

Deconstructing the Curriculum

Radical Hermeneutics and Professional Education

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This article contrasts the debate between conservatism and liberalism evident in educational policy and practice, with the radical, deconstructive position. Radical views of education are in turn contrasted with what the educational theorists Shaun Gallagher identifies as a moderate position, in which the various controversies turn in on themselves to reveal our dependence on a series of discursive practices. There are therefore four modes of thinking about education: the conservative/instrumental, liberal/critical, radical/deconstructive and moderate. According to Gallagher these modes closely parallel the four understandings of hermeneutics evident in the debates involving theorists such as Hirsch, Habermas, Derrida and Gadamer. The article explicates these four modes in the light of the experiences and concerns of professional education, particularly in architecture. In doing so, the article provides one means of making sense of the complex and bewildering state of policy-making and teaching practices in universities.

The aims and practices of education have largely been disputed from two rival positions. These are the positions of instrumentalism (sometimes also referred to as *conservatism*) on the one hand and *liberalism* on the other.¹ Instrumentalism is evident in the policies and programs of Government, but also in the policy statements of those directly connected with the education of professionals. For example, in its Objectives and Standards in Architectural Education, the CAA (Commonwealth Association of Architects) outlines its educational standards; “Graduating students should show evidence of ability to understand the needs of those who commission and use the elements of the built environment; to analyse problems and synthesise and appraise their solution as part of the design process. They should be able to produce appropriate and imaginative solutions which are technologically sound, environmentally acceptable and economically feasible in the context of the total environment. They should understand the legal, practice and managerial aspects of putting these into effect and be capable of communicating ideas, proposals and instructions to others.”

From the liberal position, although such articulations appear innocuous and well-meaning, such policies are flawed in that they lack any advocacy of criticism. Such policies assume that the role of the professional in society is well worked out and unproblematic.² It is the role of the professional school to produce graduates with the

¹ For an illustration of some of the force and complexity of liberalism in education see Jonathan, R. (1995). Education and moral development: the role of reason and circumstance, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol.29, No.3, pp.331-351.

² For discussions of the changing nature of practice see Gutman, R. (1988). *Architectural Practice: A Critical View*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pp.101-102 and Duffy, F. (1992) Strategic

requisite skills and competencies to fit into accepted modes of practice.³ Furthermore, the problems the professional encounters are assumed to be well stated. Problems are there to be analysed and solved. Furthermore, the status and role of the profession itself is beyond the realm of problem-solving inquiry. On the other hand, from the *liberal* perspective, the professional is implicated in the formulation or setting of the problem in any particular situation. Instrumentalism seems to ignore the fact that “problem setting” is itself circumspective and problematic, a view developed at length by Schön.⁴

Instrumentalism in education can be traced back at least as far as the sixteenth century French educationalist Peter Ramus. Walter Ong⁵ brings to light Ramus’ extreme schematic treatment of knowledge, his businesslike stress on method and analysis, and how his ideas held sway in Europe during the period leading up to Descartes and the Enlightenment. In more recent times instrumentalism has been bolstered by positivism and scientism which still linger in certain influential disciplines and in certain corners of Government bureaucracy. Furthermore, the general discontent with declining morals and educational standards prompts influential contemporary writers such as Eric Hirsch and Allan Bloom to articulate and support the instrumental goal of re-instating education as a means of conserving the best aspects of a culture.⁶

Instrumentalism provides simple blueprints for action. As long as instrumentalism holds sway then it appears that something is being done, policies are set in train, it appears that standards are being maintained, and knowledge is being preserved and is growing. However, it is also apparent that instrumentalism is not up to the challenge of education. Mission statements, corporate goals, strategies, performance criteria, performance indicators⁷ and competency standards are being laid out to realise the Ramist project of well-defined knowledge bases, consistency and rigour. They also represent a veneer of agreement amongst incommensurable points of view. Meanwhile, talk of flux, revolution, critique are relegated to marginalia, labelled as “very 1960s,” romantic, or vague. As it is very difficult to draft subversion into a strategy plan, such projects may be relegated to the “hidden curriculum.”

The critique of instrumentalism in general is a central theme of postmodern writing.⁸ According to this critique, instrumentalism is based on an outmoded

overview, *Strategic Study of the Profession: Phase 1—Strategic Overview*, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, pp.1-11, p.4.

³ See, Carolin, P. (1992) Expectation versus reality in architectural education, *Strategic Study of the Profession*, p.178.

⁴ Schön, D. (1982). *The Reflective Practitioner*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁵ Ong, W.J. (1971). *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.

⁶ See Hirsch, E.D. (1987). *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts, and Bloom, A. (1987). *The Closing of the American Mind*, Simon and Schuster, New York, New York.

⁷ Stokes, T. and Grigg, L. (1993) Research performance indicators survey, *Commissioned Report No.21*, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p.xi.

⁸ See for example Bernstein, R. J. (1983). *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford; and Rorty, R. (1980). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

epistemology. It assumes that knowledge builds upon knowledge as if to form some single edifice, and that knowledge can be stored and transmitted. It gives primacy to texts as containers of meaning, and thought as what can be represented on the printed page—authored and reproducible. It represents a “bureaucratisation of thought.” More radically, instrumentalism is a manifestation of a technological “enframing,” an inevitable but misguided “will to power” on the part of human kind that assumes it can ultimately control everything: its destiny, its prosperity, the minds of its youth, nature, and the control agent itself—technology.⁹

What does liberalism offer? The liberal tradition of educational development dates back at least as far as Rousseau in the eighteenth century. It was championed in the twentieth century by the American pragmatic philosopher John Dewey. The critical tradition of educational development has its seeds in liberalism but also Marx. One of the foremost proponents of the critical theme is the South American left-wing educational theorist Paulo Freire.¹⁰

If the instrumental view is the subject of severe scepticism then there are also serious concerns about liberalism. It could be said that one reason for the rise in instrumentalism is that the liberal stance is no longer vigorous. According to Zavarzadeh and Morton “the [liberal] pedagogical programs of the 1960s were theoretically too weak to cope with the incoherencies and contradictions of the humanities curriculum ...”.¹¹ Further, Aronowitz and Giroux argue that “radical critics remain mired in the language of critique even as its own constituency, much less the majority of teachers, parents and students, have at least for now, tired of this discourse.”¹²

Apart from the apparent political naïvete of liberalism, Gallagher identifies several serious inconsistencies within the liberal/critical position.¹³ I summarise them here briefly. First, there is the elusive posture of the critical overview. The major difficulty with the critical stance is that there is no position where one can stand in order to appropriate the critical position. Aware of the need for a critical posture in history, Rousseau advocated that the teacher give the pupil “the facts and let him judge for himself.”¹⁴ But all facts are interpretations. The impartial position is forever elusive. Second is the problem of the relativity of emancipation. Emancipation is also an elusive quest. We are only emancipated from one position to another. The idea of *total* freedom

⁹ See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*; Zimmerman, M.E. (1990). *Heidegger's Confrontation With Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana; and Dreyfus, H. (1991). *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹⁰ Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M.B. Ramos, Herder and Herder, New York.

