

28. Torres, C.A. 'Paulo Freire as Secretary of Education in the Municipality of Sao Paulo', *Comparative Education Review*, vol.38, no.2, 1994a, p.184.

29. *Ibid.*; Bell, Gaventa and Peters, *op. cit.*, p.xxxii.

30. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.33.

31. Freire has published a further two books following his resignation from the Municipal Bureau of Education in Sao Paulo. These texts only became available to me in the final stages of writing this thesis. While the books will be cited occasionally below, there has not been time to adequately engage the ideas presented in them or to draw thorough comparisons with earlier texts. See Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the City*, New York, Continuum, 1993b, *Pedagogy of Hope*, New York, Continuum, 1994.

32. Much of the material in the next section is to be published in Roberts, P. 'The Dangers of Domestication: A Case-Study', forthcoming in *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.15, 1996a.

33. This notion is also advanced by Kozol, J. 'Keeping Social Change at a Safe Distance', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.52, no.1, 1982, p.55.

34. Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.139.

35. *Ibid.*, p.140.

36. On the relationship between First, Second, and Third worlds, see McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. 'Introduction', in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994b, p.2.

37. For a rigorous discussion of the political background to Freire's educational efforts in various countries, see Torres, C.A. 'From the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to *A Luta Continua*: The Political Pedagogy of Paulo Freire', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993.

38. I comment critically on this phrase in the later section on Freire's practical literacy work.

39. Llyod, A.S. 'Freire, Conscientization, and Adult Education', *Adult Education*, vol.23, no.1, 1972, p.12.

40. For an excellent account of the politics of education in Brazil, past and present, see Silva, T.T. da and McLaren, P. 'Knowledge Under Siege: The Brazilian Debate', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993.

41. See chapter four below, and Roberts, P. 'Rethinking Conscientization', forthcoming in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol.30, 1996b.

42. I discuss these points in some depth in chapter four.

43. Freire, P. and Macedo, D. 'A Dialogue with Paulo Freire', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.171.

44. Colin Lankshear recalls that his use of the female pronoun in *Freedom and Education* (Auckland, Milton Brookes, 1982) caused a 'furore'. The male referent was dominant in Anglo-American contexts until the mid-1980s.

45. Freire and Macedo (1993), *loc. cit.*

46. *Ibid.*, p.172. See also, Bock, S. 'Conscientization: Paulo Freire and Class-Based Practice', *Catalyst*, no.6, 1980, especially p.7.

47. Freire and Macedo (1993), *ibid.*, p.173. Beyond this, Portuguese, like Spanish and French, is a gendered language. Literal translations carry elements of this into English. I owe this point to Colin Lankshear.

48. *Ibid.* For balanced, rigorous discussions of Freire's sexism, see hooks, b. 'Bell Hooks Speaking About Paulo Freire - The Man, His Work', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993; and Weiler, K. 'Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.61, no.4, 1991.

49. There were a host of different positions represented in the emerging 'alternative' educational literature at the time. Many of the best known books were strongly polemical and deliberately provocative, rather than thoroughly argued academic treatises. Compare, for example, the following (all published by Penguin at Harmondsworth): Illich, I. *Deschooling Society*, 1973; Reimer, E. *School is Dead*, 1971b; Goodman, P. *Compulsory Miseducation*, 1971; Postman, N. and Weingartner, D. *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, 1971; Holt, J. *How Children Fail*, 1969, *How Children Learn*, 1970, *The Underachieving School*, 1971a, *What Do I Do Monday?*, 1971b.

50. The major works on deschooling by these two authors are those cited in the previous note. For a more concise version of Reimer's critique, see Reimer, E. 'An Essay on Alternatives in Education', *Interchange*, vol.2, no.1, 1971a.

51. Illich, Reimer and other key figures in the deschooling movement tended to be more polemical than Freire in their critiques of education. If the major early texts by Illich

and Freire are compared, it is clear that the latter's pedagogical ideas rest upon a more thoroughly argued ontological, ethical and political theoretical base than the former's. Consider, for example, Illich (1973), *op. cit..*, and Freire (1972a), *op. cit.* See also Freire's comments in Makins, V. 'Interview with Paulo Freire', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 20 October 1972, p.80; and Lister, I. 'Towards a Pedagogy of the Oppressed', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 September 1973, p.14.

52. For analyses which draw substantially on Marxist ideas, see the following: Althusser, L. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London, New Left Books, 1971; Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. *Schooling in Capitalist America*, New York, Basic Books, 1976; Harris, K. *Education and Knowledge*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, *Teachers and Classes*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982; Sharp, R. *Knowledge, Ideology and the Politics of Schooling: Towards a Marxist Analysis of Education*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980. For a Marxist account of the way in which certain forms of resistance in schools contribute to social reproduction, see Willis, P. *Learning to Labour*, Hampshire, Gower, 1977.

53. To judge by Freire's own comments in *The Politics of Education*, the book's influence extends not only to those groups mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, but also to mathematicians, physicists, anthropologists, artists and musicians. See Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.191.

54. See Freire and Shor, Freire and Macedo (1987), Freire and Faundez, Horton and Freire, Escobar *et al.*: all *op. cit.*

55. Compare, Macedo's comments in Freire and Macedo (1993), *op. cit*; Giroux, H.A. 'Paulo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993; Weiler, *op. cit.* Some of the major points in this paragraph are to be reproduced in Roberts, P. Review of McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994, forthcoming in *Journal of Education Policy*, vol.10, no.1, 1995c.

56. See Roberts (1996b), *op. cit.*

57. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.61.

58. Compare, Freire, P. 'Are Adult Literacy Programmes Neutral?', in Bataille, L. (ed.) *A Turning Point for Literacy*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1976b, p.195, (1985), *op. cit.*, p.180.

59. See Freire, P. 'Foreword', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993a. See also, McLaren and Leonard's introduction in the same volume: 'Editors' Introduction - Absent Discourses: Paulo Freire and the Dangerous Memories of Liberation', 1993b, especially pp.2-3.

60. Compare, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.123-125, 152; Fonseca, C. 'Paulo Freire in Bombay', *New Frontiers in Education*, vol.3, no.2, 1973, p.94. One common misconception about Freire (which would be less likely to occur if his work was studied holistically) is that he is a priest. Although the Catholic influence on his ideas is considerable, Freire has never had formal theological training. For two published examples of this misconception, see Hendrix, R. 'The Status and Politics of Writing Instruction', in Whiteman, M.F. (ed.) *Writing: The Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written*

Communication, Hillsdale, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1981, p.68; and Oliver, L.P. 'The Third World is a Different World', *Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research*, vol.10, no.5, 1987, p.27.

61. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, pp.85-86. Compare also, Fonseca, *ibid;* Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.123-125, 152.

62. For a succinct summary of his approach to reading and study, see Freire (1985), *ibid.*, pp.1-4.

63. See, for example, Freire, P. 'Literacy and the Possible Dream', *Prospects*, vol.6, no.1, 1976c, p.70, (1985), *ibid.*, p.125.

64. Aronowitz, S. 'Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.8.

65. *Ibid.*, pp.8-9. See also, Macedo, D. 'Preface', in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994. For comment on some of the wider issues pertinent to this problem, see Bartolome, L.I. 'Beyond the Methods Fetish: Toward a Humanizing Pedagogy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.64, no.2, 1994. One commentator distinguishes between the 'Paulo Freire System' and the 'Paulo Freire Method', the former referring to 'a "system" of educational techniques,...which could be applied to all levels of formal and non-formal education', and the latter to Freire's 'technique for literacy work'. See Gerhardt, H-P. 'Paulo Freire', *Prospects*, vol.23, nos.3/4, 1993, p.441. This is still problematic, however, for it reinforces the notion that a Freirean system of education can be adequately described as a collection of 'techniques'. I shall argue, however, that there is more to liberating education than this distinction suggests.

66. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.46-47.

67. Cf. Brady, J. 'Critical Literacy, Feminism and a Politics of Representation', in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.144.

68. Freire (1993), *op. cit.*, p.ix.

69. Cf. Aronowitz, *op. cit.*, p.8.

70. See Illich, *op. cit.*

71. Cited Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. 'Preface', in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993b, pp.xvi-xvii.

72. For one example, see Timpson, W.M. 'Paulo Freire: Advocate of Literacy Through Liberation', *Educational Leadership*, vol.45, no.5, 1988, pp.63-64.

73. Lankshear, C. 'Literacy and Empowerment: Discourse, Power, Critique', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, vol.29, no.1, 1994a, p.59. Compare also, Zacharakis-Jutz, J. 'Post-Freirean Adult Education: A Question of Empowerment and Power', *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol.39, no.1, 1988, p.41.

74. Arguably, a litany of other concepts in social theory have been sapped of their original force and intent: 'empowerment', 'conscientization' and 'dialogue' could be joined with 'critical thinking', 'liberation', 'collaboration', 'participation', etc. in a broader discussion of this issue.

75. For a critical discussion of this point as it pertains to the literature on adult education, see Griffith, W.S. 'Paulo Freire: Utopian Perspective on Literacy Education for Revolution', in Grabowski, S.M. (ed.) *Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator*, Syracuse, ERIC Clearing House on Adult Education, 1972, pp.67-68.

76. Shallcrass, J. 'The Politics of Education', *New Zealand Listener*, 13 April 1974, p.24.

77. 'Freire on Free Space', *New Citizen*, 30 May 1974d.

78. For an overview of the influences, see Mackie, R. 'Contributions to the Thought of Paulo Freire', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980c.

79. See Freire's comments in 'Conscientisation, Not Magic, Warns Paulo Freire', *LP News Service* (Lima, Peru), 6 August 1971.

80. Compare, Hill, B. 'When I Met Marx, I Continued to Meet Christ on the Corners of the Street', *The Age*, 19 April 1974; Rowe, K. 'Freire Speaks on Freire', *Church and Community*, vol.31, no.4, 1974, p.7.

81. Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.198.

82. See *ibid.*, pp.1-4, 111-113.

83. See Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, pp.3-6.

84. For a discussion of tensions, inconsistencies and apparent contradictions, see Leach, T. 'Paulo Freire: Dialogue, Politics and Relevance', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.1, no.3, 1982; and Walker, J. 'The End of Dialogue: Paulo Freire on Politics and Education', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980.

85. Compare, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.151-152.

86. See Freire, P. 'Education for Liberation', *One World*, no.8, 1975a, p.16; Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, pp.31-32.

87. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.11.

88. For Freire's reflections on his work during this period, see Freire (1993b), *op. cit.*

89. Torres, C.A. and Freire, P. 'Twenty Years after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: Paulo Freire in Conversation with Carlos Alberto Torres', in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.105.

90. Freire (1993b), *op. cit.*, p.140.

91. For an excellent discussion of these strands among Freire's influences, see Mackie (1980c), *op. cit.*

92. Compare, *ibid.*

93. Compare, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.179, (1993a), *op. cit.*, pp.ix-x, 'Foreword', in Giroux, H.A. *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Masachusetts, Bergin and Garvey, 1983b, 'Editor's Introduction', in Giroux, H.A. *Teachers as Intellectuals*, Massachusetts, Bergin and Garvey, 1988.

94. See Freire and Shor, Freire and Macedo (1987), Horton and Freire: all *op. cit.* Freire has also acted as Series Editor (with Henry Giroux) for a sequence of thematically-linked books on education published by Bergin and Garvey.

95. Compare, Freire (1993a), *op. cit.*, pp.ix-xii.

96. Compare, Freire, P. 'Adult Education as Cultural Action', seminar given at Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Center for Studies in Education and Development, 1969b, p.1.

97. For a helpful overview of different approaches to the dialectic, see Hammer, R. and McLaren, P. 'Rethinking the Dialectic: A Social Semiotic Perspective for Educators', *Educational Theory*, vol.41, no.1, 1991.

98. Hegel, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*, vol.2, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1929, p.67.

99. This representation of the Hegelian dialectic can be misleading, though, since the 'thesis' itself contains within it contradictions and is at any given moment changing.

100. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for instance, Hegel analyses the process of dialectical change through the concepts of 'consciousness', 'self-consciousness', 'reason', etc., ending with the notion of 'absolute knowing' - spirit or mind knowing itself. See Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977.

101. Marx, K. *Capital*, vol.1, trans. B. Fowkes, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, p.102. This means that '[For Hegel the dialectic is] standing on its head. It must be inverted...' (*ibid.*, p.103).

102. *Ibid.*, pp.283-284.

103. The wage paid to workers is just sufficient to enable them to sustain themselves in order to continue labouring for the capitalist (but insufficient to allow workers to break free from the shackles of the system). In this way, as Marx points out, the capitalist benefits not only from the time the worker spends in selling his or her labour-power, but also from the time the worker spends away from the workplace, regaining the strength necessary for the next working day. See *ibid.*, p.717.

104. Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, p.53.

105. Cf. *ibid.*, p.54.

106. Freire and Shor, *ibid.*, p.82.

107. See Mao Tse-Tung, *Four Essays on Philosophy*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1968, especially pp.23-78.

108. In the current postmodern climate, of course, this idea is held in dim regard by many educationists and social theorists.

109. Giroux, H.A. *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*, London, Falmer, 1981, p.114.

110. Torres and Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.106.

111. *Ibid.*

112. For an extended discussion of Freire's epistemology, see Matthews, M. 'Knowledge, Action and Power', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980.

113. See Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.107.

114. See Freire, P. 'Knowledge is a Critical Appraisal of the World', *Ceres*, May-June 1971e, pp.47-48.

115. Freire, P. 'By Learning They Can Teach', *Studies in Adult Education*, no.2, 1971c, p.2.

116. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.50.

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*

119. Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, revised edn., Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976, p.42, emphasis mine.

120. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.82.

121. Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, p.78.

122. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.101. See also, Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.117; Davis, R. 'Education for Awareness: A Talk with Paulo Freire', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980, p.66.

123. Cf. Freire (1976a), *ibid.*

124. *Ibid.*

125. Giroux, H.A. 'Introduction', in Freire, P. *The Politics of Education*, London, MacMillan, 1985, p.xxiii. See also, Gramsci, A. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, pp.5-23; and Lankshear, C. 'In Whose Interests? The Role of Intellectuals in New Zealand Society', *Sites*, no.17, 1988b.

126. Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd edn., trans. H.D.P. Lee, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, section 507.

127. Cf. *ibid.*, sections 509d and 510a.

128. *Ibid.*, translator's note, p.311.

129. *Ibid.*, section 511b.

130. *Ibid.*, section 505a.

131. *Ibid.*, section 505d.

132. *Ibid.*, section 508e.

133. *Ibid.*, section 518d.

134. McLaren, P. and Silva, T.T. da 'Decentering Pedagogy: Critical Literacy, Resistance and the Politics of Memory', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.55.

135. *Ibid.*

136. See Freire's comments in Davis, *op. cit.*, pp.58-59.

137. See Teilhard de Chardin, P. *The Phenomenon of Man*, London, Collins, 1959, especially pp.164-180.

138. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.57, 'The "Banking" Concept of Education and Dehumanization: The Problem-Conscious Concept of Education and Humanization', translated from *Christianismo y Sociedad*, September 1968, p.4.

139. For an earlier example of the comparison between Freire and Aristotle, see Lankshear, C. 'Functional Literacy From a Freirean Point of View', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993a, pp.108-109.

140. Plato, *op. cit.*, sections 353a-353b.

141. *Ibid.*, section 353b.

142. Aristotle, *Ethics* (The Nicomachean Ethics), revised edn., trans. J.A.K. Thomson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, section 1097b.

143. *Ibid.*, section 1098a.

144. *Ibid.*

145. *Ibid.*, section 1099a.

146. *Ibid.*, section 1097b.

147. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.28.

148. Roberts, P. 'Paulo Freire and Science Education', *Delta*, no.41, 1989, p.42. Compare, Marx (1976), *op. cit.*, p.284.

149. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.70.

150. See Freire, P. 'A Few Notions About the Word "Concientization"', in Dale, R., Esland, G. and MacDonald, M. (eds.) *Schooling and Capitalism: A Sociological Reader*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976d, p.224.

151. Compare, Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.60-61, 'Research Methods', *Literacy Discussion*, Spring 1974c, p.141.

152. Freire, P. 'Cultural Action: A Dialectic Analysis', *CIDOC Cuaderno*, no.1004, 1970e, p.7.

153. Marx, *loc. cit.*

154. Freire, P. 'Cultural Liberty in Latin America', *International Catholic Auxiliaries News*, vol.7, no.1, 1969a, p.3, 'Cultural Freedom in Latin America', in Colonnese, L.M. (ed.) *Human Rights and the Liberation of Man in the Americas*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1970d, p.166.

155. See Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.70-73, (1976a), *op. cit.*, pp.3-5.

156. Freire (1972a), *ibid.*, p.60.

157. Freire, P. 'Cultural Action', lecture delivered at CIDOC, Cuernavaca, January 1970b, p.1.

158. See Makins, *loc. cit.*

159. *Ibid.*

160. Compare, Freire, P. 'Showing a Man How to Name the World', *New World Outlook*, August 1970a, p.16.

161. Freire (1972a), *op. cit..*, p.97.

162. See Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.109; Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.111.

163. Compare, Marx, K. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970, p.21; Marx and Engels (1976), *op. cit.*, p.42; Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, pp.29-30, 51-57.

164. Descartes, R. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol.1, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, London, Cambridge University Press, 1931, p.101.

165. This quotation is taken from Freire's comments in Fonseca, *op. cit.*, p.96.

166. Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.129.

167. Buber's influence is apparent here. (See the discussion in the final section of the chapter.)

168. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.61.

169. *Ibid.*

170. According to Lankshear, 'speaking a true word', 'naming the world', and 'praxis' are interchangeable terms for Freire. See Lankshear (1993a), *op. cit.*, p.96.

171. *Ibid*, pp.60-61.

172. *Ibid.*, p.61.

173. See *ibid.*, pp.62-65. Compare also, Freire, P. 'To the Coordinator of a "Culture Circle"', *Convergence*, vol.4, no.1, 1971d, p.61. The Christian (and specifically, Catholic) influence on Freire's thought is readily apparent here. For a more detailed discussion of Freire's theological roots, see Mackie (1980c), *op. cit.*, pp.97-104. A useful critique of Freire's discussion of dialogue and conscientization is to be found in Sherman, A.L. 'Two Views of Emotion in the Writings of Paulo Freire', *Educational Theory*, vol.30, no.1, 1980.

174. Thus, all 'true' or 'genuine' dialogue is praxical. However, as has already been noted, not all forms of praxis are dialogical. Freire specifically notes, in fact, that the praxis of the oppressor class in any society is distinctly antidialogical. Compare, Freire (1972a), *ibid.*, chapter four, (1972b), *op. cit.*, pp.71-83.

175. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.31.

176. *Ibid.*, p.24.

177. See Freire's comments in Brandes, D. 'Education for Liberation: An Interview with Paulo Freire', transcript of an interview conducted for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television programme 'Something Else', 18 June 1971, pp.6-7.

178. Compare, Freire, P. 'Letter to a Theology Student', *Catholic Mind*, September 1972f, p.7.

179. Freire also regards his position as compatible with the ethical message in the Christian gospels. Compare, *ibid.*; Freire, P. 'The Educational Role of the Churches in Latin America', *LADOC* (Keyhole Series), vol.3, no.14, 1974b, (1985), *op. cit.*, chapter ten.

180. Marx and Engels (1976), *op. cit.*, p.44.

181. Freire, P. 'Oppression', *LADOC*, September-October 1975b, p.17, 'The Third World and Theology', *LADOC*, March 1972d, p.2.

182. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.21.

183. *Ibid.*, p.22.

184. *Ibid.*

185. Compare, Freire (1975b), *op. cit.*, p.16.

186. See Fromm, E. *The Fear of Freedom*, London, Ark, 1984.

187. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.23. On the relationship between the social and the psychological in Freire's theory of oppression, see Alschuler, L.R. 'Oppression and Liberation: A Psycho-Political Analysis According to Freire and Jung', *Journal of*

Humanistic Psychology, vol.32, no.2, 1992.

188. *Ibid.*, p.24.

189. *Ibid.*, pp.23-24.

190. Freire (1972d), *op. cit.*, p.3.

191. Cf. Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, chapter one.

192. Freire has been influenced by Lukacs, G. *History and Class Consciousness*, London, Merlin, 1971.

193. Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The Communist Manifesto*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p.121.

194. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.59.

195. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.25.

196. On Freire's rejection of individualist conceptions of liberation, see Freire (1974a), *op. cit.*, p.578; Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, pp.109-110; Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.111.

197. Freire and Shor, *ibid.*, p.109.

198. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.73, (1976), *op. cit.*, p.5.

199. *Ibid.*, p.74.

200. Freire is indebted to Sartre here. See Sartre, J-P. *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, London, Methuen, 1969, parts two and three.

201. Compare, Freire, P. 'Development and Educational Demands', *World Christian Education*, vol.25, no.3, 1970c, 'Education as Cultural Action: An Introduction', in Colonnese, L.M. (ed.) *Conscientization for Liberation*, Washington, Division for Latin America, 1971b, p.115.

202. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.75.

203. Freire (1976), *op. cit.*, p.5.

204. *Ibid.*, p.7.

205. *Ibid.*, p.9.

206. *Ibid.*

207. Discussion of Freire's educational theory in this chapter will by largely confined to issues of pedagogy. Freire tends to use the terms 'education' and 'pedagogy' synonymously, though in almost all cases his references to the latter have or imply some connection with the theory and practice of teaching and learning. Even if 'teaching' and 'learning' are employed in the widest sense here (i.e. not restricted to

schooling or institutional settings), there is arguably more to 'education' than this. It will be assumed throughout that it is *adults* with whom we are dealing when references are made to 'students'. The terms 'educator' and 'teacher' will be used interchangeably.

208. On the nature and application of Freire's pedagogy, see, among other sources, Shor, I. 'Editor's Introduction: Using Freire's Ideas in the Classroom - How Do We Practice Liberatory Teaching?', 1987c, 'Educating the Educators: A Freirean Approach to the Crisis in Teacher Education', 1987d, Wallerstein, N. 'Problem-Posing Education: Freire's Method for Transformation': all in Shor, I. (ed.) *Freire for the Classroom*, New Hampshire, Boynton/Cook, 1987; Elbaz, F. 'Critical Reflection on Teaching: Insights from Freire', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, vol.14, no.2, 1988; Berthoff, A.E. 'Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy', *Language Arts*, vol.67, no.4, 1990.

209. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.45.

210. *Ibid.*

211. *Ibid.*, p.46.

212. *Ibid.*, p.47.

213. Cf. *ibid.*, p.48.

214. *Ibid.*, p.51.

215. *Ibid.*, p.47.

216. *Ibid.*, p.48.

217. *Ibid.*, p.53.

218. *Ibid.*

219. *Ibid.*, p.52.

220. Cf. *ibid.*, p.54.

221. *Ibid.*

222. *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.

223. *Ibid.*, p.56.

224. *Ibid.*, p.57.

225. *Ibid.*, pp.58-59.

226. Cf. Connolly, R. 'Freire, Praxis and Education', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980, p.73.

227. Aronowitz's (*op. cit.*) analysis is helpful in contextualizing this phenomenon.

228. This view is implicit in almost of all of Freire's writings on education, but for concise statements, see Freire, P. 'Unusual Ideas About Education', document prepared for the International Commission on the Development of Education', Unesco, 1971a, pp.1-2, 'Education: Domestication or Liberation?', *Prospects*, vol.2, no.2, 1972c, pp.173-174, 'Letter to Adult Education Workers', *Learning By Living and Doing*, Geneva, IDAC, 1979, p.28, 'Letter to North-American Teachers', in Shor, I. *Freire for the Classroom*, New Hampshire, Boynton/Cook, 1987, pp.211-212. See also, Shor, I. 'Liberation Education: An Interview with Ira Shor', *Language Arts*, vol.67, no.4, 1990, especially pp.346-347.

229. Compare, Freire (1971a), *ibid.*, p.2.

230. Compare, *ibid.*

231. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.46.

232. Shor, I. 'Education is Politics: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.27.

233. Compare, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.123.

234. Cf. Cabral, A. *Unity and Struggle*, London, Heinemann, 1980, p.136.

235. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.171.

236. *Ibid.*, p.172.

237. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.180.

238. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.157.

239. *Ibid.*, p.91.

240. For a critical discussion of the notion that the teacher knows the subject of study 'better' than the students, see Brookes, A-L. and Kelly, U.A. 'Writing Pedagogy: A Dialogue of Hope', *Journal of Education*, vol.171, no.2, 1989, pp.122-123.

241. See *ibid*; Freire (1987), *op. cit.*, p.212.

242. Colin Lankshear reminds me that the liberty-licence distinction is, of course, not unproblematic. For a discussion of key tensions and difficulties attending the distinction, see Lankshear, C. *Freedom and Education*, Auckland, Milton Brookes, 1982, especially pp.60-63.

243. Freire and Shor, *ibid.*, p.172.

244. Cf. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.35.

245. *Ibid.*, p.36.

246. Cf. Freire and Shor, *loc. cit.*

247. *Ibid.*, p.91.

248. *Ibid.*, p.157.

249. *Ibid.*, p.158.

250. *Ibid.*, pp.157-158.

251. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.193.

252. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.102.

253. *Ibid.*, pp.101-102.

254. See *ibid.*, pp.102-103.

255. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.37.

256. *Ibid.*

257. *Ibid.*, p.33.

258. See Freire (1987), *op. cit.*, p.213.

259. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.162.

260. See Freire (1987), *op. cit.*, p.214.

261. Freire and Shor, *loc. cit.*

262. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.48.

263. Some of the material in this section has been published in slightly revised form in Roberts, P. 'Education, Dialogue and Intervention: Revisiting the Freirean Project', *Educational Studies*, vol.20, no.3, 1994a.

264. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, pp.41-84.

265. *Ibid.*, p.41.

266. Mackie (1980b), *op. cit.*, p.4.

267. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.42.

268. See *ibid.*, pp.41-84; Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.81-95, (1972b), *op. cit.*, pp.29-47, (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.7-18, 21-27, (1978), *op. cit.*, pp.5-68, 'The People Speak Their Word: Learning to Read and Write in Sao Tome and Principe', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981; Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, chapters four and five; Horton and Freire, *op. cit.* pp.83-95; Brown, *op. cit.*; Sanders, *op. cit.*; Llyod, *op. cit.*; Bee, B. 'The Politics of Literacy', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980.

269. It is tempting to call this the 'actual literacy training' (Sanders, *ibid.*, p.593), because it was only at this stage that participants learned the 'mechanics' of reading and writing - i.e. the formation of words and sentences. But giving in to this temptation

represents a serious mistake, for 'literacy', as it is conceived by Freire, consists in much more than simply the mastering of the medium of print: the preceding or co-existing analyses of nature, culture, work, human relationships, etc. and the attendant posing of problems pertaining to local and national politics are as much a part of what it means to become 'literate' in Freirean terms as the learning of letters and words.

270. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.49.

271. *Ibid.*, p.50.

272. *Ibid.*, p.51.

273. *Ibid.*, pp.51-52.

274. *Ibid.*, pp.52-53.

275. See Fonseca, *op. cit.*, p.95.

276. See Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.52.

277. Literacy groups met for one hour each week-night for a period of up to eight weeks. See Brown, *op. cit.*, p.32.

278. Bee, *op. cit.*, p.40.

279. Where it was not possible to use the wall of a house, the reverse side a blackboard was utilized.

280. The originals were taken from Freire. The pictorial situations published in *Education: The Practice of Freedom* were produced by another Brazilian artist, Vincente de Abreu. See Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.61. Cynthia Brown was able to obtain eight of the original sequence of ten pictures, all (eight) of which are reproduced in her article, 'Literacy in 30 Hours: Paulo Freire's Process in Northeast Brazil'. Figures five and eight in the collection shown by Brown are from the de Abreu set. See Brown, *op. cit.*, pp.27-28.

281. Brown, *ibid.*, p.26.

282. *Ibid.*, p.26; Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.65.

283. Brown, *ibid.*

284. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.71.

285. Brown, *op. cit.*, p.29.

286. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.77. The text shown in the picture was, of course, in Portuguese. Translated, the poem reads: 'THE BOMB: The terrible bomb/And radioactivity/ Signify terror,/Ruin and calamity./If war were ended,/And everything were united,/Our world/Would not be destroyed'. The poem was a popular song in northeast Brazil. See Brown, *ibid.*

287. Freire (1976a), *ibid.*, p.79.

288. Brown, *loc. cit.*

289. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.81.

290. *Ibid.*

291. For a detailed discussion of this stage of the programme, see Taylor, *op. cit.*, chapter five.

292. *Ibid.*, pp.52-53.

293. Sanders, *op. cit.*, p.591.

294. Brown, *op. cit.*, p.30.

295. *Ibid.*, p.31.

296. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.54.

297. See *ibid.*

298. *Ibid.*

299. *Ibid.*, pp.82-84. For an in-depth analysis of Freire's approach to codification and decodification, see JanMohamed, A.R. 'Some Implications of Paulo Freire's Border Pedagogy', in Giroux, H.A. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge, 1994.

300. *Ibid.*, p.53.

301. Full details on this process are given in Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, chapter three.

302. Lopes-Correa, A. 'MOBRAL: Participation-Reading in Brazil', *Journal of Reading*, vol.19, no.7, 1976.

303. *Ibid.*, p.534.

304. This is not an isolated example. Other post-1964 work on literacy in Brazil also renders Freire invisible. There is one citation of Freire's work, but no discussion of it, in Chesterfield, R. and Schutz, P. 'Nonformal Continuing Education in Rural Brazil', *Lifelong Learning: the Adult Years*, vol.2, no.2, 1978. Another article, from the 1980s, does not even mention Freire: Moreira, C. 'Planning Literacy and Post-Literacy Programmes for the Implementation of Basic Education: The Case of Brazil', in Carron, G. and Bordia, A. (eds.) *Issues in Planning and Implementing National Literacy Campaigns*, Paris, Unesco, 1985.

305. 'Declaration of Persepolis', in Bataille, L. (ed.) *A Turning Point for Literacy*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1976.

306. Bruss, N. and Macedo, D.P. 'Toward a Pedagogy of the Question: Conversations with Paulo Freire', *Journal of Education*, vol.167, no.2, 1985, p.14.

307. Mackie (1980b), *op. cit.*, p.5.

308. Llyod, *op. cit.*, p.12.

309. *Ibid.*, p.11.

310. Sanders, *op. cit.*, p.593.

311. Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, pp.114-115.

312. *Ibid.*, p.114. See also Macedo, D.P. 'The Politics of an Emancipatory Literacy in Cape Verde', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.1, 1983, pp.106-111.

313. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.49.

314. Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, pp.64-65.

315. *Ibid.*, p.69.

316. Freire (1981), *op. cit.*, p.30.

317. Gee, J.P. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*, London, Falmer Press, 1990.

318. See Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, p.64.

319. Some of the ideas discussed here have been presented in Roberts, P. 'Critical Literacy, Social Transformation and Universities', paper presented at the annual conference of the Sociological Association of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Palmerston North, November 1994b.

320. Freire, P. 'The Importance of the Act of Reading', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.1, 1983a.

321. *Ibid.*, p.6.

322. Compare, Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, p.49.

323. Freire (1983a), *op. cit.*, p.10.

324. *Ibid.*, p.6.

325. *Ibid.*, p.7.

326. Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, p.42.

327. Compare, Freire (1983a), *op. cit.*, p.8.

328. *Ibid.*, p.10.

329. See Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, p.50.

330. Compare, Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, pp.29-30, 56-57, (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.145.

331. Bruss, N. and Macedo, D.P. 'A Conversation with Paulo Freire at the University of Massachusetts in Boston', *Journal of Education*, vol.166, no.3, 1984, p.224.

332. Freire (1983a), *op. cit.*, p.9.

333. Dillon, D. 'Reading the World and Reading the Word: An Interview with Paulo Freire', *Language Arts*, vol.62, no.1, 1985.

334. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.11.

335. Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.2.

336. See Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, chapter two.

337. Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.2.

338. *Ibid.*, p.3.

339. *Ibid.*

340. *Ibid.*

341. *Ibid.*, p.4.

342. Compare, Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, p.133.

343. See Dillon, *op. cit.*, pp.18-19; Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.31; Freire and Macedo (1987), *ibid.*, p.134.

344. In this respect Freire can be distinguished from reader response literary theorists who eschew this form of historicizing and contextualizing of authorial intentions and ideas.

345. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.32.

346. *Ibid.*, p.135.

347. *Ibid.*, p.136.

348. *Ibid.*

349. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.12.

350. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, pp.23-27.

351. *Ibid.*, p.23.

352. *Ibid.*

353. Bruss and Macedo (1984), *op. cit.*, p.218.

354. *Ibid.*

355. Horton and Freire, *loc. cit.*

356. *Ibid.*, p.27.

357. *Ibid.*, p.32.

358. Bruss and Macedo (1985), *op. cit.*, p.21.

359. *Ibid.*

360. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.21.

361. *Ibid.*, p.36.

362. Compare, Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.10.

363. Some of the material in this section has been presented in Roberts, P. 'Ethics, Politics and Literacy: An Analysis of the Freirean View', paper presented at the annual conference of the Sociological Association of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Auckland, August 1993a.

364. See Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.70-73, (1972b), *op. cit.*, pp.53-57, (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.117; Freire and Shor, *ibid.*, pp.7-9, 82, 100-102; Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.101; Roberts (1989), *op. cit.*, pp.42-43.

365. Compare, Weiler, *op. cit.*

366. Freire mentions in *We Make the Road by Walking* that while illiterates now have the right to vote in Brazil, they are not permitted to stand for political office. See Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.84.

367. Compare, Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, chapters two and three, (1972b), *op. cit.* pp.21-47, (1976a), *op. cit.*, pp.41-58, 134-162.

368. More specifically, Freire reminds us that we always need to consider how learning is 'framed'. That is, attention must be paid to questions such as these: What ought we to learn? Who decides what we ought to learn? How should we learn? Why should we learn? The three major approaches to education discussed by Freire - authoritarian, laissez faire, and dialogical - assume, or exemplify, different answers to these questions. In an authoritarian system, one (or few) people decide what to learn, monologue is the chief pedagogical style, and the object of learning is frequently to follow a path already determined by a teacher or to meet the requirements of an externally-imposed task such as an examination. Laissez faire educators say, in effect, to students: 'Learn what you like, as you wish, for whatever purpose or reason'. Dialogical approaches emphasize negotiated pedagogical forms, communicative relationships, social transformation, and learning through a synthesis of reflection and action.

369. Compare, Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.98; McLaren, P. and Silva, T.T. da 'Language, Experience and Pedagogy: A Tribute to Paulo Freire', *Access*, vol.10, no.1, 1991, pp.38-40.

370. For a succinct early discussion of this point, see Freire (1976), *op. cit.*, pp.134-136.

371. See Buber, M. *I and Thou*, trans. R.G. Smith, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1958, *Between Man and Man*, trans. R.G. Smith, London, Fontana, 1961.

372. Buber (1961), *ibid.*, p.124.

373. *Ibid.*, pp.124-125.

374. *Ibid.*, p.124.

375. *Ibid.*

376. *Ibid.*

377. *Ibid.*, p.125.

378. *Ibid.*

379. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.134.

380. *Ibid.*

381. *Ibid.*, p.148.

382. Compare, Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.60-69, (1976a), *op. cit.* pp.109-125, 134-137.

383. See Freire (1976a), *ibid.*, pp.153-154; Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, chapter four.

384. Dillon, *op. cit.*, p.19.

385. See, for example, Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, pp.23-27, 31-32.

386. Compare, Freire (1983a), *op. cit.*, pp.10-11, Dillon, *op. cit.*, pp.18-20.

387. Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, p.42; (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.43.

388. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.84.

389. See, for example, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.2-3. In the past two decades, Freire has had a great deal to say about what it means to take a critical stance in the act of *reading*, but he has had said rather less about what it might mean to be engaged in critical *writing*. This remains an under-theorized aspect of his work, and an area ripe for philosophical inquiry.

390. Freire (1983a), *op. cit.*, p.9; Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, pp.83-85.

391. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, p.28.

392. *Ibid.*, p.61.

393. See further, Peters, M. and Lankshear, C. 'Education and Hermeneutics: A Freirean Interpretation', in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994a; and Macedo, D. 'Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.63, no.2, 1993, pp.196-197.

394. For a critical examination of the role of dialogue in Freire's Brazilian work, see Roberts (1994a), *op. cit.*

395. See Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, pp.31, 61.

396. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.77.

397. Freire and Macedo (1987), *op. cit.*, pp.106-107.

398. *Ibid.*, p.108.

399. For further details on the Nicaraguan campaign, see Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, chapter five; Angus, E. 'The Awakening of a People: Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign', *Two-Thirds*, vol.2, no.3, 1980/81; Cardenal, F. and Miller, V. 'Nicaragua 1980: The Battle of the ABCs', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981.

CHAPTER THREE

EXPLORING THE DEFINITION, NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF LITERACY

Freire provides a rich theory of literacy, supported by (and emerging from) his extensive practical work in Third World adult literacy programmes. Freire's conception of literacy is intimately tied to his wider philosophical and pedagogical position. In relating his ideas on reading and writing to a carefully developed view of human beings and the nature of reality, Freire has few peers. Yet, in seeking to understand what Freire has to offer conceptual inquiry into literacy much must be drawn by inference. Freire has never advanced a systematic, in-depth analysis of the term 'literacy' (or related notions such as 'illiteracy', 'reading', and 'writing'), nor has he engaged contemporary debates over the 'nature' and 'consequences' of literacy in detail. This chapter reconsiders and extends aspects of Freire's literacy theory in light of a wider discussion of conceptual issues in literacy studies. A framework for distinguishing between different types of definition is applied in analysing major approaches to the problem of defining literacy, and popular assumptions about the 'consequences' and 'value' of literacy are problematized.

Defining Literacy

The problem of defining literacy has bewitched scholars, policy makers and practitioners since the early 1940s.[1] The range of definitions of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' put forward in the past half-century is quite remarkable, yet there remains little agreement among 'experts' over what these terms mean. Lay conceptions and dictionary definitions show greater consensus, though there is still room for considerable ambiguity in these as well. Clearly, given the enormous sums of money devoted to adult literacy programmes by international agencies such as Unesco, there is much at stake in clarifying exactly what it means to become 'literate'.

On the face of it, assessments of the extent of illiteracy (and the success of literacy campaigns) within nations and across the globe depend crucially upon consistent and lucid definitions. Politicians, especially those within Third World countries, have much to gain in lauding their achievements in eliminating illiteracy; conversely, there is much to lose if it can be shown that literacy levels have significantly declined under a given administration. With imprecise definitions, the possibility of manipulating statistics increases and the availability of reliable information for research and policy development diminishes.

Of course, it is possible that terms such as 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' defy precise definition. Perhaps, it might be argued, a more productive line of inquiry would be to consider how literacy has been constructed, shaped and discussed, by whom, when, where, and why. For some theorists, there is no single 'correct' definition of literacy; instead, there are *competing* accounts of what it means to be 'literate' or 'illiterate'. The struggle over definition, some claim, is more than a merely intellectual tussle; rather, the battle is a thoroughly *political* one. In asserting one definition of literacy over another certain groups seek to dominate others through controlling policy decisions, capturing a larger share of educational (and other) resources, and ensuring compliance to a given social order. As Wickert succinctly puts it,

> The stakes are high for the competing constructions because they involve issues of exclusion and inclusion. The literacy rate, and delineations of who is literate, depends on how literacy is defined. Arguments over definition are arguments about whose construction of literacy will win and accordingly whose related politics of literacy will prevail.[2]

In this chapter I accept the view that while specific constructs may be necessary for particular purposes, the quest for a single, all-encompassing definition of literacy is bound to fail; we

do better to focus on multiple *literacies,* each with distinct assumptions and practices associated with 'reading' and/or 'writing'. This position is consistent with what I shall call a 'pluralist' perspective on the problem of defining literacy. In ultimately supporting this conceptual model two alternative approaches - quantitative and qualitative - will be outlined and analysed.

Types of Definition

The problems associated with the nature and process of definition are of awesome philosophical complexity and have occupied thinkers from at least the time of Socrates. Given the scope of this chapter, it must suffice to simply acknowledge that there is an enormous literature germane to this topic, and to note that work in this area is united by - if nothing else - the assumption that questions of definition *never* have simple answers.[3] As the primary concern in the present chapter is to address the issue of how *literacy* might be defined, it is perhaps helpful to begin by asking: How might we understand i.e. characterize, categorize, interpret, and critique - the myriad definitions of 'literacy' already advanced by theorists, policy makers, and educationists? Toward this end, this section offers a framework for distinguishing between three types of definition - stipulative, essentialist and prescriptive - when examining literacy. This framework is an adaptation of Israel Scheffler's discussion of definitions in education.[4] Quantitative systems rely primarily on stipulative definitions, while qualitative approaches embrace examples of all three types. Those who adopt a pluralist stance either reject the very idea of defining literacy or offer what I shall call 'particularist' definitions or constructs. These are representations of specific modes or forms of literacy. On the pluralist view, the assumption is that 'literacy' cannot be understood in the singular; instead, it is argued, we can at most attempt to sketch boundaries for distinguishing different *literacies.*

Scheffler's concern is to analyse

> ...non-scientific discourses in which definitions of educational notions are offered, for example, in curriculum statements, in enunciations of program and objectives, in interpretations of education addressed to the general public, in debates over educational policy.[5]

He draws an initial distinction between 'scientific' and 'general' definitions, the former being those tied to professional research activity and requiring specialized technical knowledge, the latter representing the translation of scientific ideas into public or professional statements.[6] Three types of 'general' definition are delineated: stipulative, descriptive and programmatic.

A stipulative definition 'exhibits some term to be defined and gives notice that it is to be taken as equivalent to some other exhibited term or description, within a particular context'.[7] Such definitions do not attempt to comply with past or accepted usages; indeed, there may be no prior use to which the definer can turn. Where a term has a previous history of use, but a new use is promoted, the definition is of the 'non-inventive' stipulative variety.[8] I might begin an essay, for example, by saying: 'While the term "teaching" has been employed in a multitude of different ways over the years, for the purposes of discussion here I shall define it as "the process whereby one person enables another person to learn"'. Where a term or category or theoretical construct is used for the first time, it is an 'inventive' form of stipulative definition.[9] If, for instance, I was assigned the task of writing a newspaper article on an emerging problem of teenagers using computers to destroy important educational information stored on disk, I might coin the term 'cyberbrats' to describe the youngsters involved in such activity. Stipulative definitions, whether non-inventive or inventive, serve to reduce the need for laborious or repetitious description at every occurrence of a particular

element within a given discourse. They allow discussion to proceed where space may be limited and where lengthy digressions on the meaning or contestability of specific terms might impede the aim of presenting a coherent overall argument. No appeal is made to the way a term is supposedly used in our 'ordinary language', or to linguistic norms accepted by (eminent) scholars within a given field of study. Instead, such definitions '*legislate* conventions that may be more or less helpful in discussion'[10]; they 'can neither be fairly justified nor rejected by consideration of the accuracy with which they mirror predefinitional usage'.[11]

'Descriptive' definitions, by contrast, explain terms through reference - whether this is explicit or implied - to their prior use. They are frequently evinced in response to the question 'What does this term *mean*?'.[12] There may be more than one meaning for a term, but each meaning is supposed to be 'correct' within a particular context. Dictionary definitions, as Soltis points out, are often of this kind.[13] Descriptive definitions endeavour to unpack the rules which govern the proper use of terms. Scheffler gives the example of a definition of 'indoctrination' as 'the presentation of issues as if they had but one side to them' to demonstrate the principle at work here.[14] Definitions of this type, he suggests,

> ...are frequently presented in an attempt to clarify the term as it is ordinarily and most clearly applied. Such definitions aim at the distillation of a general rule out of the term's prior usage, a rule that may at once sum up such usage and clarify it by relating it to the usage of other familiar terms, a rule that may thus be employed to teach someone how the term is normally used.[15]

Of course, it does not follow that because rules for the application of a term have been established in the past, adjudicating over the legitimacy of all *possible* applications of that

term will always be straightforward. Scheffler claims that for any term prior use dictates clear cases where it can or cannot be properly applied, as well as instances where a certain ambiguity remains.[16] Hence, the assertion 'X is a table' might confidently be judged correct if X is a piece of furniture with a wooden rectangular top and four legs around which people customarily seat themselves and upon which objects such as items of crockery are periodically placed. Comment on the use made of X (e.g. 'people regularly eat their meals at the X') could strengthen the case here. It might be said that the term 'table' would be inappropriately applied to Y if Y was a fish, a tree, a clock, or a ball. However, other cases - e.g. a flat piece of rock from which a camper eats his or her meal - remain ambivalent. Scheffler argues that for a definition to be accurate,

> ...it must accord with prior usage only in the sense of not violating clear instances of such usage. That is, where prior usage clearly applies a term to some object, the definition may not withhold it; where prior usage clearly withholds the term from some object, the definition may not apply it.[17]

A 'programmatic' definition, Soltis notes, 'tells us overtly or implicitly that this is the way things *should* be'.[18] Definitions of education, he adds, 'are frequently mixtures of the *is* and the *ought*, of the descriptive and the prescriptive'.[19] Scheffler stresses the practical intent of such definitions: 'some terms (e.g., the term 'profession') single out things toward which social practice is oriented in a certain way'.[20] If the term 'profession', for instance, implies the granting of some sort of privileged treatment, then assigning this term to something else (as in talking about, say, the 'teaching profession') suggests that the activity of teaching ought to be accorded the same privileges as any other profession. If, on the other hand, the term 'profession' is deliberately withheld in this case, the implication is that teachers ought not to expect to enjoy the same privileges as others in occupations designated 'professions'.[21]

Programmatic definitions raise moral and practical questions: they 'call for evaluation of practice, for appraisal of commitments, for the making of extra-linguistic decisions...[etc.]'.[22]

Scheffler summarizes the purpose of each type of definition thus:

> The interest of stipulative definitions is *communicatory*, that is to say, they are offered in the hope of facilitating discourse; the interest of descriptive definitions is *explanatory*, that is, they purport to clarify the normal application of terms; the interest of programmatic definitions is *moral*, that is, they are intended to embody programmes of action.[23]

When dealing with complex terms such as 'education' it is, as Soltis points out, hardly surprising that the matters of morality to which Scheffler refers above frequently arise in definitions. Education, by almost any definition, involves purposeful human activity and as such implies some form of commitment to certain values or ideals.[24] Discourses on literacy - including those where definitions are advanced - fall into a similar category: literacy is invariably related to certain forms of human activity and many definitions turn, implicitly or explicitly, on ethical questions. Soltis argues that 'a search for *the* definition of education is most probably a quest for a statement of the *right* or the *best* program for education and, as such, is a prescription for certain valued means or ends to be sought in educating'.[25] While it may be possible to come up with one definition of education which will suffice whatever the context (e.g. 'education is learning'), this is likely to be so vague as to be of little use to anyone.[26]

Soltis's view resonates with the position on literacy adopted later in this chapter. My argument will suggest that any attempt to find a single definition of 'literacy' which satisfies

all specific legitimate applications of the term is inherently flawed. The search for a satisfactory single descriptive definition of literacy is a journey without end; one can at best hope to specify 'the' definition of literacy for particular purposes - either speculatively or programmatically, to use Scheffler's terms. Many statements of the kind 'literacy *is*...', where literacy is ostensibly being defined in unitary terms, are, in effect, propositions about what literacy *ought* to be. First, however, I wish - in light of issues canvassed in contemporary debates over reading and literacy - to propose a modification to Scheffler's terminology and an additional category of definition.

The first type of definition will be retained largely as presented by Scheffler. Stipulative definitions take the form 'X shall *for present purposes* be defined as A'. To Scheffler's original description, I would simply add that such definitions perform not only a useful role in allowing discussion to proceed but also serve a practical (if often unacknowledged) function in everyday life. In many of our daily activities we assume - in effect - that for particular purposes 'X will be taken to mean A, and not B or C or D, etc.'. We *designate* meanings in negotiating our way in the world, frequently allowing X to mean A in the knowledge that it might also (alternatively or better) be defined as B or C or D. For example, when switching between drinking vessels in consuming tea or coffee at different times during the day, we seldom pause to draw distinctions between (say) mugs and cups when offering to 'get a cup of tea'. For the purposes of communication in daily life, the term 'cup' suffices to cover both types of receptacle. The implied definition of a cup here might be something like this: 'a vessel with a handle, used for holding hot beverages'. If pressed to find a more exacting definition, however, we might distinguish cups from mugs by saying that the former usually have smaller handles than the latter, or that cups are designed to be placed on saucers while mugs are not. These distinctions may be helpful in a philosophical analysis,

or may be of importance for those who design and produce drinking vessels, but are of little practical consequence in day to day living.

In focusing on reading, writing and literacy, there is merit in replacing Scheffler's notion of 'descriptive' definitions with a more specific descriptor: namely, what I shall term 'essentialist' definitions. These take the form 'X *is* A, and *not* B, C, D, etc.'. The assumption here is that despite the many ways a term may be used in different contexts, there remains an essential, core meaning which sets this term apart from others. Thus, to return to an example discussed earlier, describing a flat piece of rock as a 'table' would be legitimate if and only if it fell within the boundaries of the core definition. Hence, if a table was defined as 'a piece of furniture with a flat top built upon a stand or several legs and around which people eat meals at regular intervals', the rock would not count as a table; if, however, the definition was 'any flat surface upon which a meal can be eaten' it would (so too might any piece of flat earth, a bench, a box, and so on).

There has been considerable debate in recent times over essentialism in constructs of 'reading'. Some theorists have claimed that reading is a unitary cognitive process, which is in essence the same no matter what the context. Others argue that there is no essence to reading but rather a multiplicity of different 'readings' (i.e. specific social practices which are constructed as examples of 'reading'). Those who adopt the former position use essentialist definitions of reading; those who subscribe to the latter view are explicitly anti-essentialist in their approach. The essentialist group are happy to concede that reading is practised in different ways in disparate situations (e.g. in reading a novel as compared with an academic text), but maintain that the underlying process is the same in each case. Reading, on this view, has an essential 'nature', from which specific instances of reading in given contexts

derive. Provided the definition of reading is sufficiently precise, the process of distinguishing 'reading' from 'not-reading' should be relatively straightforward.

Anti-essentialist theorists often adopt what I shall call 'particularist' definitions. The notion of a 'definition', however, for reasons which will become clear later on, must be viewed with caution in this context, and might better be replaced with the term 'construct'. Particularist constructs can be represented thus: 'X is A, and X is B, and X is C, *ad infinitum*'. Or, to put it another way: 'A is one form of X, B is another form of X, C is a further form of X, etc.'. In discourses on literacy, those who (explicitly or implicitly) advance particularist constructs talk about *literacies* rather than 'literacy' The singular form of the word is employed only with regard to a *specific* mode or form of reading or writing (which is recognized as one among the multiplicity of actual and possible literacies) in a *particular* situation. Modes of literacy include 'functional literacy', 'critical literacy', 'proper literacy', and so on. Literacies are socially constructed and framed by particular rules, assumptions, and practices. The same logic applies when thinking about objects. The four-legged, wooden, rectangular piece of furniture is a (particular) table; the flat slab of rock is another (different) table. Both can only be defined as tables (Table A, Table B) by reference to their use in specific contexts or situations. To give another example, an anti-essentialist might argue that there is not one hammer to be used in different ways but rather a multiplicity of hammers: Hammer A is an object used to bang in nails; Hammer B is the same object employed to crack open coconuts; Hammer C is the object used to drive tent pegs into the ground, etc.

I wish finally to suggest a change in name and a slight change in focus for the last type of definition identified by Scheffler. With respect to the discussion of reading, writing and literacy that follows, the term 'prescriptive' is a more accurate reflection of the type of definitions under consideration than 'programmatic'. Prescriptive definitions take the form

'X *should* be A', where 'should' has two possible senses. First, in a general sense, to say X should be A is to suggest that A denotes some kind of ideal. In a second - more specific - sense, the term 'should' can mean X *ought* to be A. Definitions of this (more specific) kind are normative in character: that is, they imply that there are good *ethical* reasons for X being A. In either sense (the general or the normative), the range of possible definitions under consideration is considerably wider than Scheffler's original term suggests. Programmatic definitions imply a moral dimension for Scheffler in the sense that they 'are intended to embody programmes of action'.[27] Yet, questions of ethics do not *necessarily* have to be tied to 'programmes' (of action or practice) - though of course they may be in many cases.

My modification to Scheffler's framework thus suggests three types of definition (stipulative, essentialist and prescriptive), plus an additional category (particularist constructs), which might be applied when analysing statements on literacy. Stipulative definitions facilitate discussion, allow everyday life and communication to proceed without unnecessary interruptions and lengthy analysis, and serve specific instrumental purposes in particular literacy policies and programmes. Essentialist definitions attempt to pin down the 'true' meaning of literacy, and assume that there is an essential 'nature' to literacy waiting to be uncovered. Prescriptive definitions seek to give grounds (especially of an ethical kind) for literacy being this way or that. Those who adopt particularist constructs abandon the notion of searching for a unitary essence or nature, and focus on different modes or forms of literacy: collectively, these constitute myriad *literacies*.

Approaches to the Problem of Defining Literacy

On the surface, the definition of 'literacy' is relatively unproblematic: 'literacy' is the ability to read and write. To be literate is to possess this ability; to be illiterate is to *not* possess this

ability. Unfortunately, if the scholarship of the past fifty years is anything to go by, the matter is not that simple.[28] Even if this definition is accepted, several important problems need to be addressed. What does it mean to 'read' and to 'write'? To *what extent,* and in what ways, must one be able to read and/or write before it can be said that one is literate? If a person can read but not write (or vice versa) would we want to say that he or she is literate? To define literacy as 'the ability to read and write' is to make an incomplete statement. Questions regarding *what* one reads and writes, and '*how much*' ability in reading and/or writing is required in order to be considered literate, are left unanswered. Three major approaches have been developed by scholars, policy-makers and practitioners over the past half-century in addressing these questions: quantitative, qualitative and pluralist.

(i) *Quantitative Approaches*

Earlier this century policy makers and international organizations such Unesco frequently defined literacy in terms of years of schooling. On this view, a person was considered literate either simply by virtue of having been at school a certain number of years, or through having achieved a reading level deemed to be equivalent to a given grade or class level. Estimates under this type of definition ranged from four years of schooling[29] to eighth grade level.[30] For example, in 1947 the United States Bureau of the Census considered a person who had completed less than five years of schooling to be (functionally) illiterate.[31] Schooling to fifth-grade level was adopted by Unesco in the 1950s as the international benchmark for measuring literacy.[32] Although it was in the 1940s and 1950s that quantitative definitions dominated, their use in policy documents and official statistics has continued through the decades. Rogers and Herzog noted in 1966, for instance, that for the United States Census literacy was defined as the completion of six grades of schooling.[33] As late as 1980, Copperman could report that the (U.S.) Bureau of Census still based calculations of functional

literacy on the percentage of the population fourteen years and older who had completed five years or more of school.[34]

Literacy and illiteracy have also often been defined in terms of 'reading ages'. For example, in the United States the Ministry of Education, using the Watts-Vernon test, defined illiteracy as possession of a reading age of less than seven years.[35] In Britain (functional) literacy has conventionally been defined in terms of a reading age of nine years.[36] In England in 1950 a person was considered by the Ministry of Education to be 'semi-literate' if he or she possessed a reading age between seven and nine years.[37] Many of the tests used over the years to determine 'reading ages' have been designed by psychologists, and are premised on models of supposedly 'normal' cognitive and behavioural development.

These are both what might be called (for want of a better term) 'quantitative' attempts at defining literacy. Both are problematic. Clearly, the number of years one has attended school in no way provides a definitive picture of one's abilities in reading, writing or anything else. Children learn at different speeds and schools differ in their curricula. A multiplicity of factors (e.g. the reading materials used; the teaching methods adopted in the classroom; the stimulation provided by classmates; the linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds of students and teachers; etc.) have a bearing on the extent to which, and the ways in which, a child becomes literate. These influences on reading and writing vary considerably not only from one country to another but within nations and indeed within individual schools. It is thus possible that a child with five years of schooling in one context may be no 'more' literate than a child with three years of schooling in a different situation. Even if it were true that the abilities developed over a certain number of years of attendance at one school equated in rough terms to those acquired elsewhere, there is still the question when dealing with adults of what might become of those abilities over time. If the *point* of

defining literacy in terms of years of schooling is to give an accurate picture of the literate person, this objective seems unlikely to be met. The best that might be hoped for is a designation of particular groups within a given school as 'literate' for specific purposes. But so long as schooling is regarded as a gradual continuum of learning rather than a series of abrupt steps, the cut-off point between 'illiteracy' and 'literacy' under such definitions is inevitably arbitrary. If the aim is to ensure consistency across regions or nations, the project is fraught with even greater difficulties.

Defining literacy in terms of 'reading ages' also poses problems. Being deemed 'literate' through this method invariably involves attaining a sufficiently high score on a test which has been designed to 'measure' reading (and, less frequently, writing) ability. The 'cultural biases' inherent in tests of standardized achievement have long been noted, though there is not space to pursue this line of attack here. The 'reading ages' approach is underpinned by positivist and behaviourist assumptions. There is a strong focus on 'skills' and techniques, which are ostensibly measurable and meaningful. Becoming, or being declared, 'literate' on this view is a matter of meeting certain pre-established behavioural objectives, assessed through observation of outwardly manifested characteristics. This strategy is built upon a model of empirical research derived from the natural sciences and gains its appeal for politicians, economists, 'manpower planners', and some literacy programme developers from the ease with which it allows people to categorized. Overall literacy 'levels' can be definitively stated and plotted across regions and over time. Decisions about finances and resources can be made with greater precision. This entire approach collapses, however, if it can be demonstrated that literacy cannot be 'measured' in this way. The arguments considered later in this chapter suggest precisely this.

Given the value placed on literacy in the contemporary social world, the stigma attached to 'illiteracy' can be devastating. While tests designed to measure 'reading ages' and the like are purportedly intended to prevent people growing into 'illiterate' adults, they also set limits upon, and play a strong part in shaping views of, what 'counts' as 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' Searching questions need to be asked about exactly what *kind* of 'literacy' is being measured when students pass or fail, do well or do poorly, in these tests. Conceivably, on alternative conceptions of literacy, many people who suffer humiliation and shame through poor performance on standardized tests might no longer be regarded as 'illiterate', 'semi-literate', 'functionally illiterate', etc. but simply 'literate' in a sense quite distinct from that engendered through quantitative systems. An examination of pluralist accounts of literacy gives weight to this view.

Quantitative definitions - whether of the 'years of schooling' or 'reading ages' variety - are predominantly stipulative in character. Definitions of this type have generally been employed to address specific policy and programme objectives. Quantitative definitions, then, have, in the main, been developed not from a desire to understand what literacy 'truly means', but primarily for instrumental, pragmatic and political reasons. They have typically taken the form (though not always explicitly): 'literacy for the purposes of this programme will be defined as X years of schooling or a reading age of Y'.

The political motives here stem in large part from the widely held perception of 'literacy' as something good, valuable, or worthwhile, and from (arguably mistaken[38]) assumptions about a causal connection between literacy levels and economic growth. Quantitative definitions mesh comfortably with what Wickert calls 'human capital rationales'[39] in literacy programme planning. 'Rates' of literacy are believed to be one signifier of the general health of a society.[40] Correlations are often drawn between literacy and a host of positive 'indicators':

higher productivity, greater efficiency in communications and record keeping, better business growth, increased opportunities for social mobility, enhanced critical thought, a more 'civilized' and 'cultured' citizenry, and so on. If literacy is defined in anything *other* than quantitative terms, it becomes difficult to reap the appropriate benefits in reciting (through political rhetoric) these indicators alongside apparent rises literacy levels. It is not only individual political careers that are on the line here, but also international reputations. The financial stakes are enormous. 'Measurement' - and the illusion this produces of accuracy and hence legitimacy - is vital to the whole enterprise. Given this situation, quantitative definitions are often *promoted* as quasi-essentialist definitions, though no attempt is usually made to theorize the 'nature' of literacy or to show how arbitrary placements on a scale (of years of schooling or reading 'ages') portray the 'true' meaning of literacy.

(ii) *Qualitative Approaches*

As the inadequacies of quantitative approaches to defining literacy have become apparent, literacy scholars and policy makers alike have increasingly turned to qualitative definitions. While references to 'reading ages' still abound in the literature on the psychology of reading, many educationists have abandoned the idea that literacy can be precisely or 'scientifically' measured. This shift in emphasis undoubtedly reflects, at least in part, the broader movement away from positivist research methodologies in the social sciences, though it is easy to overstate the case here. The move toward qualitative definitions of literacy by Unesco and other official bodies was as much as anything a pragmatic response to failures in achieving the desired (quantifiable) results in large-scale literacy programmes. At any rate, by the 1960s qualitative definitions had become common in policy documents on literacy.

I shall use the term 'qualitative' rather loosely to represent a wide range of definitions. The key difference between the quantitative and qualitative approaches is that where the former attempts to establish a benchmark for identifying an exact point at which a person is deemed 'literate', the latter concentrates on describing in a more general way the 'features' or 'dimensions' of literacy and the literate person. There is shift, therefore, from a system which 'quantifies' literacy, such that literacy 'rates' or 'levels' can (supposedly) be readily observed and recorded, to one which focuses on the 'qualities' associated with being literate. The term 'qualitative' is thus used in a restricted sense here and should not, for example, be taken to imply a necessary connection with qualitative research methods. Representative examples of qualitative definitions include the following:

(a) *'Literacy'* is:

'the ability to intelligently deal independently with recorded symbolic information'.[41]

'...a combination of technical skills that make it possible, with content and purpose, to interact with the specific environments in which people live and function'.[42]

'...that demonstrated competence in communications skills which enables the individual to function, appropriate to his age, independently of his society and with a potential for movement in society'.[43]

'...those competencies which any person brings to the tasks of understanding and using what he reads, and conveying what he means in writing, so that he can engage effectively in those activities which he is otherwise equipped to undertake.'[44]

(b) To be *'literate'* is:

'...not to have arrived at some pre-determined destination, but to utilise reading, writing and speaking skills so that our understanding of the world is progressively enlarged'.[45]

'...to have the disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower action, feeling, and thinking in the context of purposeful activity'.[46]

'...not to acquire the technical skills of reading and writing, but to start the journey from primary to critical consciousness. It is to emerge as a man of *praxis* - capable both of perceiving reality and transforming it for the achievement of his ends'.[47]

'...[to be] able to get the information and ideas...[one] needs from the materials one needs to read'.[48]

'...[to be a] person who reads to explore him or herself, to discover other people, to find respite, or to be startled'.[49]

Qualitative definitions are frequently prescriptive in character, though seldom explicitly expressed as such. Those who adopt a qualitative approach often make statements to the effect of 'to be literate *is*...' when it is clear from the overall context of their discussion that what they offering is a view of the way(s) in which people *ought* to read and write. The implicit message in many cases is that the definition on offer encapsulates the writer's 'ideal' model of literacy or the literate person. As an extension of this tendency, qualitative definitions are often also tacitly stipulative; in saying, in effect, 'this is the ideal', theorists

sometimes imply that literacy might best be defined in this way *given* the broader dimensions of the ideal being promoted. Similarly, although *ostensibly* essentialist, many qualitative definitions are the result of a focus on a particular mode or type of literacy. This is especially so in discussions of 'functional literacy', with definitions taking the form 'the literate person is one who...' when in many cases it is 'the *functionally* literate person' to whom authors are referring.

To convincingly advance a 'genuinely' essentialist qualitative definition of literacy would require the elaboration of each clause or aspect of the definition in an attempt to demonstrate its applicability to all situations and contexts. The classic 'commonsense' definition of literacy as 'the ability to read and write', for example, might be defended along these lines. It is instructive to test the possibility of such a defence, even if only in a preliminary way, for the difficulties posed by this challenge highlight deeper problems with essentialist approaches (some of which I consider below).

Most definitions of literacy, and most linguistic utterances where literacy is the referent, have some connection with 'reading' and 'writing'. In its contemporary everyday use, the term 'literacy' almost invariably implies *at least* 'the ability to read', and usually 'the ability to read and write'. In some settings, connotations with being 'well-read' or a 'literary' person still apply, though less so than in the past. Where such associations are made, they tend to supplement rather than override the core notion of 'being able to read (and write)'. Similarly, *most* definitions formulated by scholars, policy makers, and adult literacy workers refer - whether explicitly or implicitly - to 'reading' and/or 'writing', provided (in doubtful cases) the interpretation of 'reading' or 'writing' is sufficiently broad. For the moment, I shall leave aside two important problems, namely: (i) the question of whether *both* 'reading' and 'writing' are required for literacy; and (ii) the issue of deciding at what point one is literate (i.e. is it

when one is able to sign one's name in order to vote, or read a children's book, or comprehend newspaper items, or write and read academic papers, etc.?). I shall assume, for the time being and for the sake of argument, that 'literacy' is the ability to read *and/or* write *anything*.

If this is to stand as a core definition of literacy - that is, as the one definition which captures the essence of 'literacy', and from which all other definitions ultimately derive - there is a further issue to be addressed. Not all theorists speak of literacy as some kind of *ability*: some, for example, conceive of literacy as (social) 'practices' and 'conceptions' of reading and writing; others talk of literacy as a 'process' or an 'act'. I shall turn to this problem shortly. The objective at present is to see if there is any way of defining literacy which is sufficiently precise to distinguish 'literacy' from that which is 'not-literacy', yet also sufficiently broad in scope to embrace all particular examples of literacy. The 'ability' aspect of the definition, then, will be ignored momentarily: let us simply propose that literacy has some 'connection' with 'reading' and/or 'writing'.

If it is true that 'literacy' has some connection with 'reading' and 'writing', then provided the latter two terms can be clearly defined, there should be some hope of finding a generic definition of literacy. The only problem (seemingly) would be that the definition as it stands at the moment might be too broad to be of any practical or theoretical use. However, if either 'reading' or 'writing' *cannot* be easily defined, the value of the definition as a generic construct is called into question. I shall, given space limitations, confine myself to the 'reading' aspect of the definition.

What, then, is 'reading'? Reading is often conceived as an internal, individual, mental or cognitive process through which symbols on paper or other surfaces are 'decoded' or

interpreted. The symbols to be decoded can be described as 'writing', if this word is employed as a noun, or as 'text'. 'Writing' here denotes the 'code' which gives the symbols their sense, and may be represented through print, inscriptions on the sand, images on computer screens, lettering on a blackboard, collections of three dimensional letters, and so on. 'Text' is used in the narrow sense here to indicate a collection of written symbols arranged in the form of letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. On this view, it is acknowledged that people read different things, and that reading takes place in disparate contexts. But it is assumed that it is still essentially the same process that is occurring, irrespective of what is being read, or where or with whom this reading is taking place. Reading, then, is all of a piece.

If this view is correct, it should be possible to distinguish between legitimate and mistaken uses of the term 'reading' in our language. People certainly talk about 'reading' books, street signs, newspapers, greeting cards, and so on. But the term also finds expression in other less frequently mentioned discursive settings. Fishing experts stress the importance of 'reading' a beach before deciding where to cast a line; media critics advocate critical 'readings' of visual images[50]; politicians seek to 'read' crisis situations in an effort to avert revolution; share brokers 'read' stock movements as signals in deciding where to invest clients' money; clairvoyants 'read' tea leaves in predicting the future. (This variety of conceptions applies to 'writing' as well: reference is made at times to people 'writing' their way into history through heroic deeds or far-reaching decisions; sports stars who perform poorly are 'written off' by critics; etc.)

It might be argued that these examples represent legitimate applications of the term 'reading', provided the definition we begin with is sufficiently broad. 'Reading' might perhaps be defined as 'the process of interpreting signs'. So long as the notion of a 'sign' here is

conceived in its widest sense, the examples given above can be easily accommodated: wave action and sand formations are 'signs' in the process of 'reading' a beach, just as printed letters are signs in reading a book. Fishing experts interpret their environment in seeking the areas most likely to be productive in producing fish; readers interpret print symbols in order to enjoy novels, order restaurant meals, learn from academic articles, and so on. Hence, the situations to which the concept of 'reading' might be applied are many and varied, but it is a single, uniform concept all the same.

Much hinges, though, on the key components of the definition: 'signs' and 'interpretation'. The boundary between what is and what isn't a 'sign' is unclear. Even if we could overcome this ambivalence with further definitions, each of those definitions would contain within them concepts which begged further elucidation. Dropping the concept of 'signs' altogether would not relieve us of difficulties, for the notion of 'interpretation' still requires clarification. If we end up saying, effectively, that reading *is* interpretation (having met one obstacle after another in trying to delineate certain types of interpretation as relevant for the conceptual domain of 'reading'), then we defeat the purpose of endeavouring to demarcate 'reading' from other concepts. There is no single definition, or concept, of 'reading' which can transcend all the particularities of given applications of this term. In attempting to go to the heart of 'reading' by finding a definition broad enough to cover all actual and possible uses of the term we run the risk of opening as many ambiguities as we close. Apparent essences always embrace uncertainties. 'Reading' and 'writing', then, remain slippery concepts, definable only in provisional and context-specific ways.

This clearly frustrates the attempt to develop a single core definition of literacy. Even if agreement could be established on the definition itself (which seems highly unlikely given the history of the problem of definition), the components of that definition would always be

'up for grabs'. In trying to clarify each element of the definition, a spiral of further definitions becomes necessary, all the more so given the complexity of terms such as 'reading' and 'writing'. More and more definitions would be built up, in a chain which moves further and further away from the original 'core' definition. This is an inherent difficulty with qualitative definitions. It is far easier to avoid ambiguity when referring to years of school attendance than it is when discussing 'signs', 'interpretation', or other terms (e.g. 'texts') which might form part of a qualitative definition. Once the shift has been made from quantitative indices to qualities, processes, activities, and so on, a degree of indeterminacy becomes inevitable.

These difficulties are compounded by deviations from the conventional association of 'literacy' with 'reading' and/or 'writing'. While most definitions of literacy have some connection with reading or writing, a number of theorists have concentrated on other distinguishing features of literate activity. Langer, for instance, speaks of literacy as a way of *thinking*.[51] This conception of literacy is not tied to written texts. Langer notes that the thinking skills associated with reading and writing can be applied in a variety of settings: in 'situations where people talk about language (written and spoken), are conscious of the distinctions between the discourse (speaker's and author's) meaning and their own interpretations - where they use their knowledge to read, write, think and communicate in new ways'.[52] Literacy, for Langer, is defined by processes such as reflection, analysis, deliberation about alternatives, and group discussion - whether this applies to classic texts, romance novels, television programmes, movies, or any other form of discourse. On Langer's view, people who cannot read and write may be literate; conversely, '[r]eading and writing as low level activities can involve little literate thought'.[53] Langer summarizes her position thus:

> Literacy is an activity, a way of thinking, not a set of skills. And it is a purposeful activity - people read, write, talk, and think about real ideas and information in order to ponder and extend what they know, to communicate with others, to present their points of view, and to understand and be understood. In doing this, sometimes they read and write, sometimes they talk about what they read or wrote, and sometimes they talk about ideas using the ways of thinking and reasoning they might also have used when they engaged in directly text-based activities.[54]

The imprecision in many qualitative definitions can be viewed as either a strength or a weakness (or both), depending on the theoretical position adopted. Certainly for those who hanker after something concrete, finite, finished, and measurable, most qualitative definitions are likely to prove frustratingly elliptical. The ranking and sorting of people on standardized scales becomes impossible, the 'outcomes' of literacy campaigns which proceed from qualitative definitions can no longer be easily charted and quantified, and comparisons across different countries and historical periods become nightmarishly difficult. In addition, though, the sheer number and variety of definitions is staggering in magnitude and, from one perspective, thoroughly confusing: literacy, it seems, can mean whatever people want it to mean. Many qualitative definitions are stipulative in the weakest sense: they are simply posited and left 'hanging' in the middle (or at the beginning) of a discussion with no comment, explanation, exploration, or defence. The number of attempts to trace prior use of the term 'literacy' in detail and to take this into account in developing a qualitative definition have been surprisingly few.