¹¹ Zavarzadeh, M, ud and Morton, D. (1986-87). Theory pedagogy politics: the crisis of the subject in the humanities, *Boundary 2*, 15, pp.1-22, p.11.

¹² Aronowitz, S. and Giroux, H. (1985). Education under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Debate over Schooling, *Bergin and Garvey, South Hadley, Massachusetts*, p.7.

¹³ Gallagher, S. (1991). *Hermeneutics and Education*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York.

¹⁴ Rousseau, J.J. (1957). *The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, trans. W. Boyd, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York (originally published in French in 1762), p.108.

is clearly impossible and meaningless. According to Gallagher, “we can emancipate ourselves from something but never from everything.”¹⁵ Third, is the problem of the concealment of power relations within the critical position. Power can be pernicious when cloaked in the guise of the critical overview. Gadamer is critical of the critical stance. “Inasmuch as it seeks to penetrate the masked interests which infect public opinion, it implies its own freedom from any ideology; and that means in turn that it enthrones its own norms and ideals as self-evident and absolute.”¹⁶ Fourth, critical thinking can be seen as a form of instrumentalism. The presumption of the critical position places it firmly within the Enlightenment tradition. The objective is emancipation from dogma, prejudice, empire, and slavery. As for instrumentalism, education is a tool to produce a better society. Education is the instrument with which the critic seeks to subvert the instrumental position. So the critical position also succumbs to technological “enframing,” but without integrating this fact into its discourse.

Radical versus critical education

The failure of both instrumentalism and the critical position, conservatism and liberalism, in education provides further evidence of a more general raft of problems generally identified as the “crisis of foundations.” What is the university built on? Is it science, the foundational role of which has been seriously challenged since Kuhn?¹⁷ What are the foundations on which we build our critique? Who is in control of the educational process? One response to these perplexities is to adopt the *radical* educational position. This is to embrace the very idea of perplexity itself, to elevate it, and to recognise the constitutive role of perplexity as the basis of all understanding.

The radical educational position has been labelled as such by Gallagher¹⁸ and Caputo,¹⁹ who rely substantially on the work of Derrida²⁰ and Foucault,²¹ which in turn owes much to Heidegger. The radical position seizes on the various oppositions that are assumed within intellectual inquiry, and makes devastating play of their inversion, reversal, demolition and “deconstruction.” The philosophy is one of the major themes of poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking, sweeping into many areas of higher education, particularly the humanities. Of course, university administration and Government policy appear untouched. Poststructuralism either

¹⁵ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.262.

¹⁶ Gadamer, H.-G. (1975) *Truth and Method*, Sheed Ward, London, p.315.

¹⁷ See Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, and also Lyotard, J.-F. (1986). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

¹⁸ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*.

¹⁹ Caputo, J.D. (1987). *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana.

²⁰ Derrida, J. (1974). *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland.

²¹ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Foucault Reader: an Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, P. Rabinow (ed.) Penguin, London.

offends or converts. It always subverts. It also represents a major meeting of several traditions including the philosophers of France and Germany, philosophers of science such as Kuhn, pragmatists, and disaffected disciples of analytical philosophy. These concerns have been brought together by American writers such as Rorty, Bernstein and Dreyfus, to name but a few.

Caputo provides a useful introduction to the application of the radical view (deconstruction) to education. Whereas the classical tradition dating back to Plato elevated the immutable, the unchanging, to the place of privilege in the realm of ideas, above the fluctuating uncertainty of the temporal world, the deconstructivist inverts the privilege. Caputo invokes the power of the *flux*. “Structures are but inscribed on the flux.”²² The common metaphor is that of *play*: “In the end, I want to say, science, action, art and religious belief make their way by a free play and creative movement whose dynamics baffle the various discourses on method.”²³ This is not some statement of despair or futility. Caputo argues this is “the only really sensible, or reasonable, view of reason.”²⁴ The elevation of play represents a profound reversal of the priorities of the ordering mind.

Gallagher develops the theme of the play element present in education, dating back to Plato.²⁵ The Greek word for play is *paidía*, which shares the same root (*pais*, child) as the word for education *paideía*. The common distinction is between play and dialectic or seriousness argument, or between play and education. The radical position is to collapse this distinction—to recover the *paidía* in *paideía*. The elevation of play is not vague, frivolous or inconsequential. It has a very serious aspect. This is the dissolution of Cartesian and Enlightenment *subjectivity*—the philosophy that has committed us to the various battles between objectivism and subjectivism. The elevation of play results in a redefinition, or decentering, of subjectivity. “... the phenomenon of play destroys the traditional concept of self as substantial entity and reveals the self as an openness to various possibilities ... a self process which never stops being a process in play.”²⁶ The radical position relates substantially to Gadamer’s concepts of play. According to Gadamer, the “players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation through the players.”²⁷ Zavarzadeh and Morton summarise the deconstructive (radical) attitude in which we “no longer talk about the individual, but about the subject.”²⁸ Furthermore, deconstruction “does not conceptualize the subject as a stable entity but argues that the parameters of the subject vary according to the discursive practices that are current in any historical moment.”²⁹

²² Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p.211.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.45.

²⁶ Ibid., p.51.

²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.92.

²⁸ Zavarzadeh and Morton, *Theory pedagogy politics*, p.2.

²⁹ Ibid., p.4. The elevation of play and the “decentering” of the subject are variations around the themes of Heidegger’s deconstructive phenomenology. For example, according to Heidegger the *essence of*

A further radical, deconstructive, reversal is that between meaning and syntax—the content of a linguistic utterance and its outside form, the sentence; between the signified and the signifier (sign); or between spoken language and its written form. In reasserting the priority of writing (over speech), Derrida elevates the importance of the sign: “From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs.”³⁰ Meaning is disclosed in the ongoing play of signs—the play of indeterminate meanings: the “stability of every meaning is undermined by the shifting play of signifiers.”³¹ Elsewhere Derrida writes about the play of difference within the system—coining the term “differance” as a play on words (in French) to imply that meaning is always *deferred* along the endless line of signs. Gallagher describes the play thus: “every ‘truth’ that the interpreter closes in on becomes one of the plurality of fictions which constitute the play of differences within the system.”³² According to Caputo the task of understanding is “to keep the trembling and endless mirror play of signs and texts in play”³³ lest meanings become fixed by the tradition.

A further radical reversal echoes Heidegger. The idea that humankind must grasp and control its destiny, and the implements of its destiny such as technology, is replaced by a recognition that we are already under the control of technology. It can only ever be thus. The control that we are under is embedded within the metaphysical tradition of thinking. This is instrumental by its very nature. This concern is translated by Foucault into a concern with power. Again there is a reversal. We think of power as that which oppresses and is embodied in laws and systems of government. It is something from which we should be emancipated. However, according to Foucault, substantive power is not reducible to the representation of law or systems of government. According to Foucault power “needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.”³⁴

The radical themes of deconstruction lead to a suspicion of principles of reason, and also of institutions that promote principled reason, such as universities. According to this view, institutions are generally set up to arrest the *play* of reason and to replace it with the *principle* of reason.³⁵ According to Caputo, the play of reason is under two kinds of pressure. One is from within the university: “Debates about reason are debates

truth is not *correspondence*, but the disclosive play set up by the clash between “earth” and “world,” or, in other words, the complex flux of the actual moment with all its complex interactions. Heidegger’s thought is constituted by many examples of such deconstructions, conflation and reversals: the primary human experience is not that of a subject disconnected from an object word (as Descartes taught), but a world of total unreflective involvement; time is not primarily that which is measured, but a phenomenon that primarily presents itself in terms of the unfulfilment of roles; it is not that artworks occupy a space (*locus*), but that place (*topos*) is revealed in the artwork. In all such reversals the terms undergo revision.

³⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.50.

³¹ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.284.

³² Ibid.

³³ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p.278.

³⁴ Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, p.61.

³⁵ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p.231.

conducted by university professors in journals and books, at symposia and public lectures, by men and women who aspire to tenure, promotion, and support for more research. What is rational and what is not are very often a function of the powers that be within the academy, of those who hold the senior faculty positions in a more or less identifiable number of elite institutions ... in a self-validating, self-congratulating circle which controls the profession.”³⁶

There is also pressure from outside the institution. According to Caputo, the university is looked upon “to supply the technical and professional needs of society—its needs for scientists, engineers, accountants, computer specialists, nurses, physicians, lawyers ... It is expected to train futures citizens, to make good Americans (or Frenchmen, or whatever one needs).”³⁷ All this serves to distract, according to Caputo, from the play of reason.

According to Caputo, the humanities are rendered subservient to the process. The humanities are those disciplines in which the “play of reason” may still be evident but they are merely “retained almost as ornaments or quaint tokens of a bygone age and because of the extreme embarrassment that would result if one simply dropped them.”³⁸ Of course, the humanities provide a useful place to house subversion. Thinking, no doubt, of the poor reception in some quarters of radical intellectuals in France, Germany, England and parts of America, Caputo echoes Derrida “they provide a useful place to house those who speak, write, and think differently, who are given to subversive, decentering thoughts, who raise high-level criticisms of the existing order.”³⁹

In summary, the institutions are implicated in the *enframing* that concerned Heidegger—that perspective that claims universality, the instrumental world view of technological humanity: “All problems—political, social, personal—are conceived as technological problems for which an appropriate technology of behaviour is required.”⁴⁰

How can we cope in the modern university? The radical view is that there is no ultimate escape from instrumentalism. The radical solution is to follow Heidegger’s line of simply letting-be—“which is an old and difficult art.”⁴¹ “Letting be” requires vigilance about power: “It should proceed from an acute sense of letting-be, which lets reason play itself out, which listens to dissent, continually exposing what is called reason at any time to its other, exposing the ground to what it takes to be groundlessness and abyss.”⁴²

Deconstruction carries the reputation in some quarters of intellectual anarchy. But from its own viewpoint nothing could be further from the truth. Deconstruction is

³⁶ Ibid., p.230.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p.231.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.233.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

subversive, but far from irrational. It is also highly supportive of professional rigour, both in its own practices (its grounding in the rigours of the various philosophical traditions) and its advocacy of rigour in professional education. Derrida and Caputo talk of the “double gesture”: combining professional rigour and competence with the subversion of the foundations of the professions: “Institutions are the way things get done, and they are prone to violence ... Nothing is innocent.”⁴³

Deconstructive pedagogy involves: “Doing an ‘inside job’ on the institution.”⁴⁴ Derrida suggests what might constitute a legitimate university (or non-university), or community of thought: “Such a community would interrogate the essence of reason and of the principle of reason, the values of the basic, of the principal, of radicality, of this *arkhe* [“rule,” the opposite to *anarchy*] in general, and it would attempt to draw out all the possible consequences of this questioning.”⁴⁵ This is unlikely to be a traditional institution. It is a role of such an institution to “unmask—an infinite task—all the ruses of end-orienting reason”⁴⁶

Deconstruction and teaching practice

How is this dangerous, deconstructive, pedagogy realised in practice? What is radical pedagogy at the level of the classroom? These questions have attracted considerable attention from educationalists, particularly in the study of literature and writing composition. Some of the radical possibilities are summarised by Atkins and Johnson.⁴⁷ First, in deconstruction there is an appreciation of the importance of the textual nature of literature. The conventional doctrine is that ideas are more important than the vehicle used for their communication. There is the “clarity-brevity-sincerity” principle of composition. Under this doctrine style is superfluous. By way of contrast the radical view opens up the possibility that, rather than providing a decorative surface to reality, style may be the major constitutive element of reality.⁴⁸ We can therefore look *through* literature or we can look *at* it. The radical approach is to appropriate the play involved in this polarity between content and form, resulting in new understandings and new appreciations of the text.

Ulmer suggests that this play can be realised in the lecture presentation itself, which can also be conceived of as a kind of text.⁴⁹ The result is the “lecriture,” that word being a characteristic play between the French word for writing (*écriture*), laughter (*ri*)

⁴³ Ibid. p.235.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.234.

⁴⁵ Derrida, J. (1983). The principle of reason: the university in the eyes of its pupils, *Diacritics*, 13, pp.3-20, p.16.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Atkins, D.G. and Johnson, M.L. (eds) (1985). *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.6-7.

⁴⁹ See also Barthes, R. (1982). Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers, in *A Barthes Reader*, S. Sontag (ed), Hill and Wang, New York, pp.380-402.

and the English/French word “lecture”—laughter is inserted into lecture.⁵⁰ Similar stylistic license is exercised with the *lecriture* itself. It incorporates a reflection on its own genre, without necessarily destroying the genre. According to Ulmer, “a *lecriture* ... operates by means of a dramatic, rather than an epistemological, orientation to knowledge.”⁵¹ Reflections on the genre of presentation are frequent characteristics of Derrida’s public addresses. Derrida’s famous paper on universities (*The principle of reason: the university in the eyes of its pupils*) was an address to an assembly at Cornell University. It begins with a question: “Today, how can we not speak of the university?”⁵² This is followed by an almost obligatory reflection on the negative form of the question. But this reflection is not without its point. The play between style and content permeates the entire piece, including a reference to the siting of the university and the good *reasons* given for its location above a gorge. In his presentation, and with subtlety, the gorge on which the university is built becomes the suicidal abyss of nihilism—the reverse side, or constant companion, according to Derrida, to the *principle of reason*. According to Ulmer the success of the *lecriture* relies on its juxtaposition with convention, and the use of irony and parody.