From another point of view, however, the diversity of definitions is testimony to the complexity and multifarious character of literacy and is thus something to be celebrated. Yet,

some theorists argue that the shift to qualitative approaches following increasing dissatisfaction with quantitative models did not go far enough. There was (and still is in many quarters) a belief that there is some 'essence' to literacy which, although not measurable or quantifiable, nevertheless exists as a kind of conceptual prototype. Behind the myriad legitimate definitions of literacy, then, there lies an unchanging 'core' definition which gives every qualitative definition promulgated over the past few decades its sense (or lack of it). The logic of the qualitative approach, it might be argued, was still built around the idea of searching for *one* definition of literacy. Indeed, the parameters for theorizing literacy were limited by the very assumption that it was 'literacy' in the singular with which one was concerned as a researcher, not *'literacies'* For fuller development of this line of critique, attention must be paid to pluralist approaches. First, however, as a bridge between the first two approaches and pluralist views, let me comment briefly on the notion of functional literacy.[55]

The term 'functional literacy' was first used by the United States Army during the second world war to denote the capacity to understand instructions relating to basic military functions. It was estimated that this equated to approximately fifth-grade reading level.[56] Later, the concept of functional literacy began to find expression in studies of adult literacy in the Third World. The term was regularly employed by Unesco in the 1950s and 1960s.[57] Initially defined quantitatively,[58] constructs of 'functional literacy' in Unesco initiatives quickly became almost exclusively qualitative and increasingly complex. Gray's definition from 1956 is well-known:

> A person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his cultural group.[59]

Unesco's launching of a five-year Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) in 1964 saw a more overt linking of functional literacy with economic development and work. Disappointing results in this programme as well as earlier literacy campaigns contributed to a further shift in focus in 1975:

> The concept of *functionality*, in the broad sense of the term, comprises not only economic and productivist dimensions,... but also political, social and cultural dimensions.[60]

More recent analyses have placed greater emphasis on functional literacy as a form of individual and social empowerment. Hunter and Harman, for instance, in their study of adult illiteracy in the United States, posit the following definition:

> [Functional literacy is] the possession of skills *perceived as necessary by the particular persons and groups* to fulfil their own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders, and members of social, religious, or other associations of their choosing. This includes the ability to obtain information they want and to use that information for their own and others well-being; the ability to read and write adequately to satisfy the requirements *they set for themselves* as being important for their own lives; the ability to deal positively with demands made on them by society; and the ability to solve the problems they face in their daily lives.[61]

The range of skills and abilities covered by definitions of functional literacy has also increased over time. Levine, for example, shifts the focus toward control over information:

> Functional literacy can be defined as the possession of, or access to, the competencies and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing which an individual wishes or is compelled to engage.[62]

Finally, in striking contrast with the earlier quantitative definitions advanced by Unesco and the military, Lankshear develops a concept of functional literacy from the Freirean notion of an ontological vocation. He suggests:

> [F]or literacy to be functional is for it to enhance the uniquely human potential of every person to create the world of men and women, which is the world of culture and history.[63]

In the case of functional literacy, then, the possibility of *competing* quantitative and qualitative accounts emerges. Discourses on functional literacy provide an interesting study in comparing the three approaches. Over time, qualitative definitions have gained greater prominence in discussions of functional literacy, and the parameters of the term have expanded dramatically. As Lankshear points out, the idea of something being 'functional' begs qualification: 'functional for what? or, for whom?, or, in what ways?'.[64] Definitions of functional literacy over the past fifty years provide a mosaic of sometimes overlapping and interpenetrating, but often contradictory, responses to these questions. Frequently, the 'answers' are not provided directly but can be detected as *tacitly* embedded assumptions within a wider theoretical position or practical orientation.

The original purpose of the term was quite explicit: functionally literate recruits were those who could read and write sufficiently well to carry out military functions (commands,

operations, etc.) effectively. Later, the concept implied 'fitting in' to some sort of social or cultural system - that is, functioning as a contributing member of society. The emphasis in many Unesco programmes of functional literacy through the 1960s was on enhancing workplace productivity and national or regional economic growth through reading, writing and numeracy. In the (late) 1970s and 1980s there was an (ostensible) shift from meeting the requirements of society to opening up opportunities for the individual. Functional literacy, thus, was often conceived as the means for enabling adults to attain specific concrete goals (e.g. reading to one's children, obtaining a drivers' licence, writing letters to friends, etc.). Occasionally the concept was grounded in a thoroughly developed ethical position and a vision of the role reading and writing might play in creating a better social world. Lankshear's analysis, for instance, is couched in the language of neither 'social efficiency' nor atomistic individualism but rather a distinct conception of socialist democracy.

In attempting to say what it is about the particular reading and writing abilities or practices in question which makes them *'functional'* literacy rather than simply 'literacy', those who discuss functional literacy hint at a distinguishing feature of the pluralist approach to the problem of definition. Functional literacy can be conceived as a particular *mode* of literacy. A key tenet of the pluralist view is the notion that 'literacy' must be examined in terms of *specific* forms of reading and writing. Simply constructing a definition of functional literacy, however, does not necessarily indicate support for a pluralist position. Pluralists, as the name suggests, speak of a *plurality* of different forms. Many who have used the term 'functional literacy' over the years have merely posited a stipulative definition of the kinds of reading and writing necessary for a given purpose - without highlighting this *as a form* (of literacy), or showing why it ought to be supported, or considering how it might relate to other modes, and so on.

(iii) *Pluralist Approaches*

Pluralist approaches to the problem of defining literacy have taken several forms, the most basic of which simply derive from the recognition of multiple modes of literacy. Examples of these different modes include: 'survival literacy' (the literacy skills necessary to survive in modern technological society):[65] 'social literacy' (communication skills, and the capacity for dialogue, critical reflection and informed action);[66] 'cultural literacy' (possession of the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world);[67] 'green literacy' ('the skill of transmitting and receiving information in an intelligible manner with sustainable environmental elements built in');[68] 'media literacy' (critically interpreting and reflecting upon television programmes, advertisements, films, etc.);[69] 'entrepreneurial literacy' (envisaging, designing and implementing curricula as literacy practices built upon values such as initiative, creativity, imagination, risk-taking, etc.);[70] 'political literacy' (possession of 'the basic information which is prerequisite to understanding the political dimensions of a given context');[71] and 'scientific literacy' (the 'ability to understand science in its day-to-day context').[72]

Some theorists have placed different modes of literacy in hierarchical order. Powell, for example, outlines three levels between illiteracy on the one hand and literacy on the other. These are 'pre-literacy', 'basic literacy' and 'career literacy'. Pre-literacy is possession of the basic skills necessary to complete the tasks demanded by society in its elementary schools. Basic literacy signals the consolidation of reading and writing skills. Career literacy refers to the capacity to perform satisfactorily in one's given occupation.[73]

Wells, similarly, puts forward a four-level taxonomy of literacy forms. At the first level, 'performative literacy', the emphasis is on the decoding aspect of literacy. 'Functional literacy', the second level, refers to the use of literacy in interpersonal communication. The

third level is 'informational literacy' the use of literacy to convey (discipline-based) knowledge. 'Epistemic literacy', the fourth level, relates to the creative and critical application of literacy for the individual and society.[74]

Shor identifies a multiplicity of forms: 'basic literacy' (minimal print-decoding skills); 'functional literacy' ('the ability to interact with political, legal, commercial, occupational and social demands in daily life'[75]); 'higher-order literacy' (being able to work out multi-step problems by oneself); 'cultural literacy' (the use of Standard English lexicons and accents in the world of 'high culture'); 'computer literacy' (the specific skills necessary to operate computers and understand 'computer language'); and 'critical literacy' (transformation through reflection, action, and desocialization).[76]

There is a shift in pluralist approaches from a focus on 'literacy itself' to literacy as practised, developed, conceived, expressed, or manifested in this context, or that discursive setting, or that situation - in these ways, at this time, along these lines, etc. That is, a move is made toward what I earlier termed 'particularist' constructs. Acknowledging the existence of, and importance of delineating and evaluating, distinct *forms* of reading and writing has prompted the displacement of the unitary 'literacy' with the notion of 'literacies'. Literacies, an increasing number of theorists argue, are always social, diverse and many.[77]

An influential presentation of this position can be found in Lankshear and Lawler's *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution*.[78] Acknowledging their debt to Graff,[79] and further developing ideas from Street,[80] Lankshear and Lawler critique three 'popular misconceptions' about literacy, the first two of which are of greatest significance for the present section. These are:

(i) The notion that literacy is *unitary*: The idea here is that 'literacy is a single "thing" it is essentially the same "thing" for everyone'.[81] Literacy is either a technology, or it is the ability to use the technology of print. While it is possible that people may differ in their level of literacy, 'what literate people share in common...is their possession of this "thing" called literacy'.[82] *Illiterate* folk, by contrast, either don't possess this 'thing' called literacy at all or don't possess 'enough' of it to be called literate;[83]

(ii) The alleged *neutrality* of literacy: In so far as it is simply a skill, the argument goes, literacy can be seen as distinct from the uses to which it is put in particular social contexts.[84] As a technology, literacy can be used in a variety of ways in a range of different settings, but it does not (on its own) privilege any particular values, beliefs, practices, interests, or theories of the world over others: 'it is simply "there" for people to use however they choose'.[85]

In criticizing these beliefs, Lankshear and Lawler adopt Street's distinction between 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of literacy.[86] On the autonomous view, literacy has its own 'nature'; i.e. it is not shaped by specific struggles, relationships, ideologies, etc. Proponents of the ideological model, on the other hand, reject any notion of literacy having an autonomous essence; instead emphasis is placed on the actual 'forms' reading and writing take.[87] A 'form' of literacy is 'an identifiable set of reading and writing practices governed by a conception of what and how to read and write, when, and why'.[88] Different *literacies* are forged within distinct relations of power. Drawing on the work of Cressy[89] and Schofield,[90] Lankshear and Lawler note, for example, that Hannah More - a Sunday school teacher in the Mendips during the 1790s - encouraged children to read the Bible but disallowed any form of writing. For More, literacy was a means for training the poor in the

habits of 'industry and piety'.[91] By contrast, yeomen '...practised a literacy attuned to their economic affairs, social aspirations, and, in the case of forty-shilling freeholders, the formalities of voting and being generally politically active and informed'.[92]

With Postman,[93] Lankshear and Lawler argue that most people who become literate practise reading and writing in predominantly trivial ways - e.g. in writing shopping lists, reminder notes, cheques, letters, etc., or in reading newspapers, Mills and Boon novels, and the like for information and leisure. Few, despite the high hopes customarily held for literacy, are likely to seek enlightenment in great works of literature or use reading and writing to critically analyse the world they live in.[94]

For Lankshear and Lawler, 'what literacy *is* is entirely a matter of how reading and writing are conceived and practised within particular social settings.'[95] Hence, against the notion that 'literacy does not itself determine the uses to which it is put and is not itself shaped by the uses made of it', their argument is that 'literacy *is* the uses to which it is put and the conceptions which shape and reflect its actual use'.[96] For theorists such as Lankshear and Lawler, and Street, 'literacy' in the singular can only serve as a 'shorthand' (in Street's case a shorthand for 'the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing'[97]). The term 'literacy' is thus always a kind of misnomer: an inadequate way of describing the myriad specific literacies. There is no core definition of literacy to which we can turn as a benchmark for testing the validity of particular definitions: particulars are all we have. Strictly speaking, for these thinkers, there is no such thing as *a* definition of literacy, only definitions of this literacy or that literacy.

Recognizing that 'literacy' is always 'under erasure' for those who acknowledge a plurality of 'literacies' enables a key tension in Lankshear and Lawler's account to be addressed. Their

contention that 'literacy *is* the uses to which it is put and the conceptions which shape and reflect its actual use'[98] poses a problem of logic: how can something be both 'itself' (the 'it' in the sentence) and 'the uses to which it is put'? One way of answering this is to say that the 'it' in question is that which would be avoided if our language was adequate to get us beyond reification, in a manner sufficiently economical to make our language work. The problem might be avoided, then, were our language - in this case, the written discourse of an academic book on literacy - equal to the task. Lankshear and Lawler, thus, in the interests of maintaining brevity in presentation, rely on the reader to see the 'it' here as a shorthand for the myriad uses of reading and writing, otherwise they would be required to acknowledge them every time they wanted to address literacy issues. Properly speaking, there is 'literacy A', 'literacy B', 'literacy C' etc. through to 'N', where 'N' equals the total number of actual forms - i.e. social practices and conceptions of reading and writing - literacy takes. 'Literacy A' is what literacy 'A' is; 'literacy B' is what literacy 'B' is; and so on. There is no single, unitary, universal 'literacy' behind all of these, though there may be generic constructions of what literacy *can* be, under which several or many specific literacies fall. If the 'literacy' in Lankshear and Lawler's quotation is an 'it', therefore, it has the ontological status of a shorthand, necessitated by the restrictions imposed by a certain form of written language.[99]

Another strongly argued example of a pluralist approach is furnished by McHoul in his critique of conventional conceptions of 'reading'.[100] McHoul deconstructs traditional depictions of reading as a uniform, individual, internal, mentalistic process. Reading, for McHoul, has no 'soul', no essence, no inner core of absolute meaning. Reading is not a single process or phenomenon; instead, there are a multiplicity of different *readings*. It is always possible, McHoul maintains, 'to defeat a definite and distinct boundary between a practice or thing called reading and its opposite, not-reading'.[101]

Drawing on the work of the later Wittgenstein,[102] McHoul problematizes the notion that reading is a 'particular and specifiable' process.[103] He argues that the domain of what does *not* count as reading remains elusive.[104] This means that 'almost everything can be reading and that when it is and isn't depends on unforeseeable matters'.[105] The belief that reading is a singular process derives, at least in part, from the uniform appearance of a page of print: repeated scanning of printed pages produces a 'surface definiteness' about reading.[106] This effect, however, is illusory. No matter how carefully we try to delineate precisely what goes on when 'reading' occurs, there will always be ambivalent cases which do not fall neatly into 'reading' or 'not-reading' categories. If, for example, reading is defined as the systematic derivation of sounds from marks, and the 'wrong' sounds are derived, would we still call this 'reading'? Or, if the essence of reading consists in some form of inner experience, do instances of having this experience while asleep or on drugs count as 'reading'?[107]

McHoul dispenses with the commonly accepted distinction between 'reading itself' and 'the context' for this reading. Those who conceive of reading in mentalistic terms tend to separate the 'real' process of reading from the situation(s) in which this takes place. On such views, the term 'context' is often posited, overtly or tacitly, as the primary domain of 'not-reading'.[108] 'Reading', for those who subscribe to mentalistic models, gains its distinctiveness precisely from the fact that it is *not* everything going on around 'it': it is a particular process which merely takes place 'in' a given space and time. 'The context', then, does not shape or define a specific instance of reading *as* an example of reading; instead, the 'nature' of reading is *a priori* to the setting in which 'it' takes place. McHoul challenges this view, arguing that contexts - 'ceremonial places' - *are* readings.[109] Readings are ceremonies of social practices, always already 'enframed'. Reading is ceremonial in the sense that it entails knowing what the 'rules' for 'playing the game' of reading in situation X, or Y, or Z, etc. are for.[110] Reading does not require that one knows what the rules are; rather, to read is 'more like knowing

how to play with texts strategically'.[111] There is never a clear distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of a given framing or reading: the blurring of boundaries between 'reading' and 'not-reading' is not a deficiency but a prerequisite for drawing such distinctions.[112]

McHoul claims that '[t]o understand reading is to understand the conventions and ingredients that can make it up, that can surround it, that can come into and out of play, in particular cases'.[113] We gather some sense of what might count as 'reading' through assembling families of cases of particular social practices which come to be constructed as examples of reading. Families of cases are bound together not by 'some defining characteristic which is "essentially" reading'[114] but by '*criteria* of application'.[115] This idea derives from Wittgenstein's displacement of truth conditions in semantics with criterial relationships.[116] Criteria are forms of evidence established by convention and tradition - by histories of ceremonial practices - and provide grounds for correctness until defeated by further circumstantial evidence.[117] The suggestion here, then, is that we take a given set of social practices - a ceremonial framing 'P' - as a case of 'reading' in light of the evidence assembled from past and other instances of practices which bear some resemblance to 'P' (and which were designated 'reading M', 'reading N', 'reading O', etc.). The delineation of 'P' as '*reading* P' (and not, say, 'teaching P', or 'learning P', or 'dialogue P', or whatever) is sufficiently imprecise, however, to allow for the possibility that a ceremony of social practices 'Q' - as the next possible candidate for inclusion among the family of cases which make up 'reading' - might not become 'reading Q'.

These analyses provide a powerful challenge to popular conceptions of 'literacy' and 'reading' and stand in marked opposition to quantitative and qualitative attempts to define these terms in essentialist ways. On more extreme postmodernist positions, the whole project of definition is either abandoned altogether or radically reconstructed. Indeed, it is possible to

conceive of postmodernism as a rejection of the entire *philosophical* project.[118] Some postmodernists, deconstructionists and discourse analysts eschew any form of definition of *anything,* refusing to 'pin down' meanings for key concepts and repudiating the very idea of philosophical precision. From this point of view, the issue is not one of deciding how to answer the question 'What is literacy?' but of rendering problematic the viability of the question itself.

At the very least, the postmodernist critique of essentialism serves to *complicate* the idea of defining literacy. This is why I shall refer throughout the chapter to 'pluralist approaches to the *problem* of defining literacy', and often speak of 'constructs' rather than 'definitions' when discussing pluralist accounts. If the phrase 'pluralist approaches to *defining literacy*' is used, the implication is that those who adopt a pluralist view accept that literacy *can* be defined. This would be problematic for two reasons. First, many pluralists argue that 'literacy' in the singular does not exist; rather, they stress, we can only talk of *literacies* (or 'readings' instead of 'reading'). Second, pluralists often emphasize the 'slippery' character of literacies and readings - that is, their indefinability and undecidability. Literacies and readings, pluralists point out, are 'on the move': they have an inevitable fluidity and lack of fixity. Hence, one can only 'define' literacy in the sense of attempting to capture some of the major (distinguishing) features of a given (particular) literacy at any one time; this cannot hold indefinitely, but must be subject to modification with changing contexts and the movement of time.

On the postmodernist view, there is no transcendental centre or defining essence to human beings, texts or concepts. For example, it is not only Platonic efforts to discover the quintessential 'forms' lying behind worldly particulars which attract criticism from postmodernists;[119] Marx's attempt to unearth the 'laws' governing capitalist production[120] and

feminist characterizations of 'women' as an homogenous group[121] also come under fire. Postmodernist theory calls into question the entire project of conceptual clarification, or at least a particular version of this quest. If scholars hope, through sufficiently rigorous theoretical analysis, to find the singular 'true' meaning of literacy then they are, postmodernists would argue, seriously misguided. If, on the other hand, the concern is simply to delineate one concept of literacy among many, for a particular purpose, within a specific context, then postmodernist critics might be more sympathetic to the task.

Pluralist approaches, whether overtly postmodern or not, rule out the possibility of essentialist definitions of literacy. In fact, pluralist positions gain their distinctiveness from their *anti*-essentialist thrust. *All* definitions, or, more correctly, all constructs, are stipulative in one sense for the pluralist: it is always a case of saying 'literacy X will be A for this given purpose (or context, or situation, or moment) Y'. Pluralist constructs of literacy may be prescriptive, though 'ought' propositions are used cautiously, sparingly, or avoided altogether by some theorists, given the postmodern problematization of normative ethics. Certainly any statement to the effect of 'literacy X ought to be A' must be qualified and accepted as inevitably provisional, for, as Gee points out, all claims to universality or authenticity in questions of morals or ethics are made within particular sign systems, within given parameters, with certain assumptions already taken for granted.[122]

Abilities, Practices and Conceptions

As pluralist approaches have gained momentum in the literature, it has become increasingly clear that the dominant twentieth century view of literacy as 'the ability to read and write' is but one conception among several competing accounts. At one level of debate, theorists and policy-makers have quibbled over the extent to which, and the ways in which, one ought

to be able to read and write if one is to be deemed 'literate'. However, Lankshear and Lawler's work renders problematic the very idea that literacy is best understood in terms of 'abilities'. Following Street, Lankshear and Lawler speak of literacy as 'the *actual* social practices and conceptions of reading and writing'.[123] This shift in focus poses important challenges to conventional notions of 'literacy', 'illiteracy' and 'the literate person', and has significant practical ramifications for programmes of literacy education. While there is not space here to explore the practical import of a 'social practices and conceptions' view of literacy, I want to make a start in teasing out some of the conceptual implications of this idea.

To speak of literacy as the ability to read and write is to refer to the *potential* a given individual has to perform certain tasks or engage in particular practices. This, then, is a 'having' view of literacy: one either 'has' this ability or one does not. Provided the abilities necessary for it to be said that someone is literate can be precisely defined, the concept of 'illiteracy' is readily available as the opposite to 'literacy'; the *illiterate* person becomes the logical 'Other' in defining the literate individual. The literate person is able to do X or perform Y or engage in activity Z; the illiterate person is unable to do these things.

An analogy might be drawn here with the notion of being fluent in a foreign language. If I have learned, say, the French language to a point where I can easily converse with French men and women, read French books and newspapers, and write letters or reports in French, then I might be said to possess the abilities necessary to describe me as 'fluent' in French. In my normal activities, I speak and write in English; nevertheless, my fluency in French exists as a latent capacity which can be called upon when necessary. So too with literacy. Imagine I am employed as a farm hand and seldom need to read and write in my daily activities; I likewise have neither chance nor inclination to read morning newspapers or novels for information or enjoyment after working hours. Yet, in school I learned how to

perform those tasks which the teacher and other authorities designated 'reading' and 'writing'. While I have little need or want for practising such tasks in everyday life, I might still be typically regarded as 'literate' in so far as I am able to demonstrate the characteristics of 'reading' and 'writing' if called upon to do so.

The idea of literacy being a practice or set of practices imparts a quite different perspective. In semantic terms, the term 'literacy' shifts from being a descriptor for that which *can* happen to that which *does* happen. On Lankshear and Lawler's view of literacy, the adjective 'literate' either disappears altogether or assumes a radically different meaning to that traditionally associated with the term. Notions of 'illiteracy' and 'being *illiterate*' must also be examined afresh. First, however, the two key dimensions of Lankshear and Lawler's view - 'practices' and 'conceptions' - warrant brief comment.

The notion of 'practice' employed by Lankshear and Lawler has a materialist thrust, but theirs is not a behaviourist view. Certainly there is nothing in their account to suggest that reading and writing are simply demonstrated behaviours which can be measured, described, categorized, and perhaps quantified. The concept of 'practice' in Lankshear and Lawler's theory of literacy bears some resemblance to the Freirean ideal of *praxis*. This is evidenced by the examples they use in illustrating their position on literacy. In discussing the 'proper' literacy promoted in the Nicaraguan literacy crusade, for example, it is clear that it is not merely the transformation of material conditions but the development of a new (critical, revolutionary, sociological, etc.) way of thinking about the world which is at stake. Broadly speaking, the notion of 'practice' for Lankshear and Lawler might be taken to mean the sum of activities - including those customarily depicted as 'intellectual' or cognitive in nature - human beings engage in as social beings. It would be consistent with their view, for instance, to talk of a scholar engaging in certain intellectual 'practices' associated with his or

her field of study, or of novelists 'practising' their craft. 'Literacies' can be any social activities people engage in with texts (and especially with print), and the conceptions which underpin these activities.

'Conceptions' of literacy include:

> ...notions of what is to be read, what one can expect to get from particular print media (for example, "you get the necessary current affairs information from the newspaper", "you get a good story from Mills and Boon", "you get interesting - important? - facts from *The Guinness Book of Records*"), and what the purposes or goals of reading are (to be amused, entertained, transported away, kept up to date, kept informed or in touch, etc.). These very conceptions guide our literacy practice. And our practice in turn affirms these conceptions when we *are* amused, or *do* feel informed and kept in touch.[124]

What, then, might it mean to talk of someone being 'literate' - if it is assumed that this term survives - on the view advanced by Lankshear and Lawler? Let us deal with the 'practice' side of the equation first. One possibility is that a person could only be described as being 'literate' when actually engaged in the activities of reading and/or writing. That is, one is literate when one's actions at any particular moment satisfy the criteria for calling a given process 'reading' or 'writing'. As soon as the characteristics which define these practices are no longer evident, a person ceases being literate; he or she 'becomes' literate again once the activities which come to be classified as 'reading' or 'writing' are resumed. This notion clearly runs against the grain of conventional wisdom on literacy. There is some merit in testing this interpretation, though, for it seems to follow *logically* from the 'actual practices' notion of literacy. Literacies, for Lankshear and Lawler, *are* social practices (and conceptions): they do

not represent the abilities or capacities which enable the activities of reading and writing to be carried out.

A comparison might be made here with the process of running. While engaged in the activity typically characterized as running - i.e. moving one's legs (usually in a forward direction) at a speed somewhat faster and more vigorously than when walking - one is a runner; as soon as this action ceases, it might be said, one is no longer a runner. The fact that a person may have performed these actions hundreds of times before, and might thus reasonably be expected to perform them again (as in, for example, following a systematic regular training programme, or playing with one's children, or rushing to catch the bus), becomes irrelevant. The particular case of running under observation at any one moment - let us call it 'running R' - is all that matters in distinguishing a runner from someone who is not a runner. We may rely upon observations of what was involved in previous actions - 'running P', 'running Q', etc. - to assess a given practice ('running R') *as* an instance of running, but a person is only a runner *while running*.

Arguably, the activities of reading and writing are a good deal more complex than the set of actions associated with the process of running, which could suggest that this analogy serves us rather poorly. A more promising comparison might be drawn with the notion of a person being 'articulate'. As ordinarily applied, this term evinces images of a person who displays clarity, elegance, sophistication, and perhaps a keen wit, in speech. Unlike the process of running, which could be construed (though many regular runners would reject this view) as a more-or-less 'mechanical' set of actions, exhibiting the characteristics associated with being articulate is (it is normally assumed) an 'intellectual' process through and through. On the interpretation of the 'social practices' view being considered at present,

a person is articulate when, and only when, actually displaying the qualities typically associated with articulate people.

This, again, seems odd. We do not ordinarily assume that a person ceases being an 'articulate' as soon as he or she stops speaking. A person 'possesses' the qualities associated with being articulate, it could be argued, whether exhibiting them at any given moment or not, just as an individual might be said to possess certain qualities of character. A courageous person does not stop being courageous every time an occasion for engaging in courageous acts ceases; an honest person does not become any less honest for lack of constant opportunities to display the characteristics associated with honest conduct; and so on. It is not as if one 'switches on' and 'switches off' particular qualities, or virtues (or vices), or attributes; if one is a particular type of person, these qualities will manifest themselves in the appropriate circumstances. If faced with a situation requiring honesty (e.g. in a courtroom) the honest person will display the characteristics of honesty, while the dishonest person might take the opportunity to lie or withhold crucial information.

On the other hand, it would be very unusual to speak emphatically of A as 'an honest person', without A ever having demonstrated his or her honesty by performing honest acts. Likewise, it would seem strange to declare B an 'articulate' individual without B ever having uttered an articulate sentence. Similarly, with respect to literacy, we do not normally think of C as literate unless C has given evidence of being able to do the things literate people are 'supposed' to do: that is, typically, 'read' or 'write', whatever these terms might mean. This suggests that we develop a view of someone as a 'literate' person (or a 'runner', or an 'articulate' person) in light of their previous actions, or in view of some other form of evidence which attests to their ability to do, or be, X, Y, Z, etc.

It seems, on the face of it at least, self-evident that to do something - e.g. to engage in practices of reading and writing - presupposes an ability to do this. One cannot *actually* read if one is not *able* to read, just as one cannot swim if unable to swim. Yet to say that A is able to do X is surely to suggest that A has *demonstrated* his or her ability to do X: we would not normally talk of A being able to read unless A had shown on at least one occasion that he or she could satisfy the conditions necessary for calling a given action or practice 'reading'. In fact, a person is not usually described as 'literate' (especially in formal educational institutions such as schools) unless he or she has *repeatedly* satisfied these conditions.

Hence, practices presuppose abilities, and abilities - if they are to be recognized - presuppose practices. But this, of course, is not to say that abilities and practices are synonymous. This being so, what becomes of 'abilities' or 'capacities' in Lankshear and Lawler's account of literacy? If literacies are themselves social practices, what term describes the ability to engage in these practices? There appears to be none. One way of overcoming this is to modify Lankshear and Lawler's view such that it is not 'literacies' but reading and writing which are seen as social practices. The term 'literacy' needs to be retained to capture the notion of *being able* to engage in various social practices which go under the names 'reading' and 'writing'. 'Reading' and 'writing' are not unitary, uniform activities; hence, literacies are diverse and many. Thus Lankshear and Lawler's arguments about a plurality of different 'literacies' still hold, but 'literacies' become the myriad different capacities or abilities people have to engage in a multiplicity of reading and writing activities. 'Literacy', then, becomes not a shorthand for the actual social practices (and conceptions) of reading and writing, but a shorthand for any *given* ability to act in certain ways (or carry out certain tasks, or engage in certain practices) which come to be (socially) designated as 'reading' and 'writing'.

The trouble with this line of argument is that it assumes that there *needs* to be some term which marks out the ability to engage in (diverse) practices of reading and writing. Lankshear and Lawler would not deny that people have abilities or capacities, nor that abilities are required and manifested in the activities of reading and writing. Their point is that literacies are *more* than abilities: all literacies, for Lankshear and Lawler, are socio-cultural forms. At one level, they would argue that the abilities which characterize 'literacy A' are those required for *this* literacy and not 'literacy B', or 'literacy C'. On this view, there is no need for a generic term which can be applied to each literacy. A *form* of literacy is a particular grouping (or collection, or assemblage) of practices and conceptions of reading and writing, with a specific set of corresponding abilities. If 'literacy A' is a critical form of literacy, the features which mark this out as a distinctive form might include the ability to spot inconsistencies in arguments, the ability to apply ideas from one context to another, the ability to pose questions, the ability to think sociologically, and so on.

However, 'abilities' are not what make a given literacy what it is, for some literacies may be 'defined' (i.e. characterized) by the lack of certain abilities and the prevalence of particular practices, attitudes, conceptions, and ideas - within a social framework in which power is structured unequally - which impede the development of these abilities. For example, when Lankshear and Lawler discuss the 'improper literacy' promoted in many secondary school classrooms, they are referring to, among other things, the *lack* of critical abilities among students. The proclivity to wanting to simply be given 'the answers' to complex problems works against students when they face some of the more demanding questions in examinations. These 'inabilities', though, are not innate limitations; rather, they are shaped or constituted by pedagogical practices in the classroom (e.g. the teacher *expecting* and rewarding only the 'right', textbook-provided answers, even where the students' experiments

or observations suggest alternative answers), and by the wider social relations of education in a capitalist society.

There are deeper difficulties in attempting to confine 'literacy' to realm of abilities. What are we to make of, say, 'political commitment' as a feature of a given literacy? In talking about the Nicaraguan literacy crusade as a form of 'proper' literacy, Lankshear and Lawler would certainly want to include political commitment as one of its distinguishing features. While we might want to say that a person is either able or unable to commit themselves politically, there is something linguistically uncomfortable about this. It is not as if one simply has, or even develops, an 'ability' to become politically committed, such that political commitment exists as a (stable) capacity which can be applied in some cases but not others as one wishes. Political commitment might perhaps better be conceived as a quality of character, or a form of conscious willing, or a mode of social praxis. Whatever 'political commitment' is, it cannot be *adequately* described as a form of ability. The restrictions imposed by an abilities account become even more explicit when we want to speak of aesthetic dimensions of given literacies. It becomes nonsensical, for example, to reduce the process of appreciating the beauty of the language in a poem or literary work to a readily definable ability or set of abilities. We may want to speak of this form of appreciation as a disposition, or an attitude, or an approach to understanding the world: again, any of these possibilities give a fuller, richer picture of what is involved than an abilities model affords.

How, then, should we conceive of 'literacy' and 'the literate person'? For Lankshear and Lawler, the term 'literacy' is ultimately applicable only to a *particular* set of reading and writing practices (and conceptions), and must be 'tagged' as 'literacy A', or 'literacy B', or 'literacy C', etc. When we speak of 'literacy A' we are, on Lankshear and Lawler's position, referring to a whole web or entire set of practices and conceptions, the components of which

cannot be mechanically 'carved off' or isolated from the totality which is the particular *form* of literacy under investigation. Thus, in one sense it is accurate to suggest that a person is only 'literate' when 'actually' engaged in the social practices of reading and writing, or when constructing or forming a conception of what it means to read and write. It is important, however, not to understand this mechanistically. It is not a matter of switching on and off from 'not being literate' to 'being literate' and back again; rather, it is a case of *participating* in a set of practices, and constructing a view of what literacy is or might be, with sufficient regularity for this web of activity to become established as an identifiable 'form' of literacy. It is, moreover, misleading to talk of *a* literate person, or *the* literate individual, or even literate *individuals*, when trying to grasp what it might mean to be 'literate' on the Lankshear and Lawler account of literacy. Forms of literacy are *social* formations, in which relationships are forged, and from which conceptions of reading and writing derive. One is never 'literate' in an isolated way, but always *with others*. It makes more sense, therefore, to talk of literate *groups*, rather than individuals, as people who engage in the social practices of reading and writing, shaping what literacy becomes under a given set of circumstances and in turn being shaped by their literate activities.

The notion of 'illiteracy' does not disappear from our language on the interpretation adopted here, but it does become a relational and plural concept. That is, we can only talk of a *given form* of illiteracy relative to a particular practice of reading or writing. There are potentially as many *illiteracies* as there are literacies. Human beings occupy multiple subject positions as both 'literates' and 'illiterates', being literate with regard to some forms of reading and writing but illiterate when it comes to others. Some groups may, for example, be 'literate' with respect to their engagement in the activity customarily depicted as 'essay writing', but 'illiterate' as far as their understanding and operation of computers is concerned.

The Changing Face of Literacy

Of the three approaches to the problem of defining literacy, pluralist stances, it seems to me, best reflect the fact that conceptions of 'reading', 'writing' and 'literacy' have changed over time and meant different things in different contexts.[125] Quantitative approaches to literacy and reading are manifestly inadequate for dealing (in both conceptual and practical terms) with the different forms reading and writing take in disparate contexts. Qualitative definitions sit somewhat uneasily between these two, but are necessarily constrained by the quest for an underlying, transhistorical essence to literacy.

Street, Lankshear and Lawler, Giroux, Gee, and McLaren, among others, argue that ideas about 'literacy' are always historically situated and socially formed.[126] Conceptions are forged through social practices, often within settings in which power is structured unequally. Terms such as 'literacy' do not have fixed, final, single, *essential* meanings; rather, meanings are socially *constructed*, and always contestable. Meaning-making - including the process of defining 'literacy' and of deciding what 'counts' as 'reading' and 'writing' - is always an interest-serving, necessarily political process. As one commentator puts it, '[t]he meaning given to the term literacy...is determined very much according to *when* and for whom it is defined'.[127] Certain conceptions of 'reading', 'writing' and 'literacy' may become dominant within given discursive settings, but these can always (potentially at least) be resisted and overturned.

Some literacies, then, are more highly rewarded than others, though the forms of reading and writing valued in one situation (or in one context, or one epoch) may not be the same as those valued in another. Meek observes:

> The great divide in literacy is not between those who can read and write and those who have not yet learned how to. It is between those who have discovered what kinds of literacy society values and how to demonstrate their competencies in ways that earn recognition.[128]

Meek draws attention to the changing face of literacy over time, pointing out that conceptions of literacy, and demands on those who are literate, shift with successive generations.[129] She is happy to admit reflective viewing of television programmes, and work with computers, as forms of literacy.[130] Meek points out that literacies are not 'natural' (though they often seem to be, given the need to take them for granted in daily life). Literacies are forged and shaped through human activity. We become literate, Meek notes, 'through behaving as the literate do'.[131] Meek distinguishes between 'utilitarian' literacy, which permits people to carry out basic tasks such as writing their name and filling out forms, and 'powerful' ('supercharged') literacy, which 'allows its possessors to choose and control all that they read and write'.[132] While the former is often promoted in schools, Meek believes the latter - which 'includes the ability, the habit even, of being *critical*'[133] - is crucially important.

Thinking sociologically and historically about literacy is not easy: we typically find it difficult to understand the world in terms other than those familiar to us 'here and now'. Indeed, part of the quest of disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and history is to make us see ourselves and our social surroundings in an unfamiliar light, such that we might emerge with a different (possibly superior and certainly better informed) view of the world than we previously had. Popular discourses on 'literacy', 'illiteracy' and 'the literate person' provide a prime example of ahistorical thought and a lack of 'sociological imagination'.[134] A veneer of contextless neutrality surrounds the standard definition of literacy. Given the way the term is often used by politicians, the media, many teachers, newspaper editors, and others,

one might be forgiven for believing that 'literacy' has *always* meant, and could not mean anything *but*, 'the ability to read and write'. The apparent timelessness of this conventional definition, however, masks its historical and social situatedness.

While alphabetic writing has existed for several thousand years, the contemporary concept of 'literacy' did not emerge until late last century (although 'illiteracy' had existed earlier).[135] In its original use, the term was closely tied to literature and the educational ideal of being 'well read'.[136] The 'literate' person was a *literary* individual: a person of letters, familiar with 'great' works of literature. The modern concept of 'literacy' - a neologism of American origin - evolved in response to the move to tackle mass *illiteracy* in the 19th century, defined exclusively in terms of the inability to read and write.[137] The current prevailing definition of 'literacy' in the West, then, was formed through a distinctive set of social practices intimately related to the rise of mass schooling, just as the earlier notion of being 'literate' was tied to the literary pursuits of an aristocratic leisured class.

Collins draws attention to the convergence of a plurality of scriptal practices into a universalist notion of *'schooled literacy'* following the emergence of institutions of public education in England and North America.[138] As schooling disciplinary mechanisms and social practices have become entrenched over time, 'schooled literacy' has evolved as '*the* norm for all literacy'.[139] Testing procedures, built on a certain set of presuppositions about the value, validity, and measurability of differential achievement, have redefined reading and writing, turning 'a prior diversity of literate practices into a stratified literacy, driving a series of wedges into popular cultural practices and traditions'.[140]

Gee, in a critical essay on Kozol's *Illiterate America*,[141] claims that schools reward a mode of literacy which is 'historically and synchronically complicit' with class oppression.[142] Drawing

on the work of literary critic Terry Eagleton,[143] Gee focuses on the rise of the essay as an intellectual force in the West. While university humanists have consistently proclaimed its political impartiality, Gee's analysis suggests that essayist literacy needs to be understood as an interest-serving, ideologically generated, historical phenomenon. The doctrines of the British essayists of the 17th and 18th centuries 'represented an assertion of rights by a newly empowered middle class against the aristocracy and against a worldview...that upheld aristocratic privilege by founding knowledge and the hierarchical structure of society on divine sanction'.[144] Gee argues that far from extending equal rights to all, the assumptions and practices which underpinned essayist literacy tended to favour a privileged few (those who owned property), with those from the labouring classes being largely excluded from the 'public sphere' of discussion and debate.[145] Gee maintains that essayist literacy remains an important device for social control in schools today.[146] Schools promote an 'a-cultural and absolutist' view of literacy, while nevertheless reinforcing one mode of reading and writing over all others. While the foundations for success with this form of literacy have been laid among middle-class children before they even begin school, children from other backgrounds learn 'that their own cultural orientations to language, thought, and literacy are inferior, deficient, and restricted'.[147]

In ignoring the historical factors which have contributed to the dominance of some practices and conceptions of literacy over others, it is easy to mistake 'schooled literacy' or 'essayist literacy' (or other dominant forms) for 'literacy' in the singular. We sometimes come to assume, in other words, that *particular* modes of literate activity are, and always have been, the only possible modes of literacy. Indeed, certain forms of reading and writing are sufficiently pervasive to exclude from consideration the very idea that multiple modes of literacy might exist. Similar dangers attend popular views of 'reading' and 'writing', neither of which can properly be grasped in unitary, ahistorical or universalist terms. A glimpse at

the etymology and history of the concept of 'reading' is enlightening in demonstrating the extent to which meanings shift over time. Wolf notes that the verb 'read' derives from the Teutonic word 'raedan' which, in its initial form, 'implied nothing about decoding texts'.[148] Rather,

> ...it could be used in a number of contexts to mean giving counsel, taking charge, or explaining the obscure. The original Teutonic verb spawned a number of descendants in various languages, and in almost every case it is this last meaning - the interpretation of something obscure - that has gained prominence. Only in the English language and only in the last two centuries has the word *read* come to mean almost exclusively the interpretation of written material.[149]

Recognizing the historical fluidity of literacy (and related concepts such as 'reading' and 'writing') at the present moment in world history in the West is useful in assessing competing statements about levels or rates of literacy and illiteracy. Over the past two decades claims have repeatedly been made that 'standards' in reading and writing among school children, university students and other groups have declined. These accusations require stable conceptions of (competence in) reading and writing over time for their credibility. There is mounting evidence to suggest, however, that the 'good' reader (or writer) of yesteryear is vastly different from his or her counterpart in contemporary times. The *demands* placed upon readers and writers today are certainly not the same as those applied fifty years ago; arguably, more is expected of the 'literate' person in Western societies than ever before.[150] In fact, as Willinsky observes, the standards commonly set by those invested with the authority of measuring reading and writing achievement tend to restrict our view of what

'literacy' might imply.[151] At any rate, it is not so much a case of falling *or* rising 'standards' as of changing perceptions and concrete constructs of 'reading', 'writing' and 'literacy'.

Quantitative definitions assume a fixed notion of 'literacy', both socio-geographically (from one school, adult literacy programme, region, nation, etc. to another) and historically (from one measurement date to the next). Discourses on 'reading' provide an interesting comparison here. As the earlier discussion of McHoul's work implied, psychological models of 'reading' and 'the reading process' have been dominant this century, especially in schooling settings. These constructs rely on quantitative measures of 'reading performance' via standardized tests for their theoretical coherence, and the entire logic of testing in this manner rests upon an individualized, internalized, decontextualized conception of reading. Reading, for psychologists, is construed as a 'natural' phenomenon, discernable and knowable through the empirical methods of the 'natural' sciences.[152] As such, it is assumed that provided sufficiently rigorous standards of scientific inquiry are observed, the elements of 'the' reading process should be able to be isolated and observed or recorded, irrespective of the time and space 'within' which reading takes place. Reading is, in this sense, 'timeless' and transcends the particulars of given social contexts. The objective for the investigator is to discover the essence of 'reading' and to map out in ever greater detail (through successive studies) its constituent components.

A similar logic prevails with respect to quantitative approaches to defining literacy. Literacy is granted an *apparent* fixity and definitiveness which belies the inherently stipulative character of quantitative definitions. This illusion of universality and permanence is *reinforced*, rather than challenged, by debates over the precise 'reading age' or exact number of years of schooling required for someone to be deemed 'literate'. For while policy makers and programme planners argue over these matters, the merits of the strategy itself remain

unquestioned. A person, then, may be 'literate' one moment and 'illiterate' the next with a shift in the point on the scale at which 'literacy' is declared, but the implied view of what literacy 'is' under this system of classification is left unchanged. More reflexive devotees of the quantitative approach might claim that movements up and down scales are a result of reflections upon the 'demands' placed upon readers. The reference to demands here may be indexed against some notion of the general characteristics of literate societies in contemporary times, or measured against the requirements of specific literacy programmes. Either way, the larger question of whether literacy can and ought to be 'measured' in this manner is not addressed.

This process can be captured through the metaphor of 'wheels within wheels'. Where debate is confined to arguments over points on scales for designating literacy, it is a case of movement *within* a wheel which is but one among the many possible in the wider circle or wheel of conceptual inquiry into literacy. This wider wheel is in turn only one among the many within the total domain of literacy studies. Disputes over points on scales distract attention away from, even if they do not explicitly preclude, exploration of other wheels within the conceptual and total domains. 'Other wheels' here might include qualitative and pluralist approaches to the problem of defining literacy, together with numerous additional areas of investigation germane to literacy studies (some of which might call into question the viability of *any* conceptual work on literacy).

Again, there is an obvious parallel here with discourses on 'reading'. In a paper on the political economy of reading instruction, Luke draws attention to the dominance of psychological perspectives on reading over the past two decades.[153] He points out that while reading psychologists have quarrelled for years over the merits of skills-based as opposed to 'whole language' approaches in the teaching of reading, criticism remains confined within

relatively narrow parameters. For advocates of either method, 'reading is constituted as an observable, singular psychological phenomenon, and the adjudication of matters of pedagogy is seen to depend on psychometrically derived student performances and on psychologically theorised models of reading development'.[154] Luke challenges these assumptions and highlights the role of multinational publishers, governments and educational experts in determining reading and teaching practices.[155] Despite a shift in some quarters from behaviourist to cognitive approaches in explaining 'the' reading process, the view of reading as a unitary, individual, neutral process remains intact in the psychological literature.

Quantitative approaches, then, can account for changes in conceptions of 'reading' and 'literacy' over time only in so far as these fall within the parameters of the scale for measurement (whether this is based on school attendance or 'reading ages'). Their potential for providing an historical perspective on literacy is thus severely limited. Earlier conceptions of 'reading' and 'the literate person' could not have been easily accommodated within either of the two major quantitative measuring systems; nor could this approach deal adequately with likely changes in reading and writing in the future. (The latter point is considered in more depth below.)

Of course, those who define 'literacy' and 'reading' quantitatively play a part in *shaping* conceptions of what these terms mean, and in perpetuating the idea that current constructions of reading, writing and literacy are permanent and contextless. Baker and Luke have charted the political ramifications of psychological views assuming the mantle of legitimacy over other theoretical approaches to reading:

> [T]he monopoly enjoyed by psychologically based studies complicitly services the politics of established research institutions and the interests of corporations

> successfully involved in the business of defining and deploying school literacies. The monopoly might also be seen to carry such politics and interests into the classrooms of secular educational systems in the Western world, and to preclude some useful alternative lines of research, development and classroom practice.[156]

Elsewhere, Luke argues that reading psychologists have failed 'to challenge critically or to recognise their own politicality'.[157] Luke's charge sounds a warning to scholars interested in the broader topic of 'literacy': enclosure of discussion within overly narrow boundaries can not only result in a restricted view of a concept or subject but may also mask the political interests served by particular theories and practices.

Wider issues of funding, employment and institutional practice are at stake here. The command over 'reading' by psychologists is represented not only by the voluminous body of work on the psychology of (children's) reading, but also by the apportioning of research monies, library resources, and academic staff appointments. In New Zealand, for example, a plethora of university courses devoted to 'reading behaviour', 'reading problems', 'reading recovery' and the like, staffed by accomplished reading psychologists, clamour for student attention. Generous research grants have been given to projects in these areas over the past two decades, and university library shelves are well stocked with books, journals and reports on the psychological study of reading. Yet, thus far, notwithstanding the enormous growth of the broader field of literacy studies, there has not been a single appointment to a New Zealand university which has explicitly sought (e.g. through wording to this effect in an advertisement) a person with expertise in the sociological, anthropological, historical, or philosophical dimensions of literacy.

These institutional imbalances both reinforce and perpetuate the dominance of psychological views of reading over other accounts. If Luke, McHoul and others are correct in their assessment of the boundaries within which psychologists operate, it is not difficult to see how alternative conceptions might struggle to gain a foothold in academic and popular discourse. Psychologists begin from premises which resonate strongly with popular conceptions of 'reading' - namely, that it is some kind of internal, individual, unitary process - and in this sense have a head start over less conventional ideas (e.g. those presented by McHoul). 'Commonsense' presuppositions are fortified and bolstered, though in considerably more complex ways, by most courses on 'reading' in institutions such as universities (where 'experts' in the study of reading are supposedly housed). In many cases these are the only courses on reading available. Such courses, though, might appear to provide room for vigorous debate over reading issues, since there is much dispute over the precise 'nature' of 'the' reading process amongst psychologists. Students interested in reading take these courses, pass on the knowledge they gain from them in classrooms, and so reproduce the same fundamental assumptions their teachers began with. The media frequently turn to universities in seeking 'expert' opinions on complex academic subjects, and as most staff who deal with reading in universities tend to be psychologists, the domain for comment tends to be restricted to areas within the parameters of the psychological paradigm. When developing and implementing reading programmes in schools, government agencies sometimes seek outside assistance from professionals in the field: again, if there is a recognized authority in reading on a committee, the person is more likely to hold views compatible with the dominant perspective on reading than contrary ideas. The conceptual terrain of reading thus remains narrowly circumscribed - in both public and professional domains - despite healthy debate and obvious points of contention *within* the dominant paradigm.

Quantitative approaches have never enjoyed a total monopoly in discourses on literacy, and their influence has perhaps been less marked in the past decade than ever before. Nonetheless, the imprint of quantitative definitional mechanisms has never completely disappeared, and is still pervasive in some quarters. Statistics on literacy have until quite recently frequently been gathered on the basis of scores on standardized tests of reading achievement.[158] The early quantitative thrust in defining 'functional literacy' continues to the present day among human capital theorists, economists and 'manpower planners'.[159] Comparisons between Third World and First World 'literacy levels' are still often drawn on the basis of a 'years of schooling' index. Those who advocate a quantitative approach might also find powerful potential allies among the politicians, bureaucrats, and business people who have supported and implemented 'New Right' policies of market liberalism in recent years in New Zealand, Australia, Britain, and Canada (among other places). Much has been said about the impact of New Right thinking on education;[160] little explicit attention has been paid to literacy. However, the implications of the marketization of social policy for conceptualizing literacy seem clear. Literacy, on the logic generated by such policies, might be conceived as a 'commodity' to be acquired (or bought) and sold in a competitive educational and commercial marketplace. In this sense, 'literacy' has an 'exchange value': it can be traded for certain goods or services and used to increase income levels and standards of living. The commodification of literacy also signals its measurability: 'skills' in reading and writing are assets which can be valued in dollar terms. Some people have more of these skills, or more of the kinds of skills that count in the marketplace, than others. Certificates attesting to ability levels are one measurement tool in this theoretical framework; the indexes against which the 'market value' of an individual's 'literacy skills' are assessed are another.

Pluralist approaches, in my view, provide the most satisfactory framework for understanding the changing face of literacy under 'New Times' capitalism in the West. This point turns on

an acknowledgement of what the world - or at least the First World - has become in recent years. With the rapid development of new systems of communication across the globe, many familiar concepts - 'literacy', 'reading' and 'writing' among them - are being reconstructed. In particular, the growth in computing technologies has revolutionized the way we record, share and acquire information. The dominance of the book as a device for organizing knowledge is, some commentators believe, coming to an end.[161] Books will not necessarily disappear in the future; they will simply no longer occupy centre stage in educational institutions as the focus for reading and writing activities. Print, whether in books or other documents, is increasingly being supplemented, and in some contexts supplanted, by the *digital* text. Just as the arrival of printing prompted fundamental changes in the way people conceived of and practised reading and writing, so too (it has been postulated) might the age of the computer signal a dramatic shift in the way people read and write and, by implication, in what it means to be 'literate'.

Exactly how radical and widespread the transformation in *conceptions* of 'reading', 'writing' and 'literacy' will be remains to be seen. It is undeniable, however, that social life in the West is undergoing a profound metamorphosis. Regardless of how much or how little conceptual categories shift, it is indisputable that *practices* and *structures* are changing at a startling pace. The modifications to commercial, educational and personal life engendered by computers are unlikely to be reversed. It is difficult to imagine, for example, businesses wanting (or being able) to go back to print-based methods of record-keeping given the advantages computers afford in manipulating vast quantities of information with relative ease and at great speed. For libraries, the savings in storage space and time, and the enhanced flexibility for additions and deletions, permitted by on-line catalogues make the card systems of old appear antiquated and cumbersome. Scholars can communicate with colleagues overseas almost instantaneously through electronic mail; by comparison,

correspondence through the post can seem frustratingly slow. The vast and expanding information highway of 'Internet' allows rapid access to a plethora of international data bases, the latest ideas in different fields of study, and startling visual displays; making such connections in this way was not only impossible but barely conceivable prior to the introduction of computers and the electronics revolution.

Those who define 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' in quantitative terms have nothing to say about the new modes of reading and writing in a computerized, electronic world. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine what a quantitative approach *could* offer in this regard. It might be argued that the tests used to 'measure' abilities in reading the printed word could be applied to reading words from a computer screen. But if the notion of 'computer literacy' is to have significance as distinct *form* of literacy - i.e. as a signifier of certain kinds of reading and writing which might be distinguished from other modes - it cannot be adequately captured by reference to the decoding of symbols in this manner. With computing practices come a host of new terms: 'hard disks', 'floppy disks', 'RAM', 'software', 'bytes', 'modems', 'CD-Roms', etc. Similarly, old terms (e.g. 'boot' and 'mouse') take on new meanings. An ability to speak and comprehend this new language has become an indispensable requirement in many occupations. Yet being literate in the age of computing implies not merely understanding the language of computing and being able to operate within various software programmes, but also engaging in a new set of social relations and practices within a restructured communications environment.

Quantum shifts in literate activity are made possible (though not *determined*) through a range of features which distinguish the digital text from the printed text. New modes of textual practice - of being literate - become feasible where before they were either impossible or only possible in awkward and time-consuming ways. Accompanying these changes, as Peters and

Lankshear point out, are new modes of subjectivity and identity formation. These are associated with shifts in 'the material conditions that constitute social practices of all kinds', and, more broadly, with the transfiguration of cultural life in postmodern capitalist societies.[162] Computers and other allied forms of electronic technology allow that which was hitherto confined to the realms of science fiction to become a real possibility: the age of *cyberspace* - the 'infinite space of pure information'[163] - is dawning.

Writing practices in a computerized world are undergoing a profound metamorphosis. The digital text can be transformed, transported and manipulated almost endlessly. Words and paragraphs can be reduced, enlarged, deleted, restored, moved, and merged. Continuous and rapid reorganization within and across documents, and between different computing media and software programmes, becomes feasible. Modern, Euclidean notions of geometrical space no longer apply in cyberspace.[164] The 'text' in an electronic world can assume a multiplicity of forms with the touch of a few keystrokes (or the movement and clicking of a 'mouse'), being a set of words on a computer screen one minute, and a page of printed text (or a fax message, or an E-Mail letter, or a sophisticated graphics display, etc.) the next. Writing, composing, drawing, constructing: all become intertwined with multi-media computing.

Interactions between writers, texts, and readers are also being reconstituted. With the text no longer closed between the fixed covers of a book, it acquires a malleability and flexibility for not only writers but readers as well. The dematerialized text exists not as a physical object but as 'flows and relays of digital information, infinitely plastic, continuously available, and recyclable'.[165] Readers gain the opportunity to rework and radically alter the text's original size, shape, style, structure, and content. Where before there was an inevitable 'lag' in the communicative relationship between writer and reader, now connections can be made

almost instantly. The digital text is able to 'travel' from one terminal to another - or to hundreds of others - through thousands of kilometres of interconnecting electronic paths, across nations and oceans, in micro-seconds.

The writer-text-reader grid is now, potentially at least, truly triadic, where prior to the formation of the information superhighway it was more often dualistic in character. With the exception of face-to-face encounters between authors and readers at, for example, professional conferences, possibilities for immediate interaction between authors, texts and readers have always been limited in a print-based textual environment. Authors confront the text to be written, while readers engage the text already written (notwithstanding the fact that on some critical approaches - Freire's among them - reading can be conceived as a form of 'rewriting' what is read). Dialogue in the world of print can occur through correspondence, or through the 'interchanges' section in academic journals, or through professional society newsletters. But there is always a *space* between moments in the writing/reading process (where this involves more than one person simply reading his or her own work). The production and circulation of printed materials - represented especially, though not exclusively, by the vehicle of the book - enclose the text within a particular space/time framework. As any academic who has published regularly in refereed journals and edited collections will attest, the delays between writing and eventual publication are often inordinately long - to the point, in some instances, of rendering published material *passe* before it is even sighted by readers.

In rethinking literacy in the computer age, processes of 'reading' and 'writing' are *reconfigured*, rather than eliminated, as people negotiate new modes of literate activity in postindustrial society. Hitherto accepted views of 'literacy' and 'the literate person' are not abandoned, but *modified*, in tandem with dramatic changes in social life and the nature of work in the

contemporary world. If the transformations engendered by computing technologies and the shift from the printed to the digital text are to be understood as shifts in modes of literacy, attention must be paid to the actual forms reading and writing take within the cyberspatial environment of New Times capitalism. Care must be taken to avoid the language of technological determinism when discussing new possibilities for literate activity in a computerized world. There is no simplistic *causal* relationship between computing technologies and new modes of reading and writing, or new ways of thinking and acting. There is a reflexivity between technological innovation and social forms. Technologies allow new social relationships and patterns of daily life to be forged; but social practices also define - that is, shape the contours of - the technology. It is not a case of the digital text existing as some kind of neutral entity separate from human activity in a contextless, ahistorical void, waiting to be 'used' for this or that purpose. Instead, the practices associated with computing generally, and those revolving around the digital text more particularly, are what make the technology what it is. I expand, in a more general way, on these issues shortly.

Concluding Comments

I have attempted to demonstrate that 'literacy' is, contrary to popular opinion, *not* easily defined or understood. From a philosophical point of view, the challenge of exploring the theoretical complexities in multiple literacies might be embraced enthusiastically. The many areas of conceptual inquiry pertaining to 'reading', 'writing', and 'literacy' which remain underdeveloped provide ample scope for further philosophical investigation. Its very ambiguity and contestability gives the term 'literacy' its appeal: (ostensibly) simple, uncontroversial terms supply little fodder for conceptual exploration; those which are less straightforward and demonstrably contentious give philosophers something to sink their theoretical teeth into and can thus be tackled eagerly.

For policy makers, literacy programme coordinators, adult literacy tutors, politicians, and possibly school teachers, the complications associated with defining and understanding 'literacy' might be seen as nightmarish (or at least irritating and, perhaps, distressing). If literacy cannot be defined with certainty, it becomes difficult to draw comparisons between those who are literate and those who are not, and to measure 'literacy standards' and 'literacy levels'. School teachers can no longer chart children's literacy development with absolute confidence; historians cannot unproblematically discuss rates of literacy across different historical periods; suspicion must be cast on definitive statements about literacy 'crises' by policy makers and politicians; and serious questions must be asked about where and how money devoted to adult literacy programmes is being spent. These problems are profoundly unsettling, to say the least, and call into question long held beliefs and deeply ingrained modes of practice. Yet the answer to such difficulties surely does not lie in forcing 'literacy' back into neat theoretical compartments and easy-to-stack practical boxes, when these are clearly no longer philosophically tenable or ethically defensible. Complexity may be uncomfortable but it ought not to be ignored.

From a different point of view, conceptual work on literacy can be regarded as a 'red herring'. The arguments presented thus far suggest that if the aim is to find a single, universally applicable, accepted-by-all, definition of 'literacy', the quest is doomed to failure. But, beyond this, if there is no essence to literacy, is there any point in even *exploring* conceptual issues? In one sense, of course, we cannot know whether an area of inquiry is worthwhile until we actually undertake some form of investigation: were it not for the efforts of scholars and policy-makers over the past few decades, we might be unaware of some of the pitfalls in trying to define literacy. There can be little doubt that recent work has highlighted significant oversights in past analyses and provided grounds for a deeper understanding of literacy. If it were true that contemporary scholarship had exhausted all

or most of the important avenues for conceptual inquiry, there might be a case for abandoning further study in this domain. But this is emphatically not the case: much work remains to be done before anything like 'saturation point' is reached. Additional historical research on the evolution of the term 'literacy' is needed; the notion of 'writing' is deserving of as much philosophical attention as 'reading' has received; the implications of new constructs such as 'computer literacy' for reorienting discourses on literacy are worthy of greater attention; more work could be conducted on the relationship between conceptions and practices of literacy; and so on.

A stronger justification for viewing conceptual investigation as a red herring is the argument that other areas of inquiry in literacy studies are of (far) greater importance. Scholars have only so much time available for theoretical work and might hold higher hopes for a fruitful outcome in investigating other aspects of literacy. There is also an urgent cry for programmes of adult literacy education from many countries across the globe: perhaps attention should be turned to these practical problems in the first instance. Adult literacy workers might argue that while academics enjoy the luxury of theorizing limitlessly about the nature and definition of literacy, those who are 'illiterate' in print-dominated societies know only too well what literacy is and what they are missing out on as a result of their difficulties with reading and writing. Yet, the danger here is that theory will be uncritically replaced by practice or that one set of pressing theoretical problems will assume an artificial superiority over another. The key, I believe, is to acknowledge the need for further work in several spheres, while investigating ways of meaningfully informing projects in one area with insights from practical or theoretical work in other areas.

I want to suggest that while the task of defining *literacy* (in the singular) is a red herring, the goal of seeking a certain clarity in discussing different *literacies* is of continuing importance.

Whether constructing, discussing, or evaluating literacies, there is merit in attempting to specify - as lucidly as possible - the features which distinguish one mode of literate activity from another. Indeed, this is exactly the basis upon which a pluralist view of defining literacy is built: that is, a recognition that 'literacy A' is distinct in certain respects from 'literacy B', which differs in turn from 'literacy C', and so on. The postmodern turn in social theory highlights the ephemerality of all constructs, but this does not mean that all concepts must be utterly ambiguous, loosely formulated, or poorly articulated. Delineating, as sharply as possible, the general characteristics of a *specific* form of literacy, for purpose X, under social circumstances Y, within historical period Z, remains an important objective for scholars and practitioners.

These are perplexing but exciting times for exploring literacy. I have argued that while the search for a single, universal definition of literacy is based on misguided premises, there is value in seeking to elucidate the distinctive features of particular *literacies*. The problem of definition, it must be stressed, is but one among many avenues for inquiry. Its significance, however, cannot be underestimated given the centrality of questions about meaning, representation and conceptual clarification to so many other aspects of literacy studies.

Problematizing the Consequences and Value of Literacy

In many First World countries, where the printed word is so much a part of everyday life for most people, the question of why we have literacy at all is seldom asked.[166] Reading and writing have become basic to everyday life. Given that we live in a world which in innumerable ways assumes that we are literate, it is perhaps not surprising that we tend to forget that human beings survived without literacy for hundreds of thousands of years. Harvey Graff notes that while the species *homo sapiens* is roughly one million years old,

writing did not emerge until approximately five thousand years ago. Western literacy (based upon the Greek alphabet) has been with us about 2600 years, and printing is just 430 years old.[167] Literacy, then, even if we begin with the most elementary forms of reading and writing, has been around for less than one percent of the time human beings have existed. All basic human needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and social contact can be met without literacy. In addition, humans can quite capably communicate with one another without using reading and writing (through oral language, through drawing pictures, through using sign language, through sending smoke signals, etc.). Why, then, do we invariably take it for granted that people ought to become literate?

On the face of it this is an odd question, with at least one obvious answer: there must be some *value* or worth in literacy. This 'value thesis' clearly enjoys considerable popular support. Politicians regularly refer to the role of literacy in social and economic development;[168] newspaper editors assert that 'everyone benefits from living in a literate, civilised society';[169] major educational organisations such as Unesco invariably assume that literacy campaigns are worthwhile. Literacy has been associated with progress, civilization, social mobility, abstract reasoning, and critical thought.[170] Attitudes purported to accrue from literacy include innovativeness, information and media awareness, national identification, technological acceptance, commitment to democracy and to opportunism,[171] flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to accept and initiate change.[172] Reading and writing have been related to the achievement of expanded horizons of personal enlightenment and enjoyment, and to the maintenance of stable societies.[173] For many commentators, literacy is 'the most important technology in the history of education and human culture'.[174]

In recent years, however, cherished assumptions about the consequences and value of literacy have come under increasingly critical academic scrutiny. In this section I briefly address this

issue, concentrating in particular on the alleged differences between written and oral modes of communication. While there is a burgeoning literature pertinent to this theme,[175] I shall, given space constraints, limit my initial focus to two theorists who have been especially influential: Jack Goody and Walter Ong.

In his classic essay co-authored with Ian Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy',[176] Goody argues that the distinctive features of Western thought can be traced back to the 'radical innovations' of the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers of the sixth century BC.[177] This period coincided with the diffusion of writing throughout Greece, and with the (more permanent) recording of what was previously an oral cultural tradition. With these developments, the Greeks began to question many of the traditional beliefs that had been handed down through the spoken word. In identifying inconsistencies in these beliefs, the (literate) Greeks were 'impelled to a much more conscious, comparative and critical attitude to the accepted world picture, and notably to the notions of God, the universe and the past'.[178]

In non-literate societies, Goody and Watt note, cultural beliefs, values and norms are transmitted primarily through person-to-person communication. While there is an appearance of consistency between the past and the present, practices change with shifting circumstances over time. As soon as ideas and events become inscribed in writing, it becomes possible to revisit them and pinpoint faults and contradictions. This leads to a more critical orientation toward the world. Literacy thus promotes a form of scepticism which in non-literate societies, if it is present at all, is personal and non-cumulative in form. In inculcating an awareness of inconsistency, literacy fosters a distinction between those aspects of tradition and belief which are based on fiction, error and superstition, and those which are founded in truth.[179] Literate individuals begin to seek alternative explanations on questions about the nature of reality. Formal logic, impossible without writing, emerges.

In the *Phaedrus,* Plato suggests that writing engenders forgetfulness and cannot 'defend itself'. Of written words, he remarks, 'you might suppose that they understand what they are saying, but if you ask them what they mean by anything they simply return the same answer over and over again'.[180] Goody and Watt claim, however, that to construe Plato as a whole-hearted supporter of the oral tradition and an arch rival of the written word would be inaccurate. In fact, they argue,

> Plato was torn between his interest and understanding of the prosaic, analytic and critical procedures of the new literate thoughtways on the one hand, and his occasional nostalgia for the "unwritten customs and laws of our ancestors", along with the poetic myths in which they were enshrined.[181]

Some of the critical epistemological distinctions made by Plato - for example, the contrast drawn between truth (*episteme*) and 'current opinion' (*doxa*) - coincided with the widespread adoption of writing. This was probably because 'the written word suggests an ideal of definable truths which have an inherent autonomy and permanence quite different from the phenomena of the temporal flux and of contradictory verbal usages'.[182] The logical system followed by Socrates (as exemplified in Plato's dialogues) is essentially a literate procedure. The complexity of the arguments in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Analytics* could not have been sustained in oral form.[183]

Elsewhere Goody argues that alphabetic literacy enhances the potential for criticism by 'laying out' a discourse in written form (where it is visible and open to scrutiny).[184] In overcoming the constraints of space and time imposed by oral communication, writing increases cumulative knowledge. Written communication encourages schematic treatment of categories of understanding through mechanisms such as lists and tables.[185] The

organization of ideas in rows and columns (with each item standing in a definite permanent relationship to all other items, as in a table), is only possible through writing. One of the consequences of literacy before the Renaissance, for example, was the development of the type of systematized classification seen in the signs of the zodiac. In giving language a visual, spatial location, writing promotes a form of discontinuity in our perception of the world. It enables us to break our ideas about the world down into parts; through the written word we can create lists (of ideas or terms) which are generally too complex to be formulated orally. Writing is a tool which allows us to reclassify, organize, and reflect upon, information. The changes brought about through writing 'could be described as differences in modes of thought, or reflective capacities, or even cognitive growth'[186]; becoming literate thus alters 'not only the world out there but the psyche in here'.[187]

Another prominent scholar who has arrived at similar conclusions to those reached by Goody is Walter Ong. Ong argues that writing is a technology that restructures thought:

> Functionally literate human beings...are...beings whose thought processes do not grow out of simply natural powers but out of these powers as structured, directly or indirectly, by the technology of writing. Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form.[188]

According to Ong, we have 'interiorized' the technology of writing so deeply that, without a great deal of effort, we cannot separate it from ourselves or recognize its presence or influence.[189] Like Goody and Watt, Ong views Plato's condemnation of writing in the *Phaedrus* with some suspicion. The fact that Plato was able to critique the written word, Ong suggests, was a reflection of the influence of writing on Plato's thought processes. Plato's

entire epistemology, with its emphasis on cool, analytic thought, was more consistent with the written tradition than with the oral.[190]

Writing, Ong notes, is similar to many other technologies: it requires the use of tools (e.g. styli or pens) and special equipment (e.g. paper, animal skins, inks, paints, etc.). While spoken language is natural to all human beings, written language is not; in this sense, writing is an artificial technology. However,

> [t]o say that writing is artificial is not to condemn it but to praise it. Like other artificial creations and indeed more than any other, writing is utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials...By distancing thought, alienating it from its original habitat in sounded words, writing raises consciousness...To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance.[191]

One of the most important consequences of writing, Ong maintains, is its separating effect: writing divides and distances. In separating the known from the knower, writing promotes objectivity. We can acquire knowledge through reading a text without having to meet its author. Writing also distances the word from sound (although we may recreate sound when reading the written word). There is a tendency towards greater verbal precision in the written word than in the spoken word, inasmuch as writing usually allows for a longer period of reflection between words, sentences, paragraphs, and so on. Writing separates the past from the present - we can 'freeze' what is with us now and revisit the past (theoretically) as often as we wish to, and at whatever future point we wish to, via the written word. All elaborate, linear, 'logical' explanations depend on writing. In Ong's opinion, we could not have philosophy without the written word: philosophical analysis relies on elaborate,

intricate, exacting cause-and-effect sequences which are impossible to duplicate orally. In doing all of these things, Ong concludes, writing is a 'consciousness-raising and humanizing technology'[192] which can 'enrich the human psyche, enlarge human spirit, set it free, [and] intensify its interior life'.[193]

Three assumptions in the work of Goody and Ong are of particular significance for this chapter. I shall comment briefly on these here, and draw a more specific comparison with Freire's position on the nature of literacy in the final section.

(i) Goody and Ong advance what I shall call a 'technological' view of literacy: to be literate, from their standpoint, is to possess, and be able to use, the technology of (alphabetic) writing. As a technology, writing is neutral. It can be applied in various ways in different settings, but it is still the same basic technology in all cases. Writing has certain 'properties' and 'potentialities' which mark it as a distinctive technology; literate folk, by implication, possess particular qualities which distinguish them from illiterates or non-literates. The technology of writing is separate from the contexts in which it is used. Writing provides a tool which can be put to different ends by those who are literate. Without the technology of writing, certain forms of logic, listing, tabulation, etc. would not be possible. Given that the underlying technology is the same no matter what the (social, cultural, historical, political, etc.) situation, becoming and being literate is, in an important sense, an essentially homogenous process.

(ii) On the view of literacy presented by Goody and Ong, reading and writing have definite and distinct consequences. Ong is the more explicit in his identification of an apparently *causal* relationship between writing and particular modes of thought. Goody and Watt, on the other hand, speak of a wider range of consequences when discussing the impact of

literacy. In both cases, literacy becomes an independent variable in cognitive, communicative, and social change. This, as Street points out,[194] is a form of technological determinism. The technology of writing determines, in important ways, what we become as human beings: how we think, how we relate to and communicate with others, how we make sense of the world, and even how we structure our societies. It is not a matter of us 'determining' or shaping what writing 'is' or 'becomes'; rather, it is a case of the parameters for thought and action being defined by the technology. Our very perception of the options available to us as human beings is a product of the technology working through us.