A second deconstructive pedagogical ploy is outlined by Ulmer.⁵³ The two errors cautioned within the dominant practice of teaching composition are *misreading* and *plagiarism*. *Misreading* comes about by trying never to reproduce the original—trying to innovate. On the other hand, the postmodern rejection of romantic ideas of creativity and genius leaves the way open for unbridled *plagiarism*. The context for the exploration of the interplay between acceptable writing practice and the breakdown of authorship and originality is the *collage* (or *logokleptism*), working with the intellectual property of others, acknowledging the role and perplexity of mechanical reproduction. Collage involves taking over found material and placing it in different contexts. This can be translated to *bricolage* in writing, writing with the mass of data that already exists—regarded as an appropriate response to the information overload of today.

How does deconstruction influence attitudes to the educational subject matter? Johnson contrasts the conventional attitude to the text within literary criticism and that suggested by deconstruction.⁵⁴ The former embodies a strategy to stop reading when the “text stops saying what it ought to have said.”⁵⁵ By way of contrast,

⁵⁰ Ulmer, G.L. (1985) Textshop for Post(e)pedagogy, in G.D. Atkins and M.L. Johnson (eds) *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, pp.38-64, p.39. The best such word play is Caputo’s frivolous concatenation to produce “Derridada”—overlapping Derrida with Dadaism. A further play would be to insert laughter with “Derri(ri)dada,” but this would be redundant. To exploit the fact that *dada* means “hobby horse” in French would, no doubt, be going too far.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Derrida, *The principle of reason*, p.3.

⁵³ Ulmer, Textshop for Post(e)pedagogy.

⁵⁴ Johnson, B. (1985). Teaching Deconstructively, in G.D. Atkins and M.L. Johnson (eds) *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, pp.140-148.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.140.

“deconstruction is a reading strategy that carefully follows both the meanings and the suspensions and displacements of meaning in a text.”⁵⁶ Contrary to popular conceptions of deconstruction, Johnson makes it clear that deconstruction is not a form of “textual vandalism” or a “generalized scepticism designed to prove that meaning is impossible.”⁵⁷ Neither is it to assume that every text is secretly self-reflexive, or that every text consists only in the play of signifiers, or it is possible to read from every text a commentary about the relation between speech and writing. Johnson also makes it clear that *deconstruction* does not equate with *destruction*. If anything is destroyed it is not meaning that is destroyed, but the idea of an exclusive reading: “the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another.”⁵⁸

According to Johnson, contrary to fostering an esoteric or supercilious posture towards literature, deconstruction proves a valuable device for making the text accessible to the student: “Because deconstruction is first and foremost a way of paying attention to what a text is doing—*how* it means not just *what* it means—it can lend itself very easily to an open discussion format in a literature seminar.”⁵⁹ Johnson draws out the challenges that a text might provide for a deconstructive reading. One is to seize on ambiguous words to focus an entire discourse. This is clearly itself a reversal from convention, where ambiguity is regarded as an inconvenience. Another challenge is where a text deliberately suggests different possibilities through a syntax that leads to multiple and conflicting interpretations. A text may also outline what it is *not* about, thereby invoking a contradiction between what the text says and what it does. A text may also involve the contradiction of a literal statement with a figurative statement. A critique may involve pointing out how an illustrative example in someone else’s text proves the opposite to the assertion it is meant to support (as in Derrida’s handling of Saussure in relation to writing and speech). Another device is to deliberately introduce obscurity to promote inquiry. Counter to the use of obscurity is the use of “excessive clarity” in a text to solve the problems the text sets up. In this manner the text can be seen to illustrate the interpretive process itself.

Zavarzadeh and Morton further draw out the distinction between the conventional and the deconstructive view of the reading of a text. The former gives priority to a close, analytical reading of a text in order to understand it. Deconstruction replaces the “close” reading of a text with the idea of “strong” reading.⁶⁰ The conservative ideas of analysis and appreciation evade the political and epistemological status of the text, and conceal the “commodification of sensations and aesthetic experience.”⁶¹ The conservative idea of analysis also suggest that details within the text are the site of meaning. By way of contrast, the deconstructive approach enables the teacher to allow the text to reveal to students something of their own situation in the power matrix: “...

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.141.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Zavarzadeh and Morton, *Theory pedagogy politics*, p.8.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the teacher makes it possible for the student to become aware of his position, of his own relations to power/knowledge formations. Such a teacher often has an adversarial role in relation to the student: the teacher is a deconstructor and not a mere supporter in the traditional sense of the word. She helps to reveal the student to himself by showing him how his ideas and positions are the effects of larger discourses (of class, race and gender, for example) rather than simple, natural manifestations of his consciousness or mind.”⁶²

But radical pedagogy expresses an even more far reaching concern. For Ulmer deconstructive radical pedagogy is “to the sciences what the carnival once was to the Church.”⁶³ “In terms of curriculum, carnival disrespect means the inversion of the ‘order’ of disciplines.” According to Ulmer, initiates into a discipline normally have to wait many years before they are allowed to see its “frame”: “the inner ‘mystery’ of any discipline is not its order or coherence but is its disorder, incoherence, and arbitrariness.”⁶⁴ According to Ulmer, radical pedagogy enables the student to by-pass initiation as a specialist and to confront both the grounding of a discipline, its absolutes, as well as the provisional, destructible nature of that grounding.

How is radical, deconstructive pedagogy available to architectural education? The author has had close association with one attempt to bring aspects of pedagogy informed by deconstruction into professional education, specifically the design studio—the core teaching forum of architectural education. The design studio is a practical forum in which students design building projects, drawing on the skills developed in other courses. Typically, studio classes are led by a tutor and involve group discussions, designing individually, in groups or with the teacher, presenting work to others, and subjecting the work to criticism. Within those general constraints there is scope for latitude, and schools generally encourage experimentation by teachers with new methods. An approach to studio teaching informed by deconstruction was developed by A. Snodgrass and involved second and third year undergraduate architecture students at the University of Sydney. The students were required to explore oppositions inherent in the design of domestic architecture, to bring those oppositions to light, to challenge them, and to engage in two design tasks. The first was to re-design an existing building by reversing, challenging, and subverting some of the major oppositions built into it and largely taken for granted. The second task was to re-design the building by “reconciling” these subverted oppositions. There was therefore a “deconstruction” and a “reconstruction.” Understandably, the reconstruction resulted in something different again to the original design. On the face of it, the educational outcomes were of the kind that would meet with the approval of the most conventional design educator. It was as if students were taken through a series of exercises, in the manner of a role play, to bring out the hidden structure behind conventional practice, to investigate this practice further by “subverting” it (a kind of “analysis”), then from this new experience and insight, synthesise something new.