(iii) Goody and Ong assume that the consequences of literacy are worthwhile. Again, Ong is the more overt of the two in declaring writing a consciousness raising and humanizing technology. Writing enriches the psyche, enlarges and frees the human spirit, and is 'utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials'.[195] These advances are *specifically* and directly attributable to writing. There are also strong positive connotations in Goody's account of literacy. Goody argues that literacy enhances 'cognitive growth', which suggests progressive, perhaps even developmental, change. Moreover, he grants at least tacit approval to the whole range of critical, logical and analytical capacities made possible, fostered and extended by writing. Certainly, he does not seriously call into question the value of these qualities; indeed, given the way he builds his theory, they could not be seen as anything but worthwhile.

For Goody and Ong, there are fundamental differences between written and spoken forms of communication, and between literate and oral cultures. Writing opens up a whole range of communicative possibilities which are either impractical or impossible through the spoken word. Goody and Ong tend to develop points about literacy and writing through contrasts - through a series of oppositions - with spoken language, or with patterns of thought and

behaviour in oral (non-literate) societies. In contrasting oral communication with literate communication, the former is almost always superseded or improved in some way by the latter. Where oral societies sustain myths and superstition, literacy enables these to be identified and broken down; communication through the spoken word allows inconsistencies to occur over the passage of time, while literacy highlights errors and contradictions; where oral language places limits on the development of complicated logical arguments, the opportunities for analysis through writing are almost limitless. The technology of writing allows us to do more and *be* more as human beings than oral communication permits.

My responses to these assumptions have been largely prefigured by the preceding discussion. The second point collapses if the first assumption is not accepted, for the logic of technological determinism depends on writing *being* a neutral technology. If the arguments developed earlier in this chapter are correct, it is nonsensical to talk of literacy 'on its own' or 'in itself'. Literacies always come 'dressed in clothes'.[196] There is no transcendental, ahistorical, contextless essence to writing, reading or literacy, though there may be similarities in certain conceptions and constructions of these terms over time and in different contexts. Writing is not a neutral technology waiting to be 'used' is disparate ways; rather, what writing *is*, or becomes, is dependent upon the forms *particular* 'writings' take in various contexts. If there is no such thing as 'literacy in itself', then literacy cannot 'cause' *anything*. This does not mean that literacies do not have 'consequences' of a kind. The different ways in which we become, and be, 'literate' *do* have 'consequences', but these are not mechanical cause-and-effect outcomes. Literacy does not independently bring about logical, analytical, critical thought (or economic growth, or social mobility, or anything else), though particular forms of literacy may *be* critical, or passive, or oppressive, and so on.

For Goody and Ong, writing, reading and literacy are *unitary* phenomena: the assumption is that there is one basic technology (alphabetic writing) which all literate people use, whatever the particular circumstances in which they read and write. As I noted earlier in the chapter, Lankshear and Lawler criticize this view. They maintain that the search for unitary essences diverts attention from 'the actual forms...[literacy takes] within and among particular groups and individuals, in particular times and places...and the many issues - social, political, ethical, cultural, etc. - that turn on them'.[197] Lankshear and Lawler contend that if we focus on literacies as actual social practices and conceptions of reading and writing, we are 'freed to ask a whole range of questions that we are effectively discouraged from asking if we assume that literacy is neutral'.[198] If literacy is seen as neutral, 'teachers and other purveyors of literacy are absolved from having to consider what the end consequences are of their activities'.[199] Lankshear and Lawler claim:

> Only if we face up to ways in which, and extent to which, reading and writing *are actually patterned* are we enabled to consider the wider scene in which we, as teachers of reading and writing, are key characters.[200]

While Lankshear and Lawler's position will be supported here, I want first to consider what might be involved in trying to argue *against* their view. For, it might be maintained that *if* literacy is neutral, consideration of wider questions relating to its 'uses' and 'consequences' becomes all the more important. Perhaps taking moral responsibility for one's actions is *more* likely to follow from the 'neutral technology' view than from Lankshear and Lawler's position. Technologies, it could be suggested, can be used in beneficial or harmful ways, and put to oppressive or liberating ends. The more powerful the technology is, the greater the care required in using it wisely. An analogy with nuclear technology might be employed to illustrate the point (if this argument were to be adopted).

The ability to create atomic energy can be seen as a form of technology. Nuclear technology developed through a succession of stages. At each stage, understanding of the potential contained within the technology itself increased. While the technology has been usefully applied in creating a new source of power, it has also been used to destroy entire cities (Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by atomic bombs in the 1940s). Huge stocks of nuclear weapons now exist across the planet. The effects of full-scale nuclear war are almost too horrific to think about: we have, for the first time in human history, created a situation where it is possible for the entire *world* to be destroyed. But, it might argued, it is this very horror which makes the point of the example so transparent. In almost any form of technology there exists the potential for both benefit and harm; it is vital, therefore, that utmost importance be placed upon the way a given technology is *used*. Atoms themselves do not think. The ability to create atomic energy is not in itself the problem. The problem arises when people *apply* this technology in destructive ways. The ethical questions pertaining to scientific discovery and the development of new forms of technology ought to be addressed *before* the technologies are put into practice.[201] The technology itself is neutral; but what we *do with* that technology (i.e. how we use it) is never neutral. It is *because* atoms themselves do not think that we must, as it were, 'do the thinking for them'. The technology of fission is a powerful one, which makes it all the more imperative that we use it responsibly. It is not the technology itself which is non-neutral; rather, it is the processes, values, beliefs, and social practices involved in making the decision about what to do with this technology which are never neutral.

So too, it might be said, with literacy. Written symbols on their own are harmless; they have no inclination one way or the other with respect to questions harm and benefit. When written symbols are put to use manifold possibilities arise: people might enjoy the wonders of literature, or write racist hate letters; teachers might encourage or stifle creativity in written

expression among children; the highest truths can be pursued through the philosophical analysis writing allows, or written evidence may be falsified; stirring tributes might be paid to great performers or athletes, or ungrounded rumours might be spread to millions via tabloid newspapers. Given the potential for both harm and benefit, it becomes vital that ethical questions pertaining to literacy be addressed *before* the technology is put to use. Literacy can be applied in many different ways: we must, and *ought*, to decide which applications to favour and which to reject. Literacy *itself*, like nuclear technology itself, is neutral, but what we *do* with literacy is never neutral. The 'search for unitary essences'[202] does not *have* to direct our attention away from ethical, social and cultural issues; indeed, it should necessitate their examination. If we see literacy as neutral, then we are not absolved from the responsibility of considering the consequences of our actions; in fact, we are almost forced to consider actual and possible consequences. If we limit our focus to the 'actual' forms literacy takes, we confine investigation to that which does happen, and exclude inquiry into what *might* or *ought* to happen.

This line of argument is riddled with problems, some of which will be identified here to highlight the merits of Lankshear and Lawler's (and Street's) position. On the view tested above, it is as if technologies develop in a desocialized, depoliticized, ahistorical void: once in place, they can then be used as people see fit. But, I would argue, it is not a question of how a technology is 'used', but rather one of what form it takes *as it develops*. Indeed, strictly speaking there *is* no single, unitary technology, but only *technologies* - that is to say, social forms, which encapsulate practices, attitudes, conceptions, beliefs, values, and so on. It is peculiarly 'unsociological' to conceive of human forms (like technologies) outside of the structures and relations that make them what they are. With regard to nuclear technology, then, attention needs to be paid to the specific circumstances under which various nuclear forms developed. Hence, in questioning or lamenting the destruction wrought by nuclear

devices in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, it is not a matter of saying the technology was simply 'there', waiting to be put to use for good or for ill; rather, we need to examine the social and political factors which made the technology what it was at the time.

Thus, if nuclear technology was the focus of our investigation, attention would need to be paid to not only the practices and policies of politicians encouraging research into bomb-making, but also the capitalist interests at stake in the whole enterprise. For nuclear technology was *shaped* by exactly these forces. This was a *form* of the technology, just as the myriad practices of reading and writing Lankshear and Lawler refer to are forms literacy takes within the structures and social relations which characterize capitalist and (in the case of Nicaragua) socialist societies. Each situation in which a technology, or any other human form, develops must be studied - as far as this is possible - as a social whole. The technology 'itself' cannot be neatly separated from the wider context within which 'it' evolves. The context *is* the technology in the sense that we cannot understand writing or nuclear bombs (or computers, or various chemical and medicinal technologies, etc.) in the absence of some contextual setting. Technologies are always *embedded* in, and in this sense defined by, structures, practices, conceptions, social relations, rules, policies, theoretical frameworks, and political systems.[203]

As to whether assuming the neutrality of literacy impels us to ask ethical questions pertaining to, and take greater responsibility for, the use and application of technologies, I have my doubts. At a purely analytic level, it does not logically follow that if literacy is seen as neutral people will *necessarily* consider the consequences of their actions in 'using' the technology of writing. As it stands, the argument is as follows: (i) literacy is facility with the neutral technology of writing; (ii) neutral technologies can be used in harmful or beneficial ways; *therefore* (iii) those who use the technology of writing (i.e. literate folk) will consider

whether their application of the technology in any given situation is likely to have harmful or beneficial effects. There is at least one premise missing in this equation, namely, the presupposition that people tend (always, or often, or of necessity) to weigh up the consequences of their actions before using technologies they regard as neutral. This proposition can be questioned on empirical grounds, and certainly requires clarification if it is to be effective as the pivot on which the whole argument turns.

It is difficult to imagine many people pausing to reflect on questions of ethics (whether conceived in terms of 'harm' and 'benefit', or 'oppression' and 'liberation', or 'humanization' and 'dehumanization', or in any other way) pertaining to *any* technology in daily 'use'. It is, in part, precisely because many technologies (including writing) appear 'innocent' and 'neutral' - as simply part of the ebb and flow of everyday life - that they are seldom subjected to critical interrogation. Whether it is a toaster used for breakfast, a car driven to work, a computer employed in keeping records, or written symbols on a blackboard in a school classroom, there is a proclivity among many of us to regard these as simply conveniences or tools which make working or home life easier. This hypothesis obviously cannot be proven without empirical data; nevertheless, it seems more plausible than the notion that people always, or even frequently, contemplate the consequences of their actions in employing contemporary technologies.

Another element in the explanation is to be found in the very forms of literacy children and adults are typically initiated into. For, if it is true, as Lankshear and Lawler argue, that the majority of people who become literate practise reading and writing in predominantly trivial ways, assumptions about neutrality become embedded in these practices. The banality of everyday literate activity reinforces the view that writing is a benign, innocuous or harmless technology, while simultaneously rendering its problematization - in ethical or any other

terms - less likely than ever. Given its routinized character in many lives, literacy becomes not only innocent but effectively *invisible*: an unseen layer or strand in the tapestry of everyday life.

I believe, then, that even if (for the sake of argument) the neutrality of literacy is granted, there are problems in assuming that this will lead to, or even allow for the likelihood of, ethical and political questions being pursued. These matters, I suggest, are less likely to be addressed when this conception of literacy is advanced (or embodied in practice) than they would be if Lankshear and Lawler's view was in place. It can be argued that people *ought* to ponder ethical questions and envision consequences in 'using' technologies such as writing, irrespective of whether many people actually do this, but this idea presupposes a prior commitment to certain values (and a particular view of literacy), which not all people have or are likely to develop.

Teachers and other 'purveyors' of literacy are not literally 'absolved'[204] from responsibility for their actions in a society which takes the neutrality of reading and writing for granted - at least not in the sense of being exonerated *by* officials, politicians, parents of children under their care, or anyone else; nor do teachers exculpate themselves from a consideration of consequences. Rather, their absolution is a *logical* outcome, albeit one which is often manifested empirically, of a particular way of thinking about, and practising, reading and writing. *If* literacy is 'just' a skill, or a tool, or facility with a neutral technology, consideration of social, political, and ethical questions will always be a 'separate issue'. These matters may even be regarded as important areas for inquiry, but, on the 'neutral technology' view, they have nothing to do with literacy 'itself'. Teachers of reading and writing 'simply' provide children or adults with the means for acquiring the technology: what learners do with this technology is up to them.

I endorse the view, associated *par excellence* with Freire, that literacies are never 'neutral'. The myriad forms 'reading' and 'writing' take always rest upon certain ideas about human beings and the world, and always favour particular beliefs, values, ideologies, interests, patterns of (social) 'advantage' or 'disadvantage', and so on. Conceptions and practices of reading and writing are thus always *partial*, and in *this* sense always have 'consequences' for those who construct or participate in them. A person who engages in a practice which comes to be called 'reading' (e.g. a child deciphering written symbols from a story book) cannot but be affected in some way by this process. However, the ability to practice this activity does not constitute an independent variable, 'causing' (say) enhancement of the child's reflective or abstract reasoning capacities; rather, this ability itself represents the combination of a whole web of social factors which interact in complex ways to shape the child's future development. We can never isolate one element in a specific example of 'reading' which causes this or that; instead, we must examine each situation as a social whole, where an intricate, ever shifting range of intersecting factors combine to distinguish one (form of) reading from another. There can never be a finite list of 'consequences' or 'outcomes' which accrue from literacy; we can only talk of this person, or these people, being shaped in this or that way through practices A, B, C, etc. which are socially constructed as examples of 'reading' or 'writing'.

How we view the 'consequences' of different literacies (as regards their 'value') - i.e. as either 'beneficial' or 'harmful' - depends on the ethical assumptions we begin with. This is seldom noted in statements about the benefits of literacy. *Prima facie*, there appears to be considerable agreement about what constitutes a 'valuable' or 'worthwhile' outcome or goal. We ought to be wary, however, of taking this apparent agreement at face value. For example, politicians frequently stress the importance of literacy for economic growth, taking for granted not only a causal relationship (where arguably none exists) but also the value of the goal itself. In New Zealand at present the ruling National Party proclaims its (real or

imagined) achievements in promoting an economic 'recovery'. The concept of economic growth which underpins this boasting, however, seems excessively reliant upon indicators such as low inflation; the embarrassing problem of escalating unemployment under the National government appears to be less important in gauging progress. For the several hundred thousand people who have been made redundant or never obtained employment as a result of government economic and social policies, the desirability of economic growth - as defined by government - may be less than self-evident.

'Social mobility', likewise, is frequently mentioned as a valued consequence of literacy. Let us suppose that this concept refers to, among other things, the movement of a person from a lower to a higher income. Now, on *some* ethical positions this would be regarded as unquestionably valuable; from other perspectives, however, social mobility is not *necessarily* worthwhile. Those who espouse an ethic of 'market liberalism' (e.g. former New Zealand finance ministers Ruth Richardson and Roger Douglas) - where it is taken for granted that individuals seek, and *ought* to seek, to maximize their own economic advantage in free competition with others - would be in the former category. Those who adopt a Marxist perspective, however, are likely to fall into the latter category, for on such a view the circumstances under which income is raised must be examined. If elevating one's income means accumulating great wealth by exploiting others who do not own the means of production, then 'social mobility' is not always a desirable goal.

Of course, my earlier argument suggests that since literacies are diverse and many, there are no inevitable, uniform 'consequences' of (or 'outcomes' from) literacy. This allows us to rule out one proposition immediately, namely, the view that 'literacy (in the singular) is valuable or worthwhile'. But another possibility is left open: it might be claimed that while literacies vary, all are valuable. This proposition too, I believe, must be repudiated. I submit that on

several ethical positions, there are good grounds for assessing certain literacies (which either have existed in the past, do currently exist, or could occur in the future) as 'harmful' or 'oppressive'. To give one example, the compulsory reading of slogans or sayings in a rote-learning manner - under conditions where criticism of the material being read is discouraged and punished - offends against various conservative, liberal and radical ethical stances. Plato would condemn this practice on the grounds that it prohibits the pursuit of knowledge through Socratic dialectical processes; R.S. Peters would object to the lack of wittingness and voluntariness on the part of learners; and Freire would find the 'banking' nature of the situation intolerable. (I address this issue further in the next section.)

Literacy is both socially constitutive and socially constituted. We *construct* conceptions of what counts as 'reading' and 'writing' (and hence 'literacy'), and forge distinctive practices and discourses based upon these formations. In this sense, the 'nature' of literacy is determined by us. If we assume, though, as I have for the purposes of this chapter, that a given form of literacy implies engagement in a specific set of practices within concrete social settings, then clearly literacy also shapes us. In being literate - that is, in engaging in myriad reading and writing activities we both work within and *create* social structures, and relations. The social forms we construct through our actions as literate people 'act back' on us, conditioning us and our view of literacy.

Extending McHoul's point about reading and contexts,[205] it can be argued that the distinction between 'literacy' and 'the social context' is ultimately an artificial one. The social context of a particular form of reading or writing is what makes a specific literacy what it is. Each context (or discursive setting) conditions us in different ways. Just as we might expect a child raised in a poor family to emerge with a different view of the world (different values, tastes, perceptions, beliefs, feelings about others, etc.) than a child brought up in a wealthy

environment, so too should we expect, for instance, that the reading and writing practices associated with studying for a university degree will shape people in different ways to those required for shopping in a supermarket. Within these examples, further divisions could (and must) be made: no one child from a poor background exists in exactly the same context as any other poor child; different university degrees require different literacies; and so on. This suggests that while it may be possible to identify general patterns or trends across a number of localized practices of reading and writing, no one literacy is precisely the same as any other.

Theorists in the mould of Goody, Ong and McLuhan raise the possibility of a much more radical thesis on the question of how literacy 'shapes' us. In a recent collection of essays, Goody (again) faces the problem of 'whether and how writing transforms the mind'.[206] While acknowledging his hesitation in confronting this subject ('it seems more a problem for the analytic philosopher than the social scientist'[207]), Goody nevertheless hypothesizes that

> [i]f the development of language changed the physiological structure of the brain (or if they developed in interaction), then it is conceivable that in the long term parallel developments in hand-eye coordination might occur through writing.[208]

However, given the late arrival of writing (by comparison with spoken language) in the evolutionary development of human beings, it is likely that any influence on the physical structure of the brain will at this point in our history be negligible.[209] Where Goody is reticent in making definitive statements on this topic, Marshall McLuhan has no difficulties in boldly declaring that alterations to brain function have already occurred as a consequence of literacy. Phonetic literacy, he claims, creates an 'abstract rationalism', altering the ratio

among our senses.[210] Under the influence of the alphabet we have shifted from the 'hot hyperaesthetic world' of the ear to the 'cool, neutral world' of the eye.[211] The transition from an auditory mode of being to a predominantly visual environment contributed to the dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain in literate human beings. The characteristic features of 'left-hemisphere activity' are linearity and sequentiality. The left hemisphere is logical, mathematical, detailed, controlled, active, and analytic. The right hemisphere, by contrast, is responsible for artistic, symbolic, emotional, intuitive, creative, spiritual, receptive, synthetic activity. The rise of logic and individualism in Greece, McLuhan argues, was a direct outcome of the working of alphabetic literacy on the brain, and, through the brain, the mind.[212] Ong adopts a similar perspective: '[t]he mind does not enter into the alphabet or the printed book or the computer so much as the alphabet or print or the computer enters the mind, producing new states of awareness there'.[213]

These hypotheses are obviously difficult to 'prove' or 'disprove'. In arguing against them we may simultaneously support them, for it may, Ong might say, be only be through the influence of writing on our minds or brains that the articulation of inconsistencies, logical flaws, etc. comes to seem necessary or important. There is an unavoidably speculative character to the propositions being considered here. The interactivity between human beings, literacy, and the world has been a persistent theme in this chapter. Just as we shape what 'reading' and 'writing' become, so too do different literacies impact on us and the world. The notion of literacy having a gradual influence over the way our minds function thus seems plausible. However, it is worth repeating that reading and writing are social practices which cannot be neatly separated from other aspects of the social world. Isolating direct, singular, causal connections between writing or reading and subsequent physical, mental and cultural changes is therefore not simply difficult, but impossible.

The argument that people ought to become literate in a society where reading and writing are basic to everyday life is compelling. On the face of it, there seems to be an odd, if not cruel, irony in the fact that those who appear to be downplaying the importance of literacy are already (highly) literate. A comparison might be drawn with the rich person who declares that money is not necessary for happiness.[214] Those who problematize the value of literacy seem, at first glance, to be faced with a contradiction in that they affirm the value they are rendering problematic through conveying their ideas in writing. Presumably an author believes he or she has something worthwhile to say in constructing a critique of literacy. Typically, in arguing his or her case, a scholar consults books, articles, and the like, and employs the written word in either producing a formal paper or notes for a spoken presentation. The whole procedure of criticizing commonly held assumptions about literacy, then, is (often) literate through and through! Of course, without denying that certain ironies exist here, appearances can be deceiving. The point is that literacy can be both beneficial *and* harmful. Hence, while the claim that people need to be literate in order to participate fully in contemporary First World societies seems reasonable, we need to go beyond this to look at the *forms* of literacy being promoted. It is not sufficient, surely, to say that citizens need to learn just enough to *survive* in their society; rather, we need to investigate (theoretically and empirically) forms of reading and writing which allow people to *thrive* in the social world. Indeed, going beyond mere 'functional' survival implies, to me, an attempt to analyze exactly what kind of society it is that one is being ushered (more fully) into through literacy. This is one aspect of Freirean critical literacy.[215]

My aim in this section has been to demonstrate that the value of literacy can by no means be taken for granted. Literacy has no fixed, inevitable, uniform, causal outcomes. Different *literacies* have distinct 'consequences', varying according to the disparate social contexts within which reading and writing take place. The harm or benefit conferred by given practices of

reading and writing can only be determined through reference to an explicit or implied set of ethical principles. Promoting literacy in a world which continues to demand an increasing range of reading and writing competencies is vital, but in supporting this goal we must always consider what *kind* of literacy we aim to foster, and, ultimately, what form of social ideal we wish to work toward.

Rereading Freire

I opened this chapter by noting Freire's lack of explicit engagement with issues pertaining to the definition, nature and consequences of literacy. I suggested in chapter one, however, that there is much in Freire's work that is *implicitly* insightful on these matters. In this section I reinterpret elements of Freire's literacy theory in light of the ideas developed in the preceding pages, and consider what he has to offer in elucidating or extending points from the discussion.

The differentiation between three types of definition allows potentially ambiguous statements by Freire to be interpreted in a new light. When describing what it means to 'read', for example, Freire asserts that 'reading *always* involves critical perception, interpretation...'.[216] Yet, clearly Freire does not want to deny that practices which are usually described as examples of reading do *not* involve critical perception. The short answer to this apparent paradox is that, for Freire, not everyone who might claim to be reading *is* reading - at least not in the sense in which he defines 'reading'. Mechanically repeating words without attempting to understand them or place them in some form of social context does not, in Freire's view, constitute 'true' reading; in this instance it might be said that there is something going on which *appears* to be reading, but which does not get to the heart of what reading involves. If someone is *really* reading, they will, according to Freire, be reading critically.[217]

When Freire identifies and discusses non-critical forms of reading, then, he is referring to something which passes for reading, but which he would not recognize as 'real' reading.[218]

The same logic applies to Freire's conception of 'literacy'. Many adult education programmes and school-based reading systems might claim to be promoting 'literacy', but Freire would argue that a person could not be characterized as 'truly' literate unless he or she had learned something more than simply how to inscribe and interpret symbols on a piece of paper. Strictly speaking, a system for teaching people basic skills with print could not, for Freire, be described as a 'literacy', or even a 'reading', programme at all unless the learning of these skills was coupled with the development of some sort of critical reflection, through dialogue with others.

The distinction between 'essentialist' and 'prescriptive' definitions is helpful in assessing Freire's position here. Freire's assertion that reading 'always' involves critical perception can be interpreted as a normative statement about the way reading *ought* to be, given a particular ethical position. Reading is always critical *if* it meets the criteria Freire's holds for 'true' or 'real' reading. What Freire defines as 'real' reading could not *but* be 'critical' (in the Freirean sense of this word, as discussed in the previous chapter), given his wider philosophy, pedagogy and educational practice. Freire would not deny, of course, that others have defined reading - whether explicitly through their theoretical work, or by implication through their practice - in terms quite different to these; indeed, he would concede that his conception of what reading 'really' is, or *ought* to be, is strictly a minority view. He would agree that reading - or what normally *passes* for reading - can certainly be practised in 'mechanical', passive, unreflective ways. Indeed, Freire has often noted that reading is frequently depicted as a neutral, contextless, largely 'mechanical' process. But, *given* the philosophical

assumptions Freire begins with, this view must (in the logical as well as normative sense of 'must') be regarded as mistaken.

Freire would oppose quantitative approaches to defining literacy, on several grounds. Aside from the conceptual difficulties noted earlier in the chapter, it is worth pointing out that the 'measuring' of literacy is also a 'measuring' of people, to which ethical objections might be raised. Tests of 'reading ages' are administered in schools (and, less frequently, in other institutions) on the professed basis that they serve a useful purpose in keeping track of student progress. If students are not measured, compared and evaluated, supporters of such tests claim, teachers and officials are deprived of the fundamental means for detecting difficulties in learning. Those held accountable for enhancing learning - for facilitating maximal development of students' talents and capacities - *need* reliable instruments for gauging performance if they are to do their job properly and enhance the lives of those for whom they are responsible. There are some who would argue, however, that the harm incurred through standardized systems of measurement and evaluation outweighs any potential benefits.

Freire speaks of students being regarded as adaptable, manageable beings who are expected under 'banking' systems of education to passively receive, memorize and repeat the content of the teacher's narration.[219] While measurement of reading or literacy 'skills', 'competencies' and 'abilities' does not in itself necessarily amount to an example of the sort of oppressive situation described by Freire, such an approach is compatible with many of the assumptions which underpin the educational form he critiques. 'Measurable' people are manageable people. Assigning people to their 'appropriate' place on an educational or social hierarchy requires a system for distinguishing between individuals: the measurement of observable

'reading behaviours' (as an apparent indicator of 'literacy ability') is *one* way of ranking and classifying people.

In contemplating how Freire might view such practices, consideration needs to be given to the wider institutional and social framework within which methods of 'measuring' literacy are embedded. *If* standardized tests of reading ability are one part of a social system which measures, categorizes, sorts, and ranks people within structures in which power is shared unequally, and where such inequality is fundamental to the maintenance of the system, Freire would view claims about the educational value of these tests with great suspicion. Modern, industrial capitalist societies, Freire would argue, tend to be characterized by precisely these features. If, on the other hand, tests of 'reading ability' were administered, in combination with other processes (e.g. interviews, participant observation, etc.), as a 'one-off' means for gauging in approximate terms the number of adult illiterates in a particular area, within the context of democratically rebuilding a country following a revolution, Freire might be more sympathetic to the objective of 'measuring' - in a provisional manner - reading and writing abilities. Freire's support of Nicaraguan educational efforts following the revolution in that country in 1979 - including, presumably, the use of a 'standard' test for adults before and after the literacy crusade - affirms this point.

Freire recognizes that there is more than one form of reading and writing. In this sense, his theory is compatible with pluralist stances on the problem of defining literacy. However, he tends to collapse the multiplicity of particular and localized literacies into opposing binary theoretical categories. The major contrasting forms, for Freire, are 'reading as domestication' and 'reading for liberation', the former being dehumanizing and the latter dehumanizing. Freire argues that banking systems of education typically promote domesticating forms of reading and writing, while problem-posing approaches take as their starting point the

liberation of the oppressed. A number of accomplished literacy studies scholars have followed a similar pattern of analysis in recognizing a plurality of specific literacies, but dividing all of these into two broad categories. Lankshear and Lawler, for example, distinguish between 'proper' and 'improper' forms of literacy. Modifying a distinction first drawn by O'Neil,[220] they suggest:

> Proper literacy enhances people's control over their lives and their capacity for dealing rationally with decisions by enabling them to identify, understand, and to act to transform, social relations and practices in which power is structured unequally...Improper literacy either fails to promote, or else actively impedes, such understanding and action.[221]

These categories provide a framework for analysing historical and contemporary practices of reading and writing. The following examples are discussed as representative of 'proper' literacy: the activities of the London Corresponding Society in England in the nineteenth century; the pedagogy of Ira Shor at the City University of New York; the teaching practices of Chris Searle in working-class schools in London's East End in the early 1970s; the work of Paulo Freire; and the Nicaraguan literacy crusade.[222] By contrast, the practices observed by Alison Jones in her study of two New Zealand secondary school classrooms[223] are critically investigated as examples of 'improper' literacy.[224]

While this division into two primary opposing forms might be regarded by many postmodernists as problematic (inasmuch as it glosses the heterogeneity and specificity of actual and possible literacies), it is important to examine the relationship between 'universals' and 'particulars' in this work. One way of addressing this is to think of levels of specificity in forms of literacy. Lankshear and Lawler advance opposing generic forms (proper and

improper literacy), from which more specific forms or modes of literacy derive. Within any of these more specific forms there might be other even more specific and localized forms. As the level of specificity, particularity and localization increases, one form, in effect, becomes 'nested' within another. Hence, if we take 'proper literacy' as the generic form, the Nicaraguan literacy crusade as a whole - as a 'moment' in Nicaraguan and world history - can be taken as one example of proper literacy. Within the crusade a host of more specific forms of proper literacy emerged. One could focus, for instance, on the efforts of women confronting issues of patriarchy through organizations such as AMNLAE (the Association of Nicaraguan Women, named for Luisa Amanda Espinosa).[225] At a more specific level still, attention could be paid to the work of particular women in different communities. The same logic would apply to Freire's work: the Brazilian literacy programme, for instance, might become the generic form of liberating literacy, from which a number of more localized forms (e.g. in urban as distinguished from rural areas) could be identified.

There is a complex interplay between essentialism and particularism in Freire's statements on 'reading' and 'literacy' Freire, I suggest, stands on the border between a qualitative approach to literacy and a postmodern pluralist view. There is certainly nothing in his work to suggest any affinity with a quantitative approach to defining literacy: indeed, as I noted earlier, it seems highly likely that Freire would, given his wider critique of banking education, oppose the categorization of people as 'literate' or 'illiterate' according to their performance on standardized tests. He tends to talk about the 'qualities' of the literate person and the 'features' of literacy, rather than 'years of schooling' or 'reading ages'. Freire recognizes that there is more than one form of literacy, and in this sense his position is not unitarist. He also stresses that different modes of literacy are socially, ideologically and materially *constructed* within specific discursive settings (both macro and micro). Literacies are always forged within wider relations and structures of power. All literacies are subject

to revision and transformation, and are thus never fixed or static. Dominant conceptions and prevailing practices of reading and writing can, from Freire's point of view, be resisted and overturned.

Yet, Freire uses the *language* of essentialism in describing what it 'really' or 'truly' means to read, write, and be literate. 'Real' reading, for Freire, is *critical* reading; a 'truly' literate person is one who reads critically. It is crucial to be clear here, though, about what kind of essentialism Freire is supporting. He is certainly not maintaining that there are quintessential *Platonic* 'Forms' or 'Ideas' which lie behind reading and writing. (Plato's 'Forms' should not, of course, be confused with Lankshear and Lawler's notion of literacy 'forms'.) An application of Plato's argument in the *Republic* might suggest that all specific examples of reading in the material world derive from - i.e. participate in - the same essential Form. 'Real' reading would belong to the realm of universal ideas, not the social or material sphere. Knowledge of what 'reading' was, moreover, could be obtained not through observing and analysing actual practices of reading within specific social settings, but only through philosophical reason.

Freire's position, as suggested in the previous chapter, is precisely the opposite. Knowledge of reading (or knowledge of anything else) can, in Freire's view, only be generated through dialogical, reflective practice. For Freire, there are no 'Forms' (of the Platonic variety). Instead, Freire conceives of reality in terms of two spheres: the 'objective' and the 'subjective'. Reading, from a Freirean perspective, is a synthesis of reflection and action: in the act of reading, objective reality and subjective reality become dynamically intertwined. The subjective *knower* seeks to more deeply understand the objective world through the act of reading, and, in turn, to more profoundly comprehend the text of that reading through reflection upon, and interaction with, objective reality. Becoming and being literate, for

Freire, is an *act of knowing*, which implies the existence of a curious Subject facing a constantly changing world.

Freire's essentialism is grounded in his wider philosophy. *Given* Freire's ideas about human beings, the nature of reality, knowledge, and humanization, the only 'true' or 'real' forms of reading, writing and literacy are those which are critical. All statements taking the form of a construct or definition in Freire's work must be considered in light of his metaphysical, epistemological and ethical position. Hence, when Freire says, for example, 'Literacy makes sense *only* in these terms...',[226] he can be seen to be making both a logical and a prescriptive or *normative* declaration about what literacy 'really' means, and can *only* mean, if it is to make sense as part of his philosophical system.

Of course, Freire would argue that his concept of literacy is better than others. He would say that his (explicit or implicit) definitional statements give a 'truer' representation of what literacy 'really' is than other constructs. If he did not believe this, he would embrace philosophically, articulate theoretically, and put into practice, a different view. But he would acknowledge that other views exist, and that some of these can be strongly supported. On the very logic of his metaphysic, epistemology and ethic, Freire would regard it as essential that careful consideration be given to all thoroughly-developed alternative perspectives on literacy, with the possibility that his own position might be overturned in the face of a more compelling counter theory.

The changing face of literacy in the contemporary world provides new challenges in extending Freirean ideas. The enhanced possibilities for collegial communication in cyberspace, for example, pose interesting questions in rethinking Freire's notion of dialogue. How might 'dialogue' be reconceived in a world which allows messages - in written, graphic

and auditory form - to be relayed almost instantly around the globe? As conventionally understood, dialogue presupposes the presence of two or more human beings. In educational settings, Freirean dialogue becomes a purposeful quest to know, with others, through reflection and action upon the world. But, as I noted in the previous chapter, the *physical* presence of another human subject is not a necessity for all forms of dialogue. Reading, for Freire, can be regarded as a process through which a dialogical relationship is forged between reader and author, mediated by the text and the themes it addresses. In most cases, the author and the reader never meet (face-to-face), but dialogue of a kind between them is made possible when the text is engaged in a particular way. The author does not, of course, speak in the literal sense to the reader, but he or she does communicate *through* the text. The reader relates in a dialogical way with the author in reflecting upon, contextualizing, applying, criticizing, being challenged by, and 'rewriting' the ideas presented in the text. While Freire does not comment directly on the new systems of communication in the age of computing, it seems certain, given his views on critical reading, that he would not want to close off collegial communication through international computer networks (and other electronic modes of communication) as a further potential domain for dialogue.

Claims about the value of particular forms of reading and writing must, as the previous section argued, be made cautiously. Freire anticipates later critiques of popular assumptions about the value and consequences of literacy in some of earliest writings.[227] In *Cultural Action for Freedom*, for example, Freire criticizes the 'digestive' concept of knowledge embedded in many adult literacy education programmes. Illiterates, he points out, are sometimes regarded as either 'undernourished', 'poisoned', or 'diseased' beings, in need of the 'cure' of literacy. A mere depositing of (written) words where none existed before supposedly provides the 'bread of the spirit' to be 'eaten' and 'digested' by illiterates.[228] This conception of illiteracy fuels a (paternalistic) humanitarianism in literacy campaigns: the words of the lettered

coordinators or teachers are to be brought and gifted to those in need in order to save them from the deprivation(s) of wordlessness.[229] The primers used in such programmes often reinforce the fundamental tenets of this approach to literacy, not only through their style (predominantly mechanical repetition of syllables and trivial phrases), but sometimes quite explicitly in their content. Freire cites a representative example of the sort of passage that might be found in a primer:

> Peter did not know how to read. Peter was ashamed. One day, Peter went to school and registered for a night course. Peter's teacher was very good. Peter knows how to read now. Look at Peter's face. [These lessons are generally illustrated.] Peter is smiling. He is a happy man. He already has a good job. Everyone ought to follow his example.[230]

Freire deconstructs this text and the wider assumptions it supports. The example establishes an implicit (causal) link between literacy and attaining a good job which, in Freire's words, 'cannot be borne out'.[231] The text reveals (and perpetuates) a lack of understanding about the structural foundations of widespread illiteracy, which is characteristic of naive thinking about social phenomena generally.[232] Freire maintains:

> Unable to grasp contemporary illiteracy as a typical manifestation of the "culture of silence", directly related to underdeveloped structures, this approach cannot offer an objective, critical response to the challenge of illiteracy. Merely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them.[233]

Freire also critiques commonplace assumptions about illiteracy and marginality. Illiterates, he notes, are often perceived as (and *presented* as, in literacy primers) people on the margins of society. Their marginality, however, is seldom theorized beyond a superficial level. The pervasive message of conventional literacy primers, policies and programmes is that illiterates somehow *choose* to move from the centre to the periphery of society; yet, Freire points out, given all the conditions that characterize their marginality - 'hunger, sickness, rickets, pain, mental deficiencies, living death, crime, promiscuity, despair, the impossibility of being'[234] - this seems highly implausible. A more likely explanation is that such people have been 'expelled from and kept outside of the social system'.[235] This proposition is still an inadequate explanation, though; in fact, Freire argues, the marginalized adult illiterate is a 'being inside of' i.e. a part of - social structural reality, but one who has been made dependent in crucial ways on others.[236] The myth of marginality is of more than academic importance: it fuels a misguided but powerful view of illiteracy, literacy and education:

> In accepting the illiterate as a person who exists on the fringe of society, we are led to view him as a sort of "sick man", for whom literacy would be the "medicine" to cure him, enabling him to "return" to the "healthy" structure from which he has become separated. Educators would be benevolent counsellors, scouring the outskirts of the city for the stubborn illiterates, runaways from the good life, to restore them to the forsaken bosom of happiness by giving them the gift of the word.[237]

Freire opposes this line of thinking, and speaks of adult illiterates as 'beings for another' - dominated, dependent people within an oppressive social order.[238] The solution does not lie in more deeply immersing illiterates within the structures which oppress them, but in

transformation of the conditions of oppression. Illiteracy is a reflection or manifestation of structural oppression, and literacy is one element in the struggle to overcome that oppression.

I turn now to Freire's position on the (thorny) problem of 'meaning' as this pertains to readers and texts. From one perspective it would appear as though Freire sees texts as containing a single, fixed meaning which can be sought and discovered. He talks, for example, of unveiling 'what is hidden' in texts,[239] and of going beyond mechanical memorization to understand a text's 'underlying significance'.[240] He speaks of appropriating a text's 'deeper meaning'[241] and 'most profound meaning'[242] in critical reading. His references to (the importance of grasping) the 'soul' of words[243] hint at the notion of texts embracing a single, or at least a *central*, meaning - something which lies at the 'heart' of the text, waiting to be uncovered by the reader. Freire comments:

> The theme of an essay is not merely what appears on the surface in words. There is always something hidden, something with a deeper meaning that is the key for complete understanding. Accordingly, whenever possible, writing on or toward real issues entails an extensive effort to see through deceiving appearances that may blur our vision. Often we have to surmount a number of difficulties in disentangling the issues from these appearances so that we can perceive the total theme as an actual phenomenon in an actual world...To do this, we address our theme through the richness of its network of specific characteristics that are sometimes not obvious. The more we are able to penetrate this network, though, the more we are able to capture the overall theme in its complex dynamism.[244]

Yet, Freire also stresses that knowledge is *created* (through critical dialogue, social transformation, and one's interaction with an ever-changing objective world), and posits a thoroughly dialectical relationship between text and reader. As McLaren and Silva point out, for Freire, language in the broadest sense (i.e. in both its spoken and written forms) does not give us 'transparent access to reality'; rather, it 'serves as a medium for constructing rather than discovering meaning'.[245] Freire does not assume that written texts have a permanent, single, *correct* meaning. He often talks of the process of 'rewriting' texts through reading them critically.[246] This suggests that the text is *dynamic* rather than static in Freirean theory, which prohibits the possibility of a fixed, inert or enduring meaning which transcends the particulars attending any given reading. It would seem more plausible, therefore, to think of meaning being *imposed* on the text, in the act of reading, than to see it as *residing* in the text awaiting its unveiling by the reader.

Interpretations of texts perpetually change through continued engagement and problematization. In a very important sense, there *is* no unitary text: at least not from the moment at which it becomes the object of investigation by readers. The text for Reader A, then, may comprise the same printed symbols as that given to Reader B, but assume a quite different character or quality as a 'living' text for the two readers. The *read* text is thus 'fluid', or 'in motion', and must not be seen as merely a transportable collection of fixed signs. Attention needs to be paid, as McHoul would say, to the manner in which a given reading is 'framed': this shapes the way a text is approached, and provides parameters for constructing meanings. Freire recognizes that texts can be given diverse and disparate *readings*, though he claims that a critical mode of reading is ethically preferable to other approaches. Freire would insist that the process of generating meaning is thoroughly political, 'a terrain of struggle in which individuals take up conflicting positions in relation to signifying practices'.[247]

Two principles are helpful in addressing these tensions:

> (i) The process of knowing is, in Freire's terms, never complete; we can never know a text or a *context* absolutely. We can, at most, attempt to get closer to the *raison d'etre* which explains the text.[248]
>
> (ii) We strive to come closer to the essence of a text when we adopt a *critical* stance in the act of reading.

Knowing involves struggling to discern the essence of the object of study, while nonetheless being aware that *through this very endeavour* the text, theme, or subject under investigation changes. Texts, Freire might say, are, like human beings, always in a state of becoming. To the extent that reading necessarily involves a dialectical interaction between text and (a subjective) reader, there will always potentially be as many interpretations of a text as there are readers. In confronting a text, there is no unitary, correct, *final* reading, though Freire would want to claim that some readings are better than others. The long quotation cited earlier indicates what Freire has in mind: readings which are critical in the sense of being *holistic, contextualized and dialectical* are preferable over other forms (e.g. those which are fragmented, decontextualized and passive).

Freire's approach to adult literacy education relied upon a dynamic integration of oral and literate modes of communication. Learning to *read* the word, for the adults with whom Freire was working, emerged from purposeful discussion of generative words and codifications through the medium of the spoken word. Dialogue provided the *bridge* between oral and literate forms of interpreting, understanding and transforming the world. In fact, there was no rigid separation between 'speaking' and 'writing' in Freire's literacy work, at least not into

clearly defined 'stages' in the literacy process. Generative words were simultaneously an object for dialogue through speech and the means through which this speech was reflected upon and modified in a 'lettered' way.

The word-world relationship was dialectically redefined through this process. Freire stresses that no one comes to read the word without first having read the world. Not all readings of reality, though, are especially critical. Freire argues that many peasants in his literacy programmes tended to view or interpret - i.e. 'read' - their world 'magically', attributing the overtly oppressive conditions they endured to 'fate' or 'God's will'. (I comment further on this in chapter four.) Introducing the written word in unison with critical discussion via the spoken word allowed this reading to be *re-read* - that is to say, transformed. At the same time, the lettered world of coordinators was demystified: as peasants learned to combine syllables from generative words to form new words, the (perceived) 'magical' character of writing itself was deconstructed (even if only in a rudimentary way, given the time available).

Freire's integration of speech, writing and action is effectively captured in the notion of 'the word'. In a literacy programme which is truly dialogical these three dimensions become intertwined. There is a constant interaction between the spoken word, written words, and *true* words in the process of learning to read and write. The word, for Freire, *is* a praxis: a synthesis of reflection and action, 'in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers'.[249] 'Word', 'work' and 'praxis' are interchangeable terms for Freire: all imply conscious transformation of reality, through relationships with others.[250] According to Freire, speaking the word - which is not merely a verbal but an active process - is a *primordial* human right.[251] It follows for Freire that *literacy* 'belongs' to all human beings *as* human beings. To *be human* is to be literate, if we understand 'literacy' in

Freire's special sense. Speaking the word - which includes, but is not limited to, 'reading' and 'writing' the printed word - is, Freire stresses, a fundamental right for *all* human beings, and should not be the privilege of an elite few.[252]

The word-world relationship is crucial in understanding Freire's concept of literacy. Freire does not suggest that there is no difference between 'word' and 'world', or 'text' and 'context': he simply identifies and discusses different *kinds* of 'words' (spoken, written, and 'true') and 'texts' (written texts and the text that is social reality itself). The world, for Freire, is more than simply a complex collection of dancing signifiers: reality has a concrete, objective, material dimension. The 'world' in the word-world relation comprises the reflective activity of human beings, the social institutions human beings create, the relationships they forge with each other, and the material sphere of the objective world. These are the dimensions of reality to be transformed when Freire talks of 'speaking a true word'. 'Words' are both a part of the 'world' and the means through which it is shaped and transformed. Speaking a 'word', of any kind, always implies a process, or an act, and a *relationship* with others and with the world. Hence, it is the larger 'world' on which the 'word' works, and this is a necessarily social process.

Thus, words are always but one element of the larger world: that is, they are necessarily 'in' the world. But the world is also always 'in' the word. This is a difficult idea to grasp, but it is pivotal in understanding the Freirean concept of literacy. Words - whether in the form of speech, writing or reflective action - are always spoken or written in a given context, within a particular set of material circumstances, subject to specific ideological influences, and as part of a distinct web of social relationships. But these features which mark out the 'setting' or the 'context' or the 'framing' for speaking or writing the word also *'live through'*

the word itself. For words are not lifeless formations which arise seemingly from nowhere: they are forged, created, and conditioned by the world in which they evolve.

Freire's conception of 'writing' is considerably broader than the conventional view, though Freire would be the first to admit that his view is only *one* construct among the many possible. We typically think of 'writing' as an activity involving pen and paper, or keyboard and screen, through which a person inscribes or types signs which can later be interpreted ('read') in some meaningful way. The writing process, then, involves a thinking subject acting purposefully to produce something through the medium of print (and, in more recent times, through electronic images). Writing can serve a communicative function, allowing messages or ideas to be conveyed from one person to another; it can act as a vehicle for self-expression or theoretical clarification; it can replace the need for memorizing long lists of shopping items; it can enshrine documents in a quasi-permanent form and give 'official' or 'legal' status to verbal agreements. Writing, like reading, is conventionally conceived as an internal, cognitive and often individual process. A writer may be influenced by others in what he or she says, of course, but the 'actual' act of writing supposedly takes place through individual cognition and inscription. Writing and reading, though related, are usually seen as separate practices. Writers inscribe signs; readers decode signs.

Freire's theory of literacy offers an alternative way of thinking about writing. We often tend to think of writing as an essentially private process which is, at most, 'influenced' by our experiences, our reading, our interactions with others, our daily practical activities. But, for Freire, *life* is writing, and writing is the process of living. To live humanly is to 'write' the world, and to write the world is simultaneously to *be* 'written' as human beings. Writing occurs through the whole process of living - through the complex web of actions, thoughts, and feelings which comprise a given mode of *being*. The whole set of processes that make

life what it is for us - our *experience* of living - is a part of 'writing'. This corpus of experiences and practices 'writes' writing, if we conceive of 'writing' here in the conventional sense (i.e. as the recording of signs).

'Literacy', for Freire, can be seen as the *synthesis* of reading and writing, of reflection and action. All forms of 'true' reading are also forms of writing for Freire. If one is 'really' reading, in the Freirean sense, one will simultaneously be *rewriting* what is being read: i.e. engaging the ideas critically, contextualizing them, applying them to one's own situation, comparing them to other ideas, and so on. Hence, when Freire talks about critical reading, he is also referring to writing: to be critically literate is, among other things, to integrate reading with writing. Writing and reading can be seen as two interrelated moments in the same process: *being* literate.

This notion of literacy being a synthesis of reading and writing hints at what seems to me to be an important gap in our language: we have no word for describing the practice of *both* reading and writing. We can talk of a person 'reading' *or* 'writing', and the term 'literacy' can be employed either to describe the ability to engage in these activities or to denote their occurrence (as actual practices). But there is no word available for describing the process of doing what literate people are supposed to do - whether one adopts a 'conventional' or a 'social practices and conceptions' view of literacy. If a new term is to be coined, I suggest that the notion of 'literacizing' best captures what synthesizing reading and writing might mean: to 'literacize' is to engage in those practices associated with being literate. While this flows logically from a Freirean view of literacy, it is worth noting that the term would be applicable irrespective of the perspective adopted on what it means to be 'literate'. If 'being literate' means being able to read and write, 'literacizing' is the manifestation of these abilities. Alternatively, if one is literate only when 'actually' reading or writing, 'literacizing'

is the term that describes these practices. Or, if when we speak of A being 'literate' we are referring to A being a particular kind of person, 'literacizing' means engaging in those activities which characterize A as this kind of person. Introducing the notion of 'literacizing' allows the concept of literacy to be discussed in three forms: 'literacy' is the noun, 'literate' is the adjective, and 'literacize' is the verb.

For Freire, reading and writing are ways of being in (and with) the world. Were Freire to use the language of discourse analysis (he does not, as a rule), he would say that reading and writing are discursive practices. In this sense, his theory meshes comfortably with pluralist positions in which literacies are understood as a multiplicity of 'discursive forms and cultural competencies that construct and make available the various relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world'.[253] Freire's posture on literacy is beautifully summarized by Giroux:

> Central to Freire's approach to literacy is a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other. Within this perspective, literacy is not approached as merely a technical skill to be acquired, but as a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom, a central aspect of what it means to be a self and socially constituted agent. Most importantly, literacy for Freire is inherently a political project in which men and women assert their right and responsibility not only to read, understand and transform their own experiences, but also to reconfigure their relationship with wider society.[254]

Freire's work presents a view of literacy which differs markedly from the positions typically espoused by politicians, reading psychologists, most adult literacy programme planners, and

many literacy studies theorists. Being literate - 'literacizing' to use the newly-coined term - means engaging in a particular mode of humanizing praxis. 'Literacy', for Freire, means much more than simply dealing with printed texts in particular ways: it implies the development of a particular *mode of social being,* grounded in reflective, dialogical, transformative action.

Notes

1. An abbreviated and revised version of the discussion that follows is to be published in Roberts, P. 'Defining Literacy: Paradise, Nightmare or Red Herring?', forthcoming in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol.43, no.4, 1995e.

2. Wickert, R. 'Constructing Adult Illiteracy: Mythologies and Identities', *Discourse*, vol.12, no.2, 1992, p.30.

3. Compare, the various essays in Fetzer, J.H., Shatz, D. and Schlesinger, G.N. (eds.) *Definitions and Definability: Philosophical Perspectives*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic, 1991.

4. Scheffler, I. *The Language of Education*, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, 1960. Scheffler's distinctions were later adopted by Soltis, J.F. *An Introduction to the Analysis of Educational Concepts*, 2nd edn., Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley, 1978.

5. Scheffler, *ibid.*, p.12.

6. *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

7. *Ibid.*, p.13.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, p.15, emphasis mine.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Soltis, *op. cit.*, p.8.

14. Scheffler, *op. cit.*, p.15.

15. *Ibid.*, p.16.

16. *Ibid.*, p.18.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Soltis, *op. cit.*, p.9.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Scheffler, *op. cit.*, p.19.

21. Cf. *ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p.21.

23. *Ibid.*, p.22, emphasis mine.

24. Cf. Soltis, *op. cit.*, p.10.

25. *Ibid.*, p.11.

26. *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

27. Scheffler, *loc. cit.*

28. For a wide range of views on the problem of defining literacy, compare Levine, K. *The Social Context of Literacy*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, chapter two; Pattison, R. *On Literacy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, especially chapter two; de Castell, S., Luke, A. and MacLennan, D. 'On Defining Literacy', in de Castell, S., Luke, A. and Egan, K. (eds.) *Literacy, Society, and Schooling: A Reader*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Brodkey, L. 'Tropics of Literacy', *Journal of Education*, vol.168, no.2, 1986; Aveni, A.F. 'Non-Western Notational Frameworks and the Role of Anthropology in Our Understanding of Literacy', in Wrolstad, M.E. and Fisher, D.F. (eds.) *Toward a New Understanding of Literacy*, New York, Praegar, 1986; Harman, D. *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1987, chapter one; Rachal, J.R. 'Measuring English and American Historical Literacy: A Review of Methodological Approaches', *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, vol.6, no.3, 1987; Gee, J.P. 'What is Literacy?', *Journal of Education*, vol.171, no.1, 1989a.

29. Gray, W.S. *Preliminary Survey of Methods of Teaching Reading and Writing* (Part One), Paris, Education Clearing House, 1953, p.7; Roy, P. and Kapoor, J.M. *The Retention of Literacy*, Delhi, MacMillan, 1975, p.26, cited in Hunter, C. St.J. with Harman, D. *Adult Illiteracy in the United States*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979, pp.16-17.

30. Harman, D. 'Illiteracy: An Overview', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.40, no.2, 1970, p.227.

31. Cook, W.D. *Adult Literacy Education in the United States*, Delaware, International Reading Association, 1977, p.51.

32. Hunter, C. St.J. with Harman, D. *Adult Illiteracy in the United States*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979, p.16.

33. Rogers, E.M. and Herzog, W. 'Functional Literacy Among Colombian Peasants', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol.14, no.2, 1966, p.192.

34. Copperman, P. 'The Decline of Literacy', *Journal of Communication*, vol.30, no.1, 1980, p.113.

35. Cited Kedney, R.J. 'The Nature and Dimensions of the Problem', in Kedney, R.J. (ed.) *The Adult Illiterate in the Community*, Bolton, Bolton College of Education, 1975, p.11.

36. Levine, *op. cit.*, p.39.

37. Cited Anderson, *op. cit.*, p.90.

38. See the discussion later in this chapter.

39. Wickert, *loc. cit.*

40. See *ibid.*

41. Tuinman, J.J. 'From the Editor', *Journal of Reading Behaviour*, vol.10, no.3, 1978, p.229.

42. Harman, D. *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*, New York, Cambridge, 1987, p.96.

43. This definition was developed by Robert Hillerich, and is cited in Judy, S.N. *The ABCs of Literacy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p.15.

44. From the New Zealand Education Department, and cited by Tilley, C.M. 'Australian Public Libraries, The Library Association of Australia, and Literacy', *Australian Journal of Adult Education*, vol.24, no.2, 1984, p.13.

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53. *Ibid.*, p.3.

54. *Ibid.*, p.4.

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59. Cited Harman (1987), *op. cit.*, p.4.

60. Unesco, 'Experimental World Literacy Programme', in Bataille, L. (ed.) *A Turning Point for Literacy*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1976, p.40.

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63. Lankshear (1985b), *op. cit.*, p.16.

64. *Ibid.*, p.14.

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68. Usang, E.N. 'Strategies for Green Literacy', *Convergence*, vol.25, no.2, 1992, p.51.

69. Compare, Graham, R.J. 'Media Literacy and Cultural Politics', *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol.39, no.3, 1989; Buckingham, D. 'Going Critical: The Limits of Media Literacy', *Australian Journal of Education*, vol.37, no.2, 1993; Shuker, R. 'Popular Culture, Media Literacy and Schooling', paper presented at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education annual conference, Auckland, 1990; Brookfield, S. 'Media Power and the Development of Media Literacy: An Adult Education Interpretation', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.56, no.2, 1986.

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80. Street, *op. cit.*, especially chapters one to four.

81. Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, p.39.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.

84. *Ibid.*, p.40.

85. *Ibid.*, p.41.

86. Street, *loc. cit.*

87. Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, p.43.

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92. *Ibid.*, p.46.

93. See Postman, N. 'The Politics of Reading', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.40, no.2, 1970.

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95. *Ibid.*, p.43.

96. *Ibid.*, p.50.

97. Street *op. cit.*, p.1.

98. Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, p.50.

99. I owe some of these points to Colin Lankshear, in personal communication.

100. McHoul, A. 'readingS', in Baker, C.D. and Luke, A. (eds.) *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy*, Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991.

101. *Ibid.*, p.191.

102. See Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edn., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1967, sections 156-171.

103. McHoul, *op. cit.*, p.193.

104. *Ibid.*, pp.191-197.

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*, p.194.

107. *Ibid.*, p.194.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*, p.199.

110. *Ibid.*, pp.195, 198.

111. *Ibid.*, p.195.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*, p.197.

114. *Ibid.*, p.196.

115. *Ibid.*

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117. Cited McHoul, *op. cit.*, pp.196-197. The original source here is Coulter, J. *The Social Construction of Mind: Studies in Ethnomethodology and Linguistic Philosophy*, London, MacMillan, 1979, p.74.

118. See Peters, M. and Marshall, J. 'Beyond the Philosophy of the Subject', *Educational Theory*, vol.25, no.1, 1993, p.22.

119. See Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd edn. (revised), trans. H.D.P. Lee, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, particularly pp.260-355.

120. This undertaking is best represented in Marx, K. *Capital*, vol.1, trans. B. Fowkes, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976.

121. For a critique of the universalizing of women's experiences, see Weiler, K. 'Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.61, no.4, 1991.

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123. Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, p.49, emphasis mine. The concentration on Lankshear and Lawler's work here reflects the local context of this thesis: most readers are likely to be Australasian. Were the thesis being completed in the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom, the work of other theorists (such as Giroux, McLaren, Gee, or Street) might serve equally well as a focus for discussion.

124. *Ibid.*

125. The following sources are helpful in indicating the extent to which, and the ways in which, conceptions of reading, writing and literacy change over time and differ in disparate contexts: de Castell, S. and Luke, A. 'Models of Literacy in North American Schools: Social and Historical Conditions and Consequences', in de Castell, S., Luke, A. and Egan, K. (eds.) *Literacy, Society and Schooling: A Reader*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986; de Castell, Luke and MacLennan, *op. cit.*; Clanchy, M.T. 'Literate and Illiterate; Hearing and Seeing: England 1066-1307', in Graff, H.J. (ed.) *Literacy and Social Development in the West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, especially pp.16-20; Aston, M. 'Lollardy and Literacy', *History*, vol.62, no.206, 1977, especially pp.348-349; Miller, G.A. 'The Challenge of Universal Literacy', *Science*, 9 September 1988, p.1293; Stedman, L.C. and Kaestle, C.F. 'Literacy and Reading Performance in the United States, From 1880 to the Present', *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol.22, no.1, 1987; Welch, A.R. and Freebody, P. 'Introduction: Explanations of the Current International "Literacy Crisis"', in Freebody, P. and Welch, A.R. (eds.) *Knowledge, Culture and Power: International Perspectives on Literacy as Policy and Practice*, London, Falmer, 1993, especially pp.11-12; Resnick, D.P. and Resnick, L.B. 'The Nature of Literacy: An Historical Exploration', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.47, no.3, 1977; Clanchy, M.T. 'Looking Back from the Invention of Printing', in Resnick, D.P. (ed.) *Literacy in Historical Perspective*, Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1983; Heath, S.B. 'The Function and Uses of Literacy', *Journal of Communication*, vol.30, no.1, 1980, 'Toward an Ethnohistory of Writing in American Education', in Whiteman, M.F. (ed.) *Writing: The Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written Communication*, Hillsdale,

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126. Compare, Street, *op. cit.*, especially chapter four; Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, especially chapter two; Giroux, H.A. 'Introduction', in Freire, P. and Macedo, D. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, London, Routledge, 1987, 'Literacy and the Pedagogy of Voice and Political Empowerment', *Educational Theory*, vol.38, no.1, 1988a; Gee, J.P. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*, London, Falmer Press, 1990; McLaren, P. 'Culture or Canon? Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Literacy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988a.

127. See, for example, Anderson, J. 'Testing for Literacy', in Elliot, C. and Anderson, J. (eds.) *Literacy - A Focus on the Future*, Adelaide, South Australian Reading Association, 1975, pp.87-88.

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130. See *ibid.*, pp.216-226.

131. *Ibid.*, p.6.

132. *Ibid.*, p.10.

133. *Ibid.*

134. The latter term is taken from C. Wright Mills' classic study, *The Sociological Imagination*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

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143. Eagleton, T. *The Function of Criticism*, London, Verso, 1984.

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152. Baker and Luke (1991b), *op. cit.*, p.xii.

153. Luke, A. 'The Political Economy of Reading Instruction', in Baker, C.D. and Luke, A. (eds.) *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy*, Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991, pp.3-5. A more recent paper by Luke is also helpful: see Luke, A. 'Reading and Critical Literacy: Redefining the "Great Debate"', paper presented at the 18th New Zealand Conference on Reading, Wellington, 1993.

154. Luke (1991), *ibid.*, p.3.

155. *Ibid.*, p.4.

156. Baker and Luke, *op. cit.*, p.xix.

157. Luke, *loc. cit.*

158. See Chall, *loc. cit.*

159. This is the terminology most commonly used in the literature. In keeping with contemporary trends in language use, the term might be modified to 'personpower' planners.

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161. See Peters, M. and Lankshear, C. 'Critical Literacy in Cyberspace', paper presented at the annual conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, Auckland, 1994b, p.1.

162. See *ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*, p.9.

164. *Ibid.*

165. *Ibid.*, p.11.

166. Some of the material in this section has been presented in Roberts, P. 'A Question of Value: Exploring Assumptions About Literacy', paper presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Hamilton, December 1993c.

167. Graff, H.J. *The Labyrinths of Literacy*, Philadelphia, Falmer Press, 1987b, p.26.

168. See, for example, Goff, P. As quoted in 'Global Effort on Literacy', *Waikato Times*, 19 February 1990, p.3.

169. Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 18 July 1990, p.8.

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190. *Ibid.*, p.29.

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192. *Ibid.*, p.48.

193. *Ibid.*, p.33.

194. See my comments in the review of the literacy studies literature in chapter one.

195. *Ibid.*, p.32.

196. I have taken this phrase from Colin Lankshear, who used it in a seminar on literacy at the University of Waikato in 1988.

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CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION, CONSCIENTIZATION AND LITERACY

Freire's pedagogy has been undeniably influential and widely praised. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been translated into numerous different languages and reprinted countless times in Portuguese, Spanish and English.[1] Freire has been described as 'perhaps the most significant educational thinker of the twentieth century,[2] and as 'the exemplary organic intellectual of our time'.[3] One commentator recently noted:

> It is no exaggeration to say that, as John Dewey was the dominant figure in pedagogy in the first half of the century, Paulo Freire has been the catalyst, if not the prime *animateur*, for pedagogical innovation and change in the second half.[4]

Of course, as chapters one and two signalled, Freire's work has by no means been free from criticism. The avenues for critique range from concerns over the 'technical' aspects of Freirean literacy programmes to rejection of the entire paradigm within which Freire operates. This chapter focuses on several formidable challenges to fundamental assumptions in Freire's ethic, educational theory and pedagogical practice. Particular attention is paid to a key element in Freirean education hitherto unexamined in this thesis: conscientization. Over the past two decades, numerous scholars have commented on the notion of conscientization, and many attempts have been made to apply the concept in First World educational settings.[5]

As a prelude to later discussion, I begin by identifying the three levels of consciousness discussed by Freire in his early work. This provides a starting point from which a number

of related strands of critical analysis proceed. The first section focuses on the 'imposition problem' in Freire's work, concentrating in particular on Bowers' critique of Freirean interventionism. The second part of the chapter draws attention to pivotal ethical dilemmas posed by the postmodern abandonment of universals. The final section explores some implications of the demise of subject-centred reason for conscientization. I repudiate the 'stages' model of 'consciousness raising', reject individualist interpretations of Freire's critical ideal, and draw a direct link between conscientization and praxis. The postmodernist notion of multiple subjectivities is brought to bear on a reformulated concept of conscientization.

Conscientization, Ethics and Freirean Pedagogy

When the work of Paulo Freire first began to attract international attention in the early 1970s, a new term 'conscientization' found its way into educational discourse. Almost immediately, this concept was embraced by many as a miraculous solution to problems of oppression and exploitation. Freire's success with adult literacy initiatives in Brazil and Chile was taken as evidence by those who became converted to Freirean principles that conscientization could rapidly and dramatically change people's lives. From the beginning, however, Freire emphasized the importance of understanding conscientization in light of his wider philosophy and in relation to the context within which the term was applied. Conscientization quickly became the object of much confusion as well as fascination.

Although his name has become synonymous with the concept, Freire was not the first person to use the notion of conscientization. The original Portuguese term, 'conscientizacao', came into being during a series of meetings between professors at the Brazilian Institute of Higher Studies (ISEB).[6] While the concept had immediate appeal to Freire, and obvious relevance

for his emerging pedagogical theory, it was Helder Camara who first popularized the term 'conscientizacao' and gave it currency in English.[7]

In his early writings on the subject, Freire relates conscientization to socio-historical conditions in Brazil.[8] Essentially, conscientization represents the movement toward 'critical' consciousness from a state of either 'magical' consciousness or 'naive' consciousness. This classic portrayal of conscientization as an educative process of moving through different 'stages' of consciousness has generated considerable debate. In the final part of the chapter, the 'stages' model of conscientization is examined critically in some depth; here, I simply want to identify the three levels as a reference point for several lines of argument against Freire's pedagogical and ethical ideal.

Magical (semi-intransitive) consciousness predominated in rural areas. 'Introverted' peasant communities - isolated from political and industrial changes taking place elsewhere in Brazil - suffered exploitative working conditions, poor nutrition, alarming levels of infant mortality and disease, and low life expectancy.[9] Illiteracy was widespread. Freire describes the worldview typical of individuals in these communities thus:

> Their interests centre almost totally around survival, and they lack a sense of life on a more historic plane...semi-intransitivity represents a near disengagement between men and their existence. In this state, discernment is difficult. Men confuse their perceptions of the objects and challenges of the environment, and fall prey to magical explanations because they cannot apprehend true causality.[10]

Brazilian peasants trapped at this level of consciousness lacked any form of structural perception. Their situation, which Freire describes as 'desperate',[11] was typically attributed to the workings of a power higher than human beings (God). Given this view, they were rendered powerless: the circumstances they endured reflected 'God's will', which could not be changed. This way of thinking, Freire claims, was actively promoted by many priests who came into contact with people in rural areas: while the harsh conditions were not denied, suffering them was to be rewarded in heaven rather than challenged on earth.[12] Where references to 'God's will' were not sufficient, those in the dominant classes were quick to promote the equally fatalistic view that living circumstances were simply the result of 'destiny': it was 'just the way things were'.[13] When coupled with the systematic distortion of reality by the media and other ideological forms, acquiescent resignation to difficult conditions among peasants become the norm, reinforcing structural impediments to change. For those immersed in magical consciousness, reality was conceived as largely static, fixed and inevitable. The very essence of human agency - a reflective, transformative orientation toward the world - was suppressed. In this sense, magical consciousness alienated peasants from each other, from the world, and from their ontological vocation of humanization.

The transition to 'naive' consciousness corresponded with infrastructural changes in Brazil which began after the abolition of slavery at the end of the nineteenth century.[14] Change accelerated during the First World War and further intensified after the Second World War, with increasing development of urban areas, and with the emergence of a popularist (rather than land-owner) leadership.[15] Freire notes:

> Naive transitivity, the state of consciousness which predominated in Brazilian urban centres during the transitional period, is characterized by an over-simplification of problems; by a nostalgia for the past; by underestimation of

> the common man; by a strong tendency to gregariousness; by a lack of interest in investigation, accompanied by an accentuated taste for fanciful explanations; by fragility of argument; by a strongly emotional style; by the practice of polemics rather than dialogue; by magical explanations.[16]

Magical and naive states of consciousness are contrasted with critical consciousness, which is characterized by:

> ...depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's "findings" and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not reject the old just because it is old - by accepting what is valid in both old and new.[17]

Critical consciousness is characteristic of 'authentically democratic regimes', and represents the only genuinely humanizing mode of consciousness among the three levels. In his early work Freire provides little elaboration on the countries or social systems he has in mind when referring to critical consciousness. This paucity of references to concrete examples of genuinely democratic social systems, with a large proportion of the population displaying characteristics typical of critical consciousness, is remedied somewhat in more recent works where Freire cites the example of Nicaragua as a country which has made definite moves toward critical transitivity in its policies and practices immediately following the revolution

in 1979.[18] Freire's work with illiterate adults, of course, was intended to exemplify a democratic, dialogical, critical approach to pedagogy. His hope, however, that a large proportion of the Brazilian population might become critically conscious was stifled by the military coup in 1964, and Freire was forced into exile.

A Defence of Freire's Interventionism

'Conscientization' and 'education' are closely related in Freirean theory and practice. Indeed, in the 1970s - especially the early 1970s - the two terms were often regarded as synonymous. In conscientization, the essence of Freirean education is revealed. Conscientization implies the development of a new view of the world (and of human beings), and a movement from one state of understanding, acting and being to another. Conscientization is explicitly concerned with the transformation of oppressive political structures, and with the building of a better (more fully human) social world. Educators have a crucial role to play in facilitating this process. They have a special responsibility, for example, to provide the appropriate conditions for purposeful dialogue, without which, Freire has always insisted, conscientization cannot occur. Arguably, conscientization *is* the educational process for Freire.

Many of the strongest attacks on Freire's pedagogy, and his approach to adult literacy education in particular, are thus also critiques of conscientization. Three powerful examples are provided in the work of Berger, Walker and Bowers, who (respectively) accuse Freire of elitism, antidialogue and cultural imperialism. These critics throw into sharp relief the question of whether, how, and why educators ought to *intervene* in the lives of others. This issue is clearly of fundamental importance for pedagogical theory and practice, since almost all systems of formal education (schools, universities, technical institutes, etc.), and many

programmes of informal education (e.g. adult literacy campaigns) involve some form of deliberate intervention. Crucial questions arise over who is to intervene, when, where, with what groups, and under what circumstances. I shall concentrate on Bowers, for the theme of interventionism is considered more explicitly and at greater length in his work than in the studies by Berger and Walker. Bowers' critique also addresses issues of subjectivity and individualism which will be important in my reinterpretation of conscientization in the final part of the chapter.

In 1974 Peter Berger offered a stinging critique of conscientization.[19] Berger, like many other opponents (and supporters) of Freire, construes conscientization as a process of 'consciousness raising'. He suggests that programmes adopting consciousness raising as a guiding principle assume that

> ...lower-class people do not understand their own situation, that they are in need of enlightenment on the matter, and that this service can be provided by selected higher-class individuals.[20]

Freirean literacy programmes set up a dichotomy between an intellectual vanguard and 'the masses', the former taking it for granted that they possess the knowledge and the means necessary to liberate the latter.[21] Intervention in the lives of others is seen as necessary in order to assist in raising their consciousnesses to a level sufficient to transform conditions of oppression. Berger accuses Freire of setting up a cognitive and ontological hierarchy, with illiterate peasants portrayed as less fully human than those organizing literacy programmes. Despite the ostensibly democratic character of Freirean methods, in Berger's view,

> ...it is hard to imagine a more "elitist" program (and, for that matter, a more "paternalistic" one) than one based on the assumption that a certain group of people is dehumanized to the point of animality, is unable either to perceive this condition or rescue itself from it, and requires the (presumably selfless) assistance of others for both the perception and the rescue operation.[22]

For Berger, Freire's approach to adult literacy education is akin to an act of *conversion*, where one group imposes their truth on others in order to save them.[23] Berger concedes that one person's consciousness might be said to be 'higher' or 'more useful' than someone else's on specific topics or within particular settings.[24] He points out, however, that 'the peasant knows his world far better than any outsider ever can'.[25] Different people make sense of the world in different ways; it is, therefore (Berger concludes), impossible to talk of raising someone's consciousness since no one can be said to be 'more conscious' than anyone else.[26]

Further problems are identified by Walker, who contends that 'Freire's praxis does not have the liberating potential it aspires to'.[27] In pointing to a number of contradictions in Freire's theory, Walker argues that Freirean approaches to adult education are likely to be antidialogical. Walker sees a tension in Freire's pedagogy between two influences: existentialist Christianity on the one hand, and Marxist/socialist national liberation theory on the other. Of the two, Walker claims that the former is more fundamental for Freire's practice.[28] This creates difficulties for Freire in dealing with the concrete realities of structured oppression and class conflict. Abandoning the Marxist notion of workers rising against the capitalist class of their own accord, Freire adopts the concept of 'class suicide' whereby members of the petit bourgeoisie renounce their class origins and join with the oppressed as organizers and leaders of the resistance.[29] Where for Marx the struggle between dominator and dominated is to be played out dialectically (with the inevitable contradiction

between the two groups eventually being negated through revolution), for Freire the answer lies in dialogue between leaders (formerly from the dominating class) and the oppressed.[30] Freire's faith in dialogue as a means for addressing class conflict is, in Walker's view, misplaced. Dialogue is initiated by the leaders, not the oppressed, through a process in which 'the enlightened reach out to the unenlightened'.[31] Walker acknowledges the (educational and ethical) worth of dialogue, but suggests that the genuine political equality necessary for its effective functioning is absent in Freire's pedagogical theory.[32]

Bowers sees Freire's pedagogy as a example of cultural invasion.[33] According to Bowers, the Freirean ideals of critical reflection, praxis, and liberation reflect a Western, modernizing mode of thought[34] where change is equated with progress[35] and the moral authority of individualism is taken for granted.[36] Bowers describes Freirean pedagogy as a form of 'consciousness raising',[37] and argues against the intervening character of Freire's literacy work. Supposedly empowering, Freirean adult literacy programmes colonize the consciousnesses of illiterates,[38] overturning their traditional belief systems. Bowers contrasts Freirean assumptions with the worldview of the Chipewyan of Canada. Despite pressures to become assimilated into Western patterns of thought, the Chipewyan have retained an integrative, pragmatic, nonintervening approach to knowledge.[39] Freire's stress on gaining distance from 'the natural attitude toward everyday life'[40] is in direct opposition to the Chipewyan stance of 'not wanting to be in situations that lead to the questioning and renegotiation of beliefs'.[41] Bowers maintains that under the Freirean framework, premised as it is on the idea that one group 'possesses a truth that must be shared with, and even imposed on, others in order to save them',[42] intervention in situations which are judged oppressive becomes morally imperative. In encouraging participants to see the world in a different way by privileging notions of critical thought, agency and transformation over traditional beliefs, values and

practices, Freirean literacy programmes represent an invasive 'continuation of Western domination'.[43]

The critiques of Berger, Walker and Bowers, though differing in the dimensions of Freirean theory and practice they target, all point to a deep-seated problem in Freire's work: Freire, in one way or another, assumes that (a) he knows better than the oppressed the nature of their difficulties, (b) he is better placed than 'the people' themselves to organize their struggle, and (c) the imposition of a particular conception of the world and a specific mode of educational practice on the oppressed is (given the first two premises) justified. Collectively, these assumptions form the backbone of what might be called 'the problem of imposition' in Freire's work. I want to begin by briefly commenting on the claim that Freire's pedagogy is antidialogical, before turning to a detailed analysis of Bowers' critique.