⁶² Ibid., p.10.

⁶³ Ulmer, *Textshop for Post(e)pedagogy*, p.61.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.61-62.

However, the studio had other dimensions more in keeping with the paradigm of radical pedagogy. There were many reversals in the program, all of which sparked critical discussion amongst the students. The relationship between drawings and designs loosely parallels the deconstructive literary critic's concern with writing and speech, style and content. In architecture, it is common to regard drawings as a means of communicating "design intent." The selection of an appropriate presentation style commonly comes at the end of the project. In this studio one of the reversals was to begin with drawings, bringing the interactive nature of drawing and designing to the fore. Students were asked at the outset to study "straight" and "deconstructed" presentation styles evident in the architectural literature, the latter being a presentation style that highlighted the ambiguities and oppositions in a design. Students were then asked to re-present an existing design (a precedent, such as le Corbusier's Villa Savoye) using the "deconstructed" presentation style. Later on, they would use that style, or a variation on it, for the presentation of the final design.

Students were required at various stages to present their work to the group. On several occasions the work was presented not by its author, but by a fellow student, to whom the scheme had already been explained. In one situation a drawing presentation was explained to the author/s by the audience, who had to interpret and discuss what the presentation was about. This brought to light the nature and role of interpretation itself, as well as revealing new insights to the student about their own work and ways of thinking.

The discussion of oppositions within the existing house designs readily focussed on the obvious—such as front and back, upstairs and downstairs, public and private—showing how there is a privileging in each case, and how this privileging may have changed historically. The discussion also brought out the play between such oppositions, and raised the question of what would happen if the privileging were reversed, or the opposition were reversed, or the opposition were dissolved. This also involved a consideration of how the privileging comes through in language and in our drawing and designing practices. For example, light and dark featured in discussion: we talk of *total* darkness but not of *total* lightness. Also, there is a priority given to front and rear aspects of a building compared to the sides. We do not have a common word to distinguish the sides from each other that implies one is more important than the other. The relationships between oppositions was also discussed, such as light and dark, sun and moon, male and female. A consideration of these simple oppositions, identified in most cases by the students themselves, paved the way for a discussion of more profound oppositions, such as: real and ideal; the representation versus the reality; the presenter versus the audience; the designer versus the client; order versus chaos. In the latter case a student took it upon herself to look for the chaos in the apparently ordered drawing and the order in the chaotic drawing. At various stages discussion focussed on whether the deconstructive exercise was merely an intellectual game; or was it an exercise to address entrenched power structures and prejudices, and develop appropriate responses to pressing social, urban and environmental issues? At times attention also focussed on the nature of the profession of architecture and on university

education. The discursive practice of deconstruction, and the student's curiosity about the field, generated a high level of critical inquiry, not normally afforded in more conventional design studios.

But the exercise was not merely one of "consciousness raising." Nor was "talk" the only medium of presentation. In writing about studio experience it is always easier to focus on what was said rather than what was done. There were positive outcomes in terms of practical skills. The design outcomes were judged to be innovative. Furthermore, the "plagiarism" of designs and presentation styles did not result in mere reproductions. Designs and presentation styles had been translated into new designs and new presentation styles. Neither was it the case that the deconstructions were arbitrary. For example, it was apparent that to locate bathroom facilities in the public part of a house does not result in an absurdity, but in a different and innovative kind of house (for the Australian suburbs), a new set of design challenges, and even new ways of living.

The design studio has features similar to the other university sites of practical application—the tutorial seminar, the laboratory and the workshop—but the studio has always also been a site of play, as evident in the early Bauhaus teaching method. So the style of pedagogy presented here is not foreign to it.

The design project served to demonstrate, among other things, how far removed deconstructive pedagogy is from anarchy. The real dangers of deconstruction have been institutionalised within deconstruction's own discourse. The problem is that of *normalization*. What would the deconstructive design studio be if it became the norm? According to Gallagher, "any attempt to teach abnormal, agonistic discourse would be to normalize it and to turn it into an established discipline"⁶⁵ For Derrida the worst fear is the exploitation of deconstruction by conservatism. The perplexities that deconstruction sets up are that the whole radical project may itself be exploited by "socio-political forces,"⁶⁶ "reproducing the hierarchy."⁶⁷ According to Derrida this risk is unavoidable—"it is the risk of the future itself."⁶⁸

Hermeneutics and education

Even though radicalism embraces its own critique it is not immune from criticism from without.⁶⁹ Radicalism is also caught up in series of debates between conservatism, the

⁶⁵ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.313.

⁶⁶ Derrida, *The principle of reason*, p.17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.18.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁶⁹ It is obviously necessary to look beyond the old prejudices against Continental philosophy for the impetus for interesting debate. The familiar and ill informed conservative position towards deconstruction is exemplified by Bloom who states that comparative literature "has now fallen largely into the hands of a group of professors who are influenced by the post-Sartrean generation of Parisian Heideggerians, in particular Derrida, Foucault and Barthes. The school is called Deconstructionism, and it is the last, predictable, stage in the suppression of reason and the denial of the possibility of truth in the name of philosophy. The interpreter's creative activity is more important than the text; there is no text, only interpretation. Thus the one thing most necessary for us, the knowledge of what these texts have to tell us, is turned over to the subjective, creative selves of these interpreters, who say that there

critical position and also with what has been labelled the “moderate” position. The latter asserts that the radical position, along with conservatism and liberalism, is subservient after all to the nature of intellectual communities.

The issues of education have been framed in terms of education’s relationship to the practice of interpretation—hermeneutics. The parallels between education and interpretation are explored at length by Gallagher.⁷⁰ To be educated is to be brought into a state of understanding. Similarly, to interpret a text (or any situation for that matter) is to understand. In forming this link between education and hermeneutics we have access to a rich tradition of thinking about interpretation, bringing in concepts of dialogue, play, judgement, reproduction, recollection, tradition, power, critique and community. According to Gallagher, the different approaches to education can be placed within an ongoing conversation about the nature of interpretation. There is a conservative hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics, radical hermeneutics and a moderate hermeneutics, expressed through various debates involving Hirsch and Betti, Habermas, Derrida and Gadamer. Much of the debate focuses on Gadamer’s moderate hermeneutical position. It is Gadamer, in appropriating Heidegger’s reflections on being and understanding, who is primarily responsible for bringing hermeneutics to the fore as a universal concern. In summary, Gadamer’s hermeneutics focuses on the ubiquity of interpretation, and on the contextual, historical and social nature of any interpretive situation. The interpreter is both constrained and enabled by historically situated prejudice. There are strands within Gadamer’s thought that seek to disable the force of the Enlightenment’s “prejudice against prejudice,” and to locate method and logic as subservient to rhetoric and dialogue. Gadamer’s understanding of the way interpretation proceeds invokes the metaphors of dialogue and play, and appropriates Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* (prudence, practical wisdom, tacit judgement) as the operative “intellectual virtue” in understanding.