Walker notes that the Freirean project relies on the idea of a genuine dialogue between the organizers of a literacy programme and the illiterate adults to justify the involvement of the petit bourgeoisie in the lives of the oppressed. While Walker concentrates on Freire's work in Guinea-Bissau, his critique is applicable to all of Freire's major literacy education efforts. As there has been only limited discussion of Freire's post-1964 adult literacy work in previous chapters, I shall place particular emphasis on the Brazilian programme through which Freire first gained international recognition. A dialogical approach was supposed to underpin every aspect of the Brazilian programme, including the selection of generative words, the discussion of experiences and political reality, and the formulation of transformative alternatives to existing structures. On closer examination, however, it might be argued that there was at best only a partial, selective form of dialogue in operation. (The nondialogical aspects of Freire's work were, if anything, more pronounced in other campaigns;[44] comment here, though, will be confined to Freire's efforts in Brazil.)

The notion of choosing the initial words for a literacy programme on the basis (at least in part) of what mattered to participants was a relatively novel one in the early 1960s. Sylvia Ashton-Warner pioneered a similar approach with her organic vocabularies and key words in working with Maori children in New Zealand, and the Cuban literacy crusade of 1961 was built around themes and words tied to revolution and national reconstruction.[45] But the dominant approach to literacy work, exemplified in both school classrooms and programmes of adult education, was unquestionably 'top-down' in emphasis: the words and themes of school journals and adult literacy primers were selected in their entirety by people other than those learning to read and write. It was the 'experts' - curriculum planners, government policy makers, occasionally academic researchers - who were considered best placed to decide the content of reading programmes. Frequently the major words, story lines, and themes bore little relation to the lived reality of those learning to read. This philosophy resulted in some memorable failures in adult literacy schemes, chief among them a number of highly visible and comparatively expensive Unesco campaigns.

The Freirean approach was, without doubt, a giant step away from this tradition. Freire did, of course, have to satisfy certain linguistic criteria in his selection of generative word lists to allow the 'technical' features of the programme to be realized. In this sense, the selection process was a negotiation between the 'technical' requirements and the need for words to be intimately connected to participants' lives. With this, there can surely be little complaint. The success of the Freirean programme depended on both of these requirements being met. Other features of the campaign, however, require stronger justification.

First, and ironically, Freire's insistence that coordinators replace the monological methods of old with a dialogical form of pedagogy was itself an exercise which had to be conducted in a rather nondialogical way.[46] There is little evidence of *negotiation* over this issue. While

Freire cautions that the elaboration of agendas 'should serve as mere aids to the coordinators, never as rigid schedules to be obeyed',[47] the commitment to a dialogical approach was unflinching: '...coordinators must be *converted* to dialogue'.[48] For this to occur, pedagogical instructions '...must be followed by dialogical supervision, to avoid the temptation of anti-dialogue on the part of the coordinators'.[49] Freire says nothing about the possibility of different coordinators using alternative teaching practices with different groups of illiterate adults: dialogue, and a particular type of dialogue at that, was to be *the* method across the whole campaign.

It is difficult to see how Freire could have avoided this paradox, given the educational ideal he espouses and the ethical assumptions which underpin this. In not wanting to risk dialogue being compromised, watered down, only partially instituted, or completely ignored in favour of more traditional banking methods, dialogue over the form the programme would take had, to a certain extent, to be curtailed. For coordinators and participants, then, it was a case of accepting dialogue within certain pre-defined boundaries. There would be dialogue in discussing the codifications, generative words and themes from Brazilian daily life, but not dialogue over the merits of (Freirean) dialogue as a pedagogical form. Thus, dialogue was fostered, but the framework for that dialogue was already presupposed. It was dialogue *within* given parameters that was promoted, rather than dialogue which might lead to a rejection of those parameters altogether. Freire could not *logically* have accepted other pedagogical styles, given his theory of education: indeed, it would not have been an 'educational' programme at all, from Freire's point of view, had it not been based upon the principle of dialogue.

Of even greater interest than this was the next stage of the programme: the introduction to the concept of culture. Ostensibly an open exploration of themes arising from the

codifications (which depicted aspects of the illiterates' world), it is important to note that it was a *particular* notion of 'culture' that was under investigation. Indeed, it was a specific theory of human beings and the world that illiterates were encouraged to consider. The ideas covered in discussions of the codifications, if Freire's description of these in *Education: The Practice of Freedom* is taken as representative of the programme generally, were essentially a reproduction of the Freirean ontology, ethic, and epistemology. The distinctions between humans and animals, the notion of transforming nature through work, the idea of human beings relating to each other: these themes, at the heart of the discussions of codifications, are also central to Freire's philosophy. The second stage of the programme, then, far from being an open invitation to discuss *any* themes associated with the pictorial representations, was more an induction into a given way of understanding the world. This provides the starting point for Bowers' critique, to which I turn shortly.

First, however, it is important to repeat that Freirean educational dialogue does not imply open discussion of whatever themes happen to be of interest to participants. To the contrary, as I argued in chapter two, Freire has always stressed the structured and purposeful nature of dialogue in liberating education.[50] Freire would be quite happy to admit that he *did* have a 'set' agenda (of a kind) in his work with illiterate adults. For him, there was an identifiable form of oppression operating in Brazil at the time; dialogue was directed at overcoming that oppression. The locating of discussion around themes such as reflective transformation, then, was no accident: in Freire's view, it was precisely in coming to see the world this way - i.e. in coming to realize their own capacity for changing the world - that Freire saw hope for the people with whom he was working.

It is also important to remember that Freire's theory was informed by his practice. The correspondence between the codification themes and pivotal theoretical principles in Freire's

written work is hardly surprising. Freire has consistently underscored the importance of linking theory and practice.[51] He has likewise always insisted that the teaching-learning relationship is a reciprocal one, with teachers and coordinators not only teaching but also learning from other participants (whether they are students in a school classroom or illiterate adults) in the educative process.[52] It is quite possible, therefore, that Freire's theoretical statements on the differences between humans and animals, the nature of culture and work, and the transformation of reality through critical reflection and action, were influenced as much by his involvement in adult literacy programmes as his reading of Marx, Hegel, and other theorists. Indeed, in a recent interview, Freire claims: '...I write about what I do...[M]y books are as if they were theoretical reports of my practice'.[53]

The analysis thus far leaves open the question of whether Freire should have intervened *at all* in the lives of adult illiterates in Brazil. Bowers seems to object to the idea of an educationist imposing *any* programmatic framework on others. Indeed, he appears to be opposed to any form of *intervention*, unless it can be demonstrated that the system for learning and the assumptions and ideals that go along with this comply with the worldview of the participants. This surely raises enormous theoretical and practical difficulties. Are educationists to say that the imposition of a different way of looking at the world on others is never justified? *Not* intervening in some situations can allow what appears to be overt oppression and exploitation of large numbers of people to continue. There are, as McLaren points out, strong elements of cultural conservatism in Bowers' position.[54] I want now to tease some of these out, concentrating in particular on aspects of Bowers' critique which bear on the question of intervention, returning later in the chapter to his charge of tacit individualism in Freirean programmes of conscientization.

In criticizing Freire's interventionism, Bowers argues:

> Freire's position reflects what Max Weber called the "emissary prophecy" tradition of Western thought. The belief that one possesses a truth that must be shared with, and even imposed on, others in order to save them is fundamental to the Western pattern of thinking.[55]

Bowers aligns Freire with Christian missionaries, Marxists and bourgeois liberals in describing examples of the emissary prophecy at work. While these seem to be odd bedfellows indeed, Bowers draws a common connection between them in their interventionist tendencies. Missionaries no longer exert the influence they once did, but have been replaced by 'more secular types who can justify their intervention in the lives of others on equally high-sounding moral grounds'.[56] Thus, on the one hand there are Marxists who wish to eliminate social injustices 'caused by capitalism and traditional (non-Western) patterns of belief';[57] on the other, there are bourgeois liberals 'who advocate public education and democracy as the chief means of moral and social uplift'.[58] In Freire's case, his

> ...cultural bias toward change, progress, social revolution, and the continual problematizing and renegotiation of the rules that govern everyday life makes intervention in the lives of others both a moral and ontological obligation.[59]

Bowers employs the general category 'Western' in buttressing many of his claims about the nature of Freirean pedagogy. He talks, for example, of 'Western culture',[60] '[the] Westernizing mode of consciousness',[61] 'the Western episteme',[62] 'the dominant pattern of Western thinking',[63] 'Western assumptions about progressive change',[64] 'the traditional Western pattern of thinking',[65] 'the Western mind set',[66] 'this Western view of literacy',[67] and 'Western

ideology'.[68] This is problematic. In speaking of *'the'* Western mode of consciousness, episteme, pattern of thinking, mind set, etc., Bowers glosses - to the point of grossly reifying the term 'Western' - the complexities, contradictions and deep divisions between different theoretical perspectives in Western thought. There *is* no uniform Western 'mind set', no single 'dominant pattern of Western thinking', no view of literacy which is typically Western.

In assuming such homogeneity in Western ways of thinking and acting, some of Bowers' examples sometimes border on the absurd. He draws a contrast, for instance, between Chipewyan and Western approaches to learning how to drive a road grader. Bowers claims that 'the Western approach...would involve reading operating manuals and listening to someone else explain the steps of the operation'.[69] The Chipewyan, on the other hand, used a quite different strategy:

> [They] sat on the side of the road watching the operation of the road grader. After watching for several days, the man operated the grader with skill and ease. In interviewing the man [it was found that]...he could not explain how he operated the machine. The integrative way of thinking enabled him to learn from direct experience, and to be able to explain the operation in abstract, to have knowledge in our sense, was useless - particularly in terms of other Chipewyans who would trust only what they learned from their own experience.[70]

The way this example is constructed, it is as if no Westerners ever learn via direct experience, or through practical example, or informal apprenticeship. All or most Westerners, Bowers would have us believe, use abstract, print-based, linear or lock-step approaches to learning, even where the task is an obviously practical one such as driving a grader. In using

references to 'the' Western way of doing things as his primary bludgeon in criticizing Freire, this example is highly ironic. For Freire, perhaps more than any educator, has emphasized the importance of learning through experience. His approach to adult literacy education is built around words, themes, and codifications which derive directly from the existential reality of participants. At a deeper level, Freire conceives of knowledge in a profoundly *anti-abstract* way. Knowledge, for Freire, can only be acquired, or, more correctly, authentically *constructed*, through practical experience: through one's interaction with others and with the objective world.

Bowers' very act of positioning himself against Western assumptions (to which Freire supposedly subscribes) contradicts his own thesis on the 'Western mind set', for while he admits that he too 'cannot escape entirely'[71] Western categories of thought, his analysis attempts to do precisely this, from a Western setting, in a Western publication, for predominantly Western readers. Lest Bowers claim that he is a lone battler against the tide, his citation of the work of several other accomplished scholars in this piece and other articles provides further evidence that within 'the' Western tradition, there are many thinkers who advance views which radically oppose the individualism, liberal rationalism, Marxist view of history, etc. he finds so objectionable. In addition to Bowers himself and the writers he refers to, of course, there are literally thousands of others who have undertaken detailed critiques of, and in many cases advanced alternatives to, the elements within Western scholarship with which Bowers deals.

A related problem is that Bowers attributes to Freire views which neither Freire's written works nor his practice bear out. In part, this is a result of the rhetorical device of collapsing diverse intellectual traditions, practices and ways of life into two clearly opposing groups: 'Western' and 'non-Western'. Bowers' argument depends on Freire being placed squarely

with the former - at least as far as the pivotal assumptions in Freire's philosophy and educational practice are concerned. Bowers claims that Freire's pedagogy 'serves as a *carrier* of a Western mind set'.[72] The Chipewyan are juxtaposed against Freire as a logical 'Other' in undermining ostensibly 'Western' patterns of thought. Freire gains a form of 'guilt by association', where both aspects of the association and the portrayal of that with which he is allegedly associated are questionable. For Bowers, Freire becomes a 'carrier' almost in a literal sense: it is as if Freire transports into the field (of his adult literacy work) the imprint of the Western mind set in the same manner as a person might be a 'carrier' for a disease or a defective gene. According to Bowers, Freire is *blinded* by the categories of thought which have shaped his pedagogy.[73]

Some of the paths of connection made in criticizing Freire are either unwittingly dubious or deliberately mischievous. At the most fundamental level, the nature of the comparison between Freire's approach and Chipewyan belief structures is problematic. Bowers aligns Freire with certain strands of Western thought, alludes to some of the problems in these views, and then asks, in effect, '*What if* Freire's form of pedagogy were to be applied to the Chipewyan context?' Bowers then proceeds to show how Freirean theory and Chipewyan conceptions of reality do not comfortably mesh, and concludes that it would be 'problematic' to 'use' Freire's pedagogy 'in an Islamic culture or one [such as the Chipewyan's] not already partially assimilated to the Western mind set'.[74]

Yet, Freire has never (to the best of my knowledge) commented on the Chipewyan context, and certainly never 'used' his pedagogy in working with Chipewyan people. Leaving aside problems pertaining to the term 'use' here, it is imperative to recognize Freire's insistence on dealing with each setting for a major educational effort (such as a regional or nationwide literacy campaign) in its proper historical, social and cultural context. Some of the beliefs

Bowers outlines as integral to the Chipewyan worldview are certainly at odds with elements of Freire's ethical ideal, but before Freire could comment on how he might interpret or respond to these beliefs he would insist that he first be given the opportunity to learn something of the people with whom he might potentially be working. On the 'nonquestioning' and 'noninterventionist' qualities of Chipewyan thought, for example, Freire might say that one would have to examine the *way* in which these attributes had developed before any decision could be made as to whether and how they ought to be challenged. This would involve considering these patterns of thought in relation to the wider cultural and social mores, structures, practices, and relations which characterize Chipewyan society. Despite Freire's repeated warnings that his pedagogical ideas should never simply be transported or transposed from one context to another, and notwithstanding the fact that Freire has never said anything about the Chipewyan to indicate his views on their culture, Bowers states unequivocally:

> If a revolutionary socialist government were to come to power in Canada and invite Freire to use his adult literacy program with the Chipewyan, he would undoubtedly welcome the opportunity to emancipate another group from the oppression of their own history. Even if it were possible to establish dialogue, the pedagogy would involve the most fundamental forms of cultural intervention.[75]

This is pure speculation, however, for not even Bowers, let alone Freire, has established whether and in what ways the Chipewyan *are* (or have been) oppressed. The extent to which dialogue might be possible, and the precise form that dialogue might take, could only be gauged on assessment of the concrete realities of Chipewyan life, with due regard to the nature of the educational programme.

A further example is provided in Bowers' differentiation between the Chipewyan's 'integrative form of knowing' and Freire's emphasis on the importance of gaining rational distance from the everyday tide of experience. Bowers notes with regard to Freire's view, '[t]he same pattern of thought, when carried to an extreme, is expressed in the activities of technocrats who have reified the power of abstract-theoretical thought'.[76] Bowers concedes that Freire is 'highly critical' of the nondialectical and authoritarian nature of abstract theory, but asserts nonetheless: 'the cultural episteme underlying his pedagogy is based on the same epistemological assumption that can easily lead to the extreme forms of technological culture that he criticizes'.[77]

The point is, though, that Freire does *not* carry his ideas on rational/critical thought processes - and in particular those pertaining to the notion of human beings gaining 'distance' from their social surroundings - to a technocratic form of rationality. It is not self-evident that the underlying epistemological assumptions of Freirean and technocratic forms of rationality are the same; indeed, Freire would argue that human beings can never completely separate themselves from 'the ongoing flow of experience'.[78] Even if the base-line premises were the same, there would still be no logical reason to connect Freire with technocrats in the manner Bowers does, for, quite apart from the fact that Freire explicitly rejects such positions, many of the *other* theoretical assumptions (about dialogue, the nature of knowledge, dialectical thinking, etc.) which give Freire's views on rationality their sense contrast markedly, and in some cases diametrically oppose, technocratic views. Fundamental premises on rational distance *may or may not* lead to 'extreme forms of technological culture', and with respect to Freire, they demonstrably do not. The point about technocratic rationality, then, could have been made without any reference to Freire: linking his ideas on rationality with extreme technological positions is provocative but has no logical ground.

Bowers seriously misunderstands Freire's view of oppression. In discussing Freire's description of semi-intransitive (magical) consciousness, Bowers makes two erroneous leaps of logic. First, he states: 'In terms of education...[Freire] designated the passive acceptance of other people's knowledge as the banking approach'.[79] There is something important missing here, namely, the process through which people come to adopt passive stances toward the world. *This* is the key to Freire's notion of banking education. Freire does not claim that passivity is itself the banking approach: rather, passivity is one inevitable outcome *if* banking education is taking place. There are, in other words, different paths through which a person might become passive in their orientation toward social reality. Educational provisions in Brazil were so poor for many in remote rural areas that immersion in a fully fledged banking system of education was simply not possible. Many peasants were passive, nonquestioning, fatalistic, etc. in their views, however, given the strong influence of other political, structural and ideological forces - e.g. the overtly hierarchical system of land ownership, the activities of the conservative wing of the church, the earlier history of master-slave relationships, domesticating rural extension policies, a legal system which prevented illiterates from voting, and so on. These features need to be understood, more broadly, in light of deeper relations of social inequality between the emerging class of corporate elites and the majority of the Brazilian people, and alongside wider patterns of international trade in the 1950s and early 1960s. Bowers seems to want to shift the locus of 'blame' here (as if to 'set up' Freire) away from the sources Freire clearly targets, such that it appears as though Freire is condemning the peasant communities themselves.

Further evidence of this tendency is provided in Bowers' next sentence, where it is claimed: 'Culture reproduced through language in this mode is seen as oppressive, alienating, and inauthentic'.[80] Again, given (i) the way this sentence is worded and (ii) its placement immediately following Freire's description of magical consciousness, it appears almost as if

Freire wants to say that peasant communities oppress themselves, creating an alienating and inauthentic culture of their own accord. But culture, Freire never tires of saying, is created through a complex web of social relationships and interactions with objective reality. It is not the peasants themselves who have forged an oppressive situation here (although Freire would not deny that there are oppressive features of peasant society - especially those connected with *machista* attitudes and practices); rather, peasant groups have been forced to endure intolerable conditions foisted upon them by others.

Bowers' propensity for making sweeping generalizations carries over to the language he uses in describing particular features of 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultures. This is betrayed by, among other things, his use of the phrase 'the natural attitude' as a descriptor in several places. For example, with regard to Freire's approach to literacy, he says:

> Freire's concern with teaching literacy is tied to his belief that being able to read about the world gives the individual greater power to distance oneself from *the natural attitude* toward everyday life.[81]

Again, in a discussion of the hegemonic influence of Western patterns of thought, Bowers signals his intention to

> ....challenge *the natural attitude* that views change and modernization as progressive, critically reflective individualism as an expression of the highest mode of consciousness, and the state as the most progressive form of social and political organization.[82]

Later, with respect to the 'segmented' nature of Western thought, Bowers speaks of '*the natural attitude* toward a secularized world that fosters the growth of individualism'.[83]

In these examples Bowers uses the term 'natural' in two quite distinct ways. On the one hand, there is a 'natural' way of viewing everyday life, which is to be contrasted with the supposedly 'unnatural', reflective, critical, distancing approach fostered by Freire. On the other hand, there are 'natural' attitudes in 'the' Western way of thinking. Yet, it is precisely these Western attitudes which are allegedly 'carried', reproduced and imposed by Freire. Attitudes which are natural in the Western mode of consciousness, then, become aberrant or unnatural when viewed alongside the normal, natural, pre-intervention, unWesternized attitude toward everyday life. There are at least two ways of responding to this apparent contradiction.

For Bowers, there is a clear-cut division between that which is 'Western' and that which is 'non-Western'. Perhaps the separation between the two spheres is such that what is 'natural' for Westerners is completely unnatural for non-Westerners (and vice-versa). It might be hypothesized that these are *primordial* differences: that is, differences which have existed 'from the beginning' and which will always and necessarily exist. If this is correct, both 'Western' and 'non-Western' views are granted a curiously transcendental, depoliticized status. If an attitude is 'natural', it is presumably free of ideological trappings, the ebb and flow of history, and social influence.

If this interpretation of Bowers' ostensibly contradictory statements is accurate, it is as if there is some kind of *a priori* code which underlies - indeed, almost 'writes' or prescribes - 'Western' and 'non-Western' attitudes. Holding this proposition to be true certainly provides some justification for Bowers' chief rhetorical device: broad generalizations about 'the' Western

mode of consciousness can be more readily explained, legitimated and neatly contrasted with their opposite (non-Western or traditional patterns of thinking). With respect to the 'Western' side of the binary, then, it might be said that permeating all *particular* attitudes and practices among Westerners (and among those in the grip of Westernized modes of consciousness) is this invisible ether or timeless cultural imprint.

Perhaps, though, what Bowers really wants to say is that certain attitudes come to *seem* 'natural' and normal given the pervasive influence of a particular cultural heritage, or ideology, or set of practices in daily life. Attitudes, then, could be seen as patterns of thought which are *shaped* by social structures, intellectual traditions, material forces, cultural rituals, and so on. Bowers appears to apply (something like) this line of argument to Freire in construing him as a prime representative of the 'Western' side of the equation, but he is reluctant to fully explore its implications for traditional cultures. To do so, as I note shortly, would be to place the logic of his critique at risk.

Freire, Bowers appears to suggest, is thoroughly steeped in philosophical ideas bequeathed by Enlightenment thinkers to the point, in fact, of being 'blind' to the assumptions undergirding his pedagogy. In a general sense, then, it might be said that Freire's attitudes have, in Bowers' view, been strongly influenced - that is 'shaped' or partially constituted - by a particular intellectual tradition and the practices accompanying this tradition. Freire comes to see certain ways of thinking and acting as 'natural' given his embeddedness within this tradition.

Bowers says very little about the way ideological and material forces impact upon cultural practices, attitudes, and patterns of thought. He does comment in places about the 'hegemonic' influence of Western culture.[84] While he does not elaborate on what the notion

of 'hegemony' means in his account (e.g. whether it closely approximates the classic Gramscian rendition, or derives from some other source), the implication is that representatives of 'Western Culture' have often colonized the consciousnesses of non-Western cultures, wittingly or unwittingly imposing a Western way of thinking in place of traditional belief structures: this is a form of cultural domination. On ideology, Bowers is even less forthcoming. He admits at one point, however, that he has been conditioned by humanist ideology,[85] and he clearly wants to say that Freire has likewise been shaped in his thinking by liberal, existentialist, Marxist, and humanist strands in the Western mind set.

Bowers says virtually nothing, however, about the ways in which ideological or other 'conditioning' factors might operate in traditional or non-Western societies to shape attitudes and ideas. In commenting on traditional societies, Bowers adopts a peculiarly decontextualized, depoliticized, and ahistorical view of social practice and the formation of consciousness. 'Ideology', 'hegemony', 'domination': these all seem to be features of Western societies and the Western mind set. In non-Western and traditional societies they appear curiously absent (in Bowers' account). There is a risk here of romanticizing traditional cultures, and of positing an idealized notion of community. While Bowers does not claim that everything about Western culture is undesirable, he certainly finds a great deal that is problematic in the Western mind set. Non-Western cultures, by contrast, appear remarkably free of faults - to the point, in fact, of being almost 'pure' by comparison with their opposite in Bowers' binary. Bowers anticipates this criticism,[86] but does not *address* it, even in a cursory way. Much is made of the destructive and colonizing elements in Western thought but, as far as I can see, not a single feature of any traditional society has been rendered problematic by Bowers.

Bowers' reluctance to interrogate non-Western culture, or to even seriously entertain the possibility that such an analysis could be undertaken, is noteworthy given the relentlessness of his attack on Freire and the binary framework he employs in this assault. In setting Freire up as an arch perpetrator of the Western mind set, Bowers makes a definitive ethical judgement, in two senses. First, Bowers objects to a whole range of assumptions, attitudes, ideas, practices, and categories of thought within this mind set. Of the characteristics he identifies as typically Western, he speaks disapprovingly of the imperative to intervene in the lives of others, the equating of change with progress, the privileging of rationality or critical reflection as the ultimate source for moral authority, and so on. Second, Bowers is at least implicitly critical of the *pervasiveness* of Western ideology. On his own analysis, the power of the Western mode of consciousness is so great that even a thinker of Freire's repute can be blinded when in its grip. Similarly, even though he clearly wants to rid himself of the debilitating and oppressive features of the Western mind set, Bowers admits: 'I cannot escape entirely the Western categories of thought that I share with Freire'.[87]

There are thus two dimensions to Bowers' treatment of Western and non-Western cultures. First, Bowers points to a whole range of problems in the Western mode of consciousness. Second, his arguments suggest that the Western mind set, by its very nature, imposes itself upon non-Western cultures: this is one of its most distressing features for Bowers. Hence, Bowers constructs a 'dominator/dominated' sub-binary within the overall framework of a 'Western/non-Western' division. Those who draw on assumptions which are allegedly characteristic of, or derived from, or reproductive of, the 'Western' side - Freire being one example, in Bowers' opinion - are held responsible, either directly or in a 'once-removed' fashion, for this domination of non-Western cultures.

In aligning Freire with the 'Western' side of the Western/non-Western binary, Bowers is compelled to see Freire as an opponent of not only traditional cultures but 'tradition' itself. Bowers maintains:

> Freire's theory, by presenting us with an oversimplified view of tradition - one he inherited from the Enlightenment, leads to an intellectual stance that would reject as reactionary any consideration of the possibility that traditions can be sources of individual meaning, empowerment, and bonding to the shared life of the community.[88]

This is ungrounded and, arguably, patently false. Freire notes that one of the distinguishing features of critical consciousness is 'receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not reject the old just because it is old - *by accepting what is valid in both old and new*'.[89] This statement is absent from Bowers' account of the Freirean critical ideal. Bowers is correct, I believe, in asserting that Freire would want participants in any programme for which he was coordinator to develop a critical consciousness. But he fails to provide a rounded picture of what being critically conscious entails - *for Freire*. Instead, Freire is portrayed as a *de facto* supporter of generalized 'Western' views on critical agency, individual freedom, rational autonomy, and so on. The subtleties of Freire's analysis - those which give his work its distinctiveness, and which demarcate his interpretation of concepts such as 'praxis', 'dialogue', 'critical reflection', 'knowing', 'the dialectic', etc. from others - are ignored or downplayed. Bowers' structural framework for critique makes this a necessity: Freire must be made to conform to the generalized lines of 'Western' thought for the analysis to work.

Bowers' comments about Freire being 'blinded' by Western categories of thought paint a picture of Freire as a singularly unreflexive thinker. According to Bowers, Freire adopts certain Western assumptions without question. One example is the 'unquestioning acceptance' by Freire 'of the Western myth that equates change with progress'.[90] Both elements of this assertion are of dubious validity. To deal with the claim of 'unquestioning acceptance' first, Freire would vigorously oppose the suggestion that he accepts *anything* without question. There are, of course, certain theoretical principles (e.g. about the dialectical nature of reality, the educational importance of dialogue, the human capacity for praxis, etc.) which Freire has retained largely unchanged for the duration of his career. This is true of most major thinkers. The point is, though, that Freire has held on to key metaphysical, ontological, ethical, and educational ideas precisely because they have withstood his own critical interrogation over the course of many years. In this respect, his intellectual practice has mirrored the advice he gives to others in his books. As I noted in chapter two, Freire has always been a 'restless' thinker, ever ready to challenge, rework and, where necessary, repudiate earlier assumptions and ideas. In some vital areas, he has changed his position quite dramatically: his stance on the relationship between politics and education, for example, has shifted substantially over the past three decades (see my comments in chapter two). More recently, he has reflected critically, over the course of an entire book, on pivotal - and contested - themes in his classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[91]

More importantly, though, Freire does *not* (necessarily) equate change with progress. Certainly, he does not see *all* change as progressive. He would clearly oppose, for example, the enormous changes to systems of social welfare, education, and health care brought about by Right-wing monetarist policies of market liberalism in recent years in many countries of the First World. He would also join with Bowers in rallying against the stripping of rainforests in Brazil and would be aghast at other ecologically destructive practices around

the globe. Bowers presumably has something more specific in mind here, though he does not make this clear: the proclivity to making generalizations about 'the' Western way of thinking and acting works against him in this case. If his assertion is read in conjunction with earlier statements, he appears to be referring in particular to changes engendered in the individual through the process of critical reflection,[92] though the specificity of this contention is overridden by the broader claim about 'the Western myth'. At any rate, the claim that Freire equates change with progress must be carefully qualified. Freire would say that *some* changes (those which are humanizing) are progressive, while others (those which are dehumanizing) are not.

Freire's hope that his literacy efforts would allow adults to move from magical or naive consciousness to critical consciousness, an aim so strongly criticized by Berger and Bowers, embraced through the very nature of the ideal he was espousing the possibility of illiterates rejecting Freire's view of the world if they so wished. As we saw earlier in the chapter, critical consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, openness to revision, the rejection of passive positions, and the acceptance of 'valid' ideas whether old or new.[93] If these were the qualities Freire was attempting to promote in his practical work with Brazilian adults (and if Freire is taken at his word, it must be assumed that they were), the means for criticizing and, if necessary, repudiating any or all aspects of the Freirean programme were built into the inner logic of Freire's ideal. Theoretically, then, taking Freire's advice to heart, a peasant might decide to continue viewing the world in 'magical' terms if he or she saw some validity in this. Similarly, Freire provides an open invitation for adults to revise his depiction of nature, culture, work, humans and animals, etc., and to find fault with his framing of political issues. Unfortunately, Freire supplies few details on the success of the programme in 'shifting' consciousnesses; it is not clear how many adults significantly changed their way of thinking about the world, or in what ways these

changes were manifested.[94] The extent to which such challenges were issued by participants, then, cannot be easily gauged.

There are at least two problems with this line of argument. First, given the limited time available, it seems unlikely that adults could have developed the analytical sophistication necessary for engaging in what amounts to a meta-critique of the Freirean project, in the literacy phase of the Brazilian programme. Such a level of analysis - where the critical capacities promoted in the campaign are in effect turned back upon the programme itself - might be a more realistic possibility in the post-literacy phase of a Freirean adult education programme. In Brazil, of course, this potential was thwarted by the military coup.

More than this, though, the very act of critically analysing the Freirean philosophy in the ways indicated above represents more an endorsement than a dismissal of Freire's ideal. So long as people display the qualities outlined by Freire as typical of critically conscious, dialogical and praxical individuals - even if in so doing they criticize the notion of critical, dialogical reflection and action for transformation - the Freirean ideal is being met. Rejection of Freirean assumptions through Freirean approaches, then, does not overcome the concerns expressed by Bowers: to the contrary, this form of disavowal would, for Bowers, confirm the impositional character of Freirean literacy campaigns.

This is a dilemma from which Freire cannot easily escape. It is joined by another (closely related) paradox, also attendant upon the promotion of critical consciousness as an ethical ideal. Freire argues that all ideas should be open to question. A logical corollary of this is that there are no ideas which *cannot* be questioned. All ideas, for Freire, are thus potentially subject to change. We should never, as Freire puts it, be too certain of our certainties. We should always be open to the possibility that some ideas might be rejected on the basis of

critical reflection. Yet this must also include the idea that there are no ideas which cannot be questioned. But to question this idea is simultaneously to uphold this idea. In effect, then, there *is* one idea which cannot be questioned, namely, the idea that there are no ideas which cannot be questioned.

Notice, however, that in saying that there are no ideas which cannot be questioned, it does not necessarily follow that all ideas should be questioned all of the time. Freire grants what might be termed 'provisional' acceptance to certain ideas in order to allow theoretical and practical work to proceed. He recognizes that it would be quite impossible to engage in any kind of consciously directed action, or to develop a philosophy, or advance an ethical position, without taking some ideas for granted - for the time being. This is true whatever political stance one adopts, and applies as much to Bowers as it does to Freire. Bowers takes for granted the divisibility of cultures into 'Western' and 'non-Western' categories, the value of tradition, the importance of community, etc., just as Freire assumes that reality is dialectical, that education should be dialogical, that liberation from oppression is desirable, and so on.

Nevertheless, questioning is a vital element of Freire's ethical ideal. Freire argues for a restless, curious, probing, searching, investigative orientation toward the world. Education, for Freire, should foster this critical attitude. To participate in a Freirean programme of adult literacy education, then, is to be inducted into a particular way of viewing the world. As Bowers points out, this critical orientation is likely to be different from the approach many people in 'traditional' cultures adopt in understanding reality. Bowers is, I believe, theoretically astray in arguing that Freire's pedagogy reflects, reinforces and reproduces 'the Western mind set', but it is undeniable that Freirean adult literacy programmes privilege (and

foster) a critical mode of consciousness over what Freire regards as passive and naive forms of thought.

Once a framework for understanding and acting upon the world has been 'imposed' (the term is used in the 'weak' sense here) through an educational programme, the more successful this programme is the less likely participants are to return to their former ways of making sense of the world. It is difficult to see how someone could ever be the same again after participating in a Freirean literacy campaign: for Freire, this was exactly the point. There would, as it were, be no way of 'going back' if the programme achieved what Freire intended it to. In this sense, Bowers is correct in his view that Freire's approach to pedagogy has a 'bias' toward change.[95] But this is true of *any* educational programme, and indeed of any educational process. Education, by almost any definition, implies some sort of change within those being educated (and often change in other senses as well). This principle holds on a variety of liberal and radical positions, and on some conservative accounts as well. Indeed, 'change' is one of the few themes that binds otherwise disparate groups commenting on education together. While there are deep disagreements over the nature and direction of that change, and over questions as to whether it is 'personal' or 'social' or 'structural', etc. in character, many theorists who consider educational processes in detail argue that *some* sort of transformation ought to occur through education.

In condemning Freire's pedagogical approach, Bowers seems to ignore the obvious: Freire's adult literacy programmes were developed in circumstances where he was held directly responsible for bringing change about. In Brazil, Freire was appointed Director of a national literacy campaign. The level of responsibility is not the important factor here; rather, the point is that pedagogical programmes are necessarily directive, interventionist, and change oriented. If the term 'programme' is taken to mean any structured, organized form of

pedagogy or system of education, then 'change' is always a fundamental objective and 'intervention' a logical necessity. Whether examining an educational programme in schools, in prisons, for the elderly, or with adults learning to read and write, it would not be a 'programme' at all unless it was assumed that people would change in some way as a result of their participation or involvement.

Any educational endeavour where one group has the responsibility of assisting others in learning something (be it reading and writing, or anything else) necessarily involves the favouring of some ideas and practices over others. Even if the methods used are developed through discussion with participants, this assumes that negotiated pedagogical forms are better than those which are decided in advance. To have a programme at all, some system or other must be imposed. This is the 'weak' sense in which Freire's adult literacy work was impositional. A literacy campaign always rests (even if only implicitly) upon a particular conception of human beings, knowledge, and the world, and the ends organizers and coordinators have in mind (whether they state them or not) cannot but influence the way a programme is structured. Freire is no exception to this rule; indeed, he theorizes at length on issues pertinent to this theme in his writings.

If it is true that all educational programmes are interventionist (even if only in an indirect way) and almost by definition 'biased' toward change, then perhaps Bowers does not favour *any* form of organized education. This certainly appears to be the case with regard to his view of the relationship between Western and traditional groups: the former, he seems to suggest, ought not to bring their views and their practices to the latter, whether it is through a literacy campaign or any other form of educational programme. Traditional cultures should be 'left alone', presumably to develop whatever mode of education seems appropriate to them. It does not matter for Bowers whether pedagogical forms are negotiated dialogically

or autocratically, for provided the system or programme is initiated by (or even involves) someone - like Freire - who has been 'tainted' by Western culture, it will necessarily contain at least vestiges of the ideas from this culture which have been so oppressive to traditional cultures.

There is some evidence that Bowers' aversion to educational programmes is stronger than this. As we saw earlier, among those he uses as exemplars of the 'emissary prophecy' (which allegedly underpins Freire's interventionism) are bourgeois liberals 'who advocate public education and democracy as the chief means of moral and social uplift'.[96] This is an odd example, which begs a number of questions. Precisely why 'democracy' constitutes an undesirable form of interventionism, or even why it is interventionist at all, is not made clear by Bowers. In bracketing this comment with references to missionaries, Marxists and Freire, all of whom supposedly impose Western ideas on non-Western cultures, Bowers implies that democracy is not only at odds with, but impositional upon, traditional practices, values, or ideas. While it might be argued that certain forms of democratic social organization are in tension with traditional structures and beliefs, this is not a *necessary* condition for, or concomitant of, democracy. Bowers simply does not provide enough information for the reader to know what he has in mind.

On the more specific question of educational provision, provided the term is given a sufficiently broad interpretation, 'public education' is arguably a feature of many non-Western or traditional, as well as Western, societies. In myriad social settings around the world, elders or 'experts' pass on the knowledge, stories, folklore, beliefs, skills, etc. valued by the community to novices and the young. Whether this takes place in schools, in the bush, or on the sea is, to a certain extent, irrelevant: it is still, in one sense, a form of 'public education'. In traditional (pre-colonial) Maori society in Aotearoa, to cite but one example

which contravenes Bowers' depiction of a traditional cultures, there was a highly organized and very rigorous system of teaching in the Whare Wananga (houses of learning), where the most sacred forms of knowledge were passed on through specialized systems of learning to prospective leaders in tribes.

Bowers might concede that exceptions can be found to his claims about education in traditional and non-Western societies, but argue that in the case of the Chipewyan (the group he uses in counterpoint to Freire) there was nothing that could reasonably be construed as 'public education' or 'interventionist education'. Bowers notes that in Chipewyan society, 'adults taught children to be nonintervening by rarely exercising control over their activities'.[97] Children learned by experience and when adults intervened this was viewed as 'a serious matter'.[98] There is a tension here between 'teaching' and 'nonintervention'. Teaching, almost by definition, implies some form of intervention. Children may *learn* through observation and direct experience, even where this involves watching and imitating an adult. But if children were *taught* to be nonintervening, this suggests there was some form of deliberate guidance by adults.

At any rate, irrespective of what a closer examination of traditional societies might reveal, Bowers conveys a clear preference for a noninterventionist approach to daily life. Programmes of education - of *any* kind - appear to be ruled out by Bowers' analysis given their necessarily interventionist character. The notion of 'pedagogy' must disappear in Bowers' ideal, given its connection with teaching (and thus intervention of some kind). The concept of 'education', likewise, if it remains at all, will have to be radically reconstructed if it is to avoid connotations with the forms of change Bowers finds so worrying in the work of Freire and others. Indeed, any notion of change formulated in the Western tradition is ruled out in Bowers' account, for it precisely the attitude toward change, and the form change

takes, in 'the' Western mind set which (in Bowers' view) makes Freire's pedagogical approach so undesirable.

Bowers is particularly critical of Freire's stress on the importance of change through critical reflection. He sees the constant problematization of daily life and continual renegotiation of beliefs as central to Freire's ethical and pedagogical ideal, and contrasts this privileging of a questioning stance with the nonquestioning, 'integrative' approach of the Chipewyan. Freirean pedagogy - which, for Bowers, is simply a manifestation of the sanctioning of change through individual reflection inherent in the Western mind set - undermines traditional belief structures and community-based forms of authority. From Bowers' comments on these themes, plus the general structure of his argument, it is clear that he favours the Chipewyan approach over Freire's. Thus, Bowers gives at least tacit support for the proposition that existing beliefs, values, ideas, practices, and forms of authority ought not to be challenged.

If this principle of nonquestioning is endorsed, it is instructive to contemplate what might properly count as 'the process of education' when the principle is coupled with a policy of noninterventionism. Presumably, if we wish to talk about educational processes at all in situations where the nonquestioning principle is adopted, any reference to critical thought, the development of rational autonomy, social transformation, and the like would have to be eliminated. One possibility is that educational processes become those in which existing forms of knowledge are transmitted. But the notion of 'transmission' is problematic here, since this implies a 'transmitter' and someone to whom ideas are transmitted: such a relationship is ruled out by the nonintervention requirement. Even the broader notion of 'passing on' existing knowledge must be rejected, since this still implies someone doing the passing and someone receiving. It might be more accurate, therefore, to talk of educational processes as those activities through which the accepted beliefs, values, practices, etc. are

acquired or *learned*. If a policy of noninterventionism is strictly applied, this must be a wholly spontaneous process. Even if there might be occasions in which adults might override this policy in, for example, protecting a child from physical harm, the general attitude would be one, as in the Chipewyan's case, of '*rarely* exercising control' over childrens' activities.[99] Individuals would be largely, and *on principle*, free to learn whatever they wished, when they wished, as they pleased.

But what if, in encouraging children to 'learn by their own experience',[100] a child, on the basis of this experience, questioned or challenged some aspect of the existing belief system? This would pose a dilemma, for if the imperative of nonintervention is to be met, no one ought to step in to prohibit such questioning, or even to dissuade it. Bowers points out that the Chipewyan try to avoid being in situations which lead to the questioning and renegotiation of beliefs.[101] It seems highly unlikely, though, that such instances could be entirely eluded. Indeed, given the curiosity children often display in spontaneously investigating the wonders of everyday life, it seems probable that questioning of established beliefs, ideas, practices, and forms of authority - even if in a relatively unsophisticated way - might occur quite regularly. In the case of adults, if, despite the discouragement of problematization, one or two people *did* question accepted views or existing modes of practice, what steps would be taken to censure this questioning? The moment at which *any* move is made to stem the problematization or renegotiation of beliefs, the principle of noninterventionism is subverted.

These difficulties are compounded by a wider, closely related, problem. Just as Freire faces a paradox in holding that all views should be open to question, those who support a policy of not intervening in the lives of others (Bowers appears to among them) must also deal with a potential contradiction. If a group (such as the Chipewyan, to use Bowers' example) has a noninterventionist philosophy, then it is not clear what ought to be done in a situation

where one member of the group *does* intervene - in, for example, correcting, or guiding, or helping, or teaching, a child. If other members of the group intervene to prevent this intervention, the principle of noninterventionism is violated. On the other hand, if they do not intervene, this allows the original intervention to continue. Bowers says nothing about how such contradictions might be resolved, or when they might be justified, or which principles override others under given circumstances. He simply notes that when adults intervened with children, it was viewed as a 'serious matter' by the Chipewyans.[102]

In light of Bowers' preference for not questioning existing modes of thought and action, it is difficult to imagine what role there might be for *educators* in traditional societies. Western educators ought not to be involved at all, it seems, but what of people within traditional societies? There can be no teachers, for teaching implies directiveness. Nor can there be 'coordinators' or 'facilitators', since there is still an element of interventionism present, even if one attempts to simply set up the conditions for others to learn. In fact, there can be no hint of deliberate instruction, guidance, or assistance of any kind, for these can all be construed as interventions - whether direct or indirect. In short, it appears as though educators will not exist in a society which upholds the principles Bowers seems to support, for any relationship which involves one person educating another implies some sort of intentionality on the part of the educator that those being educated will learn (or gain in some way from participating in this relationship). If an educator *intends* that someone else be 'educated' in some way as a result of their educating, this constitutes a form of interventionism. Speaking of learning through example and imitation does not defeat this point - at least not with groups such as the Chipewyan - for the very process of deciding as a group to encourage or allow children to learn in this manner is itself interventionist.

Freire's position on education, imposition and intervention is revealing:

> ...I have never begun from the authoritarian conviction that I have a truth to impose, the indisputable truth. On the other hand, I have never said, or even suggested, that not having a truth to impose implies that you don't have anything to propose, no ideas to put forward. If we have nothing to put forward, or if we simply refuse to do it, we really have nothing to do with the practice of education.[103]

The question for Freire is not 'How can one, as an educator, avoid intervening in the lives of others?', but 'What *form* will this intervention take?' It is not a matter of trying to avoid changing people's way of thinking about the world but of asking what direction this change will take. The best defence of Freire's approach to adult literacy education, then, is not to deny that his programmes were interventionist, but to demonstrate that such intervention could be justified. For Freire, an interventionist stance is not the same as an impositional approach:

> ...the educator does not have the right to be silent just because he or she has to respect the culture. If he or she does not have the right to impose his or her voice on the people, he does not have the right to be silent. It has to do precisely with the duty of intervening, which the educator has to assume without becoming afraid. There is no reason for an educator to be ashamed of this.[104]

Bowers, it seems to me, effectively avoids the most difficult practical and *ethical* question of all: What would he do if he were in Freire's position? For, as I pointed out earlier, in the

literacy programme for which he gained international recognition Freire was not dealing with the Chipewyan - the group upon which so much of Bowers' analysis depends - but with illiterate adults in Brazil in the early 1960s. On any historical account of conditions for the majority of the people with whom Freire was working, it would be difficult *not* to describe them as 'oppressed'. Even if the suitability of this term might be disputed, it could not be denied that the people to whom Freire's literacy programme was directed were poverty-stricken, malnourished, extremely poorly paid, and so on. What was Freire to do, given these circumstances? With no intervention of any kind, the situation was unlikely to change; indeed, there was some evidence to suggest it might reasonably be expected to get worse.[105] Should Freire wash his hands of the situation, ignore it, not intervene at all? Or was some kind of intervention - in *this* situation - justified? If so, what form should this take? Bowers has virtually nothing to say on these questions, yet they are surely vital from an ethical - and an educational - standpoint.

As we saw in chapter two, from Freire's point of view an educator has a *duty* to 'take a stand': he or she can never be neutral. Freire's approach to adult literacy education in Brazil was not impositional in the strong sense of *forcing* others to comply with his view of the world; but he did *encourage* and challenge participants to think and act in new ways. From the generic question about what form intervention should take emerges a more specific question: '*Given* the situation with which Freire was dealing, was a critical orientation toward the world the best mode of consciousness to promote?'. Freire would have little to gain by asking what might be done in an ideal, 'pure' community, for, in his view, such communities do not exist. To what extent, then, was the promotion of a critical consciousness (and, more specifically, critical literacy) justified in Freire's adult literacy work in Brazil?

From Freire's point of view, the majority of the people with whom he would be working in his literacy education efforts were unequivocally *oppressed*. As Bowers points out, if Freire was convinced that large numbers of illiterate adults were oppressed, intervention directed at transforming this oppressive situation would - given Freire's philosophical, ethical and educational position - seem imperative to Freire. It could be argued, perhaps, that under theoretical frameworks other than Freire's, Brazilian illiterates might not have been considered oppressed. Freire would find it hard to conceive of the conditions he observed (for illiterates) at the time as anything other than oppressive, under any reasonable definition of 'oppression'. Certainly there was no question that on *his* ethical position the adults with whom he was working were not only oppressed but oppressed in strikingly overt, severe, degrading, utterly dehumanizing ways. All oppression, of course, is dehumanizing from Freire's point of view: the point is, however, that the conditions endured by the majority of Brazilian peasants and the urban poor were so utterly *desperate* (to use Freire's own descriptor[106]), that to *not* intervene as an educator under such circumstances would, for Freire, be ethically unjustifiable - indeed, ethically unthinkable.

Even a fleeting glimpse at Brazil's history provides sobering reading. Despite rapid industrial expansion in Brazil between 1956 and 1961, much of the country's wealth remained concentrated in the hands of relatively few people. In 1960, the share of the total national income of the lower 50% of the population was only 14.5%; the lowest 10% of income earners enjoyed only 1.9% of the country's wealth. By 1970, these figures had decreased even further to 13.9% and 1.2% for the lower 50% and lowest 10% respectively.[107] The poor, in both urban and rural areas, endured horrific hardships. The northeast of Brazil, especially, was marked in the early 1960s by 'truly appalling social conditions - 60,000 square miles of suffering'.[108] In sections of the northeast in the years immediately prior to Freire's appointment as Director of the national literacy programme average caloric intakes were at levels barely high enough

to sustain life, the life expectancy was 28 years for men and 32 for women, half the population died before the age of 30, and infants frequently died before reaching their first year.[109] Freire speaks of malnutrition so severe that permanent damage to mental faculties resulted.[110] With high rates of disease, substandard housing, and minimal facilities for basic hygiene practices, living conditions for the poor in Brazil were virtually intolerable.

Freire is adamant that these were *structural* inequalities, which could not be addressed through mere reform within given systems. Indeed, the suffering of the poor in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s needs to be examined against the wider international landscape at the time. Freire observes in *Cultural Action for Freedom* that Latin American economies were 'controlled from the outside'.[111] Raw materials were exported - a process sustained by cheap labour costs - while manufactured goods were imported. Among the diseases to which the poor were subject were 'the naively named "tropical diseases" which are really diseases of underdevelopment and dependence'.[112] The 'rigid hierarchical structure'[113] within Latin American societies - including Brazil - reinforced international imbalances, and was sustained by the immersion of the majority of the population in a 'culture of silence'.

Freire's claim that those subject to conditions of poverty and dependence in Brazil tended to see the world in 'magical' terms needs to be considered against the background of Brazil's history. The semi-intransitive consciousness which prevailed among illiterate peasant communities was, in Freire's words, 'a consciousness historically conditioned by the social structures'.[114] Freire refers to this mode of thought as a *dominated* consciousness.[115] Passivity, fatalism, the attributing of problems to higher powers, and so on: none of these facets of magical thought existed in an ahistorical void. Rather, all emerged within relations in which power was structured unequally. Dominant groups exerted enormous influence over the lives of others, restricting the parameters within which illiterate adults (among other groups)

could act and think. Encouraged by others to think in magical terms, peasants not only 'explained' but *reinforced* their own material domination, and thus played a part - *though not an intentional one* - in perpetuating the very system which oppressed them.

Bowers seems to largely sidestep the question of oppression: for him, the paramount concern is to respect the culture of certain groups. If Bowers' argument is taken to its logical limit, existing forms of experience, consciousness, and practice can only be affirmed, or, at most, modified along lines that do not threaten the overall worldview of the people involved. For Freire, however, inaction on the grounds of 'respect for the culture' would, in the case with which he was dealing (but not every case) amount to *de facto* support for the status quo - and hence for the continuation of an oppressive situation. Hence, while Bowers argues that Freirean adult literacy programmes perpetuate Western domination, Freire would turn the tables and say that Bowers - were he to do nothing in the same circumstances - could be accused of reinforcing domination himself.

It is difficult to know exactly what Bowers would do, however, because he says so little on this crucial question. The few overt statements he does provide remain ambiguous and underdeveloped. Bowers notes: 'While I may agree with most aspects of [Freire's]...moral, social and pedagogical position, it would be wrong to misrepresent his position as free of cultural domination'.[116] Elsewhere, though, he provides qualified support for the application of Freirean ideas in some contexts: 'As Freire's pedagogy reproduces the mind set of a Western and modern mode of consciousness, it would be quite appropriate to use with adult populations who possess language codes based on Western categories of thought'.[117] In concluding his major critical essay on Freire, Bowers states:

> As I said at the outset, I find much about [Freire's]...pedagogy attractive and usable - but only in an already Westernized cultural context. Whether it should be used in a non-Western setting is problematic. The justification will have to be framed in arguments that go beyond the Marxist-humanist framework Freire uses, as that framework underlies older, more easily recognizable forms of cultural imperialism.[118]

On the one hand, Bowers is scathing in his attack on Freire's Western mind set, and in this sense appears to suggest quite unequivocally that Freire's pedagogy should not be 'used' in traditional and non-Western settings. On the other hand, he is reluctant to make a decisive declaration about the worth of Freirean approaches in revolutionary contexts in which 'traditional cultures have been overturned or partially assimilated into the culture of the colonial power'.[119] Bowers simply says a Freirean form of pedagogy '*may*... be the only approach that can be taken' under such circumstances.[120] Yet, these were precisely the situations with which Freire was primarily dealing, from his major involvement in adult literacy education in Brazil and Chile, to his role as a consultant and advisor in Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua and Grenada.

It is not clear what elements in Freire's philosophy and pedagogy Bowers sees as valuable or worthwhile for *any* context. Certainly Bowers' suggestion that he concurs with *most* aspects of Freire's moral, social and pedagogical position seems odd, given the tenor and substance of his criticisms of Freire. In fact, the only dimension of Freire's thought Bowers gives extended and transparent approval to is the principle of 'relating the learning process to the life world of the learner'.[121] Bowers talks about Freire's pedagogy possibly being 'usable' in certain contexts, but, if the arguments developed earlier in this thesis are valid, this sort of language (and its embodiment in educational practice) is highly problematic. Freirean

pedagogy, as Freire himself explicitly and repeatedly stresses, cannot, or ought not, to be collapsed into a set of 'methods' which are 'usable' in a variety of settings. Freire offers a particular *approach* to pedagogy, and to adult literacy education more specifically, which is underpinned by broad principles rather than fixed methods.

Bowers' references to 'using' Freirean pedagogy are in keeping with the overall structure of his critique. For Bowers, there are certain ways of understanding and acting in the world which are 'Western' and others which are 'non-Western' or 'traditional'. In conjoining Freire with 'the' Western approach, particular methods and courses of action become almost inevitable from Bowers' point of view. 'The' Western mind set, no matter what its specific manifestations in given contexts, is, for Bowers, always interventionist, individualist, questioning, non-integrative, and so on. The methods employed by theorists in the grip of the Western mode of consciousness - whether Marxists, liberals, Christian missionaries, existentialists, critical pedagogues, or Freireans - simply perpetuate, in one form or another, the ideas, attitudes, beliefs, practices which underlie this mind set. Freire, then, as Bowers sees him, has something unique to offer only in the sense that the particulars of his 'methods' differ in detail from, say, missionaries or liberal rationalists; in essence, substance and consequences, however, the approaches are the same. Were Bowers to acknowledge Freire's work as genuinely eclectic in its intellectual mix, and complex and contradictory in its theoretical assumptions, he might be inclined to a different view.

In more recent years, Bowers has extended his attack from Freire to the work of two prominent scholars in the field of critical pedagogy, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren.[122] The thrust of Bowers' critique remains the same, though arguably his cultural conservatism becomes more explicit. I shall concentrate on those elements of his analysis which bear directly on his attack on Freire's interventionism. Bowers argues that Giroux and McLaren,

like Freire, are Eurocentric 'carriers' of the Western hegemony which is responsible for many of the social concerns they address.[123] He claims that Giroux and McLaren do not acknowledge the problems that attend the politicization of all aspects of culture.[124] This becomes problematic when Giroux and McLaren apply Cartesian-liberal presuppositions about the individual and rationality in evaluating the attitudes and practices of other groups.[125] Adopting a modified version of the 'emissary prophecy' argument, Bowers attacks Giroux and McLaren for attempting to emancipate dominated groups - many of whom 'still have strong traditions that regulate social relationships and how responsibility to the group is defined'[126] - using pedagogical premises derived from the Western Enlightenment. In Bowers' opinion, Giroux and McLaren fail to recognize the limitations of 'the political process': they disregard the fact that even when guided by principles of critical reflection and dialogue, Western societies seem unable to 'resolve such basic political issues as what constitutes an appropriate form of education for this era, pro-life versus free choice, and whether it might not be wiser to put our resources into developing an ecologically sustainable society rather than into weapons'.[127]

Bowers says his 'most serious reservation' about the work of Giroux and McLaren is that they almost completely ignore the 'most paramount' problem of all facing North America and other Western societies, namely, 'the way in which our form of culture is contributing to deepening the ecological crisis'.[128] Bowers notes:

> The problem with the Giroux-McLaren interpretation of a critical pedagogy is not so much that they missed the most fundamental event of our epoch, but that they continue to promote the modernizing ideology that is a major contributing factor to the crisis. Although they are against technical rationality, capitalism, and certain forms of individualism, they embrace an

> equally flawed anthropocentric view of the universe. Critical reflection, as they define it, still places authority in the judgement of the individual; and like the technocrats, they continue to equate change and experimentation with new ideas and values as progressive.[129]

Bowers claims that Giroux and McLaren embrace an unnecessarily narrow concept of community. In limiting their attention to issues of egalitarianism in class, race and gender relations, Giroux and McLaren neglect a wider view in which acknowledgement of 'the interdependence of life forms' is pivotal.[130] This notion of community highlights the hazards of 'assuming that one group within this ecology can exercise "rational" and unilateral control over the rest'.[131] Human beings should be seen as merely one part of the ecological whole: this starting point 'suggests limits, responsibilities, and forms of authority that we do not find in the hubris of the emancipated individual that is the ideal of Giroux and McLaren'.[132]

McLaren provides a comprehensive response to Bowers' critique.[133] There is neither space nor need here to outline McLaren's arguments in detail: I wish instead to simply sketch, briefly, those elements of his account which are pertinent to my defence of Freire's interventionism. McLaren argues that Bowers refuses 'to interrogate the values that structure his own discourse'.[134] Bowers presents a 'mythological and idealized relational community that is supposedly devoid of ideology'.[135] McLaren stresses the social, historical, political, and ideological formation of all language, discourse, experience, and culture. He recognizes the difficulty of stepping outside oppressive structures, and the importance of examining the tacit assumptions which guide one's pedagogical practice.[136] For McLaren, historical agency 'does not reside in consciousness or things *but in the relation between the two*'.[137] Humans, McLaren suggests, are neither completely determined by discourse nor totally self-directing beings. Acknowledging the limitations of modernist thought does not, in McLaren's view, necessitate

the utter disavowal of Enlightenment ideals such as freedom and reason; rather, the point is to 'open...[these and other values and ideals] up to indeterminacy and a plurality of contexts'.[138]

McLaren is not 'against' tradition; instead, he opposes 'the concealment of cultural uncertainties in the way tradition gets ideologically produced'.[139] McLaren defends the principle of problematizing all aspects of culture, pointing out that this does not mean all features of tradition will necessarily be rejected. While admitting that mythic, religious and familial traditions 'can be empowering to the extent that they locate subjectivity in a reciprocal relationship to the larger environment',[140] McLaren stresses that a prime objective of critical pedagogy is demythologization. In McLaren's view, Bowers, in shielding tradition from criticism, falls prey to the very tendency he attacks in the work of critical pedagogues: Eurocentrism.[141] McLaren alludes to Bowers' reluctance to engage questions of domination, human suffering and justice, and emphasizes the pedagogical importance of challenging students to re-examine and politicize everyday life.[142]

In his rejoinder following McLaren's response to this critique, Bowers reinforces the view that many beliefs regarded as sacrosanct in the Western mind set underpin anthropocentric cultural practices which have degraded the planet and belittled nonanthropocentric cultures as 'primitive and backward'.[143] As Bowers sees it, the form of critical pedagogy developed by Giroux and McLaren undermines the authority of tradition and community: critical reflection implies autonomy from these constraining influences.[144] Bowers claims that McLaren's writings are 'based on the deep cultural assumptions that give the "master narratives of bourgeois liberal humanism" its [sic] special sense of hubris'.[145] In emphasizing the importance of demythologizing and subverting tradition, McLaren substitutes one form

of competitiveness (the clash of ideas) for another (economic competitiveness).[146] Bowers goes on to say:

> [T]here are certain beliefs, values, and practices that should not be politicized. For example, if we could arrive at a new cultural consensus on viewing our relationships with the rest of the biotic community as part of our sense of the moral order I would not recommend that teachers politicize it by encouraging each generation of students to make up their own "individualistic mind" about it. Should students be encouraged to demythologize the Constitution and Bill of Rights? Should the relativizing power of *pedagogical negativism* be directed at the emerging sense of taken for grantedness relating to the immorality of gender and racial discrimination?[147]

The general characteristics of Bowers' critique have been addressed in the earlier discussion of Freire. Bowers employs the same theoretical device in attacking Giroux and McLaren as he does in criticizing Freire: Giroux and McLaren are seen as 'carriers' of 'the' Western mind set. Bowers establishes a highly problematic chain of causality, allowing some quite bizarre leaps in logic to be made. In aligning Giroux and McLaren with 'the' Western way of thinking and acting, Bowers, in effect, places 'de facto' blame on them for a host of cultural, social and ecological problems. Bowers identifies a number of problematic assumptions in 'the' Western mode of consciousness, and details some of the destructive manifestations of these presuppositions. Bowers claims that Giroux and McLaren embrace a 'flawed' view of community, and holds them responsible for the ecological crisis because their work (allegedly) begins from similar assumptions to those which have underpinned the oppressive colonization of traditional cultures and the degradation of the planet.

Bowers' comment that 'there are certain beliefs, values, and practices that should not be politicized'[148] finally brings into the open what has hitherto been largely implicit in his critique of Freire: the notion that there are certain matters which are beyond interrogation, or which ought not to be subjected to critical reflection, or which we ought to strive to achieve a binding consensus on. Some ideas, in Bowers' view, should not be questioned, nor, it seems, even *open* for questioning and critical debate (or 'politicizing' as Bowers puts it). This makes Bowers' differences with Freire, Giroux and McLaren quite explicit. Neither Freire nor Giroux or McLaren would accept that some views are beyond questioning or politicization. But leaving all ideas open to problematization does not, of course, mean that every view must be superseded by a superior position. It is precisely through allowing ideas to be critically analysed that they can be held with greater conviction. Bowers laments the lack of agreement on issues such as abortion and education in Western societies, as if these matters could somehow be definitively resolved and closed to further questioning. Bowers yearns for agreement, and premises his belief that consensus on even the most complex problems is possible on an idealized notion of community.

A critical approach, Freire would be the first to admit, is only one way of understanding reality. While the preceding analysis suggests that Bowers reifies, exaggerates and distorts elements of the Freirean ideal, it is clear that Freire's orientation to the social world contrasts in important ways with that adopted by the Chipewyan and other groups in traditional societies. In encouraging and fostering a critical approach to reading the word and the world through his adult literacy work, Freire also challenged the prevailing modes of thought among Brazilian peasants and the urban poor (and other groups in other programmes). Freire was quite explicit in his wish to promote this change: he saw it as an authentic part of the wider struggle for liberation from conditions of oppression. From Bowers' point of

view, this intervention is unacceptable, or at least (very) problematic; for Freire, it was not only justified, but the *best* approach under the circumstances.

Bowers' critique is helpful in highlighting the sensitivities educationists must display in involving themselves in the lives of others. Teachers, discussion facilitators, adult literacy coordinators, or anyone else invested with educational responsibilities are people whose actions as educators always have *consequences*, some of which might be construed as 'invasive' or 'dominating' or 'oppressive'. Freire has long been aware of this, and was very deliberate in the approach he adopted in his adult literacy work: he knew that if his programme worked as he hoped it would, participants would never be the same again. The worth of a critical orientation toward the world, therefore, had to be such that it would - as far as any educator could reasonably foresee - substantially improve the lives of those among whom it was being fostered.

While participants in a Freirean adult literacy programme might never be able to go back (entirely) to their former ways of thinking, in advocating an ideal of critical reflection Freire promoted the means through which people might *revisit* and *reinterpret* their old patterns of thought and behaviour. The development of a critical consciousness does not imply the necessary abandonment of traditional practices, rituals, customs, forms of authority, and so on: it simply demands that these elements of the lifeworld of any group not be above questioning. For Freire, as for Giroux and McLaren, if ideas are worth fighting for, they can withstand critical interrogation.

Freire, Giroux and McLaren do not deny that demonstrably oppressive patterns of thought may emerge through a variety of powerful hegemonic forces; indeed, their work has emphasized the importance of examining the structural and ideological influences on modes

of consciousness and popular cultural forms. Nor would they claim that a critical approach toward the social world represents the only worthwhile way to live one's life, or the only principle from which authority for ethical judgements might arise in a community. But they would insist that a critical orientation provides an indispensable standpoint from which to ask *why* a society (or a community, or an education system, etc.) ought to be structured this way or that. If participants in a Freirean literacy programme developed a critical consciousness, or moved a significant way towards one, they would be given the opportunity to reflect upon and to understand *any* mode of consciousness (and an attendant set of actions and cultural practices) more deeply than ever before. Hence, far from implying the necessary or absolute rejection of traditional ways, critical reflection on one's past might lead to a new and more profound appreciation of the 'good' as well as the 'bad' in one's previous patterns of thought.

As Bowers points out, the West is only now beginning to catch up with many traditional societies in understanding the world holistically and in not arrogating human activity over all other forms of ecological life. This is precisely the sort of appreciation that might accrue from a critical consciousness, as this has been defined by Freire. For to affirm that Freire draws upon a number of Western intellectual traditions, and adopts and endorses principles favoured by many other Western scholars, is not to say (as Bowers seems to suggest) that Freire is an unreflexive, 'blinded', carrier of *all* Western views, or of some reified, homogenous, generalized 'Western mind set'. The Freirean critical ideal embraces possibilities for appreciating, understanding and sanctioning new *and* traditional modes of thought and action.

Bowers wants to uphold traditional beliefs and practices because they provide a form of authority which promotes community cohesion. Bowers claims that members of traditional

cultural groups tend to adopt a more 'integrated' approach to life, and to exist more harmoniously with their biotic environment, than their Western counterparts. Freire would not only criticize Bowers' proclivity to romanticizing traditional cultures, but also question the uncritical valuing of group cohesion. Apparent agreements often mask subtle or deep-seated differences: consensus and harmony, Freire would say, are often illusory. Cohesion can exist in social situations which are profoundly oppressive.[149] In such cases, Freire would not want to uphold traditional beliefs and established practices at all costs; indeed, he would be in favour of *disrupting* traditional patterns of life if these were demonstrably oppressive.

It could be suggested, perhaps, that in encouraging adult illiterates to see their world in a new light - in a demonstrably more critical way - Freire's programme was a source of frustration rather than liberation. A critical consciousness is no use, a critic might say, if the social situation does not allow one to act upon one's reflections to change the world. Those who come to view their situation critically might remain as powerless as ever to effect change, given the overwhelming dominance of certain groups, but be more frustrated, more unhappy, more resentful and bitter, than ever before. For where in the past a magical or naive mode of consciousness might have acted as a kind of 'insulating' device, allowing one to 'explain' or 'rationalize' or 'make sense of' one's circumstances in such a way that one, in a certain sense, *accepted* them, with the development of a more critical orientation toward the social world, suddenly nothing seems so simple any more. The world is, following the emergence of a critical mode of being, rendered at once more complex and more unbearable than ever before.

What, however, is the alternative to this? Freire would certainly not defend an 'ignorance is bliss' view of the world. 'Ignorance' is always a relational concept in Freire's philosophy: it is always a case of examining ignorance *relative to* a particular domain of knowledge. As

we saw in chapter two, Freire argues that no one is either totally ignorant, just as no one can possess absolute knowledge. Maintaining people in a state of ignorance about the deeper reasons behind their suffering is, from Freire's point of view, never justified. Certainly it does not provide a sufficient reason for not allowing people to see the world in a different way. In Freire's ethic, liberation cannot be equated with 'happiness': liberation involves *struggle*, sacrifice, and a profound respect for one's fellow human beings. Fighting for a better world, Freire would say, is always filled with risks and uncertainties. If becoming more critically conscious leads to unhappiness or frustration this is no reason to abandon the goal of critical consciousness as an ideal; rather, it is an affirmation of the need to change the structures and relations which form the object of critical reflection.

The 'technical' success of Freire's Brazilian adult literacy work was undeniable: Freire developed an approach to literacy which enabled adults to gain a basic competence with reading and writing in a very short period of time. Even Berger, one of Freire's harshest critics, has admitted that 'Freire's method has shown itself to be very successful...'.[150] That Freire's programme was stopped short by the military coup before rudimentary literacy abilities could be translated into more advanced forms of reading and writing was unfortunate, but hardly Freire's fault. The Brazilian programme provided *some* improvement in the lives of formerly illiterate adults. Elementary forms of reading and writing became possible, and a heightened awareness of conditions of oppression ensued. While Freire would argue that transformation of oppressive social structures through reading and writing the word *and* the world was the supreme objective in his literacy work in Brazil, political circumstances favoured change for only a brief period.

Praxis - the dialectical synthesis of critical reflection with action - lies at the heart of the Freirean ethical ideal. But Freire would be quick to point out that people do not always

achieve desired goals in their actions. Social transformation inevitably takes place under political constraints. It is in the very struggle to overcome these political impediments, in the search for a better way of life for all (be it through literacy or other means), that the Freirean ideal of liberation is realized. In so far as the Freirean programme explicitly fostered this struggle, and to the extent that adult illiterates were able to engage in certain forms of critical thinking and acting, Freire's literacy efforts in Brazil were worthwhile.