Gallagher identifies three perplexities (*aporias*) around which the debates (between Hirsch and Betti, Habermas, Derrida and Gadamer) focus. The first is the issue of *reproduction*. Is it possible to objectively reproduce the meaning of a text? The debate has been chiefly between Betti, whose position is conservative, and Gadamer.⁷¹ According to conservative hermeneutics texts have meanings placed there by their authors. The role of the interpreter is to extract and reproduce that meaning. That involves breaking out of the constraints of one’s current historical situation. The approach is Cartesian, and involves the judicious application of method. Meaning is there to be uncovered. It is the task of scholarship to uncover it. There may be disagreement about what a text means. This is the nature of lively and scholarly debate. But meaning is unchanging. Hirsch supports Betti’s view of interpretation. According to Hirsch, the meaning of a text is constant, but the significance of the text changes.

is both no text and no reality to which the text refers.” (Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p.379)

⁷⁰ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*.

⁷¹ See Betti, E. (1990). Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, in G.L. Ormiston, and A.D. Schrift (eds) SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.159-197.

The significance of a text is what it means for us today.⁷² According to Gadamer, every attempt to interpret a text produces a new meaning, a position Hirsch regards as relativistic.

The second perplexity involves the question of authority and emancipation. According to Habermas, there is always something else going on outside of language that influences language.⁷³ There is a frame of reference that includes economic factors to do with labour, class and political factors of domination. These are the extralinguistic factors: social processes of domination, modes of production, and the ideas surrounding science and technology, such as progress.⁷⁴ According to Habermas' critical hermeneutical perspective extralinguistic factors "always distort language, and therefore they distort ordinary interpretation and communication."⁷⁵ In contrast, for Gadamer, even extralinguistic experience is mediated by language if it is to have any significance or effect. According to Habermas, Gadamer's hermeneutics only focuses on language, and is therefore inadequate to the task of accounting for all understanding. Gadamer's hermeneutics does not pay sufficient heed to the fact that it is necessary to engage in critical reflection to see through the distortions imposed by the political and power-bases of the frame of reference. In response, Gadamer claims that there is no privileged position from which we can achieve such emancipation.⁷⁶ We are always constrained by the practice of our language community. According to Gadamer the issue always comes back to conversation.

The third perplexity pertains to the nature of *conversation*. Here the debate is primarily between Derrida and Gadamer. For Gadamer the act of conversation requires the "good will" of each party to understand the other. Derrida objects that the idea of "good will" has its roots in Kant's metaphysics.⁷⁷ (As that branch of philosophy concerned with foundational principles, metaphysics has been the subject of suspicion

⁷² See Hirsch, E.D. (1976). *The Aims of Interpretation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois. Fish takes to task Hirsch's proposition that there are stable, independent meanings. Hirsch gives examples of phrases that have uncontroversial meanings accessible to all speakers of the language, such as the phrase "The air is crisp." In other words the phrase has only one interpretation. Fish counters this argument: "The obviousness of the utterance's meaning is not a function of the values its words have in a linguistic system that is independent of context: rather, it is because the words are heard as already embedded in a context that they have a meaning that Hirsch can then cite as obvious." (Fish, S. [1980] *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p.309)

⁷³ See Habermas, J. (1990). A review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, in G.L. Ormiston, and A.D. Schrift (eds) SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.213-244; and Habermas, J. (1990). The hermeneutic claim to universality, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, in G.L. Ormiston, and A.D. Schrift (eds) SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.245-272.

⁷⁴ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

⁷⁶ Gadamer, H.-G. (1990). Reply to my critics, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, in G.L. Ormiston, and A.D. Schrift (eds) SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.273-297.

⁷⁷ Derrida, J. (1989). Three questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, D.P. Michelfelder and R.E. Palmer (eds) SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.52-54.

in Continental philosophy since Nietzsche.) To assert the primacy of conversation and the ability of the participants to be trusting and fair minded in the process is to imply a degree of control by the participants—to presume a kind of subjectivity. According to Derrida, everyone is aware, however, of the phenomenon of distorted communication. In characteristic fashion, Derrida opposes Gadamer’s hermeneutics of trust with a hermeneutics of suspicion.⁷⁸ Trust implies a preservation of tradition. Suspicion, the centre of deconstruction, implies transformation.

Gallagher, clearly on the side of Gadamer and the moderate view, holds that there are not three perplexities but one. These issues of reproduction, authority and conversation all come down to the problem of “ambiguity and the finitude of understanding.”⁷⁹ According to Gallagher, the truth about interpretation does not lie in the resolution of these perplexities, but in recognizing “the fundamental ambiguity of interpretation.”⁸⁰ How do we address the problem of ambiguity? According to Gallagher, conservative theory seeks to deny or partition ambiguity, critical theory seeks to control it by disarming the power that generates it, radical theory celebrates and elevates it, and moderate theory acknowledges that we always have and will continue to generate and promote understandings according to the workings of the tacit norms and conventions of the interpretive communities within which we are situated, in spite of, and possibly because of, the play of ambiguity: “Conservative theory wants to deny or fix ambiguity by the principle and canon of reproduction; critical theory seeks to rationalize and control it by neutralizing the effects of power, tradition, and authority; radical theory wants to radicalize it in the concept of play. Moderate theory, as we have called it, proposes to recognize that we cannot avoid ambiguity and therefore must not deny its operation but find a way to live with it without inflating its effect.”⁸¹

Moderate hermeneutics

According to Gallagher’s moderate position these perplexities bring us back to the primacy of conversation and community, a theme developed by writers such as Kuhn, Rorty and Fish. Rorty applies to philosophy the view developed by Kuhn (and, from a different tradition, Foucault) of the dependence of science on the conversational, experimental, discursive and other practices of communities. He develops the theme of the primacy of conversation in philosophy. For Rorty the objective in philosophy is not to have the last word, rather it is to keep the conversation going. He posits this as a

⁷⁸ Gadamer’s reply to Derrida is that what he meant by “good will” has nothing to do with metaphysics or ethics and is merely an observation about communication. Good will is present where “one does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to prove that one is always right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other’s viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating. Such an attitude seems essential to me for any understanding at all to come about.” (Gadamer, H.-G. [1989] Reply to Jacques Derrida, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, D.P. Michelfelder and R.E. Palmer [eds] SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.55-57, p.55)

⁷⁹ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.343.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.344.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.343.

requirement of wisdom: “as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation.”⁸² In a slightly different vein, Geertz asserts the primacy of conversation over thinking.⁸³ Thinking is primarily a public activity, realized in conversation. It is “consummately social: social in its origins, social in its functions, social in its form, social in its applications.”⁸⁴ Private thinking is a derivative mode of thought, analogous to the act of reading, which has only recently developed as a silent activity.⁸⁵ According to Geertz, “thinking as an overt, public act, involving the purposeful manipulation of objective materials, is probably fundamental to human beings; and thinking as a covert, private act, and without recourse to such materials a derived, though not unuseful, capability.”⁸⁶ Bruffee applies Geertz’s argument to education. Our thoughts have their source in some interpretive community. The educational corollary is that in order to think well we need to “think well collectively.”⁸⁷ In other words we need to converse well: “We establish knowledge or justify belief collaboratively by challenging each other’s biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers through assenting to those communities’ interests, values, language, and paradigms of perception and thought.”⁸⁸

The conversational view of thought disarms conservative, reproductive views of knowledge. It also suggests new metaphors with which to describe the educational experience. According to Gallagher, “one never ‘has’ knowledge; one participates in conversations at various interpretive sites.”⁸⁹ The conversational view also says something about the critical position. Critical discourse operates through the normal operations of interpretive communities. According to Gallagher, if “questioning or critical reflection is possible, it is only possible because one’s tradition, culture, and upbringing enable it.”⁹⁰ What about *abnormal* discourse, radical discourse, whose task it is to detect or sniff out “stale, unproductive knowledge”⁹¹ and challenge the authority of the community? According to Bruffee there is no discipline that describes abnormal

⁸² Rorty, R. (1980). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p.378.

⁸³ See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. This theme of the indebtedness of thought to community is also developed by Fish. In the context of interpreting texts, Fish argues that a reader’s interpretive strategies are “community property,” and in so far as these strategies “at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too.” (Fish, *Is there a Text in This Class?* p.14) Fish also argues: “... since the thoughts an individual can think and the mental operations he can perform have their source in some or other interpretive community, he is as much a product of that community (acting as an extension of it) as the meanings it enables him to produce.” (p.14)

⁸⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.360.

⁸⁵ According to Ryle silent reading has only been practiced in Europe since the Middle Ages (Ryle, G. [1949] *The Concept of Mind*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex).

⁸⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, p.76.

⁸⁷ Bruffee, K. (1984). Collaborative learning and the “conversation of mankind,” *College English* 46, pp.635-652, p.640.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.646.

⁸⁹ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.248.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.265.

⁹¹ Bruffee, Collaborative learning and the “conversation of mankind,” p.648.

discourse. It is only possible to teach the tools of normal discourse. There *is* room for the abnormal, however, if we acknowledge that these tools are not universal. We should teach practical, normal skills in such a way that students “can turn to abnormal discourse in order to undermine their own and other people’s reliance on the canonical conventions and vocabulary of normal discourse.” The primacy of conversation and community therefore embraces the theme of radical pedagogy, recognising that radicalism requires a grounding in convention to operate.

Radical education trades in the subversion of entrenched oppositions evident within a field of study, and plays on strange readings, the games of the *lecriture*. How does the moderate, conversational view account for this aspect of radical educational experience? From the point of view of moderate hermeneutics, such games are well situated within the conventions of interpretation. Any interpretive situation requires *objectification*. This is where something confronts the interpreter as alien, unfamiliar.⁹² The objectification in interpretation “involves distance plus a collusion with the tradition-context of language.”⁹³ The interpretive act is a negotiation across this distance. Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to see the play of interpretation as rendering the familiar strange and the strange familiar.⁹⁴ The educational experience provides the best example of this phenomenon. The teacher has a major role in presenting material as worthy of understanding. Paradoxically, this requires that there are elements of the material that are strange. For example, there are at least two possibilities in presenting historical material about the building of the Parthenon. First, if the student has never encountered classical Greek architecture before then it is a matter of presenting the material in such a way as to establish that there is a distance, a shortcoming in some knowledge, something worth knowing but not known. To establish relevance is precisely to establish this distance. The second case is where the student is immersed in the history, culture and mythology of the Parthenon. It is familiar. In such a case it may be appropriate to establish distance by questioning the entrenched myths, telling the story in a new way, possibly even undermining (or asserting) reverence for the building. In either case, a distancing is implicated in the process of understanding: “... in any instance of teaching, even when the teacher can assume that the student is in some way familiar with the subject matter, he still must make something stand out as unfamiliar, and he must call the student’s attention to precisely that which is unfamiliar. The teacher thus presents the subject matter, or one aspect of the subject matter, as an unfamiliar object of learning.”⁹⁵

Teaching requires opportunities for strange encounters. This commonly involves recognising and challenging aspects of the tradition in which the discourse is taking place: “... the teacher’s essential task is not simply to provide opinions, or insert information, but, working within traditional authoritative frameworks, to open up

⁹² See Snodgrass, A. (1991). Asian studies and the fusion of horizons, *Proc. Gadamer, Action and Reason*, Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney, Sydney, pp.35-42.

⁹³ Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, p.137.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.129.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.136.

opportunities for such encounters, to help create the occasions in which the student will come into a challenging relation to a particular tradition.”⁹⁶ The contrasting position is that in which everything is taken as familiar. Where we think that we understand then the play is finished.⁹⁷ It signifies a “foreclosure of learning.”⁹⁸

The radical educational experiments described above can be seen in this light. The deconstructive design studio involves rendering the familiar items of domestic life unfamiliar through the play of oppositions. But then this is normal design studio teaching practice. Successful learning situations are those in which the teacher is aiding the process by which objects are revealed, challenging that which the student takes for granted, establishing distances, bringing out disparities between the students’ emerging practices and those of the teacher’s particular slice of the established interpretive community. What of the radical pedagogy that subverts the foundations even as it builds the foundations—teaching the unfoundational nature of professional practice? This is a common enough feature of the design studio (and, no doubt, other teaching forums), brought about in part by the inevitable plurality of views to which students are exposed. Over the course of an architectural education students are typically presented with a range of opinions, each presented with equal conviction by various teachers. From the point of view of the teacher, who may have forgotten what it was like to be a student, the knowledge structures may possibly take on the appearance of a monolithic and highly principled structure. But for the student there will always be a bewildering array of points of view, a situation that must at least hint of a “problem of foundations” for the student. So the deconstructive awareness is always there, though usually concealed within a confused relativism.⁹⁹ The difference radical pedagogy makes is that it provides a new possibility for conversation. It permits the problem of foundations to be discussed openly and realised as something that transcends the issue of foundationalism or relativism. Flux and play become new terms in the conversation. The subversion of foundations is not difficult to do, nor does it require a body of sophisticated theory, but it requires an interpretive community that gives such an activity legitimacy, and brings the matter to crisis. This is abetted if the legitimacy resides within mainstream university and professional institutions, and has developed a highly influential vocabulary and literature. To this end, the discourse of deconstruction has great value.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.143.