Freire and the Postmodern Challenge

Postmodernist ideas, as I indicated in chapter one, have exerted an enormous influence in the Social Sciences and Humanities in recent years. Among the challenges postmodern criticism has issued to previous categories of thought, those pertaining to questions of meaning are especially important as far as literacy scholars are concerned. At stake in discussions of meaning are not only key epistemological problems, but crucial ethical dilemmas as well. This point is given substance in a recent essay on postmodernism and literacies by James Paul Gee. The difficulties raised in Gee's essay have found dramatic expression in the pedagogical practices of some educators. Elizabeth Ellsworth attacks critical pedagogues for their abstract theoretical language and universalizing of oppression, yet lapses into what I shall call a form of 'pedagogical paralysis'. In focusing on Gee's work, I will *not* be dealing with postmodern themes in depth; nor will my discussion of Ellsworth address the wider literature on critical pedagogy. I merely wish to raise some issues which bear on my defence of Freire's pedagogical interventionism.[151]

Gee sketches three models of meaning.[152] On the first view, meaning is seen as a mental concept of something 'out in the world'.[153] Two people are able to meaningfully talk about 'birds' because both have the same image of 'bird' in their minds. This conception of meaning comes unstuck, Gee points out, when individuals encounter another culture, with a different sign system. The sign 'red' has a particular meaning in English language and culture; in the Dugum Dani language of New Guinea, however, there are only two basic categories for dealing with colour: 'light/bright' and 'dark/dull'.[154] Here structuralist theories of meaning come into their own:

> This second view of meaning privileges the *system* of signs and the structure of the mind/brain and body over the individual human being. Human individuals and the "sense" they make of the world and each other are simply products of their sign systems and the mind/brain/bodies that 'control' them.[155]

Gee claims that this idea is central to 'artistic movements that went, ...loosely, under the name of "modernism"'.[156] It is also consistent with Fordist capitalism, where the 'meaning' or 'value' of workers, consumers and commodities 'is determined by their place within systems of production and consumption'.[157] After a brief interlude demonstrating the structuralist underpinnings to the poetry of William Carlos Williams, Gee moves on to a third perspective of meaning: the postmodernist/post-structuralist view. Where Imagists such as Williams wanted to create a new form of poetry to enable us to look at the routinized world in a different (and preferable) way, postmodernists recognize that all attempts at understanding reality are constructions of sign systems:

> A given sign system (language, way of seeing the world, form of art, social theory, and so forth) can *claim* universality or authenticity or naturalness, but this is always a claim made from *within* the system itself.[158]

This means that

> [a] sign system operates not because it is inherently natural or valid, nor because it is universal, but simply because some group of people have engaged in the past and continue to engage in the present in a particular set of *social practices* that incorporate that sign system.[159]

Certain sign systems gain ascendancy over others in the struggles between different groups to 'carry out their desires and claim and contest power'.[160] Gee presents two texts - one from an upper/middle-class five year old white girl, the other from a seven year old black girl from a lower socioeconomic background and analyses them closely in light of a postmodernist perspective on meaning. The middle-class child's story, Gee maintains, is likely to be validated in school while the other child's story is not. One child's story conforms to the dominant literary norms perpetuated in schools (through, for example, using the device of 'sympathetic fallacy'). With its use of 'intricate rhythmical language, repetition, and syntactic parallelism',[161] the other story is equally literary (as a 'dramatic *performance* of the spoken voice'[162]), but its presentation does not comfortably mesh with the most powerful discourse or sign system. For Gee,

> ...the meaning and value that these texts take on is a product of various social practices and their specific histories and contestations over power. The form of these texts, and what is going on inside these little girls' heads, have no

> inherent relationship with value, meaning, ability, intelligence, giftedness, or anything else. These latter are all simply social constructions of various social practices, carried out so as to privilege members of the practice ("insiders") and contest entry to the practice on the part of "outsiders".[163]

In concluding his essay, Gee raises a crucial problem:

> If no sign system can be validated as against any other, if all sign systems are rooted simply in historically derived social practices instantiating the desires and claims to power of various groups, then how can we *morally* condemn the school's (and society's) treatment of the Black child...?[164]

Given the postmodernist focus on images and the 'play' of signs, it becomes easy to overlook the *reality* of the black child's suffering. The postmodernist turn of mind appears to leave no grounds for making definitive statements about what is 'right' or 'wrong' in a moral sense: those who see the child as 'oppressed' must concede that this judgement, like all others, is not absolute or final but historically rooted within a particular sign system. Presumably (though Gee does not say this), it is possible that other discursive formations may deny or diminish the oppressive character of the child's experience.

Gee offers only a tentative answer to the problem he identifies. He lays down two conceptual principles for governing ethical human discourse. The first is:

> That something would *harm* someone else (deprive them of what they or the society they are in view as "goods") is *always* a good reason (though perhaps not a sufficient reason) *not* to do it.[165]

This is coupled with a second principle:

> One always has the (ethical) obligation to (try to) explicate (render overt and conscious) any social practice that there is reason to believe advantages oneself or one's group over other people or other groups.[166]

By 'advantage' here Gee means bringing 'oneself or one's group more of what count, in the society one is in, as *goods* (whether this be status, wealth, control, or whatever)'.[167] This second principle is 'the *ethical* basis (and main rationale) of education'.[168] Rather than arguing for his position, Gee simply says he believes anyone who deserves the term 'human' would accept these principles, and that he and most others are not going to interact with those who do not accept them. Those who fail to honour the principles ought to be morally condemned.[169]

Gee's identification of his two ethical principles leaves a number of ambiguities and loose ends. For example, the concept of 'goods' is rather ill-defined, and the limiting of the domain of 'harm' to what people view as these 'goods' seems unnecessarily restrictive. Gee lists 'status', 'wealth', 'power', and 'control' as 'goods', but what of love, peace, harmony, emotional well-being, kindness, friendship, honesty, and wisdom? For Gee, 'goods' seem to be defined in material and power/political terms only. The first ethical principle is reminiscent of J.S. Mill's 'harm principle',[170] yet Gee considers utilitarian justifications for his position inadequate.[171] The precise philosophical grounds for Gee's stance are not clear.

These points of criticism are minor, however. Gee's discussion of ethics affords educationists an opportunity to ponder problems of much deeper ethical significance. Gee does not *address* these issues; it would be unreasonable to expect that he could in the space of one chapter.

He does not deal, for example, with the possibility of conflicts, contradictions or overlaps arising between people in their pursuit of the 'goods' he identifies. For one person to attain the status associated with (say) full-time work in a rapidly diminishing employment market, many others must miss out. An employer inevitably, if indirectly, 'harms' unsuccessful applicants for a position while keeping Gee's first principle intact for one fortunate person. From a different angle, *not* harming someone may result in harm for many others. This has been a pivotal point in debates over pacifism. The true pacifist shuns physical violence against any human being, under every possible circumstance. This means that were a Hitler-like character to have his or her finger on the nuclear button, ready to destroy the world, the pacifist would not use violence even if this was the only means of preventing a disaster. Radicals on the Left have long agonized over the question of violence and relative levels of harm. For some, the harm inflicted upon an elite few in the cause of releasing the masses from servitude, exploitation or oppression is justified; for others, to use violence in such conditions is to become no better than one's oppressors. Finally, harming a person or group of people in one way is (arguably) sometimes necessary in order to prevent another - greater - form of harm befalling them. A parent might strongly discipline a child playing with fire in order to stop a serious accident occurring. Or, a teacher may 'force' a youngster to learn certain subjects in school in the hope that such learning will ensure less financial hardship later in life (a misguided hope today, perhaps). Gee appears to acknowledge the point being made here in noting that there may be good reasons for overriding his first principle,[172] but he does not specify what these reasons might be and offers no criteria for distinguishing between different levels of harm.

Indeed, Gee issues conflicting messages as to how 'harm' is to be determined. In his first principle, it is the people to whom actions are directed (or the society of which they are a part) who decide what the 'goods' are. 'Harm', it should be remembered, occurs (in Gee's

scheme) when people are deprived of these goods. In his next sentence, however, Gee asserts that it is always a good reason not to believe, claim, or do anything if '*we believe* that our believing, claiming, or doing this would harm someone else'.[173] Now, unless a person's belief that harm might occur is based upon what those to whom his or her actions are directed have told him or her (as regards their conception of 'goods'), there appear to be two different ways in which 'harm' is established. In one instance, it is ascertained by the person him or herself; in another, it proclaimed by others.

If the determination of harm depends, effectively, upon others informing a person in advance of the wrong they may potentially do him or her, this opens up huge ethical problems. Marxists and other radical theorists have convincingly argued that people do not always know what they are missing out on as far as the 'goods' in a given society are concerned: ideologies function to cloud people's perceptions of the world, giving a structured misrepresentation of social reality.[174] This process, in the classic Marxist formulation, serves to reproduce existing power relations where some have more of the goods Gee describes (wealth, status, control) than others. For Marxists, the ruling ideas are those of the capitalist class; others lay stress on the dominance of men's ideas over those of women, or focus on racist and colonialist ideology. If it is accepted that one's view of the world can be distorted by ideological processes, Gee's analysis becomes problematic *irrespective* of whether 'harm' is determined by the person him or herself or those affected by his or her actions. Even the ability to 'hear' others telling someone that they are being denied something may be influenced by the workings of a particular ideology. In New Zealand during the early 1990s, for example, it might be claimed that National Party members of parliament, blinded by the ideology of market liberalism so fervently espoused by senior politicians such as former Finance Minister Ruth Richardson, literally could not hear the cries of the poor and hungry who had to turn to food banks for survival.

Of course, the notion that people 'do not know what is good for them' has drawn considerable fire over the years, and prompted charges of vanguardism and elitism. As the earlier part of this chapter revealed, Freire has endured precisely this line of attack with respect to his literacy work with Brazilian adults. The reframing of social theory around conceptual categories such as 'text' and 'discourse' in postmodern times (in place of talk of 'the dominant ideology' and 'the ruling class') does not overcome the difficulty Gee has raised. *All* members of a society, on the postmodernist view, are 'shaped' by multiple discourses: the idea of an 'unencumbered', autonomous self becomes so much myth. The myth is itself an element of a particular discourse or sign system. Identifying and addressing 'harm' under these circumstances becomes an uncertain and delicate business. The postmodern turn of mind leaves radical educators and social activists wary of any attempt to speak *for* others by, for example, analysing their pain or suffering from afar and developing theoretical 'solutions' to their problems.[175] Yet, as Gee makes plain, the answer does not lie in passivity, pessimism and inaction. It is precisely these features, however, which characterize Ellsworth's pedagogical theory and practice, to which I now turn.

Ellsworth's Critique of Critical Pedagogy

In an influential article, Ellsworth asserts that appeals to universal propositions 'have been oppressive to those who are not European, white, male, middle class, Christian, able-bodied, thin, and heterosexual'.[176] She argues that the abstract language of critical pedagogy creates a barrier between educators and students, reducing the possibility of genuine dialogue and social transformation (of racism, sexism, classism, and other oppressive practices). Ellsworth describes the rationalist ideals ('empowerment', 'student voice', 'dialogue', etc.) which inform the literature on critical pedagogy as 'repressive myths' which serve to perpetuate rather than overturn relations of domination.[177] Citing examples from her own experience as a university

professor working with a diverse group of students in a course on antiracism, Ellsworth chronicles the obstacles she came up against in attempting to put 'liberating' pedagogical ideas into practice.

Among other things, she had to acknowledge her own position of power as a teacher, and recognize that as a white, middle-class woman she 'could not unproblematically 'help' a student of color to find his/her authentic voice as a student of color'.[178] Her understanding of racism, she believed, would 'always be constrained by... [her] white skin and middle-class privilege'.[179] Class discussion was inhibited by the dissonance participants felt in having to call up contradictory social positionings: women, for example, 'found it difficult to prioritize expressions of racial privilege and oppression when such prioritizing threatened to perpetuate their gender oppression'.[180] Dialogue was also stifled by fears of being misunderstood, by memories of unfortunate previous experiences of speaking out, by uncertainties about the allegiances of other class members, and by resentment of the concentration on racism at the expense of other oppressions.[181] According to Ellsworth, '[d]ialogue in its conventional sense is impossible in the culture at large because at this historical moment, power relations between raced, classed, and gendered students and teachers are unjust'.[182] Other pedagogical forms where students would be given the opportunity of speaking without interruption were pondered. A coalition of affinity groups developed, eventually giving rise to several protest efforts in the campus library mall and administrative offices.[183]

Ellsworth's analysis is not without its difficulties. It is not clear, for example, exactly what it is that makes certain groups 'oppressed'. Details of what 'liberation' might mean for the oppressed groups she mentions are similarly sparse. Of course, one of Ellsworth's chief messages is that it is not the job of teachers or critical pedagogues to inform oppressed

'Others' of the nature of their oppression. But, having taken this premise on board, Ellsworth appears to accept without question that people are oppressed either simply because they say they are, or by virtue of their gender, sexuality, body shape, etc. alone. That is, it appears to be sufficient, for Ellsworth, that a person is (for example) a woman, or gay, or overweight, to decree that he or she is oppressed. This means that *all* women, *all* homosexuals, and *all* overweight people are *necessarily* oppressed in certain ways. Conversely, all males, heterosexuals, and thin people *necessarily* enjoy certain advantages. What this implies for a theory of oppression, or, indeed, for a plurality of *theories* of oppression, is unclear.

The notion that individuals from certain groups, categories, or classes are necessarily oppressed can without doubt be strongly supported,[184] but Ellsworth provides relatively little argument in this direction (despite the fact that her entire essay turns on this premise). She is quick to point out the difficulties for individuals in reconciling their oppressed and non-oppressed spheres, noting her own affiliation to one oppressed group (women) together with her connection to several privileged classes (viz. whites, the able-bodied, the thin, etc.). But without a clear elaboration of underlying ethical and political assumptions, the result is a nightmarish typology of oppressor-oppressed groupings, with little idea of how the different 'levels' of oppression and privilege might interconnect or cancel each other out. The consequences of conflicting experiences and discourses for the emotional and intellectual development of individuals remain obscure, though schizophrenia might be one possibility!

The dangers of thinking purely in terms of (an ever-increasing number of) 'lines' of oppression become readily apparent here. The categories of 'class', 'race' and 'gender' have formed the backbone of much work in critical pedagogy and sociology of education. Ellsworth expands on these three, mentioning at different places in her essay: sexual-orientation, age, religion, body-shape, body-mobility (able-bodied/disabled), and language

of origin (English/English as a second language). Why stop there though? A case might be made for looking at the unemployed as a distinct (oppressed) group; or attention could be turned to the deaf, the blind, and so on. Ironically, in focusing on an ever-increasing number of specific groups, the need for some sort of explanatory framework which links all of these together comes to seem all the more necessary. Ellsworth says nothing about whether her list of lines of oppression is meant to be exhaustive, or whether there are certain features which all groups she does identify have in common.

Somewhat ironically, having just presented an exhaustive critique of abstract universals, Ellsworth nevertheless offers what appears to be a normative principle not unlike those she finds so objectionable in the critical pedagogy literature. Seeking to locate pedagogical forms which address 'a commonality in the experience of difference without compromising its distinctive features',[185] Ellsworth concludes:

> Right now, the classroom practice that seems most capable of accomplishing this is one that facilitates a kind of communication across differences that is best represented by this statement: "If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and "the Right thing to do" will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive".[186]

This opens up two possibilities which have previously (apparently) been closed in Ellsworth's study. First, the notion of students 'thriving' is introduced. As this arrives in the last sentence of the essay, it is impossible to ascertain what 'thriving' might entail. Even so, mere

mention of the word implies a concern with some form of ethical ideal which ought to apply to all students. Second, where up until this point dialogue between students from different oppressed groups has been portrayed as (at best) difficult, now the differences between students do not seem like such an insurmountable constraint to collective action. Without these final remarks, Ellsworth's analysis leaves educators with few avenues for solidarity, unity, or praxis. Giroux's assessment of Ellsworth's 'separatism' as 'a crippling form of political disengagement'[187] may be somewhat harsh, but the danger of inadvertent passivity through fragmentation cannot be ignored.

The themes under investigation by Gee and Ellsworth, while distinct in certain respects, are related in the *ethical* difficulties they pose for educators. Both theorists convey a clear commitment to working toward a better social world (though neither, given the space they have available, are able to articulate in precise terms what form of social ideal they support), yet, in acknowledging postmodernist and post-structuralist insights on questions of meaning and oppression, both also arrive at something of an impasse in their analyses. Gee's problem is that he can no longer assert with complete conviction that what is done to the black girl is (absolutely) 'wrong' or 'harmful' - i.e. ethically undesirable - even though he appears to want to say this. Gee raises the complex question of where we might find the (or an) authoritative ground from which to assert the condemnation of certain practices if we embrace a postmodern view of meaning, according to which all judgements are contingent upon and embedded within particular discourses or sign systems. Ellsworth's predicament seems to be more serious: in recognizing the multiple lines of oppression which operate in classroom settings and the often conflicting subject positions assumed by teachers (and students), she reaches a virtual ethical standstill - a state which might be termed a form of 'pedagogical paralysis'. Given what both Gee and Ellsworth have to say, the question 'What *ought* I (or we) to do?' becomes an especially difficult one for an educator to answer,

or even address. Deciding upon general principles or goals (e.g. doing what is 'good', promoting 'liberation' rather than 'oppression', avoiding 'harming' others, etc.) is, if the postmodernist views invoked by Gee and Ellsworth are correct, no longer satisfactory.

Postmodernism, Pedagogy and Political Commitment

Freire argues that all human beings have an ontological and historical vocation of humanization. People pursue this vocation when they engage in critical, dialogical praxis. Praxis, for Freire, represents the synthesis of reflection and action. Where opportunities for pursuing authentic praxis are impeded, a situation of oppression emerges. Impediments to praxis may take the form of overt constraints to human action (e.g. through exploitative working conditions), structural barriers to democratic participation in social life (e.g. being denied the vote because of one's illiteracy), or hegemonic control of patterns of thought (e.g. fostering the view that poverty is 'God's will'). Relations of oppression are dehumanizing for both the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressed pursue their liberation (and hence humanization) when they struggle against the conditions which oppress them, seeking, collectively, to reclaim their role as Subjects in the historical process.

Education is vital in this process. Freire calls upon educators to side with the oppressed in building a better social world. Education should be based on the principle of dialogue between the teacher and students, and between the students themselves, rather than a monological, one-way, vertical relationship where the teacher issues communiques to passive, docile, patiently listening pupils. Dialogue is seen as the ethically preferable and most effective form of educative engagement. Freirean dialogue presupposes that two or more people can communicate meaningfully with each other within a setting where all participants are given an opportunity to contribute to the educative 'conversation'. It is taken for granted

that critical reflection upon a mediating object of study is worthwhile, and that all members of a dialogical group are, or ought to be, pursuing the same end (humanization).

In his classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire speaks of oppression, liberation, humanization, and dehumanization in universalist terms.[188] This has drawn criticism from Weiler, who regards Freire's largely abstract treatment of these concepts as inadequate for confronting the specifics of oppression for particular groups.[189] In positing humanization (and, concomitantly, conscientization, dialogue and praxis) as a universal ethical ideal, Freire glosses over the layered and contradictory positions of privilege and oppression people experience.[190] A peasant male, for example, might be oppressed by a landowner but simultaneously oppress his wife.[191] The Freirean notion of grounding adult literacy (and other) educational efforts on the experiences of learners also takes on a new face if the homogeneity of oppression cannot be taken for granted. Freire's hope that the oppressed will engage in collective, united action arising from critical reflection on their own experiences becomes problematic if such reflection throws up conflicting, divided experiences, interests and solutions.[192] Weiler emphasizes the importance of locating claims about oppression and liberation in particular lived social and historical contexts.[193] She shares the Freirean ethical imperative of educators 'siding with' the oppressed, and does not want to abandon the goals of 'social justice' and 'empowerment'.[194] There is a need, however, for coalitions of common goals to be formed which do not deny difference and conflict.[195] This, for Weiler,

> ... suggests a more complex realization of the Freirean vision of the collective conscientization and struggle against oppression, one which acknowledges difference and conflict, but which, like Freire's vision, rests on a belief in the human capacity to feel, to know, and to change.[196]

In a recently-published interview, Macedo draws Freire's attention to the concerns raised by Weiler and other feminist scholars:

> [Feminists]...point out that your goals for liberation and social and political transformation are embedded in universals that, at some level, negate both your own position of privilege as an intellectual man and the specificity of experiences which characterize conflicts among oppressed groups in general. That is to say, in theorizing about oppression as universal truth you fail to appreciate the different historical locations of oppression.[197]

Macedo advances the view that there exists 'a hierarchical structure of oppression that ranges from being a white middle-class woman to an underclass black woman who may also be peasant'.[198] The basis for this argument is that while women are an oppressed group (given their relationship with men in a patriarchal society), black women are *more* oppressed than white women because they experience racism as well. Working-class black women bear an additional burden in a classist world. Working class black peasant women are the most oppressed of all (using the categories supplied by Macedo), enduring sexism, racism, classism, and the hardships engendered by geographical and political isolation, together perhaps with exploitation by ruthless landlords.

There are important theoretical and practical problems to be addressed in a hierarchical approach to oppression. Neither Macedo nor Ellsworth comment directly on the question of where the hierarchy begins: they do not say, for example, whether racial oppression represents a 'stronger' or 'more severe' form of oppression than gender oppression. On Macedo's logic, it can only be surmised that membership of any one oppressed group represents the first 'layer' on the hierarchy, while membership of any two oppressed groups

would place an individual on the second layer, membership of three the third layer, and so on. Thus, black middle-class men endure oppression of a similar magnitude to white middle-class women; black working-class men are more oppressed than white middle-class women; black working-class women are more oppressed than black working-class men; etc. If the wider range of categories of oppression mentioned by Ellsworth are invoked, an individual who is female, black, working-class, homosexual, disabled, overweight, and speaks a first language other than English would be particularly oppressed, whereas a person who is female, white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, thin and whose first language is English is likely to experience considerably less oppression.

The notion of counting layers or adding up the number of oppressed groups to which one is affiliated seems, at the very least, a somewhat crude approach to understanding the complexities of oppression, yet this is surely one implication of pursuing the hierarchical model in a systematic and orderly fashion. It is not clear where the process ends, for the number of categories of oppression continues to expand. As Ellsworth does not provide a theory of oppression (and Macedo could not be expected to do this given the constraints imposed by the interview form), the grounds for including or adding particular categories to the list of oppressed groups are uncertain.

Ellsworth eschews the very idea of developing universal theoretical principles, especially those of an 'abstract' variety, and would therefore perhaps find the project of developing an overarching theory of oppression untenable. Yet, her analysis depends on at least an *implicit* acceptance of criteria for oppression: without this, she has no substantial basis on which to include (and exclude) certain groups among the ranks of the oppressed. How does Ellsworth know that overweight people are an oppressed group (and that thin people are not oppressed)? She might legitimately claim that others have argued a strong case in support

of this view, and that there is not space in a single article to address the arguments or muster all the evidence demonstrating the ways in which each of the groups she mentions are oppressed. But the very process of deciding which groups should be included in her discussion implies a judgement about the authenticity of claims that certain groups are oppressed. In other words, if Ellsworth did not believe the arguments demonstrating the oppression of women, 'people of colour' (to use her preferred terminology), working-class folk, homosexuals, overweight people, and those for whom English is a second language were compelling, presumably she would not have listed these as oppressed groups in her analysis. It is difficult to see how a decision to include such a wide variety of different groups in her discussion could have been made without at least a rough (if unstated) theory of oppression.

Jones recounts a hierarchical logic to oppression being promoted among feminists in New Zealand. She notes that for a time,

> [t]he local feminist solution to the tensions and differences among women was still largely in terms of a framework of opposing, unitary groups: women/men; Maori/Pakeha; lesbian/heterosexual; working class/middle class. Hierarchies of oppression were developed (working class Maori women more oppressed than working class Pakeha women, more oppressed than middle class Pakeha women...etc.), and membership of the most oppressed groups on these binaries conferred a moral advantage to the individual.[199]

Jones suggests that at conferences and other gatherings of feminists locating oneself on the hierarchy sometimes became a ritualistic exercise in identity definition. Sessions would begin with women taking turns to identify themselves, thus:

> The convenor of the workshop made it clear about what was expected with: "I am a middle class lesbian Jew, an academic with white privilege" The prouder end of the hierarchy of oppression was represented by "I am a working class dyke active in the trade union movement".[200]

Jones recalls that '[t]he more oppressed were to be listened to; not because we needed to understand what they had to say, but because their membership of certain suffering social categories gave them the moral edge.[201] This resonates strongly with Ellsworth's position. Ellsworth implies that those in oppressed groups have a better understanding of their oppression than their opposite non-oppressed 'others', given the experience of oppression on the part of the former and the lack of this on the part of the latter. This line of argument, Freire would maintain, is defensible on at least one level: no one knows (in one sense of 'knowing') what it is like to live a particular life better than the person living that life. An individual's personal experiences constitute one domain of knowledge, to which he or she has privileged access over all others. It is surely crucial from an educational point of view, however, that this knowledge not be 'celebrated' uncritically.[202] It does not follow that because one is oppressed, one's knowledge of oppression (even the specific oppression to which one is subject) will necessarily be superior in every respect - or even most respects - to those who do not experience this oppression. This is where Ellsworth drastically downplays the role teachers might potentially play in facilitating a deeper, more critical understanding of oppression. She confuses 'exercising authority' with 'authoritarianism'[203] and places such emphasis on the forms of privilege and power enjoyed by teachers at the expense of students that the directive, interventionist role of teaching is diminished almost to the point of total collapse.[204] From a Freirean point of view, if teachers do not have something 'special' to offer an educational situation, especially with regard to knowing the

object of study (whether this is 'oppression' or anything else), a vital element in the process of educating is missing.

Freire claims agreement with Macedo's notion of a hierarchy of oppression, but stresses that his major preoccupation in early work was class oppression. Without denying the specificities of oppression, however, Freire stresses the need for solidarity in a 'collective war against all oppression'.[205] From a Freirean standpoint, there are strategic as well as ethical reasons for avoiding a purely particularist approach to liberation struggles:

> If the oppressed women choose to fight exclusively against the oppressed men when they are both in the category of the oppressed, they may rupture the oppressor-oppressed relations specific to both women and men. If this is done, the struggle will only be partial and perhaps tactically incorrect.[206]

At the end of the day, from Freire's perspective, there are certain features which all oppressed groups have in common which transcend the particularities of their specific oppressive situations. By implication, there is an overriding vision of liberation beyond the particulars of local struggles.[207] Freire believes there are distinctive forms of oppression (e.g. sexism as opposed to racism), and localized liberation movements with concerns which differ from other movements. At a further level still, there are specific examples of oppression within given forms. Sexism in the workplace, for instance, might differ from sexism in the home; or, to be even more specific, sexism in *this* home might contrast in important ways with sexism in *that* home; and so on. But the local and the specific only make sense in relation to some larger conception of oppression and liberation. Where the postmodern turn of mind appears to privilege the particular over the universal, for Freire both depend on each other for their intelligibility. We cannot know that sexism and racism are both examples of

oppression without some broader theory of oppression. On the other hand, a theory of oppression only gains its authenticity through reference to particular forms of oppression. That is, it would not be a theory of oppression at all unless it could apply to more than one type of oppression and myriad specific examples of oppressive situations and practices.

The analyses by Gee and Ellsworth lead to some of the most perplexing questions in contemporary social, ethical and educational theory. How do those who share the postmodernist unease with essentialist thought take a stand against 'oppression' and 'exploitation' when these terms no longer have any absolute meaning? What becomes of the commitment to social change when one cannot be sure of the grounds for transformation? What kind of social ideal (if any) should critical pedagogues be working toward in an era where all metanarratives - including those associated with discourses of 'liberation' and 'emancipation' - have been called into question?

These questions find some answers in recent work on critical literacy. Giroux notes:

> ...[A]s a heterosexual, white, middle/working class educator, I cannot, for example, speak as or for Afro-Americans or women. But I can speak self reflectively from the politics of my own location about the issues of racism and sexism as ethical, political, and public issues, which implicate in their web of social relations all those who inhabit public life, though from different spheres of privilege and subordination.[208]

Advocating a 'politics of difference responsive to the imperatives of a critical democracy',[209] Giroux argues that students should be encouraged to analyse the ways in which society is 'historically and socially constructed',[210] with opportunities for identifying both equalities and

inequalities across race, gender and other lines. Rather than foisting a set, closed view of history upon learners, educators ought to be enhancing the prospects of students being 'noisy, irreverent, and vibrant'[211] in their readings of the word and the world. 'Difference' should be examined tolerantly but critically. This implies using texts in ways which challenge dominant social structures, modes of thought, and conceptions of history. Making the world uncertain through reading and writing is something which should be welcomed - not scorned or feared - for the dialogical possibilities it provides.

In their essay, 'Critical Literacy and the Postmodern Turn', McLaren and Lankshear consider postmodern and post-structuralist ideas at length, weighing up both their strengths and limitations for critical literacy projects.[212] Gee's third perspective on meaning finds ready, but not uncritical, acceptance in McLaren and Lankshear's analysis, as does the notion that 'every individual consists of an ensemble of multiple, shifting positions within discourses and social practices'.[213] McLaren and Lankshear acknowledge the importance of basing pedagogies on lived experience, but caution against unqualified celebration of students' interpretations of their lives.[214] All voices in an educative engagement need to be probed in an effort to understand the political, economic, cultural, and linguistic factors which have shaped individual and collective experiences.[215]

Wishing to avoid the pitfalls of a liberal pluralism where voices are heard but not contextualized within wider 'asymmetrical relations of power',[216] McLaren and Lankshear advocate a thoroughgoing interrogation of competing interpretations of reality. Rejecting an 'anything goes' approach does not mean the automatic ushering in of authoritarian pedagogical forms; instead, educators can respect difference while at the same time offering a framework for students to rework and transform understanding and action through dialogue with their peers. Attention to local and specific discourses of emancipation does

not, for McLaren and Lankshear, necessarily foreshadow the abandonment of totality but rather its reformulation. Their call is for a *provisional* vision of a social ideal: one which is 'perhaps evanescent or even *ephemeral*',[217] such that particular struggles for identity are affirmed but where sites for unity are also identified.

There is a pull in two directions here, with McLaren and Lankshear straddled between the utopian, modernist, Freirean tradition in critical pedagogy, and more recent post-structuralist and postmodern positions. The tensions I identified in Gee's argument are not entirely transcended, but McLaren and Lankshear's stance suggests that Freirean and post-structuralist perspectives on epistemology, ethics, and literacy need not be seen as polar opposites. The same point might be made with regard to the broader dichotomy between modern and postmodern thought. While postmodernism is sometimes conceived as a complete break from modernism, it is worth remembering that the former is, as Murphy points out,[218] parasitic on the latter: the postmodern age defines itself against (and thus requires reflection upon) modern structures, practices, and ideas.

For some commentators, the postmodern condition signifies the emancipation of modernity from false consciousness;[219] for others, notably Jameson, postmodernism represents a further stage - the 'cultural logic' - of capitalism.[220] However the postmodern turn is conceived, modernist ideas have not simply evaporated. Habermas has defended the project of modernity against post-structuralist onslaughts on subject-centred reason, branding Foucault, Derrida, and Bataille 'young conservatives'.[221] Eagleton, likewise, has criticized postmodern theorists for setting up a simplistic, 'straw target' version of the unified subject: '[t]he subject of late capitalism', he suggests, '...is neither simply the self-regulating synthetic agent posited by classical humanist ideology, nor merely a decentred network of desire, but a contradictory amalgam of the two'.[222]

As we saw in chapter two, Freire is not a relativist, in either an ethical or an epistemological sense. He believes some ideas and certain modes of human existence are 'absolutely' better than others. A critical, dialogical, praxical approach in understanding and living in the world is clearly preferable, in Freire's opinion, to a passive, or monological, or oppressive approach. The theory of humanization and dehumanization which underpins the Freirean stance is a prime example of what might today be termed a 'totalizing' vision. Lyotard and other postmodern thinkers speak of incredulity toward metanarratives of this sort, yet the very idea of questioning totalizing systems of thought has itself become a kind of metanarrative in its own right. The renunciation of 'essentialist' ethical and metaphysical principles creates the impression that social theory can do without absolutes. But if there are no absolutes, then, paradoxically, there must be at least one absolute: namely, the premise that there are no absolutes. Having no absolutes means that there can be no absolute acceptance of the proposition that there are no absolutes. If one cannot be sure that this proposition (i.e. that there are no absolutes) is true, then one cannot be sure that there are no absolutes. The only alternative to having no absolutes is having (one or more) absolutes. The postmodernist who disavows absolutes must therefore concede that it is at least *possible* that there are absolutes.

The postmodern era, thus, signals not the disappearance of absolutes altogether but the replacement of one set of taken-for-granted assumptions with another. All postmodernists and post-structuralists appear to agree that the unified subject is now dead; difference is inevitably celebrated and pluralism promoted; Reason is invariably seen as partial and socially-constructed. Absolutes can *never* be avoided in theory; they simply parade in different guises under different paradigms.

Postmodernists criticize the 'binary logic' of much modernist work, yet, as Beilharz notes,[223] many discussions of postmodernism also fall back on the same dualistic thinking. Hassan,

for example, lays out a table of differences between modernism and postmodernism using opposites such as these: purpose/play; hierarchy/anarchy; centering/dispersal; signified/signifier; etc.[224] The propensity of some postmodern theorists to make sweeping generalizations about modernism, where significant differences between ideas and theoretical perspectives are glossed over, also appears to be self-contradictory.

Postmodernist ideas have received a cautious reception among some scholars in several fields, including anthropology,[225] feminist theory,[226] and education.[227] For Lankshear and McLaren, as for a growing number of other progressive and radical educational theorists,[228] there is much to be gained from appropriating the best in postmodern thought while retaining some of modernism's most laudable principles, goals and achievements. Lankshear and McLaren remind us that while we can no longer be certain of traditional theoretical constructs of 'oppression', 'domination' and 'exploitation', the need for transformative action where injustices are perceived remains as urgent as ever before. The answer, if there is one, does not lie in throwing one's hands up in despair as soon as the safe moorings of modernist theoretical categories and oppositions are untied. Radical educators are increasingly recognizing that oppression and liberation are multifaceted realities: different groups and individuals experience different forms of oppression and seek distinctive means of redressing the injustices inflicted upon them. A democratic stance demands that all voices - all cries of pain, exploitation, discrimination, and powerlessness be listened to with respect and investigated seriously. This does not mean, however, that every declaration of oppression must inevitably be deemed valid or granted automatic access to a greater share of economic or educational resources. If the postmodern turn in social theory has made anything crystal clear it is surely this: *all* claims to truth, every assumption about human beings and the world, and all pleas for ethical redress are ripe for critical questioning.

While Ellsworth's target is the wider field of critical pedagogy, her critique is useful in highlighting certain areas in need of further development in Freirean theory. Freire does not pay sufficient attention to the micro-politics of education and conscientization. Specifically, he does not adequately address the question of 'difference' in educational settings. Students bring diverse experiences, desires, and forms of understanding to bear on the educative engagement. Participants operate within different discourses of power, with some enduring greater hardships than others. People are thus located within disparate 'spaces' in any educational setting. This impacts on their relationships with other students and the coordinator. Conscientization is never a unitary or uniform process; people reflect and act on the world in different ways according to the subject positions they assume. There is a constant negotiation between intersecting, sometimes conflicting, discourses of power. Conscientization for one person may be stifled by the actions of another person. Equally, as Ellsworth discovered, the possibility of critically-informed action may be inhibited by tensions within the individual between different social positionings.[229]

Ellsworth and Freire are at one in the view that oppression exists, at a number of levels, and that oppressive situations ought to be addressed. Ellsworth claims that no teacher is free of 'learned and internalized oppressions' such as sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and 'fat oppression' (her term).[230] Freire, I'm sure, would be in broad agreement with this. His entire pedagogy is built around the assumption that we live in a deeply oppressive world. In participating in the social institutions of daily life, oppressive attitudes, values, beliefs, modes of consciousness, and actions become inscribed in our very being. Indeed, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and other early writings, Freire makes much of the notion that the oppressed 'internalize' oppressive patterns of thought and practice: to 'be' (human) in an oppressive society is to be an oppressor. However, he and Ellsworth part company in their response to the recognition of internalized oppressions. Ellsworth accentuates the constraints 'white skin

and middle-class privilege'[231] place on understanding racism and other forms of oppression, and finds the contradictions, tensions and clashes between different forms of oppression pedagogically debilitating. She points out that she cannot 'unproblematically "help"' students from oppressed groups other than her own find their 'voices' as members of those groups, just as she cannot 'unproblematically "affiliate"' with these students.[232] Freire would concur with Ellsworth that none of these processes are 'unproblematic', but would also stress the importance of taking action and getting involved in addressing oppression. Political commitment is as crucial in the postmodern world as it was in the modern: it simply has to become better informed and more complex.

'Difference' and 'unity' need not be seen by educators as mutually exclusive categories: there are points of both similarity and dissimilarity in students' experiences, knowledges, struggles, and goals. In a climate where the fracturing of universal ideals and splintering of liberation movements threatens to overwhelm the quest for anything like a holistic understanding of the social world, new possibilities for solidarity need to be forged. We need both micro *and* macro analyses of power and oppression. In paying closer attention to the local and the particular we must be careful not to ignore larger structural impediments to justice. Above all, we need to *get involved* in the intellectual and practical struggles of daily life, even in the face of unprecedented uncertainties.

Acknowledging the different privileges enjoyed by teachers (and students) and recognizing contradictory subject positionings should lead to a more sensitive and ultimately more *critical* form of pedagogical practice, not a position of despair, confusion and political immobility. Ellsworth's analysis furnishes helpful insights in allowing significant gaps and points of underdevelopment in Freire's theory of oppression, liberation and education to be highlighted. The Freirean notion of conscientization, on the other hand, provides an equally

sobering antidote to Ellsworth's pessimism and pedagogical paralysis. If it is Ellsworth and Gee who draw attention to difficulties associated with addressing the question 'What ought I (or we) to do?' in the postmodern educational world, it is Freire who reminds us that this questions can still be answered, even if only in provisional and contingent ways. On the Freirean view, taking a risk-laden, potentially contradictory, always constrained stand against oppression is almost invariably preferable to taking no stand at all.

Rethinking Conscientization

The main purpose of the discussion to this point in the chapter has been to defend Freire's pedagogical interventionism. While Freire's theory of oppression, liberation and education is certainly not devoid of problems, his work bears witness to the continuing importance of political commitment in a postmodern world. Although I have commented at length on the practice of conscientization in Freirean programmes of adult literacy education, little has been said about how the *concept* of conscientization ought to be interpreted. In this section I begin with one popular view which construes conscientization as the movement of individuals through a succession of distinct stages, with each stage being defined by certain attitudes and behaviours. I argue that this 'stages' model of conscientization is inherently flawed. The interpretation of conscientization as 'consciousness raising' under the stages theory is found to be problematic. An individualist reading of conscientization is rejected. An alternative perspective which draws a direct link between conscientization and praxis is advanced, and the concept of conscientization is reformulated in light of postmodern ideas on multiple subjectivities.[233]

Freire and the Stages Model of Conscientization

Freire's focus on three levels of consciousness in his early writings has been taken by many as evidence that he intended the notion of conscientization to be conceived in terms of a 'raising' of consciousness through clear, definitive stages. A detailed example of this 'stages' model of conscientization is provided by William Smith.[234] According to Smith, conscientization is '...a developmental process which can be divided into three distinct stages: magical, naive, and critical consciousness'.[235] At each stage, people interpret and act upon the world in different ways. Smith categorizes characteristic responses of magical, naive and critical individuals to three key questions:

> ...what are the most dehumanizing problems in your life? (NAMING); what are the causes and consequences of those problems? (REFLECTING); and, what can be done to solve those problems? (ACTING).[236]

In 'naming' their world, magically conscious individuals tend to either deny that they have problems or avoid them by situating them in the past or elsewhere.[237] In reflecting upon their circumstances, such individuals typically explain the conditions they endure through reference to 'God's will', fate, or bad luck.[238] Using examples from his experience with Ecuadorian farmers, Smith notes that people at this level of consciousness often either sympathize with their oppressors, or live in fear of them.[239] Causal explanations of difficulties are frequently simplistic. For example, peasants might say: 'We can't study because we don't have any money', but not go on to inquire as to *why* they are impoverished.[240] Passive acceptance of harsh social conditions, rather than critical analysis and transformation, is the order of the day for those at this stage of consciousness. People at the 'naive' level see reform within an existing social system as a major task. Where

problems are identified, individuals (rather than social structures or systems) are often blamed.[241] Naive individuals sometimes attempt to model their oppressors' behaviour and distance themselves from their oppressed peers. Violence within families and among groups of people at this stage of consciousness is not uncommon.[242] Overcoming difficulties becomes a matter of using the system rather than changing it. Critical consciousness is characterized by an attempt to transform oppressive social structures.[243] Self-esteem increases, and an understanding of and sympathy for one's peers ensues.[244] Connections between different oppressive structures are identified.[245] Self-actualization becomes possible, and cooperative dialogical relationships are sought.[246] The critically conscious individual is willing to take risks in resisting oppression.[247]

For Smith, the process of conscientization is strictly sequential:

> One does not begin as critical and become magical, nor move from magical to critical, nor move freely between the three stages. Development is a progression from magical to naive to critical...[248]

This idea owes much to the work of Kohlberg and Mayer, who talk of development through 'invariant ordered sequential stages', where all individuals are assumed to follow the same developmental path.[249] Environmental and personal factors influence the extent to which individuals progress through the stages of development, but the stages remain the same in all cases.[250] On Smith's model of conscientization, not all people will necessarily reach the stage of critical consciousness, but those who do must move through the stages in order: an Ecuadorian peasant who exhibits the qualities of magical consciousness, then, cannot 'skip a stage' and move directly to critical consciousness. Magical consciousness is considered the least desirable (lowest) level and critical consciousness the most desirable (highest) stage,

with naive consciousness in the middle. Hence, under this framework conscientization can legitimately be seen as a process through which one's consciousness is *raised* from one level to the next.

An Alternative Interpretation: Conscientization and Praxis

The stages model of conscientization, particularly as exemplified in the work of Smith, is methodical, systematic and convenient. It allows us to categorize people according to their level of consciousness, and to explain their attitudes and behaviours in terms of pre-identified characteristics. Educators appear to have an important role to play in seeking ways of assisting people from one stage to the next. Once a person has reached critical consciousness, he or she has 'made it' for life: those who reach this stage of consciousness continuously display the most desirable qualities of conscious development and cannot regress to earlier stages.

This portrait may exaggerate some features of the stages model but I believe it indicates the logical direction of such an approach to conscientization. In this section I suggest that it is the very systematization of the stages theory which gives rise to difficulties: a mechanical theory of consciousness emerges, which goes against the grain of Freire's dialectical perspective on reality. Making a direct link with the notion of praxis, I argue, takes us closer to Freire's initial intentions in using the concept of conscientization.

Under the stages model, there is a categorization of individual characteristics at each stage. For magically conscious individuals in Smith's scheme, denial of problems, passive acceptance of one's circumstances, and simplistic causal explanations are common characteristics. Critically conscious individuals, by contrast, possess high self-esteem, take risks, empathize

with peers, and work dialogically with others. For each stage of consciousness, then, there are certain personal qualities - particular attitudes, modes of thinking, acting and behaving - which are distinct from the characteristics which are typical at other stages. These characteristics separate the stages from one another. In Smith's theory, there is no overlap between magical, naive and critical consciousness. In depicting conscientization as a process of consciousness raising, the stages model is also hierarchical: naive consciousness is a higher stage than magical consciousness, and critical consciousness is higher than naive consciousness. Critical consciousness represents the most (ethically) desirable mode of being, magical consciousness the least desirable.

Freire clearly intends critical consciousness to be quite separate from other levels of consciousness. He does allow, however, for a degree of overlap between magical consciousness and naive consciousness. In *Cultural Action for Freedom*, for instance, Freire cautions:

> Although the qualitative difference between the semi-intransitive consciousness and the naive transitive consciousness can be explained by the phenomenon of emergence due to structural transformations in society, there are no rigidly defined frontiers between the historical moments which produce qualitative changes in men's awareness. In many respects, the semi-intransitive consciousness remains present in the naive transitive consciousness.[251]

And in *Education: The Practice of Freedom* Freire notes with respect to naive consciousness:

> The magical aspect typical of intransitivity is partially present here also. Although men's horizons have expanded and they respond more openly to stimuli, these responses still have a magical quality.[252]

Naively conscious groups remain as dominated as those at the magical level of consciousness, with the myths perpetuated by oppressors continuing to exert a powerful influence over their lives.[253] It is only when the potential for resistance to oppression among naively conscious groups is realized and the full flowering of critical consciousness emerges that the shackles of these myths are removed.

In Smith's analysis, the blurring of boundaries between levels disappears. The divisions between magical, naive and critical individuals become tidy and clear-cut. There is little attention paid to the transition from one stage to another. Where Freire finds in naive consciousness both aspects of the former magical stage and the seeds of potential resistance to oppression, in Smith's study the two stages are presented as discrete categories with distinctive defining characteristics. For Freire, the categories 'magical consciousness' and 'naive consciousness' represent an attempt to capture the essence of general patterns of thought among contemporary and past social groups. In Smith's study, the focus is on individuals and the extent to which their attitudes and behaviours conform to pre-determined characteristics for given stages. Smith begins with the characteristics identified by Freire, making slight modifications in an effort to develop a systematic code for 'measuring' conscientization. Alschuler summarizes this approach in his foreword to Smith's study:

> We needed to define *conscientizacao*...more concretely than Freire's abstruse philosophizing. We reasoned that if we could create an operational definition of *conscientizacao*, in other words, a way of measuring it, we would have

> reached a clear understanding of the term. And, we would have a method of accurately gauging the level of consciousness in situations before and after efforts to raise consciousness.[254]

This systematization, while appealing to those disinclined to grapple with the complexities of Freirean philosophy, is fraught with problems. As I argued in chapter two, the dangers of domesticating Freire's theory and practice are ever-present in attempts to convert his pedagogy into a method or set of methods. Freire is concerned with a certain *approach* to education, which is informed by a particular understanding of human beings, knowledge and the nature of reality. The aim of accurately 'measuring' levels of consciousness betrays a behaviouristic view of human consciousness and activity, and a technocratic conception of education. The professed hope that an 'operational' definition of conscientization would provide a 'clear' understanding of conscientization is, I believe, ill-founded. This interpretation of conscientization certainly simplifies the notion (by ridding it of its contextual and theoretical 'baggage') and perhaps furnishes a certain clarity in that respect. But, given Freire's explicit rejection of behaviourism and technocratic reductionism, this is obviously not a form of lucidity he would support: in systematizing conscientization in this manner, the concept is arguably stripped of the very feature which gives it its educational significance, namely, its *dialectical* character. What, then, can be offered as an alternative interpretation?

Freire's discussion of magical consciousness and naive consciousness is largely confined to two early works, *Education: The Practice of Freedom* and *Cultural Action for Freedom*.[255] In his classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, new terms such as 'critical thinking', 'real consciousness' and 'potential consciousness' emerge, but there is little overt talk of magical and naive stages of consciousness.[256] While references to naive thinking continue throughout Freire's published works, the concept of 'naivety' appears broader in later statements than the initial

formulation in the books mentioned above. The need for a critical approach in understanding reality has remained a key theme in Freire's work throughout his publishing career. The important point, for present purposes, is that the categories of 'magical consciousness' and 'naive consciousness' were developed by Freire in order to explain a *specific* situation (namely, the conditions which prevailed in urban and rural areas in Brazil during and before the early 1960s). Freire never intended these categories to be taken as universal stages of consciousness for all people, in all social contexts and in every historical period.

It is also instructive to note that Freire has usually avoided using the term 'consciousness raising' in his books, articles, and interviews. Given the relatively small number of exceptions to this, it is possible that where the term has emerged under Freire's name it has been as a result of the translation from Portuguese to English.[257] It is undeniable that Freire regarded critical consciousness as an ethically more desirable mode of being for Brazilian adults than magical or naive consciousness. In this sense it could be said that he hoped illiterates would 'raise' their consciousnesses to a 'higher' level. But Freire avoids talk of the logical corollary to this, namely, the notion that some people are at a 'lower' level of consciousness than others.

It would certainly be accurate to say that Freire saw illiterate adults as operating at a *different* level of consciousness to that which he regarded as necessary for their liberation from conditions of oppression. Freire is careful, however, (contrary to the assertions of Berger and Bowers) not to denigrate the people with whom he was working by declaring them 'lower' beings. His point in identifying magical and naive modes of consciousness is that these forms of thought are shaped by, and serve the interests of, oppressor classes. If there is any

group at risk of being 'denigrated' by Freire it is those who deliberately promote a view of world which reproduces an oppressive social order.

Freire would argue, then, that for the specific situation with which he was dealing, the categories of 'magical', 'naive' and 'critical' forms of consciousness were appropriate. In reply to Berger, Freire would say that a 'magical' way of viewing the world *was* inferior to a critical apprehension of reality, *if* the ideal of identifying and transforming oppressive structures was accepted as a worthwhile goal under the circumstances. For Freire, this is not to impugn those who see the world in magical terms; rather, it is to signal the existence of social structures, policies and practices which discourage people from viewing the world in any other way.

Harris is quite explicit in defending the imperative to intervene in such circumstances. While Harris uses the term 'consciousness raising', which I reject, it should be noted that his discussion of Freire's work takes the form of a direct response to Berger - who employs this terminology. Harris argues that consciousness raising is desirable in situations where it can be shown that people do not (critically) understand the situation in which they live or grasp what is in their best interests.[258] As he describes it, the essential idea is that

> ...some people's consciousness has been arrested and fixed at some point, and that others, with raised consciousness of a situation, can step in and help the former to understand the situation properly. Or, to put this just a little differently in the Marxian terms we employed earlier, some people have false consciousness, which can possibly be put right by those whose consciousness is not false.[259]

For Harris, some ideas provide a better reading of reality than others. Given that the dominant ideology in capitalist societies serves to distort reality, those with higher consciousnesses are justified in attempting to provide the conditions for enlightening others with a less critical understanding of the world. Contrary to Berger's assertions, however, there is no reason why critically conscious individuals need come from the 'higher' or 'educated' classes. Quite the opposite, Harris claims: such individuals are more likely to emerge from the 'exploited and deceived' classes.[260]

Berger, Harris would say, forgets that consciousnesses are formed within relations of power where certain interests are privileged over others; indeed, '[p]art of the disguise and mystification lies...in the implanting of the consciousness that one actually does, freely and actively, define one's own situation, and that one is perfectly well aware of what the realities of the situation are'.[261] Consciousness raising does not imply the imposition of one's views on others; rather, the aim is to encourage people to examine their world in a different way.[262] Provided dialogue is employed in place of monologue, and in so far as the starting point for any programme is the lived reality of learners,

> ...consciousness raising can...be seen...as a viable alternative to education, allowing as it does for people to gain undistorted knowledge by interacting with the world in terms of their *own* interests...The distortions normally brought about by the social dimension of knowledge production should be eliminated, such that people can come to perceive their world as it really is.[263]

While Freire's initial discussion of conscientization in *Education: The Practice of Freedom* and *Cultural Action for Freedom* embraced many features of what I have called 'the stages model', subsequent (and other) work lends support to an alternative interpretation of

conscientization. In his essay 'The Process of Political Literacy', for example, Freire suggests that conscientization involves 'a constant clarification of what remains hidden within us while we move about the world'.[264] He observes:

> I know very well that implied in this critical reflection about the real world as something made and an unveiling of yet another reality, conscientization cannot ignore the transforming action that produces this unveiling and concrete realization.[265]

Conscientization, he continues, 'occurs at a process at any given moment'.[266] This suggests that Freire intends conscientization to be seen not as a progression through a finite series of steps with a fixed set of attitudes and behaviours to be achieved, but rather as an ever evolving process. Constant change in the world around us demands a continuous effort to reinterpret reality. In other writings, this idea is carried over to Freire's view of what it means to study: one must adopt a restless, curious, searching, questioning stance in reading, writing and thinking.[267] To the extent that reality is always changing, one can never know the object of one's study absolutely: one's knowledge of the world, on the Freirean view, is necessarily incomplete.[268] Freire does speak, however, of the need to strive for an ever-deeper understanding of the essence or reason behind the object of study.[269] Conscientization consists in the constant search for that which lies beneath the surface. It is as if Freire wants us to peel back layer after layer of reality, searching all the time for a better understanding of the world. For Freire, knowledge is, in one sense, always *provisional*: it is that which we understand of reality as it exists at any given moment.

This construct of conscientization stands in marked contrast to a theory based on distinct stages of consciousness. The stages model depends for its very intelligibility on the idea of

sets of characteristics which endure for some period of time: there is no consideration of the possibility that people shift, from moment to moment, from one level to another. The process of moving from one stage to the next is gradual, difficult, and (for Smith) irreversible. On the alternative interpretation presented here, conscientization occurs incessantly, provided one continues to interrogate reality. There is no end to the process: individuals probe layer after layer of understanding in their ongoing quest for knowledge.

I wish to extend this line of argument and draw a more overt connection between conscientization and praxis. Praxis, as we saw in chapter two, is the pivotal concept in Freire's ethical ideal. We humanize ourselves, Freire argues, to the extent that we engage in praxis.[270] To prevent others from pursuing praxis is to dehumanize them. The pursuit of one's humanization through praxis is, on the Freirean view, an inevitably incomplete process: the transformed reality which results from reflective action always presents a fresh set of (material or social) conditions, requiring further reflection.[271]

For Freire, praxis is the *synthesis* of reflection and action. Freire speaks of conscientization as 'the process by which human beings participate critically in a transforming act',[272] and stresses: 'there is no conscientization outside of praxis, outside the theory-practice, reflection-action unity'.[273] Conscientization, Freire notes elsewhere, 'can only be manifested in the concrete praxis (which can never be limited to the mere activity of the consciousness)'.[274] I propose, therefore, that rather than separating the two concepts out, as many people attempting to apply Freirean ideas do, conscientization and praxis ought to be seen as *necessarily* intertwined. Conscientization, I submit, is the reflective component of praxis. Hence, when one engages in praxis, one is of necessity being conscientized. Conscientization occurs in the transforming moment where critical reflection is synthesized with action.

Freire's use of the concept of conscientization must be understood in relation to the original context within which it was applied. In promoting an alternative to the stages model, it is important to stress the *political* nature of conscientization in Freire's early work.[275] The goal was critical reflection upon, and active transformation of, oppressive social structures and practices within Brazilian society. 'Conscientization', then, was tied directly to an explicit political agenda where it was assumed (a) that certain groups were oppressed, and (b) that praxis was necessary to overcome this oppression. The praxis championed by Freire was not simply reflective action designed to change *any* aspect of the world; rather, it was a specific form of praxis directed at transforming particular social conditions. Freire was up-front about the political intentions of his literacy work, observing that all education serves certain interests, and paid the price for success in encouraging adults to be critical of Brazilian reality with a stint in jail and enforced exile.

While identification of, and resistance to, political impediments to liberation through critically informed action has remained a dominant theme throughout Freire's writings, the range of areas to which this imperative applies has increased over time. In the last few years, Freire has acknowledged the significance of 'new' social movements (feminism, gay rights, ecological causes, etc.) in promoting awareness of, and contesting, various forms of discrimination and exploitation.[276] The basic ethical principles underlying Freire's theory and practice, though, have remained the same for the past twenty-five years. Freire assumes that all human beings have an ontological vocation of humanization (becoming more fully human).[277] We humanize ourselves when we engage in critical, dialogical praxis. Conscientization is the reflective moment which occurs in a liberating educational programme designed to dialogically address and transform conditions of oppression.

Conscientization, Individualism and Multiple Subjectivities

I have identified two constructs of conscientization in Freire's work: a particular version of the stages model tied to an explicit political project, and a dialectical representation of conscientization as a momentary reflective process. While the former conception is underwritten by modernist assumptions which become difficult to sustain in the contemporary postmodern climate, the latter opens up the possibility of a reformulated notion of conscientization - one which is linked to the ideal of praxis but sensitive to recent criticisms of universalist thought and subject-centred reason. In this section I critique individualist readings of critical consciousness, and reinterpret conscientization in light of the postmodernist notion of multiple subjectivities.

As noted in the first chapter, while modern thought places the unified, autonomous subject at its centre, postmodern social philosophy decentres the subject and rejects the ideal of a self-directing, self-knowing, individual agent.[278] Postmodernists underscore the multiplicity of (sometimes contradictory) subject positions assumed by human beings.[279] We become, as it were, an amalgam of many different 'selves'. There is no 'essential' or 'unencumbered' self: all individuals are constituted within discourses or sign systems.[280] In the face of these challenges to fundamental modernist principles, Smith's categorization of individuals into neatly-defined, closed 'boxes' (as 'magical', 'naive' or 'critical') seems quaint and artificial. From a postmodernist perspective, it becomes impossible to conceive of a quintessentially magical (or naive, or critical) individual. Smith's portrayal of conscientization as a *linear* progression through successive, irreversible stages is equally worrying given the postmodernist view of history as discontinuous, disorderly, and non-sequential.[281]

These concerns apply also, to a certain extent, to aspects of Freire's work - in particular, to his early writings on conscientization. As I have suggested in previous chapters, elements of Freire's work resonate with ideas advanced by postmodernists in fields such as literary criticism and cultural studies. However, the metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, and ethical principles which underpin Freire's pedagogy work are essentially modernist. The demise of subject-centred reason poses particular difficulties for Freirean theory.[282] Freire explicitly situates the knowing, praxical, dialogical human Subject (the capitalization is Freire's[283]) at the centre of his ethic, and in the notion of conscientization we find the educational manifestation *par excellence* of this ideal. Education on the Freirean view should (among other things) enable people to more deeply perceive the contradictions of social life, probing beneath the superficiality of surface appearances, while simultaneously entering the historical process as critically conscious Subjects. Becoming critically conscious affirms humans as beings who create history and culture. The critically conscious person, at first glance, appears to be the very embodiment of the self-knowing, self-directing, self-contained subject so central to the Enlightenment project. Critical consciousness implies not only an ability to transform the world, but a *self-conscious, reflective, rational* process of change.

Bowers claims that conscientization, or 'consciousness raising' (to use the term he more frequently employs), is an essentially individualist ideal. This view is reinforced by the 'stages' interpretation of conscientization represented in the work of people such as Smith and Alschuler. For Smith, conscientization is conceived as a process of individual development. Further support for the individualist account of conscientization is furnished by the wide variety of 'empowering' pedagogies which purport to be Freirean in orientation. Many of these concentrate on *self*-empowerment and draw tacitly if not directly on the same assumptions which underpin Smith's understanding of conscientization. At stake is the ideal

of an individual human being gaining greater control over his or her life through the acquisition or adoption of certain attitudes, modes of thought, and forms of behaviour.

The characterization of conscientization in individualist terms does not square with Freire's stress on the *collective, dialogical* nature of liberating reflection and action for transformation.[284] From his earliest writings, Freire has emphasized the *social* character of conscientization:

> It is sufficient to know that conscientization does not take place in abstract beings in the air but in real men and women and in social structures, to understand that it cannot remain on the level of the individual.[285]

The notion of dialogue is central to conscientization, as Freire conceives it, and must be understood in contextual, political terms. Dialogue, when viewed specifically as an aspect of the process of conscientization in Freirean adult literacy education, is not merely idle conversation, nor even simply an educative conversation in the general sense (i.e. a conversation through which learning takes place). Rather, it is explicitly directed toward identifying, analysing, criticizing, and transforming conditions of oppression. The importance of collectivity for Freire cannot be over-emphasized: without it, he warns, those who wield greatest power have a lever for fragmenting (and thus reducing the effectiveness of) struggles against dominant ideas and practices. Dialogue for conscientization implies a certain unity of purpose, originating in (what Freire sees as) the very nature of human *being* itself: the ontological vocation of humanization.

An individualist account of conscientization is (or ought to be) ontologically untenable given what it means to 'truly' *be* for Freire. For being critical, dialogical and praxical - that is to say, being a Subject in the Freirean sense - is in large part what being human entails. An

individualist reading of conscientization (and Freirean theory more broadly) is also at odds with the Freirean concept of 'knowing', suggesting an epistemological tension as well. Freire argues that no one can 'know' alone: knowing requires the presence (though this does not have to be an immediate physical presence) of an 'other' to gain its authenticity. Conscientization, apart from anything else, represents the process of coming to 'know' the world in a different way. One dimension of this process is acquiring a sense of oneself as a being among others - i.e. as a member of a class, or at least a group - such that personal difficulties come to be seen in their wider social context. This is a process of linking 'biography' with 'structure'[286] which is profoundly anti-individualist and which can only proceed authentically *through* a more collective (dialogical) approach toward education and the activities of daily life.

Those who construct a developmental individualist model of conscientization might protest here that nothing in their analysis precludes a dialogical approach. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of critically conscious individuals is that they are dialogical. Naively conscious individuals analyse and confront the world in reformist terms, often shunning relationships with their peers and disavowing their class origins.[287] Magically conscious individuals have no sense of themselves as beings *with* as well as *in* the world, and no conception of life on a more historic and social plane: their existence is defined by the struggle to survive rather than the need to flourish.[288]

Yet, in locating the process of conscientization within the discourse of individualism - and more specifically (in Smith's case) within the Kohlbergian approach to developmental psychology a significant break from Freire's overall intentions in employing the term 'conscientization' has already been made. Freire does not deny that individuals will (or ought) to change through the conscientization process, but this must be seen alongside the

wider phenomenon of *social* transformation. The 'I think' is, as we saw in chapter two, only possible (Freire believes) through a corresponding 'We think'. Thus, to speak of conscientization as a movement in patterns of thought or behaviour among individuals without tying this to a broader shift in collective consciousness is nonsensical from Freire's standpoint.

There is a deeper sense, however, in which Freire's philosophy and pedagogy might be construed as individualist. Bowers maintains that Freirean adult literacy programmes are built on an existentialist-humanist view of individualism, from which Freire derives the notion that 'rational thought should govern individual choice'.[289] Freire begins with the liberal Enlightenment construct of the individual as a 'self-forming and directing being'.[290] In essence, Bowers claims, Freire's approach to pedagogy represents (and perpetuates) a modernist, secular, rational individualism. Freire builds upon the shift from a medieval to a modern Western consciousness, which carried with it an attack on received traditions of authority.[291] One implication of Enlightenment thinking (of which Freire is a product), is an overturning of traditional forms of religious belief, such that religion is either abandoned altogether or reconfigured as a constraining influence which must be privatized and rationalized. Bowers speculates that, given the theoretical framework within which he operates, Freire is compelled to deal with religion in terms of 'the Western formula' which 'requires that it become a matter of personal belief, or, hopefully, displaced entirely by rational thought'.[292]

Bowers extends his critique of individualism to literacy. He believes that Freire accepts a conventional Western view of literacy as a means for conquering 'the forces of darkness'.[293] By implication, Freire also accedes to the 'romantic yearnings about social progress and individual uplift' which accompany this view.[294] Bowers admonishes Freire for ignoring the

'darker side' of literacy identified by writers such as Illich, who emphasizes the role literacy plays in ensuring compliance with the state. Illich maintains that the state needs a uniform system of education and literacy in a common language in order to secure control over all parts of the realm.[295] With the emergence of the modern state, the autonomy previously granted to different regions disappeared, and the flourishing of vernacular languages and local cultural traditions was stifled.[296] In Bowers' view, '[t]he self-sufficiency of vernacular groups that Illich sees as a positive form of social organization is, for Freire, a hindrance to the growth and planning of the state'.[297]

Bowers argues that literacy promotes the emergence of a mode of individual consciousness which undermines the authority of tradition as a source of knowledge.[298] He accepts - from Goody, Ong and Havelock - the thesis that 'literacy contributes to the decontextualization of knowledge (and thus to the privatization of learning and the hegemony of theory)'.[299] These points, Bowers argues, are crucial in understanding the cultural impact of literacy.[300] Bowers contends:

> Freire's basic argument that literacy empowers the individual is easy to accept as a moral, political and educational ideal, but it also introduces changes into the culture that he fails to consider. The decontextualization of knowledge not only alters how individuals think and relate to each other, but may be basic to forms of social stratification and political technologies that characterize the modernization process.[301]

In his critique of Giroux and McLaren, Bowers draws a set of distinctions between the spoken word and the printed word. He accepts as convincing arguments which suggest that print fosters a more individualist, abstract, analytical, decontextualized mode of consciousness than

oral language.[302] He reprimands Giroux for failing to take account of 'the arguments that print contributes to class distinctions, and the mode of thinking that underlies the technical form of rationality that is now viewed in some quarters as problematic'.[303] Print involves an asymmetrical power relationship between writers and readers, aids the centralization of political power in the state, and perpetuates a Cartesian masculine mode of thinking.[304] The spoken word, by contrast, 'is more contextual and fosters social relationships (community), integrates memory and all the senses into the communication process, and does not lead to reifying the word in the way print does'.[305]

According to Bowers, Freire's pedagogy privileges personal and social change over tradition and continuity. The constant problematization of daily life implied by Freire's ethic, and by critical consciousness in particular, is characteristically Western and unavoidably individualist. Freire moderates his ideal of critical reflection by 'saying that learning to think must lead to democratic and mutually responsible forms of community',[306] but he does not resolve the tension between the authority of individual judgement and 'the forms of authority that give community a sense of coherent identity and purpose'.[307] Similarly, '[e]ven though Freire stresses that critical reflection must involve a dialogical relation with others, it remains ultimately a capacity exercised by the individual-like intentionality'.[308] In Bowers' view, Freire sees critical reflection as 'the *only* source of knowledge and legitimation of moral values'.[309]

In the face of these criticisms, the appeal to dialogue and collectivity as a counter to the claim that Freire's philosophy is individualist is no longer self-evidently sufficient as a defence. For Bowers would argue that the very basis of concepts such as 'dialogue' in Freire's philosophy is Western to the core and thus *necessarily* individualist in certain senses. This idea turns on a particular construction of 'the' Western tradition and Freire's relationship to this (and place

in it). Bowers assumes that underlying or 'driving' all of Freire's theorizing is a specific way of looking at the world, a mode of consciousness which can be described as 'the Western mind set'. At the heart of this mind set are certain assumptions about rationality, control, agency, and change. Dialogue may involve discussion between two or more people - and Freire may talk of the importance of fostering collective relationships, an awareness of class, and a sense of community - but the modes of human thought and action which occur within dialogical and communal settings are still centred on the individual. Freirean dialogue, Bowers would say, presupposes the value of change, the importance of questioning tradition, the fundamental significance of human historical agency, and so on.

Freire's early writings on conscientization appear, at first glance, to lend some support to Bowers' position. While the political radicalism in Freire's ethic clearly runs counter to liberal humanist notions of individual empowerment, agency and resistance, the ideal of critical consciousness seemingly retains and perpetuates elements of this tradition. In its original formulation, the characteristics of critical consciousness resonate strongly with the liberal conception of rational autonomy. As we saw earlier in the chapter, an approach based upon (the unearthing of) 'causal principles' is to take the place of magical modes of understanding; findings should be tested and open to revision; depth is to be promoted, and preconceptions and distortions are to be avoided, in perceiving, interpreting and analysing problems; and sound argumentation should be employed.[310]

This is arguably not only compatible with liberal views of the ideal rational individual, but thoroughly enmeshed within the liberal-humanist *academic* tradition. A better concise description of the exemplary liberal intellectual than Freire provides here would be hard to find. The critically conscious Subject is invested with the responsibility, integrity, clarity, precision, and rigour expected of any good academic or scholar. The reference to practising

dialogue 'rather than polemics', if read only in relation to the other characteristics mentioned in Freire's initial description of critical consciousness, is also compatible with sound conventional academic practice. The notion of sharing and debating views in a tolerant atmosphere of intellectual openness, and of disseminating knowledge to colleagues and students through peer-reviewed journals and the like, might be viewed as nothing other than dialogue in action. In juxtaposing 'dialogue' against 'polemics' Freire gives primacy to rational argument, in-depth theorizing, and careful justification over mere rhetoric and provocation.

However, the notion of conscientization must, as I have repeatedly stressed, be understood in light of the context in which it was developed and applied. The classic passages in *Education: The Practice of Freedom* where Freire summarizes the features of critical consciousness must be read in conjunction with other sections in this text, alongside Freire's other writings, and in light of Freire's *practice* of conscientization in his adult literacy work. Critical consciousness is more than intellectual or scholarly activity. It is a mode of social being: a form of thinking, feeling, and acting forged through relationships with others, and interaction with the objective world. In Freire's philosophy, rationality cannot be separated from social practice. To be critically conscious is not merely to engage in educational conversation: it is to be committed to the liberation of the oppressed and the creation of a more fully human society.

Freire's ethic is not built on the idea of unified individuals making 'free', autonomous choices in a contextless vacuum. The ideal of conscientization, in fact, rests in large measure on assumptions which directly oppose this view. As human beings, Freire argues, we are always socially, culturally and politically 'situated'. Human consciousnesses are constituted within distinct ideological frameworks, through relationships with others and with an ever-

changing world. The very justification for conscientization depends on an acknowledgement that consciousnesses are never 'pure', but always shaped or conditioned. We are not, and can never be, 'atomistic' individuals or 'unencumbered' selves; instead, humans are always social beings who can be both 'in' and 'with' the world. Individuals, for Freire, can never completely direct their own destinies, but they can take *increasing* control over their own lives.

While *Education: The Practice of Freedom* is arguably Freire's most overtly 'liberal' text, the book does not support a position of liberal *individualism.* Freire speaks in the book of thinking, acting and knowing as *social* events.[311] Freire is adamant that we cannot think, speak, read, write, learn, or *be* alone. To *be human* is to be a social being. Humans are beings of relationships: beings whose very existence cannot be comprehended without reference to others. Freire explicitly rejects the Cartesian notion of self-identical, self-knowing 'I' and replaces it with the dialogical, socially constituted 'we'. Clearly, then, Freire cannot embrace a 'pure', 'atomistic' notion of individual rational autonomy. Bowers would concede this, but argue that in placing the reflective Subject at the centre of his ethic, Freire cannot avoid fostering a certain form of individualism. The critical reflection in Freirean dialogue, Bowers would argue, presupposes an 'individual-like intentionality'.[312]

This, I believe, is a distortion of the Freirean ideal. It is true that Freire conceives of consciousness - and, by implication, reflection - as 'intentionality toward the world', but this is not an 'individual-like' intentionality. When we turn to world to examine it, or attempt to step back from our immediate surroundings to more clearly perceive the nature of our problems, we do so with a reflective intentionality that is already, and necessarily, socially formed. Consciousnesses are created in a social world, through interaction with that world. We can strive to know or understand ourselves in relation to the world, but we cannot

autonomously constitute ourselves as knowers. As McLaren and Hammer argue, and this is consistent with Freire's position, human beings are *self-conscious* rather than *self-constituting*.[313] While we do not individuate our own consciousnesses, we can nevertheless become *sufficiently* self-conscious to 'recognize our own constitution outside of the exigencies of our own volition'.[314] Crucially, it is our self-consciousness of the constitution of selves which *makes liberation possible*.[315]

An important element of conscientization is precisely this: the development of a deeper (self-conscious) understanding of the ways in which we are *not* merely isolated, self-constituting individuals. Dialogue, the means through which this growing realization emerges, can never be simply a collection of individual consciousnesses. Consciousnesses are socially constituted before dialogue even begins and they are *re*constituted through purposeful communication with others. The ideas generated through dialogue are more than the sum of individual contributions: they are the *synthesis* of a dialogical relation, mediated by an object of study, between two or more partially self-conscious Subjects seeking to know and to transform the world.

Bowers' arguments about Freire's allegedly individualist view of *literacy* are problematic on a number of levels, most of which have been addressed earlier. The identification of clear-cut consequences in discussing spoken and print-based forms of communication is questionable on theoretical grounds and empirically refutable. Bowers' reference to 'Freire's basic argument that literacy empowers the individual'[316] betrays a misreading of Freire. Freire does not argue that literacy always or necessarily 'empowers' the individual; rather, he maintains that certain *forms* of reading and writing may be humanizing. Freire recognizes that literacy may assume 'sinister' or dehumanizing forms, and would concur with Illich that reading and writing can serve to reinforce state control and surveillance. Freire generally avoids the term

'empowerment' and he certainly does not talk about empowering the *individual*. Humanizing forms of literacy are exactly those which, through dialogue and collective struggle, go beyond mere individual betterment.

Freire does not use the language of discourse analysis, but his theory of conscientization - *when viewed in relation to his philosophy as a whole* - is compatible in many respects with insights from work in this area. All of us, Freire wants to say, operate within and through multiple discourses. (The term 'discourse' here is used in the broadest sense to mean 'a way of being in the world'.) Conscientization is concerned with expanding the range of discourses within which people might operate. This is not merely a shift in 'sign systems', but a change in the concrete practices of everyday life. There is thus a material as well as 'intellectual' basis to conscientization. Being critically conscious implies a continuous process of transformation. People who undergo conscientization are constantly being re-constituted, as they critically reflect upon reality, act, change both themselves and the world around them, reflect again on the new reality which results from transformation, carry out further actions as necessary, and so on.