⁹⁷ One of the most distressing pedagogical situations is where the teacher, thinking they are presenting something new, is met with indifference from the students. To be told “we know all that—what’s the big deal!” is even more disconcerting than “we don’t understand.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.144. In keeping with the tenets of liberal education, learning about the world is also learning about one’s “self.” According to Gallagher, in “discovering the possible connections between the unfamiliar and the familiar, the learner also discovers his own possibilities.” (Ibid., pp.143-144) All understanding is “self understanding.”

⁹⁹ According to Bloom, 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.” (Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p.24)

The moderate response to instrumentalism in education

The conservative, instrumental position in education is partly driven by a reaction against liberalism and relativism. To the conservative, the moderate hermeneutical position (as with liberalism and radicalism) bears the trappings of relativism. If the meanings of texts depend on what the interpretive community happens to be thinking at the time, and educational practice is an acculturation into a hermeneutical community, then the path is wide open for a plurality of competing and incommensurable viewpoints. But worse than that there is no authority by which we can adjudicate between them. In other words, “to have many standards is to have none at all.”¹⁰⁰ This perplexity is the “fine line,” the difference that radical and moderate hermeneutics makes: it is also where we get off the seesaw;¹⁰¹ it is where one says—“it is missing the point to think that embracing the primacy of interpretive communities is to hand our deliberations over to relativism.” Fish’s response, for example, to the fact of having many (or no) standards for adjudication is to say it is “really of no importance.”¹⁰² According to Fish, everyone is situated somewhere, and the lack of an “asituational norm” is really of no consequence. “So while it is generally true that to have many standards is to have none at all, it is not true for anyone in particular (for there is no one in a position to speak “generally”), and therefore it is a truth of which one can say ‘it doesn’t matter.’”¹⁰³ “No one can *be* a relativist, because no one can achieve the distance from his own beliefs and assumptions which would result in their being no more authoritative *for him* that the beliefs and assumptions held by others, or, for that matter, the beliefs and assumptions he himself used to hold. The fear that in a world of indifferently authorized norms and values the individual is without a basis for action is groundless because no one is indifferent to the norms and values that enable his consciousness.”¹⁰⁴

The attack on relativism is a major theme of postmodernism. To advocate relativism is to give primacy and permanence to the elusive subject. Deconstruction and hermeneutics incorporate challenges to the existing tradition, but also posit new metaphors with which to account for understanding that do not resort to either objectivism/foundationalism, or subjectivism/relativism. The notion of play alluded to earlier is one attempt to decentre subjectivity, to strike a blow to both foundationalism and relativism, and to extricate thought from the Cartesian anxiety.¹⁰⁵

How then do we address the instrumental concern for rigour and the maintenance of standards? On the subject of rigour, the notion of the primacy of interpretive communities affords full support to the conservative’s concern with professional

¹⁰⁰ Fish, *Is there a Text in This Class?* p.319.

¹⁰¹ Rorty describes the tension between objectivism and subjectivism, romanticism and moralism, idealism and realism as “seesaw” battles from which we need to be disengaged. See Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.10-11.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*.

competence. Where the moderate parts company with the conservative is in the “meaning reverence” accorded to normative texts: texts that seek to capture knowledge and define competencies. By focussing on the communities that generate and use such documents, the moderate has greater access to what is going on.¹⁰⁶

From the viewpoint of moderate hermeneutics, these documents become a part of current discursive practice. The moderate is wise to the strengths and limitations of texts, and the political and power contexts in which they are used. Whereas the conservative has to submit her understanding of what is going on in the community to the letter of the text, the moderate knows that no normative text has any force other than what the community allows—what the community is prepared to accept and interpret (that is, to apply). There are many examples of where reverence for a text obscures the practices of an interpretive community. One example is the use of the term “integration” to describe what should happen in architectural education—according to this view the curriculum should be put together in such a way that the subject matter is integrated into what constitutes an effective overall education for an architect. Problems in the curriculum are commonly attributed to poor integration. But the rhetoric of integration can mask the problem of relevance. Commonly, subject matter is not simply poorly integrated, it is just not particularly relevant, or not taught in a way relevant to being a professional. But the banner of integration can also obscure an important feature of the life of interpretive communities. The call for integration masks the possibility that education may in fact be a fragmented affair, full of discontinuities, unrelated bodies of

¹⁰⁶ For example, the moderate perspective provides a broader range of possible views of the draft AACA competency standards—views informed by the positioning of such documents within interpretive communities. (i) The standards may be a response to a “breakdown”—the opinion by some that recent graduates from architecture schools lack certain skills. Only the skills considered lacking appear in the standards. So currently it is not thought that there is a lack of knowledge of architectural history, or an understanding of CAD. So these skills do not appear with any prominence in the minimum standard. Of course, if the minimum standards were taken seriously then there would soon be a deficiency in those areas. (ii) The standards may be an attempt to promote a conservative and submissive work force able to slot into conventional modes of practice. The standards may thereby primarily serve the interests of a particular conservative and powerful sector of the community (within and outside the profession). (iii) The requirement to generate such standards may also be an attempt by government and/or its bureaucracy to undermine the power base of the professions, which are seen by some as both powerful and secretive. (No doubt aware of this, the AACA draft asserts that “competency standards or not, the Board of Architects, or on their behalf the AACA, remain the Assessing Authority for the entry of persons into the architectural profession” [p.3]). (iv) There is also the possibility that the profession is undergoing a “crisis of identity.” Its skills base is under threat from incursion by other professions. Promoting competency standards may be a means of making clear precisely what is an architect as opposed to an engineer, an interior designer or a property consultant. (v) The standards may also be a way of coping in a time of profound change and uncertainty. The instrumental response to uncertainty is to latch onto something—such as texts, standards, criteria. (vi) The standards may be a way of coping with the current wave of litigation against professional activity in all areas. The standards assume that the issue of litigation is simply tied to quality of service, whereas the current difficulty may be a product of changing cultural norms and expectations about value, contract, service and professionalism, and an opportunistic, instrumental view of the law. This latter interpretation of the situation may suggest that new modes of practice are called for, as is already advocated (and practiced) by some (see Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View*), or even reform to the law and the legal profession. Each of these possible responses (and others) to the issue of competency standards goes beyond the texts (the standards) and locates the issues within the context of a critical interpretive community.

theory and skills, perplexities, incommensurable fields of study, and contradictions—all unconnected and barely related. It may even be the case that it is through this discontinuous matrix that learning occurs.

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