The conscientized Freirean Subject is therefore a subject 'on the move', a being who both shapes reality and is shaped by it. The subject remains the 'home of consciousness'[317] in Freirean theory, though the consciousness which 'resides' in a given subject is never stable. The subject for Freire is neither completely self-constituting and self-directing nor a totally decentred network of crisscrossing desires.[318] The critically conscious Subject is still regarded as an agent of social change: Freire retains the view that people can resist oppressive structures, ideas and practices - consciously, reflectively and deliberately. Such resistance, though, which is at the heart of conscientization, always takes place within ideological and political limits, must be forged dialogically with others, and is necessarily incomplete. The

Freirean conception of agency - especially as represented in the notion of conscientization - thus falls between the liberal individualist view and a fully developed postmodern position.

The postmodernist notion of multiple subjectivities suggests a reorientation in thinking about conscientization. Individuals can certainly no longer be neatly categorized into 'personality types', nor adequately described as being at a (single) particular level of consciousness. For, on the postmodernist view of subjectivity, we live in and through a plethora of different discourses. Freire would acknowledge that these discourses are frequently contradictory. If the original construct of conscientization as a process of moving from a state of either 'magical' or 'naive' consciousness toward 'critical' consciousness is reconsidered, a postmodernist perspective implies constant movement between the three levels. The assumption that one cannot display characteristics of more than one stage of consciousness in any given period becomes highly questionable.

Taking Freire's initial list of characteristics at each stage as a starting point, imagine the case of a Brazilian peasant supposedly at a magical level of consciousness. Under a strict stages model (such as Smith's), such an individual would not be expected to display any of the characteristics typical of critical consciousness. 'Depth in the interpretation of problems', 'the testing of one's "findings"', 'openness to revision', and the avoidance of distortion in the perception of problems are all features of critical consciousness.[319] While peasants might not display these characteristics with respect to their understanding and evaluation of political problems, it is surely possible that such qualities would be in evidence in their management of land and crops. Making the most of the land involves balancing a complex range of factors pertaining to soil, plants, the weather, irrigation, crop rotation, and so on. The depth in interpretation of the various elements necessary for effective crop production is likely to have been considerable; many peasants would have 'tested' their 'findings' in employing

different methods of using the soil from year to year; and revision of planting or harvesting procedures in light of experience would have been almost essential.

The notion of occupying multiple stage positions by displaying characteristics from several levels seems not only possible, but probable, given a moment's reflection on everyday experiences. Conceivably, a person might be classed as 'magical', 'naive' *and* 'critical', depending on the sphere of his or her life under examination. In other words, people might display the qualities associated with critical consciousness within one discursive setting, while acting in typically 'magical' or 'naive' ways in other situations. I may develop a sophisticated, critical understanding of party politics, yet at the same time explain events in my family life in terms of fate or the workings of some higher power. Or, I may exhibit all the qualities of critical consciousness in my professional life (e.g., as a teacher), yet display a naive understanding of environmental issues. This suggests, at the very least, that consciousnesses cannot be divided up into the neat packages implied by Smith's analysis.

The whole 'stages' approach to conscientization, though, is problematic from a postmodernist point of view. People cannot be adequately understood in terms of a finite number of levels of consciousness, each with certain defining characteristics. There are an *infinite* number of levels at which human beings live, if we think of 'levels' here as 'discursive moments'. At any given moment, a person thinks, acts, feels, wants, etc. in particular ways, within a discursive framework which constructs limits and possibilities for being and doing. Almost simultaneously, however, a specific orientation toward the world can be transformed as people shift between different moments or 'sub-discourses' within the larger discursive framework. In a classroom dialogue on, say, 'racism', then, students might move virtually instantaneously from one understanding of, or attitude toward, racism to another as questions are raised in discussion (where this discussion constitutes one element of the larger

discourse of classroom practice in course X, Y or Z). Within the discussion itself, of course, there are a multiplicity of sub-discourses (e.g. this form of interaction between these students as opposed to that form of interaction between other students). We are thus constantly 'negotiating' our way in the world within what might be called a 'sea of shifting signs'. Our consciousnesses of reality are continuously being altered as we move between and within different discourses.

There are, in short, no fixed stages of consciousness with clear-cut distinguishing characteristics at each level. People experience, engage and construct social reality in different ways within different discourses and social settings. We do not remain permanently conscientized, or 'locked in' to a particular way of thinking; conscientization takes place as a momentary process. A person is likely to display a greater propensity toward critical reflection and action within some discursive situations than others, but this may change with time and shifting circumstances. A rethinking of the notion of 'moments' is helpful in conceptualizing this process.

Conscientization can be seen as the moment of knowing which occurs when reflection is dialogically synthesized with action. The term 'moment' here does not denote a 'unit' or 'measure' of time (e.g. 'a fraction of a second'), but rather a way of speaking about periods, or aspects, or parts of (human) history. A 'moment', then, can be a virtually instantaneous 'knowing': in a structured, purposeful, rigorous dialogical educative setting, there might be (indeed, from a Freirean perspective, one would *expect* there to be) multiple 'moments' of this kind. Additionally, however, a 'moment' can also be a period in history: Lankshear, for example, talks of 'the moment of the Nicaraguan Revolution'.[320] In this sense, the term 'moment' implies not simply an interval of time (e.g. 1979-1990 in the Nicaraguan case), but also a whole web of human experiences which might collectively be captured as a distinctive

aspect in the history of a group or nation. The Nicaraguan revolution was characterized by a particular set of political structures, social relations, educational arrangements, health and welfare provisions, and so on. These were accompanied by a shift among many Nicaraguans in their orientation to the world (toward what might be described as a mode of 'revolutionary consciousness'). These features of Nicaraguan history distinguished the 'moment' of the revolution from earlier and subsequent moments under the Somoza and Chamorro regimes. As such, the term 'moment' signals 'a way of being in the world' at a particular time - whether this is virtually instantaneous, for a few hours or days, or many years in duration.

Given this framework, conscientization might conceivably take place at a number of different 'levels' (no connection with the term 'levels' in the stages model should be made here) or 'layers'. Conscientization can occur as a series of reflective moments within a structured dialogical setting; or, it can be seen as a gradual process of learning, of *knowing*, across an entire lifespan. Between these two extremes, there will be, or could be, a multiplicity of interpenetrating intermediate layers. These levels can not only overlap (such that 'smaller' moments of conscientization are taking place within 'larger' moments), but also contain within them contradictory elements which inhibit conscientization. Within a 'larger' moment of conscientization, then, there can be periods when one is, for example, seeing the world in distinctly passive or non-dialogical or unreflective ways. But, over the course of the larger moment, these can be seen to not only have not compromised, but actually enhanced, the wider process of conscientization.

One point seems clear in re-examining conscientization from a postmodernist point of view: we operate not at one level of consciousness (with an attendant set of defining behavioural and attitudinal characteristics), but at multiple, ever-moving, sometimes contradictory, 'levels'. If postmodernist arguments are accepted as valid, a splintering of conscientization into

myriad moments of reflective action, and a fracturing of the 'individual' into multiple subjectivities, appears inevitable. The focus is no longer on a single, 'self-contained', self-knowing human subject directing his or her life in an increasingly critical fashion. If there is no essential self, then we can only talk of a person as he or she 'is' at any given moment engaging in reflective action. Through conscientization, a person shifts his or her 'position' in the world, though not in the ordered, sequential, behaviourist fashion implied by the stages model.

If the original impetus for, and purpose of, conscientization is to be retained, particular emphasis must be placed on conscientization as one moment - or a series of moments - in the overall process of dialogically transforming conditions of oppression. To denude conscientization of its praxical, dialogical and *political* character is to destroy the very purpose for which the term was initially employed. The postmodern turn in social theory (and in ethics and education especially) does not, to my way of thinking, rule out the possibility of *attempting* to understand - and act within and upon - the world in ever more critical ways. Striving to be critical, for Freire, implies probing beneath surface appearances, continuously questioning that which is often taken for granted, attempting to think holistically, and constantly relating 'text' to 'context' and 'theory' to 'practice'. Critical consciousness emerges in the synthesis of critical reflection with action.

From a postmodernist point of view, however, any effort to act or think in a particular way must be recognized as partial, incomplete, and possibly contradictory. Indeed, an important dimension of critically conscious activity is the process of reflecting on the embeddedness of one's own views within multiple discourses. This demands an exhaustive attempt to examine processes of discursive construction and the historical formation of subjectivities - especially those associated with modes of oppression and liberation. Critical theoretical analysis,

political commitment, and social action may all be inevitably *provisional* in postmodern times, but this does not make them any less necessary. While nearly three decades have passed since Freire published his first thoughts on conscientization, there is potentially much that might be gained in rethinking the concept as an educational ideal and in applying it as a powerful force for social change.

Notes

1. Torres, C.A. and Freire, P. 'Twenty Years After *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: Paulo Freire in Conversation with Carlos Alberto Torres', in McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (eds.) *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.100.

2. Cover notes on McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993a.

3. West, C. 'Preface', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.xiii.

4. Torres and Freire, *loc. cit.*

5. See, for example, Lloyd, A.S. 'Freire, Conscientization, and Adult Education', *Adult Education*, vol.23, no.1, 1972; Sanders, T.G. 'The Paulo Freire Method: Literacy Training and Conscientizacion', in La Belle, T.J. (ed.) *Education and Development: Latin America and the Caribbean*, Los Angeles, Latin American Center, 1972; Plunkett, H.D. 'Modernization Reappraised: The Kentucky Mountains Revisited and Confrontational Politics Reassessed', *Comparative Education Review*, vol.22, no.1, 1978; Gleeson, D. '"Theory and Practice" in the Sociology of Paulo Freire', *Universities Quarterly*, vol.28, no.3, 1974; Snook, I. 'The Concept of Conscientisation in Paulo Freire's Philosophy of Education', paper presented at the annual conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, Auckland, 1976; Elias, J.L. 'Social Learning and Paulo Freire', *The Journal of Educational Thought*, vol.8, no.1, 1974; Shor, I. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987a; O'Hara, M. 'Person-Centered Approach as Conscientizacao: The Works of Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol.29, no.1, 1989; Kilian, A. 'Conscientisation: An Empowering, Nonformal Education Approach for Community Health Workers', *Community Development Journal*, vol.23, no.2, 1988; Burstow, B. 'Conscientization: A New Direction for Ex-Inmate Education', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.8, no.1, 1989.

6. Freire, P. 'Conscientisation', *The Month*, May 1974a, p.575.

7. *Ibid.*

8. See Freire, P. *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972b, pp.57-71, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, London, Writers and Readers, 1976a, pp.17-20.

9. Freire (1972b), *Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

10. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.17.

11. Freire, P. 'Conscientizing as a Way of Liberating', *LADOC*, April 1972e, p.6.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Compare, *Ibid.*

14. Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, p.63.

15. *Ibid.*, pp.63-68.

16. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.18.

17. *Ibid.*

18. See Freire, P. and Macedo, D. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, pp.106-107.

19. Berger, P. *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change*, New York, Basic Books, 1974, chapter four.

20. *Ibid.*, p.113.

21. See *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p.116.

23. *Ibid.*, p.118.

24. *Ibid.*, p.116.

25. *Ibid.*, p.117.

26. *Ibid.*, p.118.

27. Walker, J. 'The End of Dialogue: Paulo Freire on Politics and Education', in Mackie, R. (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London, Pluto Press, 1980, p.150.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, p.134.

30. *Ibid.*, p.137.

31. *Ibid.*, p.140.

32. See *Ibid.*, p.146.

33. Bowers, C.A. 'Linguistic Roots of Cultural Invasion in Paulo Freire's Pedagogy', *Teachers College Record*, vol.84, no.4, 1983.

34. *Ibid.*, p.937.

35. Bowers, C.A. Review of Freire, P. *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, Massachusetts, Bergin and Garvey, 1985, *Educational Studies*, vol.17, no.1, 1986, p.150.

36. Bowers (1983), *op. cit.*, p.938.

37. See, for example, *Ibid.*, p.941; Bowers (1986), *op. cit.*, pp.148, 151; Bowers, C.A. 'The Problem of Individualism and Community in Neo-Marxist Educational Thought',

Teachers College Record, vol.85, no.3, 1984, pp.387-388.

38. Bowers (1986), *Ibid.*, p.149.

39. Bowers (1983), *op. cit.*, pp.939-40.

40. *Ibid.*, p.941.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, p.942.

43. *Ibid.*, p.950.

44. Consider, for instance, Gee's critique of Freire's approach to adult education in Sao Tome and Principe: Gee, J.P. 'The Legacies of Literacy: From Plato to Freire Through Harvey Graff', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988, pp.207-208.

45. See Ashton-Warner, S. *Teacher*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966; Kozol, J. 'A New Look at the Literacy Campaign in Cuba', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.48, no.3, 1978; Morales, A.P. 'The Literacy Campaign in Cuba', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981.

46. I have deliberately used the term 'nondialogical' here in place of the more pejorative term 'antidialogical'. This is to indicate that Freire, in my view, did not intentionally set out to destroy dialogue, or to dominate those with whom he was working. Freire regards antidialogue as typical of oppressor groups. See Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972a, chapter four. In pointing to the nondialogical character of aspects of Freire's pedagogy, I am alluding to something which is inherent in the Freirean approach, but for good (i.e. educationally justifiable) reasons.

47. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.52.

48. *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

49. *Ibid.*

50. See, for example, Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.61, 65, (1976), *Ibid.*, p.46; Freire, P. and Shor, I. *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, London, MacMillan, 1987, pp.102, 109, 171-172.

51. See, for instance, Freire, P. *The Politics of Education*, London, MacMillan, 1985, pp.155-157; Freire and Shor, *Ibid.*, pp.135-137; Horton, M. and Freire, P. *We Make the Road By Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, eds. B. Bell, J. Gaventa and J. Peters, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990, pp.21-22, 31-32.

52. Compare, Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, pp.53-54.

53. Torres and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.102.

54. McLaren, P. 'Postmodernism and the Death of Politics: A Brazilian Reprieve', *Educational Theory*, vol.36, no.4, 1986, p.396.

55. Bowers (1983), *op. cit.*, p.942.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*, p.935.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, p.937.

63. *Ibid.*, p.939.

64. *Ibid.*, p.938.

65. *Ibid.*, p.940.

66. *Ibid.*, p.947.

67. *Ibid.*, p.949.

68. *Ibid.*, p.951.

69. *Ibid.*, p.940, emphasis mine.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, p.944.

72. *Ibid.*, p.936, emphasis mine.

73. *Ibid.*, p.943.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*, p.942.

76. *Ibid.*, p.941.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*, p.936.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*, p.941, emphasis mine.

82. *Ibid.*, p.943-944.

83. *Ibid.*, p.947, emphasis mine.

84. See, for example, *ibid.*, p.935.

85. *Ibid.*, p.949, emphasis mine.

86. *Ibid.*, p.943.

87. *Ibid.*, p.944.

88. Bowers (1986), *op. cit.*, p.150.

89. Freire (1976a), *op. cit.*, p.18, emphasis mine.

90. Bowers (1986), *loc. cit.*

91. Freire, P. *Pedagogy of Hope*, New York, Continuum, 1994.

92. Bowers (1986), *loc. cit.*

93. Freire (1976a), *loc. cit.*

94. In *Education: The Practice of Freedom* Freire cites a number of statements from participants at various stages of the programme, but these hardly provide a definitive answer to the questions implied here. See *ibid.*, pp.50-55.

95. Bowers (1983), *op. cit.*, p.942.

96. *Ibid.*, p.942.

97. *Ibid.*, p.940.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*, p.940.

100. *Ibid.*

101. *Ibid.*, p.941.

102. *Ibid.*, p.940.

103. Freire, P. and Faundez, A. *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1989, p.34.

104. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.138.

105. Compare Taylor, P.V. *The Texts of Paulo Freire*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993, on the changes between 1960 and 1970.

106. Freire (1972e), *loc. cit.*

107. From the 1970 Brazilian census, cited Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.18.

108. Comments from Josue de Castro, cited *ibid.*, p.16.

109. From Tad Szulc, cited *ibid.*, p.17.

110. Freire (1972b), *op. cit.*, p.62.

111. *Ibid.*, p.61.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*, p.62.

115. *Ibid.*

116. Bowers (1983), *op. cit.*, p.938.

117. *Ibid.*, p.943.

118. *Ibid.*, p.952.

119. *Ibid.*, p.943.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*, p.938.

122. See Bowers, C.A. 'Some Questions About the Anachronistic Elements in the Giroux-McLaren Theory of Critical Pedagogy', *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol.21, no.2, 1991a. This article was followed by a response from Peter McLaren, and a rejoinder by Bowers: McLaren, P. 'The Emptiness of Nothingness: Criticism as Imperial Anti-Politics', *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol.21, no.4, 1991a; Bowers, C.A. 'Critical Pedagogy and the "Arch of Social Dreaming": A Response to the Criticisms of Peter McLaren', *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol.21, no.4, 1991b.

123. Bowers (1991a), *ibid.*, p.246.

124. *Ibid.*

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*, p.247.

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.*, p.250.

129. *Ibid.*

130. *Ibid.*, p.251.

131. *Ibid.*

132. *Ibid.*

133. See McLaren (1991a), *op. cit.*

134. *Ibid.*, p.461.

135. *Ibid.*, p.462.

136. See *ibid.*, pp.463-364.

137. *Ibid.*, p.465.

138. *Ibid.*, p.466.

139. *Ibid.*, p.468.

140. *Ibid.*, p.470.

141. *Ibid.*

142. *Ibid.*, pp.475-476.

143. Bowers (1991b), *op. cit.*, p.481.

144. See *ibid.*, p.481.

145. *Ibid.*, p.482.

146. *Ibid.*

147. *Ibid.*, p.483.

148. Bowers (1991b), *op. cit.*, p.483.

149. Cf. Nazi Germany and the social cohesion among Hitler Youth. The Ku Klux Klan, likewise, are a cohesive group whose actions are clearly oppressive.

150. Berger, *op. cit.*, p.112.

151. Some of the material in this section has been published in Roberts, P. 'Education, Literacy and Political Commitment in Postmodern Times', *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies*, vol.17, no.1, 1995b.

152. Gee, J.P. 'Postmodernism and Literacies', in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993.

153. *Ibid.*, p.271.

154. *Ibid.*, p.272.

155. *Ibid.*, p.275.

156. *Ibid.*, p.276.

157. *Ibid.*

158. *Ibid.*, p.281.

159. *Ibid.*

160. *Ibid.*, p.282.

161. *Ibid.*, p.288.

162. *Ibid.*, p.289.

163. *Ibid.*, pp.290-291.

164. *Ibid.*, p.291.

165. *Ibid.*, p.292.

166. *Ibid.*, p.293.

167. *Ibid.*

168. *Ibid.*

169. *Ibid.*

170. See Mill, J.S. 'On Liberty', in *Utilitarianism*, ed. M. Warnock, London, Collins, 1962.

171. See Gee, *op. cit.*, p.292.

172. See *ibid.*

173. *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

174. See Harris, K. *Education and Knowledge*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

175. Compare, McLaren, P. 'Critical Pedagogy, Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Risk and Resistance: A Response to Kelly and Portelli', *Journal of Education*, vol.173, no.3, 1991c, p.44.

176. Ellsworth, E. 'Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.59, no.3, 1989, p.304.

177. *Ibid.*, p.298.

178. *Ibid.*, p.309.

179. *Ibid.*, p.308.

180. *Ibid.*, p.312.

181. *Ibid.*, p.316.

182. *Ibid.*

183. *Ibid.*, pp.319-320.

184. On Marx's view of class, for example, all working-class people are necessarily oppressed given the part they play in the production process. A worker, for Marx, is someone who does not own the means of production but is forced to sell his or her labour power to a capitalist in exchange for a wage. Irrespective of the particulars of given industrial situations, all people in the class of 'workers' are fundamentally exploited or oppressed in the same way under the capitalist mode of production. See Marx, K. *Capital*, vol.1, ed. E. Mandel, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976.

185. Cited Ellsworth, *op. cit.*, p.324.

186. *Ibid.*

187. Giroux, H.A. 'Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.3, 1988c, p.177.

188. See Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*, especially chapter one.

189. Weiler, K. 'Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.61, no.4, 1991, p.453.

190. *Ibid.*, p.450.

191. *Ibid.*, p.453.

192. *Ibid.*

193. *Ibid.*, p.469.

194. *Ibid.*, p.470.

195. *Ibid.*

196. *Ibid.*

197. Freire, P. and Macedo, D. 'A Dialogue with Paulo Freire', in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.170.

198. *Ibid.*, p.173.

199. Jones, A. 'Is Madonna a Feminist Folk-Hero? Is Ruth Richardson a Woman?: Postmodern Feminism and Dilemmas of Difference', *Sites*, no.23, 1991, p.90.

200. *Ibid.*

201. *Ibid.*

202. See McLaren, P. 'Critical Pedagogy: Constructing an Arch of Social Dreaming and a Doorway to Hope', *Journal of Education*, vol.173, no.1, 1991b, pp.20-21.

203. Compare, Ellsworth, *op. cit.*, p.307.

204. See further, McLaren, P. 'Schooling the Postmodern Body: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Enfleshment', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.3, 1988b, p.72.

205. Freire and Macedo, *op. cit.*, p.174.

206. *Ibid.*

207. Freire's position on these issues may, however, be shifting. Compare, Freire, P. 'Foreword' in McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993a. See also, Roberts, P. Review of McLaren, P. and Leonard, P. (eds.) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, *Australian Journal of Education*, vol.39, no.1, 1995a.

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281. Cf. Benhabib, S. 'Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance', *Praxis International*, vol.11, no.2, 1991.

282. For excellent overviews of the issues at stake in the debate over the demise subject-centred philosophy, see Peters and Marshall (1993), *op. cit.*; and Heller, A. 'Death of the Subject', *Thesis Eleven*, no.25, 1990, pp.22-38.

283. Freire's capitalization of the term 'subject' serves as more than a device for emphasis in written expression: it indicates the pivotal importance of the concept in his philosophy. This linguistic nuance has problems of its own, though these will not be investigated in the present analysis. Cf. Martin Nicolaus's discussion of Hegel in his 'Foreword' to Marx, K. *The Grundrisse*, trans. M. Nicolaus, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973, p.27.

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286. These terms are taken from Mills, C. Wright *The Sociological Imagination*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

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CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS, CANONS AND CORE CURRICULA

The previous chapter defended Freire's pedagogical interventionism and advanced a reworked notion of conscientization in light of postmodern ideas on multiple subjectivities. Educational programmes, it was argued, are *necessarily* interventionist. I attempted to demonstrate that Freire's practice of conscientization in his adult literacy work was not merely a justifiable, but demonstrably the *best*, pedagogical approach in the situations with which he was dealing. Rejecting a stages theory of 'consciousness raising' and an individualist interpretation of critical consciousness, I contended that conscientization can be conceived as the moment of knowing which occurs when reflection is dialogically synthesized with action. Conscientization, when viewed over the course of a lifetime, expands the 'discursive universe' within which people operate, and is always a social process.

Earlier chapters sketched major themes in the literature on literacy studies, explored Freire's ideas on reading and writing, and considered questions pertaining to the definition, nature and consequences of literacy. I argued for a contextual, holistic, critical reading of Freire, and investigated the Freirean notion of reading and writing the word and the world. A pluralist approach to the problem of defining literacy was supported, and popular assumptions about the value of literacy were problematized. *Literacies*, this thesis has suggested, are diverse, many and social: assessing the value or worth of a given literacy demands a substantive ethical position.

This chapter draws several threads from preceding chapters together in evaluating recent debates over political correctness, core curricula and canons in higher education. The first section considers the concept of 'political correctness' from a Freirean point of view. After

brief comments on the different positions assumed by the Right and the Left in battles over political correctness, an apparent tension in Freire's writings between the ideal of critical consciousness and the notion of 'thinking correctly' is addressed. I argue that, for Freire, 'correct' thinking is equivalent to 'critical' thinking, and is thus compatible with (rather than antithetical to) the ideal of conscientization. 'Correct thinking', however, cannot be equated with 'political correctness'. Indeed, it can be argued that the two are fundamentally opposed, and that the former provides an important means for identifying, analysing and combatting the latter. This assertion is contingent, however, on a particular definition of political correctness.

An identification of the range of areas to which the label 'political correctness' has been applied reveals a confusingly multifaceted term. I concentrate on the key characteristics of intolerance, conformity, the stifling of debate, and the impeding of criticism. Political correctness can be seen as the promotion of one position - where a 'position' may be an interpretation of a text, or a reading of social reality, or a notion of the human ideal - as the *only* (possible or legitimate or acceptable) view, when alternatives clearly exist. To be politically correct is not to argue strongly for one's own view in the belief that it is the best possible ethical or political position to take; rather, it is to force or encourage others to accept this position *without question*. While this becomes most overt when students are overtly compelled or coerced to accept a single position, or where critical questioning is categorically banned, a charge of 'political correctness' would also be valid if a teacher failed to alert students to a range of perspectives on a given text, theme, or issue, when he or she was fully aware of the existence of such alternatives.

In the second part of the chapter I turn to recent controversies over 'Great Books' and the university curriculum. I draw a distinction between two broad 'camps' in the war over the

canon: traditionalists and reformists. A prime representative of the former position is Allan Bloom, whose book, *The Closing of the American Mind* became a national bestseller in the United States and a focal point for heated debate in universities. Bloom's proposal for a return to a traditional Great Books programme is coupled with his wide-ranging critique of North American cultural life. A summary of Bloom's ideas provides a useful introduction to wider debates over the place of the canon in contemporary institutions of higher education. Following a brief discussion of the history of 'canons' and 'Western Civilization' courses, I consider two approaches to the question 'What books ought students to read?'. One view holds that books should be chosen on the basis of their intrinsic literary or philosophical 'greatness'; the other assumes that author's gender or ethnicity should be a prime factor in the selection process. The first position is articulated by Bloom, but supported - with minor variations - by almost every traditionalist. The second approach is one among several 'reformist' possibilities. I argue that both positions are problematic, and, in the third section, offer an alternative approach based upon the Freirean ideal of conscientization.

Given the objective (in any programme of conscientizing education) of expanding the discursive universe within which people reflectively, dialogically and actively participate, and building on the view of political correctness advanced in the first section, the final part of the thesis argues for a curriculum which promotes and enhances breadth of (political and ethical) perspective through Freirean critical reading. Seeking to avoid both the restrictive elitism of Bloom's version of liberal education and the dangers of political manipulation and conformism inherent in certain radical alternatives, I advocate a programme - a distinct form of 'literacizing' - in which a small number of texts are critically and dialogically engaged from a multiplicity of different perspectives. I argue for a dynamic link between 'word' and 'world', and reinforce Freire's emphasis on the importance of tolerance, questioning, and

political difference in higher education. Freirean critical literacy is seen as both the means through which these goals are pursued and a fundamental prerequisite for further liberating study within and beyond the university.

Freire and Political Correctness

My argument in this section is at once straightforward and complex. Freire, I want to suggest, would oppose educational policies and practices based on politically correct assumptions. Given his espousal of critical literacy and his practice of conscientization, political correctness, it seems to me, is in tension with everything Freire stands for. To be a 'politically correct Freirean', then, would be a contradiction in terms. The difficulty in asserting this, however, arises when one attempts to define 'political correctness'. For, despite its widespread use and application in diverse contexts, the term remains remarkably ambiguous.[1] This imprecision is significant for two reasons. First, it has allowed the label 'political correctness' to become a multi-purpose bludgeon for criticizing an enormous variety of new developments in education and other spheres of the social world.[2] Second, such ambiguity obscures the potential value of the term as a distinct concept in educational discourse. My analysis suggests that if the concept of political correctness is to have educational force, its pejorative connotation must be retained. Once conditions for its use have been clarified, useful comparisons can be drawn between political correctness and pedagogical authoritarianism. The contrasts between politically correct approaches and the Freirean ideal of liberating, conscientizing education likewise become readily apparent.

There is a further difficulty to be addressed in arguing that Freire would be opposed to 'political correctness'. In the programme of adult education initiated in Sao Tome and Principe in the 1970s, with which Freire was closely involved, the phrase 'thinking correctly'

is repeatedly used./ Freire's analysis of the programme provides tacit support for the phrase, and his occasional references to 'correct' thinking elsewhere make this more explicit. I argue, however, that a distinction must be drawn between Freire's use of the *word* 'correct' and the substantive practices to which to this word refers. 'Correct' thinking, I suggest, can be seen as synonymous with 'critical' thinking for Freire, and thus as one element of the process of conscientization. When interpreted in this way, thinking correctly or critically becomes a means for *opposing* rather than endorsing policies premised on politically correct assumptions.

The P.C. Phenomenon

If we are to believe popular media stories, 'political correctness' is everywhere. Schools, teacher training institutions, universities, government departments, political organizations, and workplaces have all supposedly been infected, to varying degrees, by this insidious 'disease'. While the term has been employed by people from all walks of life, and from all points on the political spectrum, it has been critics on the Right who have brought 'political correctness' most overtly into the public arena. It is the Right, also, who have gained the most from the 'P.C. phenomenon'. A number of Left intellectuals have argued that protests from the Right against political correctness have sometimes - perhaps often, even - been barely concealed attempts to counter any position that does not mesh with a conservative view of the world. The Right has effectively captured the discursive terrain of 'political correctness' in recent years, shifting the conceptual ground of the term. Where in the past the term was used (by activists and scholars on the Left) with irony, humour or approval, 'political correctness' in the contemporary social world indicates something to be either ridiculed or condemned.

This creation of an overwhelmingly negative view of 'political correctness', as Messer-Davidow effectively demonstrates, is far from accidental.[3] Messer-Davidow's analysis suggests that elements of the attack on higher education have been carefully and deliberately orchestrated by conservatives. Those mounting the assault on political correctness have been supported by a number of generously funded and politically powerful right-wing organizations. Among other examples, the formation of the project of 'cultural conservatism' by Paul Weyrich (president of the Free Congress Foundation) and colleagues, and the campaign by the Madison Center for Educational Affairs to unsettle supposedly 'liberal' developments on university campuses, are two of the more obvious manifestations of this process.[4]

Some of the attacks on political correctness by conservatives rest on embarrassingly shallow understandings of the theoretical positions they criticize.[5] This does not mean, however, that all allegations of political correctness are without foundation. Certainly many claims by the Right have been clouded by conceptual ambiguity and poorly argued theoretical positions. Nevertheless, concerns over political correctness cannot simply be dismissed as (merely) right-wing propaganda.[6] Recognizing the enormous advantages conservatives enjoy in attaining resources and controlling the media should not, as McLaren points out, 'obscure the fact that the left has, to some extent, been guilty of committing the same crimes against debate and rational deliberation over social goals as the right'.[7]

'Political correctness' has taken both reactionary and dogmatic forms, some of which are tragic in their educational consequences (e.g. where dissenting views have been forbidden), others - the designation of those who are short in stature as 'vertically challenged', for instance - merely farcical.[8] Both the Left and the Right have engaged in politically correct practices.[9] If the Left have borne the brunt of public scorn for their crimes in this regard in

recent times, the Right, ironically, have often revealed their own politically correct assumptions in promoting this ridicule. This point is effectively captured by Dickstein, who writes:

> Political correctness is not exclusively a phenomenon of the would-be left. Nothing could be more PC than the rigid ideological test applied during the Reagan and Bush years to all prospective appointments to the Supreme Court, the Justice Department, and dozens of once-autonomous federal agencies. If neoconservatives deserve credit for having pointed up the follies of academe in the 1980s, they did so without shading or discrimination, mixing harmless incidents, serious abuses, and half-understood theories to paint a picture of apocalyptic decline. Meanwhile, they turned a blind eye on the administration's shameful retreat on civil rights and its crude manipulation of social symbols - the flag, the fetus, the AIDS epidemic, Willie Horton - to demonize blacks, gays, welfare mothers, and liberals in general...Conformity and intolerance have plagued both sides in the culture wars.[10]

A variation on this line of argument is provided by Melanie Phillips, who, in commenting on the British political scene, draws a parallel between the Right and Left with regard to intolerance and conformism.[11] Phillips argues that the emergence of political correctness on the Left coincides with 'the arrival of a particularly authoritarian and long-lasting Conservative government'.[12] In casting aside all who did not agree with her view of the world, Margaret Thatcher effectively excluded oppositional groups from active participation in public life. The result, Phillips contends, was that 'the left were forced to exercise their power in the one area still open to them - the private sphere of personal behaviour'.[13] What ensued was a 'remarkable mirror image of political conformity'.[14] The Conservatives, while

promoting an ideology of freedom through market individualism and the minimalist state, nonetheless enforced

> ...an anti-intellectual conformity rooted in prejudice and ignorance. Any groups who threatened this conformity were to be ostracised. So immigrants were to be feared, those without jobs despised and the poor written out the script altogether.[15]

At the same time, however, some disturbing practices began to emerge on the Left. Phillips alludes to: the abandonment of academic rigour in school classrooms in favour of a distorted 'anything goes', 'child-centred' orthodoxy; the pervasiveness of a misplaced relativism on questions of standards in reading, writing and speaking; the development of a 'lynch mob' mentality by Left liberals in the face of criticism; the sacking of three school teachers who did not follow the 'party line' on the teaching of history; the fear of speaking out among teachers who were uneasy about the direction classroom pedagogy was taking; the censoring of children's books to fit a particular ideological perspective; and the enforcement of one view of racism as the only acceptable one in the field of social work.[16] Phillips concludes:

> [W]e are living through an era of ironic political parallels. The Conservative government has pursued a policy of economic, libertarian individualism which it has applied coercively. Its leftist critics follow a creed of social, egalitarian individualism which they too apply coercively. Both purport to celebrate freedom but effectively deny it. Both are disastrous news for community and the common good.[17]

While the visibility of suspect left-wing practices is attributable, in large part, to the success of the Right in shaping the parameters for public discussion of political correctness, the bizarre character of certain activities has also been a contributing factor. Given the media's hunger for the unusual and the scandalous, it is hardly surprising that cases of the absurd (rather than, say, that which is subtle or insidious) create the most headlines. Of course, in portraying certain policies, practices, or events as ridiculous, the media sometimes mask or distort their underlying seriousness. Campus regulations requiring students to ask formal permission of their peers before hugging or kissing may be an obvious target for mockery by the media and other commentators, but such developments can also be seen as a legitimate response to problems such as 'date rape'.[18] Changing common practice in the business world by, for example, substituting 'chairperson' for 'chairman' in committee processes may seem trivial or silly to some onlookers, but failing to make such modifications allows the exclusion of women from the language of everyday commercial or institutional life to continue.[19]

What would Freire say about political correctness? Given the arguments presented in this thesis, it is clear that he would oppose intolerance, unreflective conformism, and the suppression of questioning and criticism. If these features lie at the heart of political correctness, then Freire would argue that we ought to vigorously resist curriculum changes premised on politically correct assumptions. Two matters require preliminary attention before this view can be developed. First, the relationship between 'correctness' and 'criticalness' in Freire's work warrants investigation and clarification. Second, some indication of the range of areas to which the term 'political correctness' has been applied needs to be given.

The Notion of 'Correctness' in Freire's Writings

Freire's language - or, perhaps, the language of his translators - complicates my argument that he would be opposed to political correctness. Tensions surface between Freire's espousal of critical consciousness - which is, I want to suggest, fundamentally opposed to political correctness - and his occasional references to 'correct' positions, practices and modes of thought. This issue, I hope to show, is worthy of careful examination, for it is precisely through addressing the apparent tension between 'correctness' and 'criticalness' that the fundamental criteria for a distinctly *Freirean* view of political correctness are revealed.

In *Cultural Action for Freedom*, commenting on the propensity in technologized, complex societies for 'specialties' to become 'specialisms', Freire asserts:

> [S]pecialisms narrow the area of knowledge in such a way that the so-called "specialists" become generally incapable of thinking. Because they have lost the vision of the whole of which their "specialty" is only one dimension, they cannot even *think correctly* in the area of their specialization.[20]

Nearly twenty years later, in *Learning to Question*, Freire speaks of four types of texts which can be used in 'a *correct* practice of popular education'.[21] More recently, in *Pedagogy of the City*, he describes the relationship between curriculum content and the process through which that content is taught as follows:

> For the coherent progressive educator, the necessary teaching of content will always be associated with a "critical reading" of reality. One teaches how to think through the teaching of content. Neither can we teach content by itself

> as if the school context in which this content is treated could be reduced to a neutral space where social conflicts would not manifest themselves, nor can the exercise of *"thinking correctly"* be disconnected from the teaching of content.[22]

Later in *Pedagogy of the City* Freire discusses the importance of teaching 'how to know'.[23] He says:

> You should teach how to *think correctly,* which is not done through the teaching of content, it is true. If teaching and learning are part of the same process of knowing, the moment you teach sociology you should also make it clear to your students how you study, how you approach the object of knowledge, what is the meaning for you of the search for knowledge.[24]

In his farewell speech to the Sao Paulo Bureau of Education in May 1991 Freire, in retiring from his position as Secretary of Education, observed:

> I am convinced that the Workers Party's proposals and principles to which Mayor Luiza Erundina gives life, are *correct.* These constitute the general principles of the governmental policies of which the educational policies that we have been implementing are a chapter.[25]

Similarly, in *Pedagogy of Hope,* Freire offers a critical assessment of the attitude of Left intellectuals who declare (literally, or in effect): '"Agrarian reform, like it or lump it!" "Either this congress votes laws in the people's interests or we'll close it."'[26] To this, Freire responds:

> [T]his verbal incontinence, this explosion of verbiage, has no connection, none whatever, with a *correct*, authentic progressive position. It has no connection with a *correct* understanding of struggle as political, historical practice.[27]

A final example can be found in Freire's discussion of adult education in Sao Tome and Principe in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*.[28] The Sao Tome and Principe programme employed a series of books and primers, collectively entitled 'Popular Culture Notebooks'. Students used workbooks, which Freire helped design,[29] to assist them in their learning. In Freire's view, none of the texts used in the programme, whether in the literacy phase or the post-literacy phase, were 'impregnated with manipulative discourses'.[30] Freire maintains that as students moved through the workbook in the first phase of the programme, their critical abilities were increasingly tested.[31] This furnished the necessary background for the post-literacy phase, where new challenges were offered. Near the beginning of the second Popular Culture Notebook, students are told:

> When we learn to read and write, it is also important to learn to learn to *think correctly*. To *think correctly* we should think about our practice in work. We should think about our daily lives.[32]

The second notebook dealt with 'themes linked to the nation's present historical moment',[33] and contained sections headed 'Thinking Correctly: I' and 'Thinking Correctly: II'.[34] Statements such as the following are made:

> To *think correctly* means to try to discover and understand what is found to be hidden away in things and in facts that we observe and analyze.[35]

> To *think correctly*, to discover the reason for the existence of facts, and to make the knowledge that practice gives us more profound are not the privileges of a few, but a right that the People have in a revolutionary society.[36]

In responding to these examples from Freirean texts, much hinges on how the word 'correctness' is interpreted. Debates over political correctness in the 1990s in the United States and other countries in the Western world have imparted a strongly negative flavour to the term. This negative connotation is not something I shall argue against here, though it is important, I think, to acknowledge the impact the Right has had in generating this association between 'correctness' and undesirability.[37] Readers who happen upon the term in Freire's writings may not recoil in horror when they see it, but many are likely to find the notion at least slightly uncomfortable. This stems, perhaps, from the idea that 'correctness' implies the existence of only *one* 'right' (or 'true', or 'legitimate', or 'authentic') answer, solution, political position, way of thinking, mode of acting, etc., which must be enforced or imposed on everybody. If there is only one 'correct' way of doing X, or being Y, then anyone who is *not* thinking or acting in this manner is 'incorrect' and hence, in the most obvious sense of that term, 'wrong'. Despite being constantly told how to think and act in our daily lives (by television advertisements, politicians, teachers, parents, church leaders, etc.), and seldom questioning such intrusions, the overt use the term 'correctness' in written or spoken discourse typically evokes irritation or hostility.

The negative connotations of 'correctness' are specific to certain uses of the term. Few people flinch, for example, when mathematicians insist on students finding the 'correct' answer to a problem in algebra, or when scientists claim to have found the 'correct' way to combine certain chemicals in order to produce a given reaction. This might suggest that the difficulty (or discomfort) arises when a shift is made from the 'hard' sciences to areas of inquiry which

take human beings as their main concern. Yet, multiple choice tests which assume the existence of a single 'correct' or 'best' answer to questions premised on highly contestable assumptions about human beings and human interaction (e.g. in Economics, or Psychology) attract remarkably little critical comment. Obviously, an adequate explanation of the ready acceptance of the notion of 'correctness' in such settings demands a form of historical and sociological investigation which is not possible in the space available. (Why is it, for example, that far more attention has been devoted to Marx by sociologists, political theorists, and educationists than economists? This is a question of the politics of knowledge, which I shall not attempt to address here.)

Whatever the reasons, it is clear that the idea of being 'correct' is less controversial in some discursive domains than others. In fact, in a number of academic spheres, the use of the term is barely questioned at all. 'Correctness' also has an acceptable face in some areas outside academia: chess players, for instance, talk of a move being 'correct' when it is arguably the *best* move, given the placement of pieces on the board at a particular moment in the game. However, when employed in relation to questions of 'politics' (broadly conceived) or ethics, the notion of correctness is far more apt to cause offence. When it comes to political and ethical matters, some people are willing to concede that one position may be 'better' than another, but these domains of inquiry are not, it is often felt, areas in which one can, or should, be 'correct' or 'incorrect'.

Whatever connotations the word 'correctness' currently has in different discursive spheres, there is nothing intrinsically, or necessarily, or universally, negative about the term. This point is important in considering a critique of the Sao Tome and Principe programme by James Paul Gee.[38] (Brief allusion was made to Gee's criticisms in chapter two.) Gee develops his analysis of the phrase 'thinking correctly' - which was used liberally in the programme -

in two steps. First, he cites a series of passages from the workbooks and Freire's accompanying commentary, noting, for example, references to critical perception, debate, creation and re-creation through the act of study, the concern with stimulating and challenging learners, etc. 'All this', Gee says, 'sounds open and liberating'.[39] Gee then contrasts these statements with a series of references in the Popular Culture Notebooks to 'thinking correctly', prefacing these citations with the comment: 'Freire comes up square against Plato's problem: what is to ensure that when people read (either a text or the world) they will do so "correctly"?'.[40] Gee draws attention to what he believes is a glaring contradiction:

> It is startling that a pedagogy that Freire says is "more a pedagogy of question than a pedagogy of answer", that is radical because it is "less certain of 'certainties'"...,in fact knows what it is to *think* correctly. The student is told not to repeat what others say, but then the problem becomes that in re-saying what the student reads for him- or herself, he or she may say it wrong, that is, in conflict with Freire's or the state's political perspective. Thus, the literacy materials must ensure that he or she thinks correctly, that is, re-says or interprets both the text and the world "correctly".[41]

Gee claims, with regard to the Popular Culture Notebooks, that 'any thoughts which do not fit "the new man the new woman", which do not agree with "the People's cause", will count as "misrepresentations", as the internal voice of the oppressor, and thus, as false'.[42] He is quick to point out, however, that this would (normally) apply to any form of literacy. All literacies have 'built-in perspectives and assumptions that serve as a test of whether one is correctly practising that literacy'.[43] Gee shares with Freire the view that literacies are never

neutral: there is, he says, 'no way out of having an opinion, an ideology, and a strong one - as did Plato, as does Freire'.[44]

The force of Gee's critique depends, in large measure, on readers finding the notion of '*correct* thinking' objectionable. The semantics of 'correctness' thus have an important bearing on Gee's judgement of Freire. I contend that if the statements about 'correct thinking' in the Popular Culture Notebooks and the adjoining commentary by Freire are properly contextualized, Gee's criticism of Freire becomes less effective. I draw a distinction between *thinking* correctly and adopting a 'correct' political or ethical position. The former, it is argued, is consistent with Freire's wider philosophy - *if* we read or interpret the phrase in a particular way; the latter, however, represents a slip in expression (possibly, though not necessarily, a product of the translation process) which is at odds with the rhythm of Freire's thought. My argument turns on a recognition of two levels - semantic and substantive - on which Freire's statements can be interpreted, and reinforces the need for a holistic reading of Freire's work.

In the majority of cases where Freire uses the notion of 'correctness', it is in relation to the process of thinking. To think correctly, Freire tells us, is to be curious, to create and re-create, to seek the reasons behind facts, to relate theory to practice, and so on. But these are precisely the features, or at least some of the key dimensions, of critical consciousness for Freire; thinking 'correctly', then, appears to be compatible, if not synonymous, with thinking (and being) 'critical'. Gee seems to ignore this. Yet, the very book in which Freire discusses the Sao Tome and Principe programme, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*,[45] along with almost every other text published by Freire in the past twenty-five years, quickly renders the similarity between 'correctness' and 'criticalness' explicit. Gee relies heavily on the semantic 'work' done by the notion of 'correctness' - i.e. its pejorative connotation - to effect a contrast

between what 'sounds open and liberating' and something which supposedly is *not* open or liberating. If it is true, however, that there is (for Freire) a semantic link between 'correctness' and 'criticalness', the contradiction between being 'less certain of certainties' and knowing 'what it is to think correctly' disappears. For, knowing what it is to think correctly is, among other things, knowing not to be too certain of certainties - i.e. always being restless, curious, and ever prepared to question.

Now, although there is what I have called a 'semantic' link between being 'critical' and being 'correct' in Freire's writings, this does not mean there is a *substantive* connection between being critical and being 'politically correct' - at least not if the criteria for political correctness to be advanced below are accepted. Freire, I shall argue, would be opposed to politically correct practices and policies, but, ironically, he (or his translators) might talk about 'thinking correctly' as the means through which such practices might be analysed, criticized or evaluated. This is where a distinction between encouraging people to *think* correctly, and compelling others to accept a 'correct' *political position* (without question), becomes important. Freire argues that *all* people ought to learn how to think critically. As we saw in chapter two, he stresses that this ideal should be promoted at every level of the education system - from primary school to university and beyond. In this sense, a critical posture represents a universal objective for Freire: that is, a goal which he prescribes for everybody. On the question of 'what' people should think, Freire, like all other social theorists and educators, clearly has ethical and political preferences, which he would defend vigorously. But he is quite explicit in distinguishing between the non-neutrality of education - which implies directiveness in teaching - and a position in which alternative positions are ignored or stifled:

> Educators have the right, even the duty, to teach what seems to them to be fundamental to the space-time in which they find themselves. That right and

> that duty fall to the educator by virtue of the intrinsic "directivity" of education. Of its very nature, education always "outstrips itself". It always pursues objectives and goals, dreams and projects. I have asked before in this book [*Pedagogy of Hope*]: what sort of educator would I be if I had no concern for being maximally convincing in my presentation of my dreams? But that does not mean that I may reduce everything to my truth, my *"correctness"*.[46]

'Correct thinking', if the phrase is given the reading I have offered above, is thus necessarily in opposition to any version of 'political correctness' which entails the absolute imposition of one's own political position onto others. However, there is an important problem to be addressed here. I spoke in the previous chapter of a bind in the ideal of critical consciousness from which Freire could not escape. Turning a critical approach back 'upon itself' (in other words, being critical about 'critical consciousness'), I argued, only affirms the very ideal it tries to refute. An educational programme based on the ideal of conscientization thus cannot avoid being 'impositional' in what I termed a 'soft' sense: it is, as it were, 'all or nothing' as far as conscientization is concerned. A similar logic applies with regard to the more specific notion of 'thinking correctly'. If this is, as I have suggested above, an ideal Freire wishes to prescribe for all human beings, then he is, in one sense of the term 'political' (a sense he would not dispute) imposing a political position on others. For, the ideal of thinking correctly can be seen as, in itself, a form of political position. By telling people *how* to think, Freire is, in a certain sense at least, telling them *what* to think. But, and this will be crucial for the discussion that follows, Freire is not saying his is the *only* political position one can take; nor would he say that his political ideal (which he would acknowledge is but one among many competing ideals) can be completely encapsulated in the notion of 'thinking correctly'. 'Correct' thinking needs to be seen as one element of a wider ideal of critical, dialogical, humanizing *praxis*.

Gee, I believe, allows the negative connotations of the term 'correctness' to override his critique of Freire's substantive position. Where Gee does deal with substantive issues, his assertions have a decidedly speculative character. He *assumes* that should a student in the Sao Tome and Principe programme answer a question in manner which conflicts with 'Freire's or the state's political perspective', this will be considered a 'wrong' or 'incorrect' answer. But there is nothing in either Freire's analysis or the excerpts he provides from the Notebooks to suggest that this is the case. Similarly, Gee claims that any thoughts which do not 'fit' the ideal of 'the new man and woman' or agree with 'the People's cause' will count as misrepresentations; again, however, no evidence is either provided by Gee, or easily mustered from Freire's text, to support this hypothesis. The Sao Tome and Principe campaign, to be sure, was promoting a particular view of human beings and the world, as was Freire in his literacy work in Brazil and Chile, but - and this is a point Gee explicitly acknowledges - this is true of any literacy or educational programme. Gee does not consider the possibility that were a student to question the vision of 'a new man and new woman' presented by the state in Sao Tome and Principe, such questioning might be accepted as legitimate and *valued* as a sign that the objective of 'correct' (critical) thinking fostered in the programme was being realized. This alternative possibility seems at least as plausible as the scenario Gee describes. Indeed, even on the evidence presented by Gee there appears to be a stronger *prima facie* case for this interpretation. Gee outlines many of the features of a critical approach to reality - including a statement from the Notebooks which stipulates that studying is *not* merely repeating what others have to say[47] - but assumes that these features will be ignored should political views other than Freire's or the state's be aired.

Of course, to be fair to Gee, it would be difficult to avoid being speculative if the focus of one's critique is Freire's account of the programme in Sao Tome and Principe. Freire is hardly likely, given his repeated attacks on manipulation and authoritarianism, to openly

admit that political views other than his own (or those he sanctions) should be 'corrected' or suppressed! Unless Gee seeks empirical evidence from the people of Sao Tome and Principe, or from others who have conducted research along these lines, he must advance his case largely by inference. But if Freire's constant written references to the importance of adopting a critical approach toward the world are borne out in his educational practice (and this thesis suggests they have been), it would seem very odd for Freire to support a deliberate suppression of opposing political views.

While the notion of correctness is predominantly applied to thinking and qualities of consciousness in the Notebooks, a different application of the term 'correct' can also be detected. The Notebooks speak of 'a correct sense of political militancy' as one in which people learn to overcome 'individualism and egoism'.[48] There is a shift here from telling people *how* to think to telling them *what* to think: i.e. to recognizing only one position as the 'correct' one. But this example must be contextualized. The phrase 'a correct sense of political militancy' occurs in a passage in the second of the Popular Culture Notebooks where the theme is 'The New Man and the New Woman'.[49] Here, the characteristics of a particular human ideal - one which, for the organizers of the Sao Tome and Principe programme, was commensurate with life in a society undergoing revolutionary reconstruction - are set out in some detail. In considering some of the qualities of 'the new man and the new woman', the Notebook says: '[o]ne of these qualities is agreement with the People's cause and the defence of the People's interests'.[50] This is very clearly a prescriptive political statement, suggesting that if one is to be a 'new man' or 'new woman', one must accept the principles undergirding 'the People's cause'. That this cause may be democratic and arguably in the best interests of those being asked to agree with it is beside the point here: it is the implied notion that this is the *only* acceptable political view which is of interest for present purposes.

Taken as isolated phrases, these statements certainly appear - given my earlier comments about political correctness - to be problematic. Note, however, that agreement with 'the People's cause', and with the 'correct' sense of political militancy, is conditional upon prior acceptance of the view that there is, or will be, or can be, a 'new man' and 'new woman'. The prescribing of one political position as the only correct one is thus a prescription *within* an articulated ideal - an ideal which, in the very programme in which it is being promoted, people are invited to think correctly about. Indeed, even within this section of the Notebooks, criticism is encouraged. Participants are told:

> To study (a revolutionary duty), to *think correctly*, to develop curiosity in the face of reality, to create and re-create, to criticize with justice and to accept constructive criticism, to combat antipopular activities all these are characteristics of the new man and the new woman.[51]

Hence, the ideal represented by the notion of 'The New Man and the New Woman' comprises a commitment to 'the People's cause', a particular position on the question of militancy, *and* qualities which - with the possible exception of combatting 'antipopular activities' - resemble those of Freirean critical consciousness. The texts from the programme give evidence that 'the People's cause' is precisely a cause in which people are encouraged to become critically conscious. Similarly, *if* the critical approach fostered by 'the People's cause' is to emerge, it cannot be based on egoism and individualism, for these qualities are antithetical to not only the wider social objectives of this cause but the very idea of critical consciousness. In other words, if a consciousness is to be 'critical', then it must - on the view advanced in the programme - be anti-individualist. That is, it must recognize the necessarily social nature of the struggle which is 'the People's cause'.

Freire's other references to 'correct' positions also need to be contextualized. In the passages quoted earlier, Freire refers to: 'a correct, authentic progressive position' and 'a correct understanding of struggle...'[52]; he says he is convinced that 'the Workers Party's proposals and principles...are correct;[53] and he talks of 'a correct practice of popular education'.[54] Elsewhere, in commenting on the task of rebuilding Sao Tome and Principe following national independence, Freire expresses his hope that 'both the people and their leaders will respond correctly to that challenge'.[55] In each case, he is advancing a view which he believes is the 'correct' one, *given* his ethical and educational ideal. Additionally, in every instance where Freire refers to a 'correct' position, practice, or response, his assertion is supported by surrounding discussion in the text. These cases need to be seen as examples of Freire *arguing for* a position as the 'correct' one, at times with passion, and always with conviction, while nevertheless always being ready to explore (or be confronted with) counter positions. When Freire uses the word 'correct' in this sense, he is referring to what he believes - on the basis of reflection, dialogue, and practical experience - to be the *best* position.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between Freire's writings and the English translation of Mao's work. In a text entitled 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People' (adapted from a speech to the Supreme State Conference in 1957), Mao - or his translator - speaks of 'correct' methods,[56] and 'correct' and 'wrong' ideas.[57] In a later text, 'Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?', Mao extends the notion of 'correct' and 'incorrect' ideas to include 'theories, policies, plans...[and] measures'.[58] In his famous discussion of the slogan, 'Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend', Mao addresses the question of whether Marxism - which he regards as the foundation of correct ideas - can be criticized. Answering in the affirmative, he maintains: 'Marxism is scientific truth and fears no criticism. If it did, and if it could be overthrown by criticism, it would be worthless'.[59] Indeed, he says, Marxism can only become stronger in the fight against incorrect

ideas. It is in 'the teeth of criticism and in the storm of struggle' that Marxism affirms its correctness.[60] Wrong ideas should neither be suppressed nor accepted without counter argument. Observing that banning the expression of wrong ideas does not prevent people from having them, Mao suggests: '...it is only by employing the method of discussion, criticism and reasoning that we can really foster correct ideas and overcome wrong ones, and that we can really settle issues'.[61]

Much of this resonates with Freire's position. Freire would agree with Mao that 'strong' ideas can withstand, and even thrive on, criticism. He would certainly encourage diversity of thought, and wish to uphold the right of free expression for all. He would similarly agree that discussion and reasoning are vital to the 'settlement' of contentious issues. But there are some important differences between the two thinkers. For Mao, Marxism is the only 'true', 'scientific', *correct* philosophical system. All of the major principles in Marxist thought are correct, and (as far as Mao is concerned) all ideas which oppose or directly contradict the central tenets of Marxism are incorrect or wrong. The same logic, though, does not apply in Freire's case. Freire, to be sure, would argue forcefully for the 'correctness' of his ethical ideal and the philosophical assumptions which underpin it. But he would not rule out all opposing ideas as necessarily 'wrong' or 'incorrect'. For Mao, 'correctness' means 'there is only one correct position'; for Freire, 'correctness' means 'this is the *best* position'. The Freirean notion of correctness, then, is more 'open-ended', more reflexive, less certain, than Mao's concept. Mao *knows*, or believes he knows, Marxism will always win out over other positions given its scientific superiority. Criticism can thus be encouraged - a 'hundred flowers' may blossom - as there is no chance of the Marxist system being toppled. Freire, while no less passionate about the 'correctness' of his own ideas, is always open - indeed, this openness is at the very core of his ideal - to the possibility of change.

In Search of Criteria for Political Correctness

The term 'political correctness' has been applied to an extraordinary range of different policies, practices, attitudes, and events. As I indicated in my earlier introductory comments, the lack of conceptual clarification in discourses on 'political correctness' has allowed the term to serve as a multi-purpose bludgeon in criticizing a plethora of new developments in educational institutions. Wielding the label 'political correctness' as a weapon in this manner can effectively silence debate and squash resistance.[62] Ironically, these are precisely the characteristics which might be consistent with *promoting* political correctness (as defined below) rather than opposing it. If the meaning of 'political correctness' is sufficiently vague, but the connotations of being labelled 'politically correct' clearly and invariably negative, care in using the term is (for those with sinister intentions) no longer necessary: the *accusation* of political correctness becomes, on its own, sufficient to cause the desired effect.

The Right, as Messer-Davidow and others have persuasively argued, has played a significant role in this process - both in initiating the attacks and in creating an aura of suspicion around present moves to reform the curriculum in universities. This does not mean that the *ambiguities* that attend many references to political correctness are the result of a carefully crafted plan by conservatives; indeed, these confusions are seldom noticed and only infrequently analysed by those on the Right.[63] Of one point, though, we can be certain: the ferocity and breadth of the assault has given 'political correctness' an unquestionably pejorative connotation, which has been used to good effect by defenders of tradition in the university and other institutions. Reformists, whether avowedly left-wing or not, have often ended up on the back foot - defensive, and, at times, apparently stunned by the force of the onslaught. Given this situation, it becomes especially important to clarify conditions for the term's use if 'political correctness' is to remain a pejorative concept.

In the sphere of education, the label 'political correctness' has been used in relation to: the encroachment of politics into university classrooms (education, it is charged, has 'become political'); 'multiculturalism'; new academic programmes such as 'women's studies' and 'black studies'; Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist, postmodernist, and other critical approaches to particular fields of study (especially literary criticism); moves to reform language use - particularly, though not exclusively, to make it 'non-sexist'; affirmative action policies (e.g. in criteria for admission to universities, in the appointment of faculty, in promotions, in scholarships, etc.); alleged favouritism of other kinds towards women and ethnic minorities; the apparent abandonment of merit as the prime criterion for judging quality; speech codes, where offensive remarks about particular groups of people are banned; and 'sensitivity' programmes for incoming students and staff.

Perhaps the only point critics of 'political correctness' from both the Right and the Left consistently agree on, though, is that it has something to do with *intolerance*: with, as Lehman puts it, 'the inability or unwillingness to tolerate a rival point of view'.[64] This is the view of political correctness I shall concentrate on: one which focuses on orthodoxy, conformism, intolerance of differences, and the suppression of questioning. Political correctness, when seen in this light, might relate to the enforcement of a 'party line', the refusal to allow or acknowledge alternative or opposing views on political and ethical matters, the censuring of criticism, the banning of questions, or the stifling of debate. Political correctness, in sum, is the enforcement of one position as the only possible or acceptable or legitimate position. Freire would be fundamentally opposed to any policy or practice which compelled or coerced people to accept a position without question. A 'position' may be an interpretation of a text, a stance on a contentious issue, or a reading of social reality. This is the 'bottom line' for Freire: to abandon the right to question is to forsake the very essence of the Freirean educational ideal: the development of a critical approach toward understanding the world.

'Political correctness' thus defined can be seen as the exact opposite of critical consciousness, and, hence, as incompatible with any programme of education based on the principle of conscientization.

In emphasizing intolerance, conformity, and the suppression of criticism and questioning as key criteria, I am attempting to capture a key element in the existing discourse on political correctness, and to develop a construct which might be meaningfully related to Freirean theory. My suggestion, then, is that if political correctness is to have any distinctive significance in a theory of education based on Freirean principles, it must remain a pejorative concept. It is important to acknowledge, however, that not all commentators see it this way. Some, in defending recent changes to curricula and policy, say that if the term 'political correctness' is to be used at all, it should correspond to positive developments. Jardine, for example, submits that '[i]nsofar as it is a term which means anything, [political correctness]...describes the teacher's commitment to making all teaching inclusive, faced with an increasingly diverse undergraduate population'.[65] Others deny that political correctness exists at all: it is, they argue, simply a malicious fabrication by the Right.

As far as the first option is concerned, I believe that if 'political correctness' is to name a positive set of attitudes or practices, the ambiguities currently associated with the term can only increase. In asserting this, I am presupposing that the aim is to find something meaningful to say about political correctness *in relation to Freire's work*. If this is the case, a pejorative reading is more effective than a positive interpretation of the term. While it is true that the label 'political correctness' has been used as a referent for developments Freire would support - e.g. certain multicultural policies, the growth of women's studies programmes, the discussion of literary works from Marxist and feminist points of view, etc. - it is not the case that Freire would endorse *all* practices associated with these developments. It could be

argued that the criteria for distinguishing practices Freire would support from those he would not should spring from the ethical and educational imperatives in Freire's work. Hence, being politically correct may mean being critical, dialogical, rigorous, and so on. But what would give the term 'political correctness' *special* significance if this was the case? Distinct concepts for describing these characteristics are already in place in Freire's work: the Freirean ethical ideal is encapsulated in the notion of 'humanization'; 'liberating education' is the generic term for a family of principles, practices and attitudes consistent with this ideal; and 'critical literacy' captures the essence of Freire's approach to literacy. It is not at all clear what 'political correctness' would name that is not already covered by these concepts.

If the term is given a pejorative reading, however, 'political correctness' might usefully be employed to describe a series of related practices for which there is currently no generic concept in Freire's work. Freire talks about dogmatism, sectarianism, intolerance of differences, the confining of investigation within overly-restrictive boundaries, the silencing of questions, enforced conformity, and the denial of dialogue, but he does not have an overarching concept for collectively naming these practices. This is especially so if it is *political* views with which we dealing. A staunch member of a political party (whether on the Right or the Left) may hold to a position slavishly in the face of criticism: this is dogmatism; or, teachers may actively impede discussion and debate in a monologue on political ideas: such a stance is anti-dialogical; or, political leaders may refuse to allow consideration of opposing views: this is intolerance. The notion of 'political correctness' allows all of these (undesirable) practices to be described under a single heading.

The argument that all allegations of political correctness can be explained as merely right-wing propaganda was given preliminary consideration earlier in the chapter. Let me elaborate here with brief reference to Freire's views on dogmatic and reactionary political

positions. While Freire has always been clearly (and openly) to the left end of the political spectrum,[66] he has frequently criticized intolerance on the part of both the Left and the Right. In reflecting recently on the politics of life in Chile three decades ago, for example, Freire states:

> [O]nly a radical politics - not a sectarian one, however, but one that seeks a unity in diversity among progressive forces - could ever have won the battle for a democracy that could stand up to the power and virulence of the Right. Instead, there was only sectarianism and intolerance the rejection of differences. Tolerance was not what it ought to be: the revolutionary virtue that consists in a peaceful coexistence with those who are different, in order to wage a better fight against the adversaries.[67]

Dogmatic stances, like reactionary positions, deny the reflective, critical component of humanizing praxis; neither position can be conscientizing. Indeed, dogmatism and reactionarism both positively *impede* the development of critical thought and action; both constrain, rather than expand, opportunities for expanding the discursive universe within which people might participate. For Freire, there are important similarities, as well as certain differences, between dogmatism and reactionarism. The dogmatist holds steadfastly and unreflexively to a particular view of the world. He or she either refuses to even acknowledge the existence of alternative perspectives, holding to a particular 'line' on a given issue no matter what, or denounces counter positions without engaging them. The dogmatist may, like the reactionary, be defensive in the face of criticism, attacking opposing ideas with vigour or even violence; or, he or she may simply ignore criticism and hold resolutely to existing views. For the reactionary, opposing positions represent a threat; for the dogmatist, they may simply be considered irrelevant. For dogmatists, there is only one way to view the

world, *period*; for reactionaries, there is only one *acceptable* or *legitimate* way to view the world.

For Freire, dogmatism and reactionarism are both closely related to authoritarianism. Dogmatic and reactionary educators wish to impose their view of the world on students, stifling criticism and discouraging (or explicitly prohibiting) questioning. If there is only one correct, acceptable or legitimate way of understanding an issue or subject or object of study, and if one's task is to teach others about this object of study, then it follows that this must be the view conveyed to students. The dogmatic teacher *knows* (or thinks he or she knows) what others need to know; thus, the ideas students bring to the educative situation are neither relevant nor valued. This, Freire says, 'is the certitude, always, of the authoritarian, the dogmatist, who knows what the popular classes know, and knows what they need even without talking to them'.[68] Freire continues:

> What makes sense to them is what comes from their readings, and what they write in their books and articles. It is what they already know about the knowledge that seems basic and indispensable to them, and which, in the form of content, must be "deposited" in the "empty consciousness" of the popular classes.[69]

These points lead usefully to a consideration of intolerance, conformity, and the suppression of criticism - and their opposites (tolerance, difference, and criticalness) - as pivotal themes in a Freirean theory of political correctness. In recent publications, Freire has emphasized the value of tolerance as a key virtue in the university.[70] He speaks of the need to accept - though not uncritically - ways of thinking other than one's own. In *Learning to Question*, Freire notes:

> Tolerance doesn't in any way imply giving up what seems to you to be right and just and good. No, tolerant people do not give up their dreams: they are determined to fight for them. But they do respect those who have a different dream from themselves.[71]

Tolerance, for Freire, does *not* mean accepting all views without question; to the contrary, respect for others positively demands that their ideas be open for discussion and debate. Tolerance makes ethical and educational sense to Freire precisely to the extent that it enables one to *engage* views other than one's own. Teachers have a right - indeed, a responsibility - to challenge the students' perceptions of the world. But, as Freire says in *Pedagogy of Hope*,

> ...[w]hat is not permissable to be doing is to conceal truths, deny information, impose principles, eviscerate the educands of their freedom, or punish them, no matter by what method, if, for various reasons, they fail to accept my discourse - reject my utopia.[72]

In his recently-published dialogue with a group of Mexican professors, Freire argues that the university ought not to become a 'homogenous' institution where all students have, or are encouraged to adopt, the same views and commitments.[73] Freire sees difference within a university as potentially enriching, provided it is 'lived with faith, loyalty, honesty, and integrity'.[74] He suggests:

> Instead of engaging in controversy about the difference, we must hold a dialogue about the difference. For it is very important that the young student perceives a different vision of reality and that this reality is not the same for all university students. In this manner, the young student will know that

> there is a diverse educational context within the university. Thus, his or her political and ideological education will be ensured.[75]

The university, Freire argues, ought not to become a kind of 'sacred temple where to be chaste is a virtue'.[76] An institution of higher education 'that is beyond and above the social and political system of the society where it exists is unfeasible'.[77] The university should be, and cannot avoid being, a thoroughly political institution, but this does not mean that it should prescribe or proscribe political positions for students. Freire supports an environment of intellectual pluralism within academia, where students might, for example, be taught by both reactionary and revolutionary professors. The key is for all teachers to be open with students about their politics:[78]

> I belong to a political party in Brazil and the students know this; there is no reason to hide it. What I cannot do is change the academic policy of the university where I work for the policy of the Worker's Party and I must respect the students who do not have anything to do with that party.[79]

These points find further elaboration in *Pedagogy of Hope*, where Freire speaks of the impossibility of educating without 'running risks'.[80] It is, Freire argues, 'precisely the political nature of educational practice, its helplessness to be "neutral", that requires of the educator his or her ethicalness'.[81] Freire continues:

> What especially moves me to be ethical is to know that, inasmuch as education of its very nature is directive and political, I must, without ever denying my dream or my utopia before the educands, respect them. To defend a thesis, a position, a preference, with earnestness, defend it rigorously,

> but passionately, as well, and at the same time to stimulate the contrary discourse, and respect the right to utter that discourse, is the best way to teach, first, the right to have our own ideas, even our duty to "quarrel" for them, for our dreams - and not only to learn the syntax of the verb, *haver*; and second, mutual respect.[82]

On the one hand, then, university teachers ought not to disavow their personal politics: to do so would be to deny the situatedness of their pedagogy within a particular conception of human beings and the social world. On the other hand, academics also ought not to take advantage of the spaces the university provides to engage in party politics, to coerce students into accepting certain policies, to punish those who do not conform to one's own view of the world, and so on. A university teacher should be secure enough in his or her own convictions to leave their ideas open to refutation - by others, or by subsequent events. Taking a stance on ethical and political issues always involves risks and uncertainties. Paradoxically, greater certainty about the worth of a particular stance can, from Freire's point of view, only emerge through not being too certain of one's own position, and through continually exposing it to counter-positions.[83] Working in a pluralistic way with others is not easy, since 'pluralism within the university entails positions that are not only different but antagonistic',[84] but it is the only way forward if the university is to become a site for genuine tolerance, critical analysis, dialogue, and debate.

Before finishing this section, I want to comment on two ways in which the Right has used the term 'political correctness' which, on the criteria offered earlier, must be regarded as mistaken. The first I shall deal with only fleetingly. A crucial element in conservative assaults on reforms to university curricula is the charge that education has become 'political' and is now 'ideologically driven'.[85] This accusation, Freire would argue, betrays either a

naive understanding of the political dimensions to education or a mischievous attempt to disguise the politics of traditional pedagogical practices. Freire, along with dozens of scholars in critical pedagogy and the sociology of education, has convincingly demonstrated that teaching is *always* a political process.[86] Educational programmes always favour some values, beliefs, attitudes, practices, ideologies, and interests over others. This is not the same thing as saying that teachers cannot avoid being politically *correct*. As chapter two indicated, Freire would argue that it is not a matter of asking whether one ought or ought not to be political as a teacher, but rather of deciding what *kind* of politics to foster in the classroom. An openly 'political' teacher admits his or her political preferences, but allows these to be questioned, challenged and debated; a 'politically correct' teacher advances one way of thinking as the *only* (acceptable or legitimate) way. The former encourages tolerance and diversity; the latter positively impedes the development of these qualities. Recognizing and acknowledging the political character of education expands the students' discursive universe by allowing them to interpret policies and practices in a new way; political correctness more tightly wraps student views within existing enclosures. All teachers take certain assumptions about human beings and the world as (at least provisionally) given for particular purposes in the classroom; politically correct teachers take it for granted that their assumptions ought to prevail for all, no matter what the circumstances. If 'political correctness' is equivalent to 'bringing politics into the classroom', then *all* education is politically correct from a Freirean point of view. Freire would be neither in favour of nor against 'political correctness', since the term, if defined in this manner, would fail to give effective purchase - whether pejorative or positive - on anything: a 'politically correct' educator would simply be an educator.

The equating or linking of 'political correctness' with 'multiculturalism' (the second feature I shall consider) is a peculiar, and at times revealing, phenomenon. The conjoining of the two is almost exclusively a trait of conservative critiques of political correctness.[87] Where

liberals or radicals mention the two in the same breath, it is invariably to defend allegedly politically correct practices or attitudes as a means toward a noble end: multiculturalism. Of the conservative accounts, perhaps the most blatant declaration of opposition to multiculturalism came from Hilton Kramer, who called it the 'bastard offspring' of the political correctness movement.[88] Others, however, have also been surprisingly forthright. Brigitte Berger claims that 'the multicultural agenda is overwhelmingly a political agenda and has very little to do with the essential tasks and mission of a modern university'.[89] Signalling the immanent arrival of an academic Armageddon, she writes:

> A university wavering between the mindless visions of multiculturalist propagandists and the complacency of an intellectually slothful professoriate is about to abandon its *raison d'etre* and civilatory mission. Rather than witnessing "the end of history" as Francis Fukuyama argued a few years ago, today we must face up to the prospect of the end of a civilization.[90]

William Phillips offers an equally alarmist account. Beginning with the premise that '[m]ulticulturalism is the battle cry of the politically correct and those under its [sic] influence',[91] he claims that reformists are 'promoting a largely inflated African heritage for blacks as a source for the knowledge and science of the West'.[92] Were such groups to succeed in realizing their goals, Phillips maintains, 'Western culture would be wiped out, or at least demoted to the status of an evil past'.[93]

Freire, needless to say, sees the issue of multiculturalism quite differently. He has always viewed racism as deeply dehumanizing, and has long campaigned for better recognition of non-dominant cultural groups in educational institutions. In *Pedagogy of Hope* Freire argues for a position of 'unity in diversity' as a means for addressing the problems confronting

various minority groups. Without this, he says, 'the so-called minorities could not even struggle, in the United States, for the most basic...rights, let alone overcome barriers that keep them from "being themselves", from being "minorities for themselves", *with* one another and not *against* one another'.[94] Pointing out that minorities often collectively make up the majority, Freire maintains that only through concentrating on their similarities as well as their differences can the different groups build a 'substantial, radical democracy'.[95] Freire believes that the oppression of ethnic minorities (and women) cannot be understood in the absence of a class analysis: any solution to problems of racism and sexism must therefore also address the question of class struggle.[96]

Freire contends that in a multicultural society there is a need for a certain kind of tension between different cultures. This is a tension 'to which the various cultures expose themselves by being different, in a democratic relationship in which they strive for advancement...[It] is the tension of not begin able to escape their self-construction, their self-creation, their self-production'.[97] Cultural pluralism or 'multiculturality' (these terms are synonymous for Freire) is an ongoing project: a continuous, unfinished process of social, dialogical struggle. Freire summarizes his position thus:

> The very quest for this oneness in difference [through unity in diversity], the struggle for it as a process, in and of itself is the beginning of a creation of multiculturality. Let me emphasize once more: multiculturality as a phenomenon involving the coexistence of different cultures in one and the same space is not something natural and spontaneous. It is a historical creation, involving decision, political determination, mobilization, and organization, on the part of each cultural group, in view of common purposes.

> Thus, it calls for a certain educational practice, one that will be consistent with these objectives. It calls for a new ethics, founded on respect for differences.[98]

Freire's acknowledgement of difference does not lead him to the view that one should never criticize cultures other than one's own. In *We Make the Road by Walking,* he notes: 'My respect for the soul of the culture does not prevent me from trying, with the people, to change some conditions that appear to me as obviously against the beauty of being human'.[99] Using as an example the tradition in Latin American cultures which prevents men from cooking, Freire observes: 'In the last analysis, men created the tradition and the assumption in the heads of the women that if men cook, they give the impression that they are no longer male'.[100] This confers an advantage on men, and places an additional burden on women who have to work in both the field and the home. Freire argues that his respect for this tradition should not prevent him, as an educator, from challenging this practice and the assumptions on which it is based. Pointing out that such traditions are historical and cultural formations (rather than given destinies), Freire maintains that 'if it can be changed, it's not unethical to put the possibility of change on the table'.[101]

Freire would not, of course, support every educational development initiated in the name of multiculturalism. As I argued in chapter two, his approach would be to examine each educative situation in its context, and in light of a clear set of ethical principles. Freire's discussion in *Pedagogy of Hope* makes it plain that, for him, issues of ethnicity (and gender, and homosexuality, and poverty) should be *debated* in a climate of open discussion, uninhibited by the paternalism of guilt.[102] He recalls the wrath he endured from a young black leader for advocating 'unity in diversity'[103] at a seminar in Chicago, and also notes resistance from friends and colleagues to the notion that problems of ethnicity and class are related.[104] From a Freirean standpoint, multiculturalism would certainly *not* be 'equivalent

to', or 'a symptom of', or 'a dimension of', or (to use Kramer's shocking phrase) the 'bastard offspring' of, political correctness. However, given Freire's commitment to 'multiculturality' as one aspect of his wider ethical ideal, it becomes all the more important that struggles toward this end be subjected to the same standards of critical interrogation as all other educational endeavours.

The parameters for a Freirean perspective on political correctness should now be clear. Freire regards tolerance, difference, debate, and questioning as fundamental principles on which any university should be founded. Politically correct policies, practices and attitudes are those which either negate or impede these principles. All examples of political correctness relate in some way to the promotion, whether this is direct or indirect, of one position as the only acceptable, legitimate, or possible one. Teachers have a responsibility to not only tolerate views which oppose their own, but to actively stimulate engagement with alternative discourses. To confine discussion within overly-narrow boundaries, in the full knowledge that alternative perspectives exist, is thus as politically correct as banning questions or actively ruling out dissenting views. Hence, intolerance, which lies at the heart of political correctness, does not just consist in the refusal to *allow* opposition, questioning and debate, but also in the failure to provide the conditions that make these critical processes possible. Political correctness, in whatever form it takes, inhibits dialogue, works against the development of a critical orientation toward the world, restricts rather than expands the discursive universe within which people might operate, and is thus thoroughly dehumanizing.

Bloom, Canons and Core Curricula

The publication of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*[105] caused a sensation in the United States. The book shot to the top of the bestsellers lists, and generated reactions which ranged from the friendly and generally supportive to the hostile and savagely critical.[106] Bloom's book sparked heated debate across campuses nationwide in North America. For a time, hardly a week seemed to go by without the arrival of another critique of Bloom in a U.S. journal, magazine or newspaper. *The Closing of the American Mind*, as one critic put it, had become not so much a book as a phenomenon,[107] and the ripples created by its publication seemed set to continue for some time to come.

Bloom's book was but one link, albeit a crucial one, in a chain of critical texts on education in the United States.[108] E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, published in the same year as Bloom's book, also enjoyed considerable influence.[109] In many important respects the two texts are quite different, yet in the period immediately following their publication they were frequently reviewed together and seen as complementary conservative assaults on progressive educational change.[110] Other seminal conservative works,[111] including Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* and Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*, followed.[112] All painted a similarly bleak picture of declining academic standards, rampant cultural relativism, loss of respect for 'great' works and ideas, and the breakdown of traditional values.[113]

The first part of this section briefly summarizes Bloom's critique of contemporary American life and his proposal for a 'Great Books' programme in universities. Bloom's work provides a starting point for addressing wider debates over the place of the 'canon' in a changing world. Later in the chapter, a comparison between Bloom and Freire is drawn. I argue that Bloom presents a flawed view of reading, and find his view of the contemporary social world

problematic. I suggest, nevertheless, that there is much to be gained in critically engaging his ideas.[114]

Bloom on American Culture and Education

The most immediately noticeable feature of *The Closing of the American Mind* is its breadth. Bloom seems to tackle anything and everything in the text, from books, music, and relationships, to philosophy and education. His sweep of the Western philosophical tradition is vast, traversing thinkers from Plato to Nietzsche. The oversights he makes along the way have raised the ire of a good number of critics, and his scholarship has been found wanting by several accomplished philosophers.[115]

Bloom opens his 'Introduction' with the following statement:

> There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.[116]

This claim sets the tone for the rest of the book. Bloom sees relativism as the great 'evil' of the present epoch in the United States. Under the old view of what being American meant, Bloom asserts, it was assumed that human beings have certain natural rights which transcend differences across class, race and religious lines. This belief in natural human rights provided a powerful source of social unity. In recent times, by contrast, faith in natural rights has been replaced by an (apparent) openness - 'to all kinds of men, all kinds of life-styles, all ideologies'.[117] In the twentieth century, the idea of a 'common good' has been eroded and moves have been made to stem the 'tyranny' of the majority in an effort to protect

minorities.[118] Bloom maintains that all non-Western cultures are ethnocentric: it is only in Western countries that the (moral) supremacy of one's own culture, customs and ideas is called into question. Contrary to the pervasive mood of cultural relativism in North America, Bloom sees the United States as not just one nation among many others, but as 'one of the highest and most extreme achievements of the rational quest for the good life according to nature'.[119]

According to Bloom, young people in the U.S. today know less about American history than previous generations, and gain nothing more than a superficial understanding of other nations and cultures. The real driving force in education - the search for a good life - has been abandoned. In its place is a smorgasbord of courses and subjects, with no clear connections between the endless options and no intellectually respectable distinctions between what is important and what is unimportant.[120]

But Bloom does not limit his criticism to the educational problems that have beset American society in the past three decades: he also has a stab at the music enjoyed by the young of today, and deplores the breakdown of family and other relationships. Classical music, Bloom notes, has all but disappeared from the lives of young people, who turn instead in great numbers to the pulsating rhythms of rock music. Bloom openly acknowledges the value of music in 'giving the passions their due and...[in] preparing the soul for the unhampered use of reason'[121] but sees rock music as an aberration of this noble goal. Rock music, he says, 'has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire - not love, not *eros*, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored'.[122] Students no longer care for (or even read) books: music has become '*the* youth culture'.[123] Rock music destroys the imagination and stifles the ability of young people to relate seriously and passionately to 'the art and thought that are the substance of liberal education'.[124]

The family - which Bloom sees as an intermediary between the individual and society - has (in Bloom's view) been placed under tremendous threat in the present period in America's history. Divorce is on the increase, and children no longer feel the need to look after their parents as they grow older. The old ties that bound family members together in the same geographical area are diminishing as young people become more mobile and adopt a more transient style of life. For Bloom, the young of today are lost in a no-person's land: 'They can be anything they want to be, but they have no particular reason to want to be anything in particular'.[125] The traditional forms of social pressure exerted by the family and other institutions, and the responsibilities implied by those pressures, have disappeared.

When Bloom moves to the subject of race, his assertions become even more contentious. He declares that white and black students 'do not in general become friends with one another',[126] that black students in universities tend to keep to themselves, and that 'the average black student's achievements do not equal those of the average white student in good universities'.[127] Foreshadowing the position taken by a number of other contemporary commentators on U.S. universities, Bloom sees affirmative action policies as problematic, to say the least. Quotas and other forms of affirmative action set up an artificial environment in the university, encouraging separatism and tainting the degrees of black students.

Bloom's discussion of relationships between men and women has drawn a great deal of fire, resting as it does on pronouncements such as the following:

> ...feminism has brought with it an unrelenting process of consciousness raising and changing that begins in what is probably a permanent human inclination and is surely a modern one - the longing for the unlimited, the unconstrained.

> It ends, as do many modern movements that seek abstract justice, in forgetting nature and using force to refashion human beings to secure that justice.[128]

Bloom premises much of the argument in this section on the notion that there is a 'natural' order to relationships between men and women, based - initially, at least - on biological differences. Modesty, Bloom informs us, was (in days gone by) *the* female virtue, impeding sexual intercourse but ensuring that 'acquiescence of the will [was] as important as possession of the body'.[129] Lifting the veil of modesty, while it might make the fulfilment of desire easier, ends up reducing sex to 'the thing-in-itself'.[130] Under the influence of the women's movement, men have been forced to turn inwards to examine their consciences at the first sign of any of the sentiments they 'used to feel for women',[131] purging themselves of traits such as possessiveness, jealousy and protectiveness. Sitting somewhat uneasily alongside this transformation of attitudes has been the increasing acceptance of casual sex as a normal part of human relationships. All of the old conventions and pretensions of their grandparents' days have evaporated, and young people now live together, talk together, and study together without giving the matter a second thought. Birth-control devices and abortions are readily available. Along with this demolition of past constraints, however, has come a diminution of commitment between men and women and the destruction of unity through love, marriage and the family.[132]

The theme that binds all of the varied threads in Bloom's attack on modern social life in America together is his assertion that the search for, and reliance upon, truth has been abandoned. The traditions that underpinned the family, and relationships between people generally, have been discarded. In place of traditional (read 'classical') music and conventional ('natural') codes of thought and behaviour in relationships is a culture awash with trivia, social disarray, and declining institutional standards.

What, then, is Bloom's remedy for these social, cultural and educational ills? Early on in *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bloom laments the loss of (the potential) thirst for knowledge he observed in students at the beginning of the 1960s.[133] This natural desire to learn - which educators and policy makers have failed to capitalize on - can best be met, Bloom believes, through a traditional liberal education based upon the reading of 'Great Books'.

Books are important to Bloom. From his own classes, he has concluded that '...students have lost the practice of and the taste for reading. They have not learned how to read, nor do they have the expectation of delight or improvement from reading.'[134] Books no longer matter to students - they have been supplanted by a non-stop diet of fast food, fleeting relationships, and loud music. Young people turn to Mick Jagger, not Plato, for advice on how to live their lives. Students go to the movies, but what they find there is trite and incomplete by comparison with the educative possibilities in Tolstoy. Indeed, getting students to read at all is difficult these days, Bloom has observed. Bloom attributes this problem to teachers who were products of the sixties, contrasting them with the 'old teachers who loved Shakespeare or Austen or Donne, and whose only reward for teaching was the perpetuation of their taste'.[135] He also takes a swipe at feminism, holding it to be the 'latest enemy of the vitality of classic texts'.[136] He writes disapprovingly of the efforts of feminist activists to suppress gender references to God in a translation of the Bible, and to remove 'offensive' authors such as Rousseau from the curriculum.[137] By his own estimation, then, Bloom's ideal of a liberal education centred on classic works of literature and philosophy has much in its way at the moment.

Bloom looks back, with great bitterness, to the 1960s to find some of the reasons for the disintegration of his ideal. Living through the experience of seeing university academics and administrators harassed by masses of students, some armed at times, obviously left an

indelible impression on him. He remembers not only the chants of students to abolish racism, sexism, elitism, and war, but also his fruitless efforts to resist the removal of a core curriculum for Cornell students. The steady elimination of successive 'traditional' features of the curriculum had a trickle-down effect on the nation's schools: ability in the 'three Rs' plummeted, and attainment of excellence in historical, philosophical and literary scholarship was replaced with insipid appeals to the educational goals of 'growth', 'individual development' and 'inner-directedness'.[138]

Near the end of his account of the 1960s Bloom recalls an incident involving a group of students who were spending their year (together with Bloom and a number of like-minded professors) not as protesters and counter-culture revolutionaries, but as readers of Plato's *Republic*. As chaos reigned outside, these students looked down upon their activist peers with a degree of contempt, irritated by the activity that was getting in the way 'of what they thought it important to do'.[139] Later some of the students distributed copies of a passage from the *Republic* describing the methods used by Sophists to corrupt young men. The description offered by Plato, in Bloom's assessment, perfectly captured the circumstances of the moment. Bloom goes on to say that in reading the *Republic*, the small group of students setting themselves apart from the masses of protestors '...had learned from this old book what was going on and had gained real distance on it, had had an experience of liberation.'[140] This quotation goes to the heart of Bloom's conception of a liberal education. He proclaims further:

> Men may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time, because then they are participating in essential being and are forgetting about their accidental lives. The fact that this kind of humanity exists or existed, and that we can somehow still touch it with the tips of our

> outstretched fingers, makes our imperfect humanity, which we can no longer bear, tolerable. The books in their objective beauty are still there, and we must help protect and cultivate the delicate tendrils reaching out toward them through the unfriendly soil of students' souls.[141]

Human nature, Bloom believes, has not changed. The essential questions we need to ask as human beings are the same as they were in the days of Plato and Aristotle. The best way of exploring these questions is still the 'good old Great Books approach'.[142] Making the Great Books a pivotal part of the student curriculum is the surest way, Bloom claims, of exciting and satisfying students, of finding a way into their hearts and allowing them to appreciate the special knowledge and experience they can gain from university study.[143]

Canons and Core Curricula in Higher Education

Bloom's call for a return to the classics is, of course, not a new one. Social and educational critics of various political persuasions have been pushing a similar line of argument for some years now. Mortimer Adler, for example, has created an industry with his 'Great Books of the Western World' series.[144] With the publication of Bloom's bestseller, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in the strengths and weaknesses of traditional 'Great Books' programmes in institutions of higher education. For several years in the late 1980s and early 1990s *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *New York Review of Books* regularly featured articles on debates over the canon in universities,[145] and changes to core reading lists in key courses in a number of institutions (e.g. at Stanford) have attracted much publicity and controversy.

Two main antagonistic groups can be identified. On the one hand, there are those (like Bloom) who champion the traditional classic texts, including such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, together with literary figures such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Proust, Joyce, and Tolstoy. Works by these authors are considered 'great' by virtue of their long-standing influence on the course of Western thought and culture, and for the essential questions about the nature of the human condition these books are said to address.[146]

On the other side of the debate, a number of academics have pointed out that the so-called 'Great Books' often seem to be those written by white, middle-class males, with very little representation of works by women and authors from ethnic minority groups.[147] The entire tradition of a liberal education in the Bloomian, 'Great Books' sense, is perceived by many these days to be elitist and oppressive. White males, it has been argued, have held proportionately greater political power in Western societies than other groups; it is no accident, therefore, that the curriculum should reflect and reinforce this power in both content and style. Few adopting this (or a similar) pattern of reasoning have called for the complete abolition of core curricula, but many have campaigned for a re-organization of reading requirements to incorporate more books by women, ethnic minorities, and other groups.[148]

The former group I shall call 'traditionalists', the latter 'reformists'.[149] For both sides, the focal point for debate has been the 'canon'. Given the centrality of this concept to the 'culture wars', it might be helpful to briefly examine its etymology and something of its history. The idea of a 'canon' of key literary, philosophical and historical works - to be read by all or most students, at or near the beginning of their studies - derives from the Greek 'kanon', meaning 'a straight rod', 'a ruler', and hence 'a standard'.[150] According to Kennedy, the term has its

origins in the work of scholars at the Alexandrian library in the third and second centuries B.C., who 'provided guidelines for student readers by listing what they regarded as the best examples in each literary genre'.[151] Poetry was judged not on the basis of its moral content, but on 'consistency of characterization,...subtlety of diction and versification, elegance of ornamentation, and imaginative power'.[152] The morality of the Homeric epics *was*, of course, of considerable concern to Plato (and Xenophanes). Plato speaks in the *Republic* of the delicate and malleable character of young minds - of that time in life when people are 'easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark'.[153] Given the popular appeal of Homer's poems for young people, educators have a responsibility to 'supervise the production of stories, and choose only those...[they] think suitable', while rejecting the rest.[154]

Kennedy notes that while the concept of a biblical canon may have been influenced by the (earlier) existence of a literary canon, the standards for the two forms were different.[155] In the case of the former, the prime determinant of canonical status was the authenticity or orthodoxy of the religious teaching. Works traditionally admired for their literary merit - e.g. the Song of Solomon - could be included through allegorical interpretation, but qualities of poetic style were secondary to doctrinal considerations in the selection process.[156] Kennedy observes:

> These days the neoconservatives often seem to blur the distinction between literary and doctrinal canons, between the chef d'oeuvre and a sacred text. The reason American young people should read the Constitution of the United States has little to do with its literary merit, and the reason they should read *Paradise Lost* has little to do with its religious doctrine.[157]

The canon, in this hybrid literary-doctrinal form, has been at the centre of core 'Western Culture' or 'Western Civilization' university courses in North American universities since the early part of this century. Pratt identifies the course on Western civilization instituted at Columbia University in 1919 as the major antecedent for subsequent similar courses across the country.[158] This specific moment in the history of higher education in the United States needs to be understood in light of earlier debates over 'general' education. Smith notes that in the period immediately prior to the development of the Columbia course, 'general education' enjoyed a 'roller-coaster ride of ups and downs'.[159] The idea of requiring students to have a 'major' was initiated at Indiana University in 1885, in contrast to (what was then) the traditional 'classical' curriculum on the one hand and the new 'elective' system on the other.[160] The idea of a 'major' allowed students to study one discipline or area of knowledge in some depth. This avoided the 'anything goes' character of the elective system while at the same time making a break with tradition. However, worries about increasing specialization through the mechanism of the major were raised almost immediately, and in 1901 Yale University ushered in an added requirement of 'distribution'.[161] The idea behind the Yale move, Smith maintains, was

> ...that students, while being required to focus or concentrate their efforts in a particular academic area or "field", should have at least a smattering of knowledge about other fields. Thus an English major or "concentrator" should have a nodding acquaintance with the *arrivistes*, the social sciences, and, most important of all, the sciences.[162]

In many North American universities around the turn of the century, required courses in 'core' areas of knowledge were already in place. In some cases, students could choose among

a variety of courses within the designated core subject areas. Hence, a student majoring in political economy, to give Smith's example,

> ...might be able to satisfy his/her distribution requirement in English with a highly specialized course in, say, the Georgian poets, or medieval chansons, the idea being that what was important was not so much the specialized content of such courses but the "methodology" of the scholars in that field.[163]

The difficulties in finding a suitable course for students in satisfying the science component of the distribution requirements led to the search for alternatives, one of which was the 'Western Civilization' or 'Western Culture' course. The rationale behind such courses was that 'all students should have some similar background for understanding their humanistic tradition, contemporary social issues, and the recent explosion of scientific knowledge'.[164] Similar principles were reinforced in the well-known Harvard report on general education some decades later, where the call was for a system which would address 'a body of common experiences and common knowledge,...some communication of values, ideas and attitudes, ...[and] the transmission of a common cultural heritage toward a common citizenship'.[165] Thus, debates over core courses, or core learning areas, have periodically surfaced in North American universities for over one hundred years; discussions of 'canons' have an even longer history. Current battles over the 'Great Books' and core university curricula are not new, though they do represent a particularly vigorous manifestation of older tensions and antagonisms.

While questions about canons and core curricula have been most vigorously debated in the United States, they are arguably of international educational significance.[166] There are, to be sure, a number of important differences between universities in the United States and those

in other First World countries. In New Zealand, for example, students in the Humanities are compelled to take certain courses in given subjects if they are to advance in those subjects, but there are no compulsory courses to be taken by *all* students enrolled for a BA degree. In addition to deciding what books might be required reading in a core course, then, New Zealanders are faced with the question of whether to have such a course in the first place. Countries also differ, of course, in their political systems, contemporary ethnic mixes, and educational arrangements. In many respects, though, the issues at the heart of battles over the canon transcend differences in detail between countries in the Western world. The problem of deciding which books are the *best* texts for students to read, whether they are compelled to read them or not, is germane to all university settings. Issues of selection and censorship - whether relating to speech, books or films, or anything else - are likewise pertinent to every Western nation.

A 'core' course can be conceived as any organized form of study which is regarded as essential for all students in particular programmes. However, the notion of a core in recent debates over the canon is considerably narrower than this. It is this more specific use with which I am concerned in this chapter. I shall use the term 'core courses' to refer to programmes of study in which students from a variety of university departments or schools are required to read a range of key texts. There may be variations between different universities as regards the number of students for whom such courses might be compulsory. For example, in some universities all students in all schools of study (Humanities, Social Sciences, Management, Science, etc.) may be required to enrol in a programme of this kind; in other institutions, this requirement may only apply to, say, Humanities students. For present purposes, these distinctions do not matter. (This is not to suggest that questions about the range of students for whom such courses ought to be compulsory are of no

consequence. Given the focus of this chapter, though, these issues are of secondary importance.)

While participants in discussions of university reading requirements and core curricula in the United States and elsewhere have given widely disparate answers to the question (explicitly or implicitly posed) 'What ought students to read?', all agree, in so far as they proffer an opinion at all on the subject, that students ought to read *something* (as opposed to nothing). The very step of asking this question at all assumes that this is an issue worth addressing: that is, it is presupposed by those entering the debate(s) that there is something *at stake* for students (and, some respondents argue, for others as well) in reading. Even in the most bitter confrontations, few have suggested that students ought to read nothing during their time at university, or that time which would otherwise be devoted to reading might better be spent on other activities. This point of unity among apparently divisive positions is significant for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that despite phenomenal growth in new modes of communication, books, it seems, still *matter* in the (post)modern world. Whatever response is given, the question 'What books ought students to read?' has profound implications for education - particularly as practised in institutions such as universities. The problem of deciding not only *what*, but *why* and *how*, texts should be read bears crucially upon our conception of the very nature of a university education; additionally, the different perspectives in the debate over the canon generate quite distinct arrangements with respect to curriculum processes and teacher-student relationships.

In requiring or recommending that students read certain books, it is reasonable to expect that they will change in some way for the better as a result of this reading. While we expect all courses to be of value for students, core programmes of any kind should carry particular, 'special' benefits additional to those which accrue from other courses. This, after all, is

precisely why some courses are designated a compulsory part of the curriculum in the first place: it is believed that students cannot do without certain forms of learning given what an institution is designed to achieve. If all students - including those enrolled in specialized, technical, or vocational programmes - are compelled to complete at least one core course on 'Western Civilization' or 'Western Culture', the hope is that this form of educative engagement will, among other things, bring a breadth of understanding which might otherwise be missing in a professional degree. The importance of forming a particular attitude toward studying, learning and knowledge is often stressed as an additional reason for favouring such courses. Finally, there is sometimes an expectation that those who go on to become 'well-read' will bring their knowledge and understanding to bear on the crucial issues (political, environmental, religious, etc.) of the day. Properly educated folk, conventional university wisdom holds, not only contribute to national economic growth but also foster and enhance social justice. Through a liberal education centred upon the reading of great works of philosophy and literature young people are given the foundations for becoming mature, critical, responsible, empathetic, active citizens, interested not just in personal gain but in the ideal of a good society. This conception of educational value, while seriously undermined in recent times by utilitarian 'market' models of the social world, is nevertheless retained with affection if not passion by many within universities.

Notwithstanding the dangers of drawing simplistic links between reading and a range of desirable social outcomes, many academics might agree that these are worthy objectives. The extent to which they have been addressed and achieved in practice is, of course, another matter. Much also hinges on how they are interpreted. In this respect, I believe some traditionalists have promoted an unnecessarily restrictive vision of a liberal education; in some instances, the ideas and practices espoused by conservatives have been positively antithetical to the goals articulated above. On the other hand, not all developments

supported by some who claim to be 'radicals' have been sufficiently well justified on educational grounds.

I want to argue that while the ideals espoused by those who support core 'Western Civilization' courses have been (legitimately) interrogated and deconstructed from a plethora of critical positions, the objectives, practices and curriculum arrangements which take the place of traditional 'Great Books' programmes have not always been well defended or self-evidently *defensible.* Two positions from opposing sides in the debate over the canon will be challenged: (i) the view, articulated by Bloom and supported by many other conservatives, that the 'greatness' of books can be objectively determined by 'writers of quality'; and (ii) the notion that the sole, or the prime, criterion for selecting books in a core course should be the gender or ethnicity of the author. Both of these positions are problematic. Following my critique, and drawing on earlier ideas, I offer an alternative response to the problem of deciding what books to include in core courses: one based on the reworked notion of conscientization developed in the previous chapter.

Selecting Books for Core Courses

The notion that the 'best' books should be selected for core courses, given limitations on time, seems self-evident, and is likely to be accepted by groups from diverse points on the political spectrum. Certainly few on either the Right or the Left would want to argue that students ought to read books which are 'second rate' in some respect.[167] The crucial question over which conflict inevitably arises, however, is this: What do we mean by 'best'? We need to ask: 'Best' for whom? For what purpose? On what ethical position? Under what circumstances? The problem of working out how to decide what is 'best' becomes, in itself, a major hurdle, but one which must be addressed by any university setting up a core

curriculum. Questions of *process* as well as *content* become pivotal. In broad terms, the issue becomes one of deciding how to deal with texts - how to select them, teach about them, read them, write about them, engage them, relate them to other aspects of life, and so on.

Those who defend a traditional 'Great Books' programme of liberal education typically assume that some books are better than others. This is a point with which many radicals - including Freire, with qualification - would concur. I say 'with qualification' because, for Freire, a book's value can only be assessed when that book is *read* - in a particular way, in a given context, within a specific set of social and historical circumstances. Hence, the book does not any fixed or *'a priori'* value: the worth of one text as compared with another can only be assessed in relation to the actual forms engagement with the texts in question take. Many conservatives assume that evaluating a book's worth (and hence its right to be included in a core curriculum) is a matter of assessing its intrinsic merits. Great books, for the traditionalist, transcend time, space and context: they are *always* great, whether being read by the nobility in medieval Europe or by working class black youths in twentieth century America. It is often taken for granted, moreover, that there is, or can be, substantial agreement over which books are worthy of classic status - provided people are sufficiently well qualified to make judgements of this kind. There are different variations on this theme among the myriad conservative defences of a traditional 'Great Books' curriculum, but all assume that some books have an inherent, internal value, and that some people are able to 'objectively' distinguish these texts from others of lesser value. I shall concentrate here on Bloom's version of this thesis, though my criticisms are applicable to many other traditionalist positions as well. I hope to show that the basis on which Bloom would select books for his 'Great Books' programme is *philosophically* flawed. This is not, of course, the only angle from which his position might be criticized. The elitism of his ideal (and of the assumptions which

underpin his justification of the ideal) has been attacked on *ethical* grounds by others; there is not space in the present discussion, however, to explore this line of argument.

(i) *Bloom on the Determination of Greatness*

Bloom claims, with regard to the 'relatively small number of classic books'[168] by philosophers, that

> ...[this is] a list established not subjectively by means of current criteria, but generated immanently by the writers themselves. I argue that there is a high degree of agreement among the writers themselves as to who merits serious consideration. The writers of quality know the writers of quality.[169]

There is an inevitable circularity to Bloom's reasoning here. Bloom knows which texts are philosophical classics because those who have written them know what makes a book great and identify others of similar greatness in their own works. The greats, then, know who the greats are. This leaves Bloom with something of a problem. If it is *only* great writers who know what books are worthy of serious study, then Bloom must consider himself among the greats. The argument here might proceed in this manner: an author may lay claim to his or her own greatness, or may promote the greatness of another, but in order to distinguish genuine geniuses from charlatans, a certain level of greatness on the part of the person making this judgment is necessary. The detection of 'true' greatness, thus, requires true greatness.

Bloom's comments in *The Closing of the American Mind* and elsewhere suggest, however, that he did not place himself in the same company as Plato or Shakespeare or Rousseau. If this

is the case, another possibility is that so long as Author B regards Author A as 'great', and Author C likewise holds Author B in similar regard, we can be sure that Author A *is* great. This does not mean that Author B must agree with Author A, or Author C with Author B. As Bloom points out, respect for an author is frequently evinced through criticism; Hobbes's critique of Aristotle, thus, 'shows us that Aristotle is the man to attack'.[170] Hence, we can be certain that Plato is among the greats, inasmuch as his ideas are thoroughly considered by Aristotle, who has in turn been carefully studied by Aquinas. This is a process where Author B's judgements about Author A are legitimated through Author C's assessment of Author B. By the same logic, of course, Author C's authority to judge must also be determined by a further author (D); so too with Author D, Author E, *ad infinitum*.

But note that if this line of argument is carried through to its logical conclusion either we have to declare Bloom himself among the greats (or at least a 'writer of quality') after all, or we end up going around in circles. If an author's greatness is established by someone in a later period seriously engaging his or her work, then as the path of legitimation is followed up through history, eventually the present day is reached. The line of 'great' philosophers considered by Bloom extends from Plato and other early Greeks through to Heidegger. Heidegger, Bloom pronounces, is 'a really serious thinker, Nietzsche's heir'.[171] Each of the thinkers in this path of greatness must, by Bloom's own reasoning, have been legitimated by another great philosopher grappling with his or her ideas. Yet who is to judge Heidegger worthy of consideration for greatness if (chronologically) he is the last among these thinkers? It must, if it is Bloom's comments with which we are dealing, be Bloom himself.

It might be suggested that Bloom is simply reflecting prevailing philosophical opinion as to the worth of studying Heidegger. Yet, this runs counter to the very thrust of his argument. For Bloom's point is precisely that contemporary trends in philosophy (and in other fields

such as literary criticism) are merely passing fads; the truly 'great' thinkers and really 'big' questions and ideas, he wants to say, have largely been ignored or inadequately engaged.[172] Indeed, if there is one criterion which Bloom would almost certainly *not* accept as a legitimate basis for determining greatness, it is current professional opinion. Bloom does not explicitly state that no one other than the greats will know who the greats are, but he does imply that one must be at least a 'writer of quality' in order to make this form of judgement. While he does not claim to be among the greats himself, Bloom must concede that he believes he knows who the greats are (otherwise he could not be sure that the last in the line of great thinkers was great); it follows, if the implication just noted is correct, that he must consider himself a writer of quality.

Who, then, is to rule on Bloom's ability to evaluate greatness? By Bloom's own logic, for his judgments to be authenticated another writer of quality must seriously engage his work. In this respect, Bloom finds some support for his position: respected scholars from a multiplicity of disciplines and diverse political perspectives have commented in depth on his work. That many have been critical in their assessment strengthens rather than weakens the case for Bloom: rigorous and reflective criticism, as much as well-reasoned praise, confirms the worth of confronting a given text or author. This line of reasoning is consistent with the view expressed by Bloom in his statement about Hobbes's critique of Aristotle. Yet Bloom seems reluctant to apply the same principles when commenting on thinkers other than those he regards as greats.

For example, in commenting on Stanford University's 'Cultures, Ideas and Values' programme, Bloom dismisses Frantz Fanon as an 'inferior and derivative thinker', unworthy of attention but for the fact that he happens to be the 'ideologue of currently popular movements'.[173] Fanon, despite his 'racism and incitement to terrorism' is part of the new

curriculum because 'as a black Algerian...he fit[s] Stanford's job description'.[174] Notwithstanding his obvious disagreement with Fanon's ideas, with this form of outright rejection Bloom is surely contradicting the processes of affirming greatness he espouses with regard to Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke and others. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*,[175] many would argue, has attained the status of a classic. Its influence in political philosophy - especially among Third World thinkers - has been considerable. Even if Bloom were to question the value of *The Wretched of the Earth* for Western philosophical thought, he would have to admit that a number of noted philosophers from the First World have addressed the book respectfully and seriously (including, for instance, Jean-Paul Sartre in a 'Preface' to the text). In seeking a more plausible explanation for Bloom's contempt of Fanon, the tables can be turned: presumably, the only reason Bloom sees nothing of value in Fanon's work is that Fanon's politics do not comfortably mesh with his own.

The problems here, though, go beyond apparent contradictions in Bloom's application of his principles for ascertaining greatness. If the only, or even the *prime*, criterion for determining Author A's greatness is a pronouncement to this effect by another author (B) who has in turn been deemed great by a further author (C), the number of books on Bloom's list of classics will have to increase dramatically. All major fields of study are now replete with authors who have been exalted for their achievements by their peers; in the domain of philosophy alone, the number of books to which someone has in one way or another referred to as 'great' is likely to run into the hundreds. This clearly goes beyond what Bloom intended in his comments; on the Bloomian view, the number of thinkers who are themselves great and who confirm the greatness of others by dealing with their ideas in a great book is, and always will be, relatively small.[176]

The whole process of legitimation through the declaration of greatness by others ends up being a dead end, for at the end of the day a further person who has the credentials of greatness is needed to confirm someone else's greatness. Thus, even though Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* has attracted extensive comment from 'great' thinkers of varying political persuasions - which, by Bloom's logic, gives legitimacy to his declarations of the greatness of others - the greatness of commentator 1 must be confirmed by commentator 2, who must in turn be legitimated by commentator 3, and so on. Legitimation can never be complete because the last person in the chain always requires someone else to give legitimacy to their comments.

Two other possible lines of defence are open to Bloom. First, it may be the case that the worth of Author A's work is confirmed when *many* 'writers of quality' seriously engage it. It is not enough, then, for Author A's work to be seriously considered by Author B; there must be further accomplished authors (C, D, E,...) who are doing the same as B. Hence, Heidegger's greatness is revealed by the many appraisals - both critical and approving - of his ideas by respected thinkers over the past few decades. Yet the same might be said of Fanon, whom Bloom denigrates as a racist ideologue, or any number of key feminist thinkers (about whom Bloom has nothing kind to say). Even where Bloom concedes that another philosopher's work has been highly influential, he sometimes seems unwilling to admit him or her to the company of greats - unwilling, that is, if the thinker's ideas conflict with his own.[177]

Bloom is more likely to support the view that tradition ought to be the arbiter in assessing greatness. Repeated references to a philosopher's work over the course of time becomes the key here. Plato, then, emerges as a giant among thinkers given the enormous influence he has exerted over the entire history of Western philosophy. Fanon's influence, by contrast, is

(Bloom might argue) but a temporary phenomenon in an unenlightened age. This still leaves Bloom with problems. First, the way in which tradition impacts upon or reinforces the greatness of an author is not clear. Is the worth of Plato's work more assured than that of Nietzsche given its longevity as part of the western philosophical tradition? Bloom says nothing about how many years need to pass for a text to become cemented in tradition; nor does he provide adequate grounds for delineating between works within a given tradition as regards their value.

Second, the 'last in line' difficulty surfaces again. Bloom declares Heidegger 'a really serious thinker', yet there is no tradition building on Heidegger's work to which Bloom refers as evidence of Heidegger's greatness. The philosophical merit of Heidegger's work must be assessed by Bloom himself, or by other contemporary theorists. Heidegger, then, is the latest really serious thinker in a long tradition of greats, yet the only assurance we have that he deserves to be placed in that tradition must come from those who have not been confirmed as part of the tradition. This, at the very least, places greater uncertainty over Heidegger's legitimacy as one of the really serious thinkers than exists with those who come before him in the tradition.

Finally, Bloom is highly selective in who he includes as part of the philosophical tradition he alludes to. Before this problem can be addressed, however, some attention must be paid to the question of exactly what this tradition *is* for Bloom. It might be claimed that in recommending a 'Great Books' programme, Bloom is simply commenting on the worth of certain books within a specialized field of study (e.g. the Western tradition of political philosophy). Even a cursory reading of Bloom's work, however, lays this hypothesis to rest. For Bloom, there are not multiple lists of classic texts, varying according to one's theoretical perspective or the social and cultural context within which reading takes place; rather, there

is one (more-or-less finite) set of Great Books which should be read by all serious scholars from any discipline or area of study seeking the best that has been written on the human condition.

In *The Closing of the American Mind* Bloom makes the astonishing claim that 'with the possible exception of Weber and Freud, there are no social science books that can be said to be classic'.[178] This may come as something of a surprise to the thousands of scholars who have been influenced by Durkheim (in sociology), Skinner (in psychology), or Levi-Strauss (in anthropology), to name but a few. As for natural scientists, Bloom believes they simply proceed happily with their own work, largely independently from those squabbling over the canon and the politics of education elsewhere.[179] The list of classic texts, one gathers from Bloom's essays and books, is to be principally drawn from philosophy and literature, with one or two historians also making a contribution.

As to who is on this list of greats, Bloom is at once lucid and ambiguous. To judge by many of Bloom's statements, whole groups of writers can immediately be eliminated, including all (or almost all) women authors.[180] Those outside the Western tradition almost never warrant a mention, and contemporary works by authors from ethnic minority groups and Third World countries appear invisible. Even within Bloom's specialist area - the Western tradition in political philosophy - there are some striking omissions: Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, for example, seems to have been completely forgotten. Jaffa, among others, draws attention to similar oddities with respect to literature: 'There is not', he notes, 'a single reference to Cooper or Hawthorne or Emerson or Whitman or Howells. Nor any to Dreiser or Sinclair Lewis or Edith Wharton or Willa Cather...Above all, there is nothing about Melville or Mark Twain!'.[181]

Some of the thinkers to whom Bloom directly or by implication repeatedly refers to as 'great' include Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Yet even here there is much room for ambiguity, especially in *The Closing of the American Mind*, for given that Bloom fails to cite his exact sources it is not always clear which texts by these authors are truly classic and which are perhaps of more marginal interest. Plato's *Republic* is certainly on the list, but what of all the other dialogues; what, indeed, of the much debated Platonic letters? Machiavelli's *The Prince* is referred to frequently by Bloom, but far less is said about the *Discourses*. Certain individual authors similarly remain in an ambivalent position. Bloom acknowledges Marx's influence on occasion, but appears reluctant to accord him the same respect he reserves for others he truly reveres on his list of greats (e.g. Plato and Rousseau). In his tribute to Alexandre Kojeve, for instance, Bloom comments: '[i]t is precisely Marx's failure to think through the meaning of his own historical thought that proves his philosophical inadequacy and compels us to turn to the profounder Hegel'.[182]

Bloom attacks others for preferring certain texts on 'political' or 'ideological' grounds, yet fails to turn this logic back upon his own views. He never considers in detail what philosophical or literary 'greatness' is or might be, yet his whole rationale for selecting some authors over others in a Great Books programme depends on this. While acknowledging the importance of a sense of history, Bloom's account of the Great Books tradition appears strangely *a*historical. There has never been total agreement over which books qualify for 'classic' status. Even the traditional conception of the canon has changed over time; some works which are now accepted by conservatives as unquestionably 'great' were initially regarded with suspicion. As Graff notes, '[t]eaching Shakespeare instead of the classics was a radical innovation'.[183] Conversely, certain texts once considered important are now seen as of more marginal interest. For Bloom, some writers are neglected because 'the limitation of our views

makes them seem slight or irrelevant. Machiavelli and Rousseau had the highest opinion of Xenophon; for us he is nothing'.[184] Yet Bloom gives little consideration to the possibility that similarly 'limiting' views may, for example, have prevented books by women becoming recognized as classics in the past; instead, he simply advocates turning to the philosophers he admires (Plato, Machiavelli, Rousseau, etc.) to see what they have to say about other supposedly 'great' thinkers.[185]

Some theorists - Howe, for instance - see modifications in perceptions of the value of particular books not as a threat to the Great Books tradition but as essential for its survival.[186] Others would prefer to have seen *more* change to perceptions of greatness than has traditionally been the case. While shifts in literary, philosophical and educational opinion throughout history ought not to be ignored, it is also crucial not to exaggerate discontinuities and differences in the Great Books tradition. Indeed, part of the explanation for the intensity of debates over the canon lies in the fact that until recently the superiority of certain texts over others was largely accepted without question by those responsible for core curriculum arrangements; challenging such orthodoxy is always bound to create friction. This is not to say that *all* people have accepted this assumption; rather, the point is that over the course of history certain groups have had a greater say than others over what is *deemed* to be worthwhile as far as reading material is concerned. Feminists, Marxists, and other theorists working in various critical traditions in sociology, philosophy and education have convincingly demonstrated that the construction of core reading lists is a far from neutral process.[187] This applies not only to the 'Great' books, but to books generally: the production and teaching of texts, a number of theorists have argued, has always been a thoroughly political process, serving the interests of management over workers, men over women, whites over blacks, and so on.[188]

(ii) *Challenging the Traditional Canon*

One way of addressing imbalances in traditional 'Great Books' programmes is to call for more books by groups *other* than white males in core courses.[189] For educators committed to the ideal of open, critical inquiry, the notion of making an author's gender or ethnicity the sole or even the prime criterion for selection to a core reading list is, at first sight, precarious at best (and abhorrent at worst). However, it is helpful to consider the grounds on which such a principle might be supported. One justification might be that all students, or at least as many students as possible, need role models to whom they can turn for guidance - especially on the deepest questions about how they ought to live their lives. A curriculum dominated by dead white European upper-class males, it could be argued, provides few authors to whom women, ethnic minorities and working class students can meaningfully relate. Everything about a traditional 'Great Books' programme, it seems, is foreign to many students: depictions of life among the elite classes of Europe several centuries ago, for example, are so far removed from the everyday experiences of (say) an African-American, working-class woman in the 1990s that the very idea of reading books tied to this context seems ridiculous. Many adults cringe when remembering hours spent toiling over Shakespeare or Chaucer as secondary school students, and view the introduction of more local and contemporary texts into the curriculum as a breath of fresh air. The culture of everyday life shapes the way people view the world so strongly that it would not be far off the mark to say that encountering the traditional classics often comes as a 'culture shock' to many students.

Others maintain, however, that one of the best reasons for retaining some version of a Great Books programme is exactly this: the texts encountered in such courses take people away from the 'here and now' while nevertheless dealing with themes of (purportedly) universal

human significance. Arguably, it is only through looking at the world in a different way that progress can be made. Indeed, a fundamental goal of any educational institution - and *especially* of a university is to challenge existing patterns of thought and previously unquestioned assumptions. A university ought to encourage students to *reinterpret* their experiences in light of ideas from great thinkers; to simply affirm current interpretations of reality goes against the grain of higher educational ideals. Bloom would say that the 'good old Great Books', as he likes to think of them, *are* 'relevant' for students in the United States in the 1990s: the problem is that people are not given a reasonable chance of determining why and how they are relevant. The value of Plato's work, Bloom would argue, comes precisely from the fact that he speaks not to any particular ethnic group, or to one sex at the expense of the other, but rather to all people, no matter what their personal circumstances.[190] The great philosophers from Plato and Aristotle onwards give us models of how to live our lives, of how to make sense of the world: their work is of timeless value because it addresses themes which transcend the specifics of particular social and historical contexts. We can thus (Bloom might say) all potentially 'relate' to what the great thinkers have to say if only we take the time and make the effort to study their work with the care and attention it deserves.

Having said this, the idea that *all* students will *always* gain more in reading Plato, Shakespeare, and the others on Bloom's list of 'greats' than they would in reading other texts seems unreasonable and unlikely given the diverse contexts within which reading at university level takes place. For some students, it may be less well-known, contemporary, perhaps local, books which provide the best opportunity for reflection. Certainly many might claim that a text which is 'close to home', or related to a way of life with which we are familiar, can often inspire more searching questions of the soul than a book that seems distant or remote from us. For others, books representative of cultural traditions other than

the Western European heritage which dominated 'Great Books' of the past might furnish a better opportunity for educative engagement.

These issues provided a focus for debate among curriculum reformists and conservative teachers in New Zealand a number of years ago. In introducing a revised English syllabus for senior secondary school students, a key problem was finding the correct balance between New Zealand (or indigenous) texts and overseas literature. Conservatives fought for the retention of a traditional approach based upon classic works chosen not on 'ideological' grounds but purely on the basis of literary merit. New Zealand authors could be a part of the syllabus, it was suggested by one teacher, so long as they met acknowledged standards of international acclaim; Janet Frame, Katherine Mansfield, James K. Baxter, Frank Sargeson, and Allen Curnow were listed as representative examples. In the 'overall scheme of things', however, New Zealand writing was seen as 'of relatively minor significance'.[191] As far as conservative critics were concerned, the proposed revisions were driven not by a commitment to literary and educational excellence but rather by an explicit, dogmatic sociopolitical agenda.[192]

One defender of revisions to the curriculum noted that while New Zealand literature would be 'an important focus', it was also hoped that students would attain an appreciation of 'the British tradition from which New Zealand literature sprang'.[193] For the reformers, the assumption was that education, far from being neutral, had 'clearly benefited some, and oppressed others'; changes were necessary to recognize and accept the contributions of those other than white males.[194] In one of the few academic responses to the draft syllabus, Maxwell supports the bicultural aims articulated in the document, and argues for a revisionist approach to the canon in secondary school English programmes. She suggests that canonic works should be dismantled or re-read as part of a wider attempt to 'develop

historical explanations which involve tracing the complex web of interchanges resulting from the collision of the two different cultures [Maori and Pakeha]'.[195]

Of course, the distinction between that which is 'local' and that which is 'universal' in texts is often difficult to discern. For while books may be selected on the basis of their local content, the themes addressed in those texts may have universal significance. Novels do not have to deal with social contexts, geographical locations, or historical periods which are unfamiliar to the majority of all possible readers to be of value! Indeed, as Aronowitz and Giroux point out, some of the books which end up on lists of 'classics' start out as popular novels (the work of Dickens being one example), with narratives grounded in the everyday lives of their readers.[196]

From a different angle, selecting books because they have been written by women or ethnic minorities might be justified on the grounds that authors from these groups have been under-represented in the past, and that this imbalance needs to be redressed. If the gender or ethnicity of an author is *not* the prime factor in the selection process, then the curriculum will continue to be dominated by the books of white males. After all, it might be argued, the history of universities demonstrates that despite the existence of texts by authors *other* than white males from the leisured and elite classes, there have always been far more books by this group than any other in core reading lists. Viewed as a proportion of the population of the United States (or any other country in the West), this group constitutes a minority - more so today than ever before.[197] A situation where there is over-representation of a minority group and serious under-representation of many other groups is undemocratic and unjust: the curriculum, therefore, ought to be changed to better reflect balances between different groups in society.

Traditionalists might adopt several positions in counter-attack here. First, with regard to the lack of women writers in Great Books programmes, it could be claimed that until relatively recently most philosophical and literary books were written by men: imbalances, therefore, merely reflected the availability of texts. Certainly there is a case for arguing that the number of books published by women (as compared with men) has increased dramatically this century - particularly over the past two decades. Yet there is now considerable evidence to suggest that the writings of women have been actively suppressed (by men) for centuries.[198] In some cases, texts have been written but not supported by publishers; in other instances, published works have been ignored. The texts, thus, have always been there: they have simply not been recognized as 'legitimate' for publication, serious study, or inclusion among lists of classics.

An alternative approach for the staunch traditionalist would be to argue that most of the *great* books have been written by white Anglo-Saxon males (the corollary being that little or nothing of value has been written by anyone else).[199] Lists of classics in the past frequently contained no women philosophers (or historians, or sociologists, or psychologists), and only a sprinkling of female novelists (e.g. the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, and George Eliot). Some traditionalists see little reason to change this trend.[200] Few conservatives assert that no works of lasting quality have been produced in the East (though some want to say that the West has produced more masterpieces); many imply, however, that very little of merit has been produced by Third World writers.[201] Novels and historical texts which document or celebrate working class life, or explicitly critique capitalist social structures, are seldom mentioned.[202]

On the view being tested here, if, say, female authors are not included on a given list of Great Books, the assumption must be that no books by women are superior in quality to *any* of the books by men. This proposition is likely to strike many scholars as highly dubious,

if not preposterous, yet it continues to hold currency among some traditionalists even today. Much hinges, of course, on how 'literary value' is determined. While questions of this kind can never be finally or absolutely settled, arguments which suggest that more women should have been admitted to the company of greats than many conservatives have customarily allowed are compelling. Jane Tompkins, for example, in her study of American fiction from 1790 to 1860, poses a powerful challenge to conventional notions of literary merit.[203] The orthodox view, she notes, holds that books attain the status of classics when they withstand the test of time, transcending the social circumstances under which they are authored and read. Tompkins offers an alternative position:

> [A] literary reputation could never be anything but a political matter. My assumption is not that "interest and passion" should be eliminated from literary evaluation - this is neither possible nor desirable - but that works that have attained the status of classic, and are therefore believed to embody universal values, are in fact embodying only the interests of whatever parties or factions are responsible for maintaining them in their preeminent position. Identifying the partisan processes that lead to the establishment of a classic author is not to revoke his or her claim to greatness, but simply to point out that that claim is open to challenge from other quarters, by other groups, representing equally partisan interests.[204]

Calling for a redefinition of literature and literary study, and employing Harriet Beecher Stow's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example, Tompkins maintains that novels should be studied not because they escape the limitations of their context but precisely because they convey the temper of a given historical moment.[205] Tompkins argues that Hawthorne's work might have gained less recognition under different circumstances, while other books - e.g. Susan Warner's

The Wide, Wide World ought to have received greater attention from the literary establishment. Her point is that claims to greatness are always *contestable*, politically constituted, and historically situated. Women have been under-represented in the canon not because their work has been inferior to that of men, but because critics have been unable to step outside their social milieu in making pronouncements about literary value. The politics of exclusion from the canon need to be studied alongside wider processes of discrimination against women critics, journalists and academics,[206] for acknowledging the value of books by women arguably depends, at least in part, on recognizing the contribution of those who engage, comment on, and teach, their work.

Some who oppose changes to traditional core courses concentrate not on the deficiencies of non-Western works but on the positive aspects of studying the Western tradition. The primary cultural heritage of nations such as the United States, the argument goes, is Western. Just as countries in the East pass on the values and ideas which contributed to their way of life, so too should it be natural for educators in the United States, Canada, Britain, and Australasia to pay closest attention to the thinkers - going all the way back to the early Greeks - who have been influential in shaping Western traditions. Acknowledging and fostering a shared cultural heritage, it is believed, is essential for meaningful communication and social cohesion. The trouble with this view - a contemporary expression of which can be found in E.D. Hirsch's notion of a 'common culture'[207] - is that it ignores very real differences between groups in contemporary Western societies: there *is* no single, homogeneous culture in the United States (and never has been). The same goes for most other countries in the Western world. Attempts to speak for all, as postmodern theorists remind us, frequently mask the interests of a few: in trying to universalize culture - or experience, or values - someone inevitably misses out.

Finally, it might be asserted that while certain authors have been unjustly excluded in the past, a tradition of great works has already been established and cannot be changed. The argument here could proceed along the following lines: 'The great writers of every age have turned to this tradition in providing a starting point for their own work: to attempt to "reinvent" this tradition would be to falsify or distort the past. Even if women writers and others have been omitted from serious consideration for the wrong reasons, the tradition cannot be changed. Whether they could have looked elsewhere for inspiration or not, it is undeniable that the male writers revered in the Western philosophical tradition turned to other male writers in developing their theories. Attempting to claim previously unrecognized texts as classics is likely to be confusing for students and places the very idea of passing on a generally accepted tradition from one generation to the next into jeopardy.'

This is unconvincing. Traditions are *constructed*, not cemented in stone. As Henry Louis Gates observes with regard to the publication of an anthology of African-American literature:

> Once our anthology is published, no one will ever again be able to use the unavailability of black texts as an excuse not to teach our literature. A well-marketed anthology...functions in the academy to *create* a tradition, as well as to define and preserve it.[208]

For an author to be recognized as being an important part of that tradition, a start must be made somewhere: someone has to declare a writer's greatness for that writer to join others whose worthiness has already been confirmed. All traditions are defined by some form of continuity, but this does not mean that the ideas, practices, values, or customs which characterize traditions remain entirely fixed over time. Traditions are constantly 'in the making'; i.e. they are always, as Freire would put it, in the process of 'becoming'. As social

circumstances and prevailing ideas change, so too do traditions. In affirming the value of a wider range of texts in an age (theoretically) less constrained by prejudices along gender and race lines, new books become accepted as classics. The thread of tradition continues in the granting of special status to certain texts which deal with particular questions, themes and concerns of enduring importance, even if the list of books which form the backbone of that tradition changes over time.

Apart from the difficulties already noted, reformists who argue for more texts by women and ethnic minorities in core reading lists are faced with an additional potentially debilitating theoretical problem. Those favouring such revision sometimes point out that, quite apart from injustices associated with the selection process itself, traditional Great Books programmes built almost exclusively around books by white males promote an undesirably narrow view of the world. If students only ever sample the ideas of men, they miss out on discovering what women have to say: the simple solution, then, is to include more books by women. Yet, this presupposes that there must be something which all male authors have in common (beyond merely being biologically male) which differs from that which all female writers have in common. To put it crudely, the logic here is that there is 'a male point of view' and 'a female point of view'. If the validity of this distinction (or something similar to it) is denied, then it becomes difficult to criticize a preponderance of male authors in a core curriculum as - in itself - a worrying feature.

As we saw in chapter four, however, the weight of much recent scholarship on gender, ethnicity and education suggests that the idea of a universal female or male point of view is highly problematic. Attempts by white, middle-class feminists to characterize their experiences and worldviews as representative of all women have been heavily criticized by African-American scholars.[209] No woman, it has been persuasively argued, can speak for all

other women: black women experience reality differently to white women; working-class black women live different lives to middle-class black women; and so on. The same logic, presumably, must apply to men: males do not inhabit a single experiential or cognitive or material space; rather, they encounter (and attempt to explain) the world in a multitude of different ways. The range of views available to students in a 'male only' selection of authors may, therefore, be far more diverse than surface appearances suggest. This point is eloquently captured by Howe:

> Bring together in a course on social thought selections from Plato and Aristotle, Machiavelli and Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke, Nietzsche and Freud, Marx and Mill, Jefferson and Dewey, and you have a wide variety of opinions, often clashing with one another, sometimes elusive and surprising, always richly complex.[210]

Of course, all other things being equal, it seems likely that a wider sampling of ideas will ensue from the deliberate addition of books by women and ethnic minorities than would be the case with a curriculum offering only the texts of white males from the privileged classes. Even if there are disparities between white and black women as regards their experiences and interpretations of social reality, with *no* female authors on a core reading list neither point of view can be conveyed to students. The same applies to work by authors from any of the other groups often mentioned by reformists (working class authors, Third World writers, homosexuals, etc.): whatever their differences, they are bound to bring greater diversity to the curriculum than a traditional Great Books programme affords. The difficulty lies in finding a means through which diversity can be recognized and acknowledged through core curricula without resorting to policies which make the author's gender or

ethnicity the *sole* - or even the *prime* - criterion for selection. In the final part section I return to Freire's work as one way of addressing this objective.

Conscientization, Critical Literacy and Core Courses

While Freire has not commented directly on controversies over canons and core curricula in universities, his work provides a potentially rich standpoint from which to analyse debates in these areas. In his later books, especially, Freire has discussed university education in some detail, and extended his earlier insights on critical reading. When considered alongside Freire's other writings, and viewed in relation to his practical adult literacy endeavours, these texts provide the parameters within which a Freirean perspective on 'Great Books' and the university curriculum might operate. As in the previous section, I begin by specifically addressing the work of Bloom. In evaluating Bloom's position on books and reading, a comparison with Freire's ideas is, I believe, especially helpful. While there are certain similarities between the two theorists with respect to their views on the reading of classic texts, Freire's notion of critical literacy, in my view, highlights important weaknesses in Bloom's account and allows us to move to a deeper understanding of the relationship between reading the word and reading the world.[211] Following my discussion of Bloom, I explore the problem of balancing breadth and depth in reading at the university level. The thesis concludes with a proposal for an alternative approach to reading in core courses (one based on the ideal of conscientization), and with brief comments on critical literacy and political correctness.

Freire and Bloom

There are some significant similarities between Bloom and Freire in their views on reading and books. Both theorists (i) advocate a reading of 'classic' texts; (ii) place great importance

on academic standards; (iii) speak of studying as a difficult, demanding process; (iv) talk of moving beyond a surface reading of texts in order to more deeply understand them; (v) emphasize quality rather than quantity in reading; and (vi) believe that reading is of the utmost importance in a university education. However, a comparison between the two theorists also yields vital differences. I shall concentrate on points of tension which bear directly on my later proposal.

Bloom advocates the closest possible reading of philosophical books. Texts such as Machiavelli's *The Prince* must, he suggests, be analysed word-by-word, line-by-line.[212] Unless a reader 'takes pencil and paper, outlines, counts, stops at everything, and tries to wonder', he or she may miss the most obvious points in an author's argument.[213] Freire, too, clearly wants students to read slowly and carefully. The critical reader penetrates beneath the surface appearance of words, stops to ponder the meaning of passages, questions assumptions and arguments, and relates ideas in the text to the wider (con)text of their social world.[214] The emphasis in Freire's work is on quality rather than quantity, on in-depth analysis in place of superficial skimming or 'reading for entertainment', on a complex and intimate relationship between text, reader and world.

Yet, while both Bloom and Freire would agree that if texts are to be studied seriously the number of books must be few, the two thinkers might disagree as to what a serious reading entails. On the question of how students ought to read, Bloom issues some very specific advice. He recommends:

> ...reading certain generally recognized classic texts, just reading them, letting them dictate what the questions are and the method of approaching them -

> not forcing them into categories we make up, not treating them as historical products, but trying to read them as their authors wished them to be read.[215]

This proposition is problematic at a number of levels. First, Freire's theory of literacy suggests that if we are to make sense of *anything* we read, it is necessary to construct 'categories' for understanding the words of a text.[216] Literacy, Freire has repeatedly stated, cannot be neutral. *All* forms of reading and writing presuppose certain assumptions about human beings and the world. When facing a text, then, categories for making sense of that text - for rendering it meaningful - are always already in place. We can attempt to alter these categories by tackling the text from different angles, by engaging in dialogue with others about the ideas presented in the text, or by re-reading the text following further study of other books. But we cannot avoid some form of categorization.

Freire would also question Bloom's suggestion that books themselves should 'dictate what the questions are'. From a Freirean point of view, Bloom has only told half the story here. Freire would be happy to admit that books can, in one sense, ask questions of us: they can challenge us by raising questions we had not previously pondered, by posing problems we had not anticipated in addressing a particular issue, by taking a perspective we had not hitherto considered in relation to a given theme, and so on. But these challenges are only made possible by the presence of an active *Subject* confronting the text in a curious, investigative, reflective way. In order for texts to 'dictate' questions, then, we must first ask questions of the text - or at least, *address* the text in a particular way. For Freire, the relationship between text and reader is reciprocal and interactive, but it is the critical human Subject who is ultimately 'in control' (as far as this is possible). For Bloom, it is the other way around: the text, in effect, 'authors' - i.e. shapes, or forms - the reader.

Bloom suggests that we should try to read books 'as their authors wished them to be read'.[217] This notion sits uncomfortably with the idea of meaning being made and negotiated (rather than uncovered) through reading. Bloom would be quite happy to admit that the meaning of a text is not always easily detected. However, he would insist - against those who argue that 'there is no text, only interpretation'[218] - that authors such as Plato meant to say something in their writings and that our first job is to try and find out what this is.[219] Elsewhere, he notes that 'Great books are full of hidden references and quotes which reveal themselves only to initiates'.[220] A text, Bloom seems to imply, has a fixed, absolute meaning. Not all readers, though, will grasp this meaning. Hence, a book *may* be given multiple 'readings', but this does not mean that all interpretations of an author's meaning will be valid.

As I indicated in chapter three, Freire's stance on the question of meaning is complex. Freire, like Bloom, talks of texts having a deeper meaning - of something hidden beneath the surface.[221] He stresses the importance of grasping the 'soul' of words, and of seeking the 'underlying significance' of texts. My analysis in the earlier chapter suggested, however, that Freire does not believe texts have a fixed, unitary meaning. For Freire, meaning is generated through dialogue and human practice. This does not mean we should lapse into an 'anything goes' position on the reading of texts: some readings - those which are critical, holistic, contextualized, and dialogical - are better than others. On a Freirean view of critical literacy, the reader strives to understand the essence or the *raison d'etre* of a text, while nonetheless being aware that through the very process of reading, the object of study changes. Bloom drastically downplays the role played by the reader in constructing meaning.[222] For Bloom, meaning 'resides' in the text, awaiting its unveiling by readers - some of whom will unlock the code to that which is hidden, others of whom will not.

Given his conception of reading, Bloom also has little to say about the politics of meaning-making. I argued in chapter three that in educational institutions, meanings are constructed unequally, with some interpretations of texts gaining greater legitimacy than others.[223] Giroux maintains that this process is 'largely determined by those groups who control the economic and cultural apparatuses of a given society'.[224] He is quick to point out, however, that meaning-making in educational settings remains a contested arena with 'dominant and subordinated voices constantly interact[ing] to qualify and modify each other'.[225] This mirrors the Freirean view. For Freire, all forms of educational activity - including those associated with the teaching and reading of texts - are non-neutral. From a Freirean standpoint, meaning-making is a multifaceted process of *struggle* - a process in which human beings confront, and seek to negotiate their place within, an imperfect, unequal, oppressive world dynamically in the making.

Freire, like Bloom, sees the reading of classic texts as a potentially worthwhile activity. But where for Bloom this implies accepting the wisdom embedded in these texts, for Freire the worth of classical texts can only be realized through critical engagement with an author's ideas. As far as Freire is concerned, no texts are more privileged than any others when it comes to the act of reading. A book or a theory should neither be accepted, nor rejected outright, without being subject to a rigorous, critical reading. For Bloom, the only legitimate basis for determining whether a book is to be included in a curriculum or not is the quality of the text, which, for him, is fixed and absolute: some books have immense academic merit, others are demonstrably inferior. The 'Great Books' address 'the order of the whole of nature and man's place in it'[226] and allow us to participate in 'essential being'.[227] For Bloom, the classics have an *objective* beauty[228] - an objective value - which transcends history, and this is precisely why they should be at the heart of university education. From a Freirean point of view, the issue is not quite so clear-cut. For Freire, no texts have an *a priori* claim to

greatness. Indeed, as far as Freire is concerned, the worth of a book is ultimately determined not by the text itself but by one's *reading* of it.

This does not mean that all books are of equal value for Freire. Freire would be quite happy to admit that in seeking an understanding of capitalism, Marx is likely to have more to offer than many other theorists. Similarly, Freire would not want to suggest that there is no difference between, say, Tolstoy and a Mills and Boon romance novel as far as their treatment of love and human suffering is concerned. But the potential value of Tolstoy or Marx or Plato can only be realized when their work is read in a particular way. Value, for Freire, does not reside *in* the text as something which is absolute, timeless or ahistorical. Rather, it must, as it were, be created afresh with each successive *reading* of the text. Thus, from a Freirean point of view, assertions about value must always be qualified. Given a substantive ethical position, it can be said that some texts are better than others, for particular purposes, in specific contexts, provided they are read in a certain way.

On the face of it, Bloom advances a strikingly passive model of reading. Students are to approach classic texts with a sense of reverence, reading them for the illumination they are thought to provide on the deepest questions about humankind. The text is supposed to dictate the important questions to the reader (rather than the other way round). The text itself, not the student, is to define the parameters for study and understanding. Bloom makes little mention of what it might mean to read a book *critically* - indeed, there is an implicit assumption in much of what he says that such an approach is inadvisable, at least initially. In this respect, Bloom and Freire are clearly at odds.

The ostensibly passive model of reading advocated by Bloom appears to contradict statements elsewhere in *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom expects at least some

reflection on the part of students reading the Great Books, for these books are meant to provide the foundation for choosing and living a good life.[229] Bloom surely cannot demand of his students that they make informed choices about the lives they will lead without encouraging them to develop certain 'critical' capacities. Making a choice, it might be said, involves deciding, through reflection and deliberation, upon a particular course of action among two or more alternatives. But where will the student in Bloom's ideal programme of liberal education learn how to reflect and deliberate if the Great Books at the centre of such a programme are to be read passively rather than critically? Bloom cannot assume that university teachers will become entirely responsible for instilling a critical disposition in their students, for (in Bloom's ideal) the teachers will themselves need to make critical reference to the classics in demonstrating examples of reflective and deliberative thought. Bloom argues further:

> True liberal education requires that the student's whole life be radically changed by it, that what he learns may affect his action, his tastes, his choices, that no previous attachment be immune to examination and re-evaluation. Liberal education puts everything at risk and requires students who are able to risk everything.[230]

The notion of putting 'everything at risk' hardly seems to support a passive stance toward the world, and Bloom's suggestion that under true liberal education 'no previous attachment be immune to examination and re-evaluation' makes it difficult to accept that he never intended students to question what they were reading.[231]

It is important not to lose sight of the wider picture here. Among other objectives, Bloom is concerned in *The Closing of the American Mind* to counter what he sees as excesses and

flaws in contemporary literary criticism. In analysing his statements on reading we do well to take this into account. Bloom's view of reading stands opposed to reader-response theories (as does Freire's, though for different reasons[232]), and places prime importance on authorial intention. Still, it would be fair to say that the ideal reader on Bloom's account assumes a far less critical stance than the critically literate Freirean reader. Where Bloom advises the reader to adopt a *reverent* posture in approaching a classic text,[233] for Freire the appropriate attitude is one of humility and respect, but not passivity or uncritical acceptance. Freire's position is nicely encapsulated in his phrase: 'The thing is to fight with the text, even though loving it'.[234] Critical reading, for Freire, implies neither unquestioning reverence nor total disrespect. *Any* book which tackles complex questions (e.g. those pertaining to justice, meaning, existence, truth, beauty, etc.) in a rigorous way deserves serious consideration, regardless of whether one happens to agree or disagree with the author's arguments. For Freire, a genuinely critical approach to texts is *necessarily* respectful. Similarly, Freire would say that one of the highest compliments an academic author can receive is for his or her work to be seen as worthy of critical exploration by a wide range of colleagues.

Extending Freire's line of argument, it might be said that one of the criteria for describing our reading of a particular text as worthwhile ought to be the extent to which we find ourselves in 'loving' (i.e. respectful) opposition to the author's ideas. I disagree with much of what Plato has to say in the *Republic*, but this does not make studying his text any less worthwhile. In fact, it is precisely this disagreement (and my response to it) which - in part - indicates the educative value of the experience. The stress here is on reflective, rather than reactionary, opposition. The more I am able to *engage* the ideas of another, and in so doing sharpen and re-work my own ideas, the better the educational experience. If this principle is accepted, many critics who have strongly opposed Bloom have, somewhat ironically, simultaneously

affirmed the value of his book. Bloom's opponents, in reading and responding to his work critically, have confirmed rather than denounced the worth of engaging his ideas.

Let me draw one final comparison on the question of how students ought to read. Bloom argues against treating books as 'historical products'; Freire, by contrast, explicitly supports such an approach. This point relates to a deeper difference between the two theorists on the relationship between 'word' and 'world'. For Bloom, reading the 'Great Books' is a way to remove students from the world - from the accidental nature of everyday life. Where Freire posits an intimate intertwining of 'word' with 'world', on Bloom's account of reading there is a separation between the two spheres. Bloom does not do totally divorce 'text' from 'context'. His reference to students' lives being changed by a liberal education clearly establishes a link between reading and an anticipated new world of modified 'tastes', 'choices' and 'actions', made possible by an encounter with the Great Books. But Bloom never really engages the *political* links between texts and contexts. Unlike Freire, Bloom does not see reading as a potential element of political struggle or transformative social change. Indeed, he tends to regard protest movements, along with many other aspects of contemporary cultural life in the United States, with contempt. For Bloom, a Great Books programme should enable the student to gain physical, as well as reflective, distance from such activities. The messy realities of daily life are a distraction for the student in Bloom's ideal: it is in reading classic texts by Shakespeare, Plato and other authors that the most profound mode of being is to be found. For Freire, popular liberation movements provide not only one domain to which a critical reading of texts might be applied (in informing the process of political struggle), but also a potentially fruitful source of insights in more deeply understanding the work of people such as Plato and Shakespeare. Bloom cannot treat the Great Books as historical products because to do so would be to call into question their timelessness and absolute value. From a Freirean standpoint, recognizing that books are

shaped by the social and historical circumstances under which they are they are authored does not in any way reduce the potential value of reading classic texts. Freire would agree with Bloom that students may gain as much from reading Plato today as they might have two thousand years ago; he would argue, however, that acknowledging and investigating the influences on Plato's thought *enhances* rather than diminishes the possibility of this value being realized.

In chapter two, I stressed the importance of attempting to read an author's work holistically. This point should, I think, be kept in mind when evaluating Bloom's ideas. Many critics of *The Closing of the American Mind* omit to mention that Bloom, having just endorsed 'the good old Great Books approach' as the 'only serious solution' to the problems of the university, proceeds to lay out some of the major criticisms of this approach, even admitting that he actually agrees with these objections![235] In *The Closing of the American Mind* Bloom paints his picture of an educational alternative in broad brushstrokes and should not be too strongly attacked for deficiencies in *parts* of his analysis without due attention being paid to his vision as a whole. Bloom's overall aim in the book is to convince us that we have become too relativistic in our thinking. His proposal for a Great Books programme is but a part (and, by Bloom's own admission, an imperfect part) of a wider effort to re-establish the search for truth as a fundamental goal for educators. Bloom's central thesis in *The Closing of the American Mind* is that the search for truth - through the time-tested means of a traditional liberal education based upon the reading of 'Great Books' - needs to be renewed. He makes it plain that this will not be an easy task given the relativistic, superficial world he sees us living in today. Against the current of his time, Bloom is quite happy to say that some opinions, some cultures, some texts, some ways of living one's life, *are* better than others.[236]

In *The Closing of the American Mind* Bloom addresses some of the most haunting problems in the contemporary Western world. The book confronts a daring range of 'big' questions and contentious issues, and is uncompromising in its message about higher education. One of the book's principal strengths is its breadth. With the ever-increasing tendency toward specialization in academic texts, books addressing a 'grand sweep' of cultural, social, educational, and philosophical questions are rare. The price Bloom pays for structuring the book in this manner is curiously ironic: Bloom decries the decline in academic standards in educational institutions, yet commits elementary academic 'sins' in failing to acknowledge exact sources for information and in not supporting many of the claims he makes with appropriate evidence or substantive argument.[237]

From a Freirean point of view, Bloom's conception of reading is seriously flawed. Freire would also strongly disagree with many points in Bloom's analysis of the problems of modern society. Bloom's contempt for the protest movements of the 1960s, for example, would not be shared by Freire. Nor would Bloom's analysis of race relations and affirmative action comfortably mesh with Freire's views on multiculturalism. Similarly, Freire's theory of oppression and liberation would render Bloom's views on relationships between men and women highly problematic. But, and this is crucial given my earlier discussion of political correctness, Freire would stress the importance of seriously engaging Bloom's ideas. Left intellectuals who immediately dismiss Bloom's work as hopelessly reactionary or conservative do both themselves and Bloom a disservice. Taking Freire's advice on reading to heart (and disregarding Bloom's), it might be said that to 'fight' with the ideas presented in *The Closing of the American Mind* is to affirm the potential value of the book. People from almost every political persuasion have found something in Bloom's text with which to engage their critical energies. While it is indisputable that ideas *matter* to Bloom,[238] the vigour displayed by those

who have so vehemently criticized him is evidence that ideas still matter to a good number of other people as well.

Liberating Core Courses: A Proposal

I argued in chapter four that conscientization can be conceived as a (momentary) process of knowing through which people expand the discursive universe within which they dialogically and actively participate. In concluding the thesis I want to offer a proposal for a programme of study which might be constitute one aspect of this process. I propose that core courses become a site for critically engaging texts from a multiplicity of perspectives, underpinned by key questions and themes. I seek to balance breadth with depth, while nevertheless recognizing that the latter must, to a certain extent, be sacrificed in favour of the former at the early stages of a student's career. The proposal emphasizes the fundamental importance of developing an investigative, curious, questioning, *critical* stance toward understanding 'word' and 'world' - both in and beyond the university.

While I have concentrated on the Freirean notion of critical literacy in this thesis, it is worth pointing out, before developing the proposal, that Freire's stance on reading represents just one of the myriad critical approaches developed over the past two decades. Marxists, feminists, deconstructionists, and postmodernists, among others, offer alternative approaches to critically analysing texts (and contexts). Many conservatives regard all of these efforts as examples of 'political correctness' in action, and view them with utter contempt. Kimball holds up the titles of recent conference papers on literary themes for ridicule.[239] D'Souza is more subtle but ultimately just as scathing in his attack on developments at Duke and Stanford universities.[240] Bloom speaks of deconstruction as a 'cheapened interpretation of Nietzsche': a 'fad' which will pass.[241] According to Kimball,

> ...while there are differences and even struggles among these various groups, when seen from the perspective of the tradition they are seeking to subvert - the tradition of high culture embodied in the classics of Western art and thought - they exhibit a remarkable unity of purpose. Their object is nothing less than the destruction of the values, methods, and goals of traditional humanistic study.[242]

Conservative critics, though, are also remarkably united - united, that is, in lamenting the (alleged) loss of respect among contemporary scholars for those works traditionally accepted as 'great'. My analysis suggests that students should neither be spoon-fed a romantic view of the 'greats' as being above question, nor encouraged to reject them without first having grappled thoroughly and reflectively with their ideas. *Engaging* the ideas is the fundamental objective.

Let me begin with some comments on the nature of, and justification for, core courses. It is easy for academics to overestimate the importance of books in other people's lives. While antagonists in the debate over the canon argue endlessly over *which* books students ought to read, one of the biggest practical problems for many university teachers is simply getting students to read at all. Commentators of varying political persuasions have noted the distaste for reading among current students in the United States;[243] many academics would argue, I'm sure, that this trend is not confined to North America. Students can be *encouraged* to read certain texts, and they can be compelled to complete assessment tasks based upon these texts, but they cannot be forced to enjoy reading or to make the books encountered at university matter in their lives. Of course, if the books are prescribed as essential reading for a compulsory course they 'matter' in one sense: not reading them is likely to lead to failure. The cunning of some students in managing to avoid reading supposedly

indispensable texts, though, is legendary, and is helped in no small measure by the ready abundance of easily digested, neatly packaged, and (relatively) modestly priced notes on almost all of the traditional classics. Such enterprise, on the part of both the producers of the notes and the students, is admirable! But when students are often prepared to go to extraordinary lengths *not* to read, the question becomes: Why bother with core reading lists at all?

One response is to assume that there must be something wrong somewhere - with the students, their teachers, the system, or the books. If claims about the widespread indifference toward (or active dislike of) reading are correct, perhaps university teachers have simply been prescribing the wrong texts. Few students, it might be argued, dislike *all* forms of reading: rather, they merely dread the drudgery of 'heavy' academic reading. The easy way around this problem is to allow students to read whatever they wish: in addition to (or instead of) Plato and Aristotle, then, a reading list in any given year might include romance novels, detective stories, political thrillers, and so on. Students could be left on their own to read as much or as little as they desired, with teachers having no say over reading content.

Freire's objection to this approach would not be to protest (as many conservatives might) that texts of the kind mentioned above have no place in a university. For, the study of popular fiction, when carried out in an appropriately rigorous manner, can become as serious a subject as any other in a university. Freire would concentrate instead on questions of purpose and structure. We saw in chapter two that the Freirean educational ideal stands opposed to two other major pedagogical approaches: authoritarian and laissez faire. Freire emphasizes the importance of structure, direction, purpose, and rigour in liberating education. The notion of 'responsibility', which Freire applies to both teachers and students, is also of crucial significance here. Teachers have a responsibility - an ethical obligation - to

be conversant with major ideas and works in their field. Students, likewise, have a responsibility to *engage* the object of their study earnestly and seriously. Studying, Freire stresses, is an inherently difficult process demanding great effort, deliberate and careful reflection, and much intellectual energy. While Freire claims that a curious, investigative, inquiring disposition should be encouraged in *all* educational settings, he would be especially insistent that such an approach to study should be fostered *and expected* of students and staff in institutions of higher education such as universities.

The problem also relates to what *particular* programmes of study are designed to achieve. *If* it is a core university course with which we are dealing, and *if* this course is intended to introduce students to some of the deepest human questions, an 'anything goes' policy in the selection of reading materials is clearly not likely to meet these objectives. Freire's stress on the structured character of liberating education provides a necessary, though not sufficient, ground for *having* core courses in the first place. If programmes of education require, from a Freirean point of view, a strong sense of structure, then this applies as much to core courses as it does to other courses. However, core courses are also a part of a wider structure: one cannot have a core course without this being a core *for something* - for a degree, a diploma, or whatever. Core courses are necessarily interventionist: in any university programme, but *especially* in core courses, those setting up the programme must assume a directive role. This does not mean that teachers should prevent students from reading other texts if they wish to, but, given the limits of time and the purpose of core courses, there must be a key set of readings around which class discussion revolves.

If the dangers of authoritarianism are to be avoided in creating structure and giving direction to an educative situation, it becomes important to examine the framework within which learning takes place, and the rules - formal and tacit - which govern classroom activity. *All*

dimensions of a course should be open for debate: teachers should positively encourage students to question their selection of reading materials, the perspectives they bring to bear on texts, the range of questions they open up through their coordination, and so on. But it is the teacher's responsibility, Freire would say, to put something forward in the first instance. Teachers need to furnish the conditions for, as well as participate in, dialogue, debate and critical investigation.

For Freire, there is a delicate balance between directiveness - which is fundamental in any programme of education - and manipulation (which he clearly stands opposed to).[244] As we saw in chapter two, the directiveness of education is vital for the formation of a critical approach toward the world. Critical consciousness does not emerge spontaneously, in a directionless, unstructured void; rather, a critical orientation toward social reality is, from the beginning, guided - but never entirely formed - by the directiveness of the teacher. Where the progressive teacher gives structure and direction to the pedagogical process in order to allow students, over time, to assume greater responsibility for directing their own learning, the authoritarian teacher wishes to maintain absolute control over the learning process such that students do *not* begin to adopt an increasingly critical attitude toward the world. The difficulty thus lies in knowing *'how much'* direction to provide at given times: this is, in part, why teaching demands supreme responsibility, commitment, and attention to detail.

Freire is adamant that teachers have an ethical duty not merely to allow views which oppose their own to be expressed, but to actively *stimulate* discussion of other perspectives. Respecting students, Freire insists, 'means, on the one hand, testifying to them of my choice, and defending it; and on the other, it means showing them other options, whenever I teach - no matter what it is that I teach!'.[245] Hence, while Freire is a member of the Brazilian Workers Party, and would defend strongly the socialist ideals articulated by that party, he

would also encourage students to investigate the conservatism espoused by parties on the Right. The same principle would apply not matter what view of the social world a teacher subscribed to. Feminists, then, should foster study of anti-feminist views; Marxists should assist students in engaging liberal positions; postmodernists should ensure students have real opportunities to explore modernist thought; and so on. Freire argues, further, that political differences should become the object of critical discussion: active stimulation of 'contrary discourses' (to use Freire's phrase) should be followed by dialogical exploration of, and scholarly engagement with, these discourses. This gives Freire's advocacy of 'tolerance' as a key virtue in the university a distinctly radical thrust. Freire would obviously not support a situation in which teachers either blatantly prohibit alternative perspectives, or simply 'put up with' opposing views while continuing to enforce their own. Both of these are manipulative positions which are clearly at odds with the Freirean pedagogical ideal. But Freire also does not lapse into a form of liberal pluralism where opposing views are openly shared but not *debated* or 'interrogated'. The key is to respect conflicting positions while at the same time (as a logical consequence of such a stance) being able to argue 'earnestly and with passion' against such views.[246]

How, then, might these objectives be met? One of the most obvious problems is frequently overlooked: whatever the social context, *time* is an inevitable constraint in deciding what books ought to be read. The number of texts a person can read in a lifetime, let alone during a fixed period of study at university, is limited. Thus, *if* we accept that students ought to read something (whether the texts are chosen by the students themselves, or by lecturers, or by someone else), then some sort of selection process must be employed. That is, some texts - indeed, the vast majority of available texts - must be eliminated. The limits imposed by time cannot be overestimated. To read texts *well* - by which I mean, among other things,

reading them *critically* in the Freirean sense - takes far more time than the creators of 'Western Civilization' courses (and their successors) sometimes seem to presuppose.[247]

In discussing university reading lists, Freire maintains that it is a mistake to prescribe large numbers of books to be read in short periods of time. In such cases, books are 'more to be *devoured* than truly read or studied'.[248] 'Truly' reading a text - i.e. *critically* reading the work - takes time and serious study. Critical reading, for Freire, is an exhausting, difficult endeavour demanding great effort and concentration. Freire supports the principle of requiring students to read certain texts in particular fields, but he opposes the prescribing of an excessive number of texts. He notes that there is often an obsession with quantity rather than quality. Freire quotes with approval Mao's claim that he would 'greatly fear the intellectual who reads only one book a year'.[249] Similarly, for Freire, it does not follow that a longer work will necessarily be better than a shorter text on the same subject. Freire cites the example of Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' as one of the shortest, yet most important, documents in our history.[250]

In *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, Freire mentions that a student once approached him in desperation after enrolling in a course which had, for one semester, a bibliography of 300 books.[251] The student found he had no time for anything but reading, and the situation was creating problems for him at home. Freire questions whether the professor who set the reading list would have read all of the books, and goes on to imply that even if the books had been read they may not have been understood.[252] As a contrast, Freire gives the example of using a six-page transcript of an interview with a Brazilian peasant in one of his graduate classes. The interview, which was a critique of Brazilian education in the 1980s, served as the focus for class reading and discussion. Freire describes how, in his efforts to encourage a critical stance in the act of reading, he would read a sentence of the text of the interview,

pause, then re-read the sentence to show how he might attempt to understand and interpret what the peasant was saying. After several demonstrations of this slow, careful, reflective mode of reading, he handed the task over to the students to continue. The class ended up spending twelve hours studying this single, six-page text. In Freire's estimation, after this exercise, members of his class would have understood 'what it means to read'.[253]

Yet, if critical reading of the kind promoted by Freire is to proceed, a certain breadth in prior reading seems imperative. Breadth is necessary in order to 'make the connections' between different ideas and theorists, to understand why something is this way rather than that, and to place what one is studying in its broader (disciplinary, social, historical, etc.) context. An in-depth understanding of a text requires some sort of knowledge of what it *is not*. We cannot fully understand what is distinctive, special or valuable in Marx unless we have some knowledge of thinkers *other* than Marx. In particular, we need to know something about those theorists who offer opposing points of view on questions similar to those addressed by Marx. To better appreciate Marx's critique of capitalism, then, some knowledge of Adam Smith's work is necessary. Similarly, to grasp the significance of Marx's stance on the dialectical relationship between ideas and material reality, it is essential to know something of Hegel (for whom Marx believed the dialectic was standing on its head). In broader terms, a Marxist position on ethics and politics cannot be deeply comprehended without consideration of other conflicting ethical traditions (e.g. liberalism). At a wider level still, students cannot be expected to make much sense of, say, postmodernist theory unless they have some idea of the elements of modernist thought postmodernists oppose.

Freire's appreciation of the need for students to have some understanding of a range of theoretical positions and perspectives is evident in his statements on the reading of key works in given subject areas. Freire argues that students ought to read 'the classics' in their

field of study, but emphasizes the importance of grasping a sense of conflicting intellectual traditions. He is opposed to any form of discrimination against certain texts:

> Of course, the students *have* to read. You *need* to read, to read the classics in your field. The students have to read Marx, for example, independent of their rejection or acceptance of the Marxist rigor. What for me is impossible is to deny the existence of the Positivists, of the Structuralists, of the Functionalists. You see, then, I don't accept a kind of *scientific racism*, where some of the classics are not allowed to be read, not considered part of the fundamental literature.[254]

A problem emerges here. On the one hand, a certain breadth of perspective is necessary to develop an awareness of alternatives; on the other hand, if students are to do justice to the texts they read, the number of books that can be prescribed must be (very) few. Attempting to read the 'classic' texts within each of the sociological traditions noted in the above quotation - by focusing, for example, on a selection of books by Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and so on - is likely to prove a demanding if not impossible process if the depth of critical engagement advocated by Freire is applied in every case. Reconciling the need for both breadth and depth in just *one* field of study would be difficult enough, but those embroiled in the debate over the canon are generally dealing with the problem of deciding what to include and exclude in a single course or programme (traditionally organized around themes such as 'Western Civilization' or 'Western Culture') for students from a multiplicity of subject areas. If the Freirean approach to critical reading is taken seriously in these courses, the number of books that might be 'truly' read (in the Freirean sense) would be so few that, paradoxically, the breadth of perspective necessary for critical reading could readily be compromised.

The problem of finding the right balance between breadth and depth has its genesis in debates which stretch back to the earliest medieval universities, and goes to the heart of degree planning in modern institutions of higher education. This applies to almost all universities in the First World. For example, while New Zealand universities do not have compulsory 'Western Civilization' or 'Western Culture' courses (or anything like the successors to these: e.g. Stanford's 'Cultures, Ideas and Values' course), issues of breadth and depth are central in structuring degrees. In contemporary Bachelor of Arts degrees, for instance, students are required to complete a certain number of papers in given subjects at each of three stages. In their first year, students are typically advised to take one or two papers at 'Stage One' level in three or four subjects, nominating one or two of these as their 'major' or 'double-major'. In the second and third years, the spread of subjects is usually reduced, and an increasing number of papers in the major subject(s) are taken. By the end of their degrees, Bachelor of Arts students will have completed at least one paper in perhaps half a dozen subjects, and at least eight papers in one or two of those subjects. Breadth at the beginning of the degree, thus, gives way to greater depth in later stages. For students who progress on to Masters and Doctoral degrees, this trend continues, with increasing specialization the further a student goes. The path from year one of a Bachelor's degree to the completion of a doctorate is neatly captured in the colloquial expression that at the beginning of a first degree a student knows 'nothing about everything' whereas at the end of a doctoral thesis he or she knows 'everything about nothing'![255]

Of course, students have lives beyond one course or programme in a given year of their academic studies. Other opportunities for reading the 'classic' works in given fields of study exist - potentially, at least - later in degrees: compulsory courses do not have to be confined to the early stages of a student's career. Additionally, students have their whole lives after they leave university to lead: if they so wish, their reading might (circumstances permitting)

continue for fifty years or more. This raises another issue: given the time constraints imposed by a three or four year degree (or even a six to eight year period of several degrees), educators must face the possibility that they cannot promote *both* breadth and depth in reading, knowledge and understanding at all stages in the student's total period of study. In the early stages, arguably it is depth which must be sacrificed in favour of breadth, for without a certain breadth of perspective critical reading (of the Freirean variety) is impossible. Ultimately, though, Freire's ideal demands a *synthesis* of breadth and depth in reading. While it may be necessary to emphasize either one over the other at particular times, when seen over the course of a lengthy period of study, breadth and depth are not mutually exclusive: both ultimately depend on each other for their intelligibility.

Given Freire's statements on tolerance, diversity and pluralism, it can reasonably be surmised that were he to support a core course for students at (or near) the beginning of their studies, such a course would need to enhance the students' appreciation of alternative ethical and political positions. One way of fostering this recognition of diversity would be to prescribe a wide range of texts by authors from all (or many) points on the political spectrum. As we have seen, however, given the time required to 'truly' - i.e. *critically* - read in the Freirean sense, this objective is likely to be difficult to meet in a single course. To read one book well, remembering the earlier reference from Freire to Mao, is better than reading ten books superficially. How, then, can the imperative of acknowledging a plurality of ethical and political positions be reconciled with the need for in-depth, critical reading? I want to suggest that 'breadth' and 'depth' can both be maintained, in one sense, if we think of the former in terms of 'perspectives' and the latter in terms of the number of books one reads. Instead of trying to read books from every major political and ethical position, core courses might serve a more useful purpose (and keep the Freirean ideal of critical literacy intact) if they concentrate on a few books but examine them from a variety of perspectives. My

position turns on the notion that there are certain questions, themes, and concerns of longstanding human significance: these, I argue, should lie at the heart of compulsory university courses.

Bloom frequently emphasizes the importance of addressing what he variously terms 'permanent',[256] 'old',[257] and 'first'[258] questions. He likewise stresses the need for students to be taught about the 'fundamental'[259] or 'most important'[260] alternatives. While he is somewhat vague about exactly what these questions and alternatives are, he is adamant that if we are to find out it is to 'the writings of the greatest men in the philosophic tradition' that we must turn.[261] The Socratic question 'How should one live?' appears to be pivotal for Bloom, and among the alternatives are differing principles about final ends (e.g. 'whether...salvation, wisdom, or glory is best'[262]). In the contemporary academic world, however, there is (Bloom claims) a profound lack of understanding about what the 'real' questions, arguments, alternatives, and problems are.[263] It should thus come as little surprise that

> ...when students ask about the good life and the nature of our world, they are met by a deafening silence, for there are no persons in the university whose competence enables them to respond to such questions.[264]

The accuracy of Bloom's assessment is not my concern here, though his view does seem to be an overly pessimistic one. The suggestion that there are '*no* persons' in universities who have something worthwhile to say about 'the good life' and 'the nature of our world' is at the very least perplexing, if not nonsensical, given the number of philosophers, literary theorists, and educationists (among others) who devote considerable scholarly energy to addressing these areas. At any rate, I believe Bloom is correct on one point: certain questions about human beings and the world are of enduring human importance, and it is vital that students

be given an opportunity to explore alternative answers to these questions. Specifically, I have in mind what in philosophical terms might be termed metaphysical, ontological, ethical, and epistemological questions, examples of which include the following: What is the nature of reality? What does it mean to be a human being? What ethical ideals ought we to pursue? What are the impediments to realizing given personal and social ends? How should society be structured? In what way(s) might we best understand the world?

To suggest that such questions are of concern only to philosophers would, I believe, be a grave error: in one way or another, they are pertinent to most, if not all, disciplines and fields within the Humanities and Social Sciences.[265] Even if it is discomforting in the postmodern era to talk of the search for truth and justice as a timeless human endeavour, the very process of rendering this quest problematic affirms that these themes are worth engaging. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida allow us to see truth and justice in new ways, but they do not impel us to forget these concepts altogether.

Over the centuries, as in our current epoch, questions similar in substance to those articulated above have been rigorously tackled from a multiplicity of diverse, often conflicting, perspectives. Bloom, it seems to me, is (along with many other traditionalists) unnecessarily restrictive in what he allows as legitimate alternatives here. Many critics have alluded to Bloom's neglect of women writers. This is prefigured in the questions he begins with. For example, when considering which philosophers merit serious consideration, he asks: '...who are these *men* to whom such reverent attention should be paid?'.[266] Bloom's opponents also note that books by authors from ethnic minority groups are rendered invisible in Bloom's work.

If these observations are to be fashioned into a serious critique of Bloom, there must, I submit, be a shift from focusing merely on gender and ethnicity to an examination of distinct, rigorously developed *perspectives*. While the lack of women writers among Bloom's cherished list of greats is on the surface worrying in its own right, more disturbing is his curt dismissal of *feminist* views. Bloom's denigration of Frantz Fanon as a racist ideologue and an 'inferior and derivative thinker'[267] may be irksome, but more distressing is his failure to adequately engage revolutionary socialist political thought. The crucial consideration is not the gender or ethnicity of authors but the basic assumptions about human beings and the world they begin with. In seeking alternatives, we should be examining the theoretical parameters within which thinkers operate, and assessing the distinctiveness their views on justice, social structures, the nature and meaning of human existence, and so on.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with feminists, the depth and breadth of their work is undeniable. Many feminist writers have much to offer political philosophy - Bloom's specialist field - yet there is nothing in Bloom's publications to suggest that he has made a serious effort to get to grips with their ideas: he hardly ever mentions individual feminist thinkers by name, instead preferring to make sweeping generalizations about 'the women's movement'[268] and 'the feminist project'.[269] Similarly, instead of according revolutionary socialist political thought the professional courtesy of a thorough reading and careful analysis, Bloom brushes it aside as 'ideological', seemingly without pausing to reflect on the non-neutrality of his own views.

I noted earlier that those calling for more texts by women run into difficulties when they assume, for example, that there is a 'male' point of view and a 'female' point of view. For, among women writers there are a host of disparate political positions - some of which oppose, others of which are compatible with, the ideas of men. No women authors speak

for *all* women. Rather than being thrown into a defensive posture about such tensions, it seems to me that reformists should be *highlighting* these contrasts as a primary reason for broadening the curriculum. The recognition of criss-crossing - sometimes intersecting, sometimes conflicting - views within particular fields of study poses a problem for those who limit their focus to an author's gender or ethnicity as a criterion for selection; the case for promoting a wider range of *perspectives*, however, is strengthened.

Ideally, if the concern is to investigate, say, ethical and political themes, then there is merit in looking at what conservatives, liberals of various stripes, Marxists, anarchists, utilitarians, pragmatists, religious fundamentalists, and even fascists have to say, no matter how attractive or repulsive one may find any of these perspectives. As my earlier comments suggested, for students to attain a mature understanding of *why* they believe X or Y, it is important for them to know what X and Y are *not*. The principle of maximizing breadth ought to operate with respect to all major perspectives on the aforementioned questions: if the objective is to facilitate an appreciation of alternatives, then it makes sense to expose students to the widest range of views possible, provided Freirean standards of academic rigour are maintained.

The constraints imposed by a tight university timetable pose a formidable barrier to exploring the range of alternatives implied by this sort of approach. In attempting to traverse multiple perspectives, it is inevitable that depth must be *temporarily* sacrificed in favour of breadth. As I argued earlier, in the initial stages of a student's university career, greater emphasis must be placed on breadth in order to allow those who proceed to later stages the opportunity to meaningfully choose which subject(s) they wish to pursue in depth. In light of the severe time limitations, perhaps the most fruitful starting point is with the questions themselves: attaining some knowledge of questions and problems which have been a source

of puzzlement for thousands of years seems to me to be a sound beginning. More ambitiously, a core course of the kind envisaged here might aim to create a consciousness of the different assumptions underpinning major competing perspectives on these questions. At another level still, the very nature and purpose of core courses built upon canonized works can become the subject of class discussion. Gerald Graff has recently suggested that rather than seeing disputes between various factions in debates over the canon as a sign of ill health in institutions of higher education, such conflict is essential within universities and ought to be turned to good effect by those who teach within them. His recommendation is that university professors make the debate itself a focus for student attention by 'teaching the conflicts'.[270]

While enhancing awareness of the questions, the alternatives, and the debates is the first step, these objectives do not replace the need (in the longer term) for students to experience philosophical and literary works 'first-hand': learning *about* books and what they potentially have to offer is no substitute for reading the texts themselves. With so little time in core courses, however, the task of deciding what to include could become quite overwhelming. One solution is to apply the criterion of breadth to individual texts - that is, to concentrate on books which address all (or many) of the 'permanent' questions. Plato's *Republic* is a prime example: almost all of the key questions outlined earlier are, in one way or another, tackled in this single text. In addition to dealing with such contemporary topics as censorship and gender relations, Plato addresses questions pertaining to justice, ideal and imperfect modes of social organization, the nature of knowledge, and education. My suggestion is that rather than attempting to incorporate as many texts as possible in a single core course, it might be more productive to try and examine (the problems raised in) a few books from a variety of different angles. Given its impressive breadth, the *Republic* is especially suitable for this purpose, but many other books - old and new, famous and

obscure, whether conservative, liberal or radical in their politics - might serve equally well. Diverse perspectives can be (and have been) brought to bear on the themes Plato addresses in the *Republic.* But any text which comprehensively confronts a range of metaphysical, ontological, ethical, and epistemological questions might potentially provide the focus for the forum being advocated here. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,*[271] for example, would lend itself very nicely to the approach I have in mind (as, indeed, would Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*).

While outside the domain of my expertise, it seems to me that many novels might also work well - especially when combined with more explicitly 'philosophical' texts. Literary works allow the minutiae and particulars of everyday life to be addressed in a way which normally not possible in a philosophical text. Many novels deal in profound depth with the decisions and dilemmas adults and children face in making their way in the world (compare, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina,* Twain's *Huckleberry Finn,* Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbivilles*), and implicitly reveal the social impediments to liberation through relationships between different characters (see, for example, Walker's *The Color Purple*). Some deal directly with political issues and social change (consider, for instance, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Tressell's *The Raggered Trousered Philanthropists*); others provide a less direct, but just as powerful, critique of certain forms of social organization (e.g. Dickens in *Hard Times*).

The political position adopted by the author is not the most important consideration; rather, the crucial factor is the raising of appropriate questions and issues for debate. However, provided the criterion of addressing some or all of the questions articulated earlier is met, the wider the range of views on these fundamental questions in the books themselves, the better. The goal is to enhance breadth of understanding: this objective can be fostered, *in part,* through the selection process itself. Clearly, though, given the necessity of focusing on

only a small number of books, the range of perspectives which can be represented will be limited. The few books used would be read in great depth, and examined from a multiplicity of perspectives: feminist, Marxist, liberal, conservative, etc. The texts would be related to contemporary social problems, practices, structures, and struggles: these would both inform students' reading and become the object of re-examination in light of that reading. The context within which the authors produced their books might also be analysed from a range of theoretical angles: Marxists and feminists, for instance, are likely to give quite different accounts of the influences on Plato's or Freire's thought.

There is still a risk here that the maximization of breadth will lead to superficiality, with an apparently seamless smorgasbord of perspectives and questions. This danger might be avoided to some extent were a university classroom to take on the liberating form Freire espouses as an ideal. Liberating education demands, among other things, dedicated teaching, enthusiastic participation by all, a passion for ideas, discipline and rigour in critical reading, a willingness to question, and a commitment to understanding and changing the world for the better. An educative situation with these characteristics is, of course, seldom easy to create! However, even if such circumstances did eventuate, the range of questions around which discussion would be based might easily become excessive if the requirements of critical reading in the Freirean sense were to be met. Conceivably, students and teachers might be unable to 'finish' reading *one* book if all questions outlined earlier in the chapter were to be thoroughly addressed from a multiplicity of perspectives. This difficulty could, ironically, be *exacerbated* rather than overcome if a university class displayed the ideal qualities noted above. For, the more closely a class follows the Freirean ideal of liberating education, the more thorough (and hence time consuming) reading, questioning, and dialogue are likely to be.

One way of dealing with this problem, should time be particularly limited in a given programme, is to narrow the full range of key questions down to a single, overriding question, namely: 'What human ideal(s) ought we to work toward?' This question lies at the heart of Freire's philosophy, and his response to it informs every pedagogical decision he makes. Although overtly ethical, the question also allows metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, political, and aesthetic concerns to be addressed. Asking what *ought* to be the case requires some reflection on that which might prevent or impede an ideal being realized or pursued: political questions become significant here. Similarly, before we can ask what *ideals* we wish to work toward as human beings, we need to first pay some attention to the question of what it means to *be* human: ontological and metaphysical themes would thus also almost certainly be traversed. There would, however, be a single question at the *centre* of classroom dialogue and student reading. This would act as the pivot around which all aspects of the educative situation would revolve.

The question 'What human ideal(s) ought we to work toward?' is sufficiently broad in scope to allow a diverse array of theoretical perspectives to be brought to bear on key texts. Indeed, it might be claimed that this question lies behind many theoretical perspectives in the social sciences and humanities; certainly the question provides at least an *implicit* focus or 'reason for being' in many cases. Any rigorously developed theoretical perspective which has something to offer in addressing this question might be included. The question is obviously vital in many strands of feminism, Marxism and liberalism. Feminists concentrate on building a world free of patriarchy, Marxists posit an ideal of socialism, and liberals value individual rational autonomy. However, there would also be merit in problematizing the question itself, via, for example, various postmodern positions.

To speak of 'human ideals' is to permit discussion of both 'individual' and 'social' ideals. As we saw in chapter two, for Freire, liberation is *always* a social process. However, not all thinkers see it this way, and Freire would, as we saw earlier in the chapter, be among the first to argue that perspectives other than his own ought to be given careful consideration. Indeed, it cannot be presupposed that 'liberation' of any kind should necessarily be the goal. Using the term 'human ideals' does not prejudice the inquiry in favour of a particular construct, but leaves the door open for any number to be examined. Whatever concepts are examined, it seems probable that many of the themes which might be addressed would overlap with fundamental concerns in Freire's work.

Without denying that many theorists uses categories other than those Freire employs in addressing questions about human ideals, the twin themes of 'oppression' and 'liberation' might feature strongly in a contemporary course of the kind envisaged here. Freire argues in *Pedagogy of the City* that liberation is 'the most fundamental task...we have at the end of this century'.[272] If this assessment is correct, the possibilities for relating texts to contexts in addressing 'liberation' and 'oppression' as key themes become obvious. If the task is as pressing as Freire believes it to be, this process of linking 'word' with 'world' in the university curriculum assumes new significance. Classroom dialogue might address any number of contemporary issues of local, national or international interest. Students might, for example, examine problems of homelessness, poverty, starvation, unemployment, domestic violence, exploitation in the workplace, colonialism, and so on. All of these problems can be confronted from a range of perspectives on 'liberation' and 'oppression'.

Allowing the pressing social problems of the day to become the object of critical investigation is one way of linking 'word' with 'world' through core courses. This is not to say that course content should be determined purely on the basis of its perceived 'relevance' for

contemporary issues (e.g. the environment, nuclear weapons, race relations, etc.) or for specific professional contexts (the classroom for teachers, the courtroom for lawyers, the boardroom for managers, and so on). The 'tailoring' of programmes of study toward directly vocational ends contradicts the purpose of having core courses, and should, if such courses are to have a distinctive place a university curriculum, be resisted. The linking of texts with contexts, however, is an important aspect of Freirean critical literacy. Upholding this dimension of Freire's ideal while avoiding vocationalism and a 'trendy issues' approach is a matter of turning the question of 'relevance' on its head. It is not a case of making core courses relevant to something else, but of making elements of the students' world relevant to the purposes of core courses.

There would be no requirement that the texts selected should tackle questions about human ideals directly. Rather, it would be a matter of asking: 'How might book X or text Y be *read* such that questions of this kind might be meaningfully addressed?'. If a group decides, for example, to concentrate on the theme of oppression, any number of texts might become the object of critical reading and debate. In seeking an explanation of the ostensibly manipulative and cruel actions of politicians, and their apparent indifference to the suffering of others, Machiavelli's *The Prince* might provide a helpful starting point; if a framework for addressing exploitation in the workplace (e.g. following the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act in New Zealand) is sought, Marx seems to have much to offer; if the domination of conversations by men in domestic and institutional settings is a topic for study, Dale Spender's work is likely to be useful; and so on. No text, though, has an *a priori* claim for inclusion. As I have argued throughout the thesis, from a Freirean point of view books become worthwhile when they are *engaged* in particular ways. The one factor that remains fixed in all cases, however, is time (the lack of it). The *potential* value of certain texts, given that very few can be selected if the Freirean ideal of critical literacy is to met, must

therefore be carefully considered. This is where Freire's insistence that teachers become conversant with the key ideas in their field of study becomes important. This is part of the directiveness of teaching in any educational programme, but in core courses this form of preparation is especially crucial. Teachers have a responsibility to select texts which appear to offer the greatest potential for allowing diverse perspectives to be brought to bear on the themes addressed in them, while *also* setting up a pedagogical environment which maximizes the chances of this potential being realized.

To a large extent, the number and range of themes, texts, questions, and perspectives which might be engaged depends on the time available, the students' other commitments, and the nature of the institution within which the course is operating. Obviously, if there is more than one course set aside for this sort of programme, greater breadth *and* depth in reading becomes possible. Whether the focus is on one question or several, on a single text or half a dozen, the key is to extend rather than restrict the range of possibilities open to students. This relates back to the ideal of conscientization articulated at the end of the previous chapter. Core courses, I want to suggest, have a potentially significant educational role to play in expanding the range of discourses within which students might critically participate. They are, it must be stressed, but a part - one 'moment' or 'layer' - of the wider process of conscientization. Their distinctive contribution to this process is to give students some sense of the different ways in which a wide range of groups have addressed questions of longstanding human interest. While there are real limits to what can be achieved given the time available, students might, if these courses are successful, be expected to at least develop a deeper appreciation of why these might be important questions to address. Of course, this notion would itself be contestable: it cannot be taken for granted that such questions *are* of (considerable) human significance. But teachers, from a Freirean point of view, must put something forward - that is, provide direction and structure in the programme. Questions

about the human ideal, especially when coupled with wider metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological questions, provide a starting point from which deeper reflection - a crucial element of which is the development of *other* questions - can begin.

For Freire, learning how, why, when, and where to ask questions is an indispensable part of a university education. Freire does not issue a formula, or a set of fixed procedures, for addressing this objective, but he does develop a detailed view of critical reading which takes as its starting point the adoption of a curious, probing, searching, investigative stance toward the world. The Freirean ideal of critical literacy provides both the basis upon which a programme of the kind I have proposed is founded, and the means through which students might go *beyond* this programme to other worthwhile (conscientizing) forms of learning. Knowing, through experience in core courses, what it means to pose, and address, questions lays the foundation for continuing critical inquiry.

I shall finish the thesis with brief comments on critical literacy and political correctness. Let me begin by recapping some points on literacies and literacizing from earlier chapters. In discussing conceptual problems in chapter three, I spent some time defending the principle - developed by theorists such as Street, Lankshear and Lawler, Gee, McLaren, Giroux, Luke, and others - that we do better to think of multiple *literacies* rather than the single category, 'literacy'. This idea rests on an acknowledgement of the changing face of literacy over time. It is clear that with shifts in technologies and social life over the centuries, people have engaged in quite different *practices* of reading and writing at different moments in history and in disparate social contexts. Moreover, *conceptions* of what counts as 'reading', 'writing' and 'literacy' have changed over time. These two dimensions, of course, are tightly intertwined, for conceptions both arise from, and shape, practices. I argued, building on the work of Lankshear and Lawler, that literacies are distinct *forms* of reading and writing -

modes of thinking, acting and being organized around texts (their production, selection, interpretation, etc.).

The Freirean ideal of critical literacy is a distinct generic form of literacy, from which a multiplicity of particular (actual, local and specific) critical *literacies* derive. We saw in chapter two that, for Freire, critical literacy comprises three pivotal dimensions: an active engagement with written texts; the relating of texts to contexts (and vice versa); and reflective, dialogical action upon the text that is social reality itself. These strands are dynamically interwoven through the notion of reading and writing 'the word and the world' in Freirean theory and practice. To be critically literate is to adopt a particular approach toward understanding, and acting upon, the world. Critical literacy, for Freire, can be seen as a mode of social being: a way of being in and with the world, through communication with others.

The notion of 'literacizing' was introduced in chapter three as an attempt to capture - in a single term - the interconnectedness of 'reading' and 'writing' in Freire's work. It was noted that, for Freire, 'true' reading - i.e. *critical* reading - is at once, and always, also a process of writing or rewriting. In interpreting, engaging, rethinking, reworking, and applying ideas in texts, we 'rewrite' the object of our investigation. Texts, like human beings (and knowledge) in Freirean theory, are always 'becoming'. To be critically literate, on the Freirean view, is to 'literacize' - i.e. read and write - in a particular way. Freirean literacizing implies, among other things: the adoption of restless, inquisitive, questioning stance in the act of reading; the forging of a dialogical relationship between the reader (who is, it should be remembered, also a writer); the linking of texts with contexts; and, ultimately, the active integration of 'word' and 'world' through liberating social praxis.

Freirean critical literacy, then, pertains not just to written words, but to spoken and 'true' words as well. In my discussion of the proposed programme I have, to this point, said very little about the link between 'theory' and 'practice' in core courses. The 'discursive universe' being expanded in a programme of the kind proposed is ostensibly more theoretical than practical: students encounter a range of theoretical perspectives, deal with theoretical works, and confront questions which have puzzled theorists for centuries. This theoretical thrust is, in part, what gives the proposed programme its distinctiveness as one moment in a wider process of conscientization. Yet, an artificial separation of 'theory' from 'practice', in *any* course designed along Freirean lines, is undesirable. In one sense, such a split is *impossible*: all theorizing is a form of practice, and all *reflective* practice is theoretical. How, though, might the link between theory and practice be more deliberately enhanced in core courses? The key is to be found in the multidimensional 'word' in Freirean theory.

Dialogue provides the bridge between written words and 'true' words in the proposed course. Indeed, the spoken word is the 'filter' through which everything else in the programme passes. Students, as I envisage it, would bring the world of their lived practical experience to the classroom as a starting point for discussion. This would not be an aimless 'share and tell' process; rather, the spoken word would serve as a medium for addressing, in a deliberate, structured, and *critical* way, themes, problems, or issues in one of the chosen texts. The points offered in discussion would then be tested against one or more of the theoretical perspectives being brought to bear on the text. The teacher would have an important role to play in fostering debate, in drawing out opposing positions, and in challenging students to ask further questions. There would be a constant process of modification to multiple 'texts': the text of experience, the theoretical texts of the different perspectives, and the text that is social reality itself. Each of these texts would, together with the book under discussion, be continuously *rewritten* through the process of dialogue. In the

dialogue, of course, we find a further text - the text of the spoken educative 'conversation' - also undergoing constant change.

Speaking a 'true' word - that is, engaging in critical, dialogical praxis - would occur both 'inside' and 'outside' the classroom. If the course were to proceed along optimum lines, however, the boundary between the classroom and the (rest of the) world would become blurred. The classroom would, as it were, walk out with the students as they left the university buildings. Students would not be forced to rally behind particular social causes; nor would they be pressured into supporting one political party over another. But the programme would, through the very process of laying out alternative positions and debating them earnestly and vigorously, encourage students to see political struggle - in whatever form it took - as important. Students might, moreover, gain a sense that ideas *matter*, and perhaps also come to appreciate that respecting the right of others to hold contrary views is one idea that matters a great deal in the university. Reading would become a collective process through class debate, and any joint initiatives by the students in other spheres would, it might be hoped, be better informed, and less likely to lapse into what Freire calls mere 'activism', following participation in the programme.

I return finally to the theme of political correctness. The programme I have outlined is intended to not only avoid, but provide a basis from which to actively resist, political correctness. In my earlier discussion I identified intolerance, the denial of difference, the failure to recognize alternative positions, and the suppression or impeding of questioning and criticism as key features of political correctness. I also argued that political correctness and critical consciousness stand opposed to one another. In basing my proposal on the principle of expanding the discursive universe within which students might participate, the avoidance of some of the distinguishing characteristics of political correctness is, theoretically at least,

built into the very logic of the programme. Opposing views are not just permitted; they are the pivot on which the whole programme turns. The objective of learning to question is central, and no one interpretive position on the chosen texts - whatever they may be - is enforced as the only acceptable or correct one. Freire argues that teachers should not simply tolerate, but actively stimulate, alternative discourses: in bringing diverse perspectives to bear on selected texts this is precisely what the proposed approach encourages. Of course, I have merely sketched the broad theoretical parameters for the programme; the extent to which political correctness would be avoided and resisted in practice would have to be ascertained by empirically analysing the particulars of specific courses. But the overall rhythm of the programme, as it has been hypothetically described, is against political correctness.

What *would* be classed as 'political correctness' in core university courses? Given the criteria outlined earlier, any situation where students are prevented, or discouraged, from criticizing or questioning an author's ideas or the teacher's interpretation of texts certainly fall into this category. Such cases overtly contradict the Freirean ideal of critical consciousness. Similarly, if certain books are categorically banned in a university context on the grounds that they do not 'fit' the lecturer's personal political perspective, a charge of political correctness would be valid. The same would be true of cases where sections of texts are ignored, removed, or censored because the lecturer finds them 'offensive' (sexist, racist, homophobic, colonialist, etc.). An indictment of 'political correctness' would be ill-founded if university teachers attempted to incorporate feminist or Marxist perspectives (or various conservative and liberal views) into the curriculum; indeed, if these approaches represent major alternatives in addressing the 'enduring' concerns noted earlier, those who intentionally keep such perspectives *out* of core courses are acting in a politically correct way.

If university teachers are concerned with practising, promoting or enhancing Freirean critical literacy they must - on ethical and educational grounds - be opposed to political correctness. In fact, for scholars focusing on higher education, the identification and analysis of, and resistance to, politically correct policies and practices might itself be an example of critically literate activity. The critical interrogation of popular media stories from a Freirean point of view would allow genuine examples of intolerance and the suppression of criticism to be distinguished from those where the allegation of 'political correctness' is itself used as a silencing device. If it is true, as I contended earlier in the chapter, that many accounts of political correctness rest on vague conceptual criteria, poorly developed arguments, and contradictory assumptions, then the Freirean notion of critical literacy has much to offer in exposing such flaws. These tasks are important at the present time, for inasmuch as politically correct practices are perceived as overwhelmingly undesirable, there is a strong possibility that those accused of such activities will suffer considerable personal stress, if not outright humiliation. Equally, those who dare to challenge prevailing orthodoxy in environments where political correctness *is* fostered and enforced deserve the support of colleagues who are also willing to rub against the grain of conformity. The price to be paid for speaking out in such cases is sometimes high indeed, but, as Freire has often said, risks are an inevitable part of the educational process.

While I have discussed the debate over the canon as a battle between two clearly opposed groups ('traditionalists' and 'reformists'), the divisions between antagonists are a good deal more complex than this characterization might suggest. It is easy to mask the subtleties of various positions on 'both' sides of the debate. Theoretically, there are a multiplicity of possible responses to the question 'What books ought students to read?'. Each begin from different epistemological and political assumptions and suggest distinct curriculum structures and processes (though there is often considerable overlap between perspectives).

Nonetheless, it would be fair to say that in much of the recent published literature on the canon the major division is between those who wish to preserve Great Books programmes in their traditional form and those who argue for a revision to core reading requirements. Despite the alarmist tenor of popular news stories on canon transformation, many of the changes to core curricula have been remarkably modest.[273] Traditional classics have not disappeared; they have simply been joined by other texts. If core courses were in place before the debates over Great Books and 'Western Civilization' programmes began, they generally remain in place now. In fact, in many respects, universities have changed very little over the past decade. Genuinely radical proposals (e.g. the complete disestablishment of universities in a manner analogous to Illich's deschooling of society[274]) have been few and far between.

No matter what approach is taken in addressing the question 'What books ought students to read?', there will always be (serious) limits to what can be achieved in core courses. From a Freirean point of view, programmes of this kind would be worthwhile to the extent that they encouraged the development of, and provided the conditions for, a critical orientation toward the world. If such a stance is to be authentic, it demands an awareness of, and a willingness to pay respectful (but not reverent) attention to, alternative perspectives on some of the deepest questions about human beings and the world. Freire would support any programme of study which encouraged rigorous questioning, structured dialogue and debate, and the acknowledgement of difference and opposition. Ultimately, however, the promotion of Freirean critical literacy in core university courses must be seen as but one element in the wider process of conscientization and social change.

Notes

1. For discussion of the ambiguities and misconceptions surrounding the term, see O'Keefe, B.J. 'Sense and Sensitivity', *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992, pp.123-126.

2. See Dickstein, M. 'Correcting PC', *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993, p.542.

3. Messer-Davidow, E. 'Manufacturing the Attack on Higher Education', *Social Text*, no.36, 1993.

4. See *ibid.*, pp.45-49.

5. Compare, for example, Martin, J. 'The Postmodern Argument Considered', *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993.

6. On this point, and for an overview of different dimensions to the debate over political correctness in the United States, see Annette, J. 'The Culture War and the Politics of Higher Education in America', in Dunant, S. (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994.

7. McLaren, P. 'Critical Pedagogy in the Age of Global Capitalism: Some Challenges for the Educational Left', *Australian Journal of Education*, vol.39, no.1, 1995, p.13.

8. Roger Kimball, an outspoken conservative critic of political correctness, claims that what began as a joke - as something which couldn't and wouldn't be taken seriously - has now evolved into a totalitarian threat to traditional ideals. Where in the past the 'politically correct' were those who were 'self-righteous, non-smoking, ecologically sensitive, vegetarian, feminist, non-racist, sandal-wearing beneficiaries of capitalism', now political correctness has become 'a dogma of orthodoxy that is widely accepted, and widely enforced, by America's cultural elite'. See Kimball, R. 'From Farce to Tragedy', *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, p.565.

9. Goodheart maintains that politically correct practices in the academy have been largely the domain of the Left, whereas 'in certain sections of the media and in the highest government circles' political correctness has been a characteristic of the Right. See Goodheart, E. 'PC or Not PC', *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993, pp.550-551.

10. Dickstein, *op. cit.*, pp.542-543.

11. Phillips, M. 'Illiberal Liberalism', in Dunant, S. (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994.

12. *Ibid.*, p.37.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p.38.

16. *Ibid.*, pp.38-51.

17. *Ibid.*, p.53.

18. For a thoughtful discussion of this issue, see Grant, L. 'Sex and the Single Student: The Story of Date Rape', in Dunant, S. (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994.

19. Cf. Cameron, D. '"Words, Words, Words": The Power of Language', in Dunant, S. (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994.

20. Freire, P. *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972b, pp.79-80, emphasis mine.

21. Freire, P. and Faundez, A. *Learning to Question*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1989, p.132, emphasis mine.

22. Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the City*, New York, Continuum, 1993b, p.24, emphasis mine.

23. *Ibid.*, p.112.

24. *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

25. *Ibid.*, p.139, emphasis mine.

26. Freire, P. *Pedagogy of Hope*, New York, Continuum, 1994, p.41.

27. *Ibid.*, p.42, emphasis mine.

28. Freire, P. and Macedo, D. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.

29. See Gee, J.P. 'The Legacies of Literacy: From Plato to Freire through Harvey Graff', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988, p.207; Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, pp.127 and 133.

30. Freire and Macedo, *op. cit.*, p.64.

31. *Ibid.*, p.72.

32. *Ibid.*, pp.75-76, emphasis mine.

33. *Ibid.*, p.65.

34. *Ibid.*, pp.87-88.

35. *Ibid.*, p.87, emphasis mine.

36. *Ibid.*, p.88, emphasis mine.

37. See Messer-Davidow, *op. cit.*

38. See Gee, *op. cit.*, pp.207-209.

39. *Ibid.*, p.207.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, p.208.

42. *Ibid.*, p.209.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p.208.

45. Freire and Macedo, *op. cit.*

46. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.130.

47. See Gee, *op. cit.*, p.207.

48. Freire and Macedo, *op. cit.*, p.92.

49. See *ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p.92, emphasis mine.

52. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.42.

53. Freire (1993b), *op. cit.*, p.139.

54. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.132.

55. Freire, P. 'The People Speak Their Word: Learning to Read and Write in Sao Tome and Principe', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.51, no.1, 1981, p.29.

56. Mao Tse-Tung, *Four Essays on Philosophy*, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1968, p.87.

57. *Ibid.*, p.117.

58. *Ibid.*, p.135.

59. *Ibid.*, p.117.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, p.118.

62. Cf. Carey, J.W. 'Political Correctness and Cultural Studies', *Journal of Communication*, vol.42, no.2, 1992, pp.58-59.

63. On this point, see my earlier quotation from Dickstein, *loc. cit.*

64. Lehman, D. 'The Reign of Intolerance', *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993, p.598. On the theme of intolerance (and related themes such as conformism), compare Phillips, M., *op. cit.*; Hall, S. 'Some "Politically Incorrect" Pathways Through PC', in Dunant, S.

(ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994; Delbanco, A. 'The Politics of Separatism', Loury, G.C. 'Self-Censorship', Marcus, S. 'Self-Totalitarianism', Merkin, D. 'Notes of a Lonely White Woman': all in *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993.

65. Jardine, L. 'Canon to Left of Them, Canon to Right of Them', in Dunant, S. (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994, p.106.

66. See, for example, Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.49, where Freire speaks of 'our stance on the left'. Compare also, Freire's comments on Nicaragua in Horton, M. and Freire, P. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, eds. B. Bell, J. Gaventa and J. Peters, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990, p.219.

67. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.39.

68. *Ibid.*, p.116.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Escobar, *et al. Paulo Freire on Higher Education: A Dialogue at the National University of Mexico*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994, p.91.

71. Freire and Faundez, *op. cit.*, p.17.

72. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.83.

73. Escobar, *et al.*, *loc. cit.*

74. *Ibid.*, p.91.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, p.79.

77. *Ibid.*, p.136.

78. See *ibid.*, p.96.

79. *Ibid.*, p.138.

80. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.77.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, p.78.

83. See Escobar *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp.151-152.

84. *Ibid.*

85. See, for example, Alter, R. 'The Persistence of Reading', Berger, B. 'Multiculturalism and the Modern University', Sidorsky, D. 'Multiculturalism and the University': all in *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993.

86. For work by people other than Freire, compare the following: Apple, M. *Ideology and Curriculum*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, *Education and Power*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985; Giroux, H.A. *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition*, Massachusetts, Bergin and Garvey, 1983, *Teachers as Intellectuals*, Massachusetts, Bergin and Garvey, 1988d; Aronowitz, S. and Giroux, H.A. *Education Under Siege*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986; McLaren, P. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, London, Longman, 1989.

87. See, for instance, Berger, *op. cit.*; Brustein, R. 'Dumbocracy in America', Kramer, H. 'Confronting the Monolith', Phillips, W. 'Against Political Correctness: Eleven Points', Radosh, R. 'McCarthyism of the Left': all in *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993.

88. Kramer, *ibid.*, p.571.

89. Berger, *op. cit.*, p.517.

90. *Ibid.*, p.526.

91. Phillips, W. *op. cit.*, p.672.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

94. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.151.

95. *Ibid.*, p.153.

96. *Ibid.*, p.156.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, p.157.

99. Horton and Freire, *op. cit.*, p.131.

100. *Ibid.*, pp.131-132.

101. *Ibid.*, p.132.

102. Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, p.152.

103. *Ibid.*, p.153.

104. *Ibid.*, pp.158-159.

105. *The Closing of the American Mind* was published by Simon and Schuster in 1987. All references in this chapter will be to the Penguin version of the book, published in 1988. An abbreviated version of my discussion of Bloom has been published in Roberts, P. 'Philosophy, Education and Literacy: Some Comments on Bloom', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, vol.28, no.2, 1993b.

106. For a wide selection of views in one volume, see Stone, R.L. (ed.) *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, Illinois, Chicago Review Press, 1989. On the question of why Bloom's book might have sold so many copies (far exceeding all normal expectations of an 'academic' text), see Herron, J. 'Bloomsday, or Six Mediations on America's Closing Mind', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991.

107. Barber, B. 'The Philosopher Despot: Allan Bloom's Elitist Agenda', in Stone (ed.), *ibid.*, p.81. According to one commentator, the success of Bloom's book is a uniquely *American* phenomenon: 'a phenomenon of crass, commercial America'. See Auer, J.W. 'Bloom, Neatby, and Lung Fishes', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991, p.17.

108. For an historical overview of critiques of higher education in the United States, see Oakley, F. 'Against Nostalgia: Reflections on Our Present Discontents in American Higher Education', in Gless, D.J. and Smith, B.H. (eds.) *The Politics of Liberal Education*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992.

109. Hirsch, E.D. *Cultural Literacy*, Boston, Houghton Mifflen, 1987. For a concise summary of some of his major points, see Hirsch, E.D. 'Cultural Literacy', *The American Scholar*, vol.52, no.2, 1983. Hirsch's book, like *The Closing of the American Mind*, has attracted wide-ranging - and often critical - comment. See, for example, Graff, H.J. 'Critical Literacy Versus Cultural Literacy - Reading Signs of the Times?', and Hendley, B. 'Hirsch and Dewey on Democracy and Education': both in *Interchange*, vol.20, no.1, 1989; Walhout, D. 'Philosophy in the Cultural Literacy Project', *Teaching Philosophy*, vol.12, no.1, 1989; Beehler, R. 'Grading the "Cultural Literacy" Project', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol.10, no.4, 1990; Woodhouse, H.R. 'Critical Reflections on Hirsch and Cultural Literacy', *Interchange*, vol.20, no.3, 1989; Hicks, D. Review of Hirsch, E.D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, Boston, Houghton Mifflen, 1987, *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.1, 1988; Spooner, M. 'The U.S. Cultural Literacy Debate', *Journal of Reading*, vol.30, no.8, 1987; Courts, P.L. *Literacy and Empowerment*, New York, Bergin and Garvey, 1991, chapter two; Johnston, G.L. 'Education for Australian Cultural Literacy', and White, D. 'Cultural Literacy, Trivial Pursuit or Nostalgic Regret?: both in *Discourse*, vol.11, no.2, 1991; Riecken, T.J. and Court, D. 'Extending Cultural Literacy', *The Journal of Educational Thought*, vol.26, no.2, 1992; Aronowitz, S. and Giroux, H.A. 'Schooling, Culture and Literacy in the Age of Broken Dreams', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988; Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. 'Contradictions in the Canon: Nationalism and the Cultural Literacy Debate', *Discourse*, vol.12, no.2, 1992; Smith, B.H. 'Cult-Lit: Hirsch, Literacy, and the "National Culture"', in Gless, D.J. and Smith, B.H. (eds.) *The Politics of Liberal Education*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992b.

110. Bloom, after beginning a lecture at Harvard University in 1988 by addressing the audience as 'fellow elitists', noted wryly that 'people do tend to mix [he and Hirsch] up'. See Bloom, A. *Giants and Dwarfs*, New York, Touchstone, 1991, p.13. For critical comment on the practice of viewing Hirsch and Bloom as twin reactionaries, see Rorty, R. 'Two Cheers for the Cultural Left', in Gless, D.J. and Smith, B.H. (eds.) *The Politics of Liberal Education*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992, p.237.

111. While Bloom has frequently been portrayed as a 'conservative', there is some dispute over how accurate this label is. See, for example, Bradshaw, L. 'Allan Bloom's Defence of Democracy', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991.

112. D'Souza, D. *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, New York, The Free Press, 1991; Kimball, R. *Tenured Radicals*, New York, Harper Perennial, 1991.

113. For a collection of views opposing conservative positions, see Gless, D. and Smith, B.H. (eds.) *The Politics of Liberal Education*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992.

114. This point is important, given my earlier comments on political correctness. For, whether one agrees or disagrees with Bloom, his ideas should not be ignored. On this issue, compare, Luik, J.C. 'Introduction: On Reading Bloom', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991a.

115. See, for example, Nussbaum, M. 'Undemocratic Vistas', in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*

116. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.25.

117. *Ibid.*, p.27.

118. See *ibid.*, pp.27-34.

119. *Ibid.*, p.39.

120. *Ibid.*, pp.342-343.

121. *Ibid.*, p.72.

122. *Ibid.*, p.73.

123. *Ibid.*, p.75.

124. *Ibid.*, p.79.

125. *Ibid.*, p.87.

126. *Ibid.*, p.91.

127. *Ibid.*, p.96.

128. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.100.

129. *Ibid.*, p.102.

130. *Ibid.*

131. *Ibid.*, p.101.

132. *Ibid.*, pp.97-137.

133. To judge by the testimonials of some of his former students, Bloom is an enthusiastic and inspiring teacher. See, for example, Podhoretz, J. 'An Open Letter to Allan Bloom', and Zuckert, M.P. 'Two Cheers (At Least) for Allan Bloom': both in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*

134. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.62.

135. *Ibid.*, p.65.

136. *Ibid.*

137. *Ibid.*, pp.65-66.

138. *Ibid.*, p.321.

139. *Ibid.*, p.332.

140. *Ibid.*, p.333.

141. *Ibid.*, p.380.

142. *Ibid.*, p.344.

143. Compare, *ibid.*, pp.344-345.

144. Bloom makes only brief and not especially complimentary reference to Adler. See *ibid.*, p.54. For Adler's views on Bloom, see Lyon, J. 'America's Teacher: Mortimer J. Adler, the Nation's Self-Appointed Teacher for Most of His 85 Years, Takes on the "Late Bloomers" of Academe', in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*

145. See, for example, Searle, J. 'The Storm Over the University', *New York Review of Books*, 6 December 1990; Connor, W.R. 'Milton as Misogynist, Shakespeare as Elitist, Homer as Pornographer', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 December 1990; Graff, G. 'Colleges Are Depriving Students of a Connected View of Scholarship', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 February 1991; Bernays, A. 'I Don't Want to Read a Novel Passed by a Board of Good Taste', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 6 March 1991.

146. Compare, Searle, *ibid.*

147. See Giroux, H.A. 'Series Introduction: Literacy, Difference, and the Politics of Border Crossing', in Mitchell, C. and Weiler, K. (eds.) *Rewriting Literacy*, New York, Bergin and Garvey, 1991a.

148. For discussion of some of the key issues here, see Gates, H.L. 'Whose Canon is it Anyway?', 1992a, Ehrenreich, B. 'The Challenge for the Left', 1992, Gordon, T. and Lubiano, W. 'The Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus', Berube, M. 'Public Image Limited: Political Correctness and the Media's Big Lie': all in Berman, P. (ed.) *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, New York, Dell, 1992; Rothenberg, P. 'Critics of Attempts to Democratize the Curriculum Are Waging a Campaign to Misrepresent the Work of Responsible Professors', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 April 1991; Atlas, J. 'The Battle of the Books', *Dialogue*, no.84, 1989a.

149. Cf. Searle, J.R. 'Is There a Crisis in American Higher Education?', *Partisan Review*, vol.60, no.4, 1993, on 'defenders' and 'challengers' of the traditional conception of a liberal education.

150. Kennedy, G.A. 'Classics and Canons', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*

151. *Ibid.*

152. *Ibid.*

153. Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd edn., trans. H.D.P. Lee, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, section 377b.

154. *Ibid.*, section 377c.

155. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.226.

156. *Ibid.*

157. *Ibid.*

158. Pratt, M.L. 'Humanities for the Future: Reflections on the Western Culture Debate at Stanford', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.14. The actual title of the Columbia course, according to Smith, was 'Contemporary Civilization'. See Smith, P. *Killing the Spirit*, New York, Viking, 1990, p.141.

159. Smith, *ibid.*

160. *Ibid.*, p.140.

161. *Ibid.*

162. *Ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*, p.141.

164. Cited *ibid.*, and originally from James B. Crooks, professor of history at the University of North Florida.

165. Cited *ibid.*, p.142.

166. This point also applies to the debate over political correctness. Compare, Dunant, S. 'What's in a Word?', in Dunant, S. (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, London, Virago, 1994.

167. Compare, Wake, S.D. 'The University and Democratic Life: Allan Bloom's Platonic Attack', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991, p.74.

168. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.303.

169. *Ibid.*

170. *Ibid.*

171. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.144.

172. Cf. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.345.

173. Bloom, A. 'Educational Trendiness', in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*, 1989, p.369.

174. *Ibid.*, pp.368-369.

175. Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967.

176. Cf. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.29.

177. See, for example, his exhaustive attack on John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in Bloom (1991), *ibid.*, pp.315-345, together with his belittling remarks on Rawls in *The Closing of the American Mind*, (1988), *op. cit.*, pp.30, 229.

178. Bloom (1988), *ibid.*, p.345.

179. *Ibid.*, pp.345, 356-358.

180. See Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.303.

181. Jaffa, H.V. 'Humanizing Certitudes and Impoverishing Doubts: A Critique of *The Closing of the American Mind*', in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.135.

182. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.272.

183. Gerald Graff, as quoted in Atlas, *op. cit.*, p.24.

184. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.303.

185. See *ibid.*

186. Cf. Howe, *op. cit.*, p.160.

187. Compare, Aronowitz and Giroux, *op. cit.*; Cope and Kalantzis, *op. cit.*; Singh, M.G. 'A Counter-Hegemonic Orientation to Literacy in Australia', *Journal of Education*, vol.171, no.2, 1989; McLaren, P.L. 'Culture or Canon? Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Literacy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.58, no.2, 1988a.

188. On the politics of publishing and teaching texts, compare the following: Anyon, J. 'Ideology and United States History Textbooks', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.49, no.3, 1979; Apple, M. 'The Political Economy of Text Publishing', *Educational Theory*, vol.34, no.4, 1984, *Teachers and Texts*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, 'The Text and Cultural Politics', *Journal of Educational Thought*, vol.24, no.3A, 1990, 'Between Moral Regulation and Democracy: The Cultural Contradictions of the Text', in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993; Luke, A. *Literacy, Textbooks and Ideology: Postwar Literacy Instruction and the Mythology of Dick and Jane*, London, Falmer Press, 1988; Lankshear with Lawler, *op. cit.*, pp.155-158; Altbach, P.G. 'Literary Colonialism: Books in the Third World', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.45, no.2, 1975; Lorimer, R. 'The Business of Literacy: The Making of the Educational Textbook', in de Castell, S., Luke, A. and Egan, K. (eds.) *Literacy, Society and Schooling: A Reader*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 'The Socioeconomy of Scholarly and Cultural Book Publishing', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol.15, no.2, 1993; Lorimer, R. and Keeney, P. 'Defining the Curriculum: The Role of the Multinational Textbook in Canada', in de Castell, S., Luke, A. and Luke, C. (eds.) *Language, Authority and Criticism: Readings on the School Textbook*, London, Falmer, 1989.

189. Some of the material in the remainder of this section is to be published in Roberts, P. 'Political Correctness, Great Books and the University Curriculum', forthcoming in *Sites: A Journal for Radical Perspectives on Culture*, no.31, 1995d.

190. Compare, Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, pp.28-29.

191. Moses, R. 'A Folly of Shallow Thinking', *The New Zealand Herald*, 15 November, 1990, p.8.

192. *Ibid.*

193. Rathgen, E. 'English Syllabus Misquoted', *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 November, 1990, p.8.

194. See *ibid.*

195. Maxwell, A. 'From Cannibalism to Biculturalism', *Arena*, no.96, 1991, pp.102-104. The quotation is from page 104.

196. Aronowitz and Giroux, *op. cit.* See also, Browne, R.B. 'Popular Culture: Medicine for Illiteracy and Associated Educational Ills', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol.21, no.3, 1987, p.11.

197. Cf. Minnich, E.K. 'From Ivory Tower to Tower of Babel?', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.191.

198. See, for example, Spender, D. *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them*, London, Pandora, 1988; Ammons, E. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, especially chapter one; Tompkins, J. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, particularly pp.xiv, 120, 124-125; Carby, H.V. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, especially chapter one; Giroux, H.A. 'Liberal Arts Education and the Struggle for Public Life: Dreaming About Democracy', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.133.

199. Cf. Smith, B.H. 'Introduction: The Public, the Press, and the Professors', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, 1992a, pp.8-9; Ammons, *ibid.*; Tompkins, *ibid.*, p.xiv.

200. Compare the references to writers of quality by Bloom (1991), and Kimball (1991): both *op. cit.*

201. See Mary Louise Pratt's comments on Bloom, Bennett and Bellow in Pratt, M.L. 'Humanities for the Future: Reflections on the Western Culture Debate at Stanford', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.15-16.

202. Among the authors who deal with working class life in detail, Dickens is the only one who is consistently mentioned by traditionalists. Steinbeck's work is often ignored, downplayed or written off as inferior in literary quality. See Fish, S. 'The Common Touch, or, One Size Fits All', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.* Lesser-known novels such as Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* are hardly ever considered by traditionalists. Bloom and many other defenders of Great Books

programmes stress the importance of an historical perspective on the human condition, yet never refer to classics such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982 (a text which would withstand any test of academic rigour).

203. Tompkins, *op. cit.*

204. *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

205. *Ibid.*, p.xi.

206. For a recent discussion of this issue, see Bagilhole, B. 'How to Keep a Good Woman Down: An Investigation of the Role of Institutional Factors in the Process of Discrimination Against Women Academics', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol.14, no.3, 1993.

207. See Hirsch (1987), *op. cit.*

208. Gates, H.L. 'The Master's Pieces: On Canon Formation and the African-American Tradition', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, 1992b, p.107.

209. See Weiler, K. 'Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol.61, no.4, 1991.

210. Howe, *op. cit.*, p.161.

211. While I shall concentrate on Freire, it must be stressed (again) that his work represents just one among many different approaches to critical literacy. The wider literature on this theme is also helpful in analysing Bloom's ideas. See all essays in Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993a; Giroux, H.A. 'Literacy and the Pedagogy of Voice and Political Empowerment', *Educational Theory*, vol.38, no.1, 1988a; Kretovics, J.R. 'Critical Literacy: Challenging the Assumptions of Mainstream Educational Theory', *Journal of Education*, vol.167, no.2, 1985; McLeod, A. 'Critical Literacy: Taking Control of Our Own Lives', *Language Arts*, vol.63, no.1, 1986; Fueyo, J.M. 'Technical Literacy Versus Critical Literacy in Adult Basic Education', *Journal of Education*, vol.170, no.1, 1988.

212. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.306.

213. *Ibid.*, p.307.

214. See Freire, P. *The Politics of Education*, London, MacMillan, 1985, pp.1-4.

215. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.344.

216. Compare, Rorty, R. 'Straussianism, Democracy, and Allan Bloom 1: That Old Time Philosophy', in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.100-101.

217. Bloom (1988), *loc. cit.*

218. *Ibid.*, p.379.

219. I owe this point to Kevin Jackman, in private communication.

220. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.311.

221. See, for instance, Freire (1985), *op. cit.*, p.111.

222. The literature on texts and the construction of meaning is extensive. Particularly helpful sources include: Spivey, N.N. 'Transforming Texts: Constructive Processes in Reading and Writing', *Written Communication*, vol.7, no.2, 1990; Gee, J.P. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*, London, Falmer Press, 1990; Harari, J.V. (ed.) *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, London, Methuen, 1980; Rommetveit, R. 'On Literacy and the Myth of Literal Meaning', in Saljo, R. (ed.) *The Written Word: Studies in Literate Thought and Action*, Berlin, Springer-Verlag, 1988.

223. On this issue, see the various papers in Baker, C.D. and Luke, A. (eds.) *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy*, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1991a.

224. Giroux, H.A. 'Reading Texts, Literacy, and Textual Authority', *Journal of Education*, vol.172, no.1, 1990, p.85.

225. *Ibid.*, p.94.

226. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.372.

227. *Ibid.*, p.380.

228. *Ibid.*

229. *Ibid.*, p.345.

230. *Ibid.*, p.370.

231. For a rigorous discussion of Bloom's notion of a 'liberal ėducation', see Mathie, W. 'Philosophers, Gentlemen, and Saints: The Dilemma of Liberal Education', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991.

232. See my comments in chapter two.

233. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.303.

234. Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, p.11.

235. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.344.

236. For an excellent critical discussion of Bloom's critique of relativism, see Nathan, G.J. 'Rethinking Relativism', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991.

237. Much depends, though, on how Bloom's book is read, and on what expectations we have of it as a philosophical, theoretical or academic work. According to Douglas, Bloom accepts the view that 'philosophy justifies itself to the world through story-telling rather than through argument'. Bloom 'is not writing philosophy, he is telling a story which attempts to justify the practice of philosophy'. See Douglas, N. 'After Bloom After Philosophy or How Philosophy Sold its Birthright in Exchange for a Free

Lunch', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991, pp.80, 83.

238. Atlas, J. 'Chicago's Grumpy Guru: Best-Selling Professor Allan Bloom and the Chicago Intellectuals', in Stone (ed.), *op. cit.*, 1989b, p.69.

239. Kimball (1991), *op. cit.*, especially chapter one.

240. D'Souza, *op. cit.*, chapters three and six.

241. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.379.

242. Kimball (1991), *op. cit.*, p.xi.

243. Compare, for example, Graff (1992b), *op. cit.*, chapter four; Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.62.

244. See, for example, Freire (1994), *op. cit.*, pp.78-79.

245. *Ibid.*, p.78.

246. *Ibid.*, p.79.

247. Compare, for example, the number of books on the 'Required' and 'Strongly Recommended' lists of the Stanford 'Western Civilization' course. See Pratt, *op. cit.*, pp.17-18.

248. Freire, P. 'The Importance of the Act of Reading', *Journal of Education*, vol.165, no.1, 1983a, p.9.

249. Escobar *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.64.

250. Freire (1983a), *loc. cit.*

251. For Freire's discussion of this case, see Freire and Shor, *op. cit.*, pp.83-85.

252. *Ibid.*, p.83.

253. *Ibid.*, p.85.

254. *Ibid.*, p.83.

255. Cf. Kuklick on the emergence of the modern university in North America: Kuklick, B. 'The Emergence of the Humanities', in Gless and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.206.

256. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, pp.303, 362.

257. *Ibid.*, p.359.

258. *Ibid.*, pp.355, 361.

259. *Ibid.*, p.360.

260. *Ibid.*, p.374.

261. *Ibid*., p.345.

262. *Ibid*., p.363.

263. Compare, *ibid*., pp.20, 302-303, 344.

264. *Ibid*., p.376.

265. Cf. Luik's discussion of what he calls 'humane learning' in Luik, J.C. 'Democracy, Elitism, and the Academy: Thoughts After Bloom', *Interchange*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1991b, p.13.

266. Bloom (1991), *op. cit.*, p.303, emphasis mine.

267. Bloom (1989), *op. cit.*, pp.368-369.

268. Bloom (1988), *op. cit.*, p.100.

269. *Ibid*., p.101.

270. Graff (1992b), *op. cit.*

271. Freire (1972a), *op. cit.*

272. Freire (1993b), *op. cit.*, p.84.

273. The Stanford case is a good example. See Graff (1992b), *op. cit.*, chapter two, especially pp.21-22.

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