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**ACCOMMODATING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON REALITY
WITHIN WESTERN ACADEMIC SETTINGS:
SOME POSTMODERN CONSIDERATIONS**

by

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EDUCATION**

MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL

AUGUST, 1995

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

MASTER OF ARTS

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ISBN 0-612-12096-1

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ABSTRACT

Contained within the parameters of postmodern thought, particularly feminist critical perspectives on western epistemology, this thesis proceeds from the following arguments: that knowledge is political; that it possesses a reflexive and dialectical nature and that it is based upon interpretations of reality which are in potential, indeterminate in range. Within these boundaries, knowledge is viewed as a phenomenon subject to influence from social power structures. And western culture is observed to breed situations of epistemological inequality where knowers may become unjustly privileged or oppressed.

Focusing on arguments expounded by Lorraine Code, Patti Lather and Catherine Walsh, this thesis aims to explore how western culture may be observed to impose on consciousness and thereby lead to restriction of interpretive outcomes. Following this line of reasoning, the goal of this thesis is to consider how applications in deconstructionism may be used to emancipate the position of the oppressed knower.

PRECIS

S'inscrivant dans un courant de pensée post-moderne, plus particulièrement la critique féministe de l'épistémologie occidentale, ce mémoire se fonde sur les prémisses suivantes: la connaissance est politique, elle est de nature réfléchie et dialectique et est basée sur des interprétations latentes et infinies de la réalité. `A l'intérieur de ces paramètres, la connaissance est analysée en tant que phénomène sujet à l'influence des structures sociales de pouvoir. La culture occidentale y est décrite comme générant des situations d'inégalités épistémologiques où les sujets connaissants peuvent devenir injustement privilégiés ou opprimés.

En se référant plus particulièrement aux travaux de Lorraine Code, Patti Lather et Catherine Walsh, ce mémoire vise à montrer jusqu'à quel point la culture occidentale contraint la conscience et, par là, mène à une limitation des possibilités d'interprétation. Selon ce raisonnement, le but de ce mémoire est d'évaluer comment les différentes applications de la déconstruction peuvent être utilisées afin d'émanciper le sujet connaissant opprimé.

PREFACE

The completion of this Thesis has been a long and arduous experience but one which I feel has inspired much self reflection and personal growth.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Stan Nemiroff for his patience, guidance and compelling humane approach towards learning. I am also indebted to both Ernest Tucker and Ginny Yee for their assistance in providing the editorial closure and refinement of this paper.

In general but in no small way I would like to thank my family, friends, colleagues and students who have been steadfast in their support of my efforts. Finally I would like to extend my appreciation to all faculty members past and present who have helped to challenge and inspire my capacity to think.

"Teach the children how to play
and do not limit their wisdom.
They still walk the fine line of eternity.
Their playgrounds are infinity
They hold the hope of humanity,
a concrete manifestation of our own prophetic sign.
Yet shall we empower them?
This would mean to empower ourselves."

INTRODUCTION

The Political Nature of Knowledge

As world conditions change and western society becomes more diverse in its cultural makeup, the necessity of developing a wider knowledge base -- one capable of reflecting a more balanced range of social concerns -- grows more demanding. The perceptions of stability and control western society has been preoccupied with maintaining through its institutions have proved unjust in many respects and there is now a need for a more equitable balance of social "voices"¹ to be incorporated into the processing, constructing and legitimizing of its knowledge claims. Postmodernists have long asserted that western society is in serious need of revising and restructuring its paradigms. And critical theorists claim that mainstream western knowledge does not address the interests of society as a whole because it expresses a hegemonic perspective on reality. That is to say, the way in which individuals are taught to perceive reality and to gain knowledge through these perceptions are being funneled through narrow and dominant social pathways.

Critical theorists maintain that because knowledge is grounded in political issues, what is often considered to be credible, valid and empirical knowledge is strongly shaped by individuals who occupy positions of social privilege. They argue that knowledge claims that are legitimized and those that are excluded within the context of mainstream epistemology represent a dominant outcome of power struggles. They also claim that in relation to knowledge outcomes, western society reflects a particular social history -- one in which the privileged position of some knowers is sustained through the exploitation and oppression of other knowers. And they challenge mainstream western knowledge through this claim on the grounds that it is not absolute because its foundation in empirical and objective methodology evolved in a specific relation to cultural conditions.

Through the arguments of critical theorists that western epistemological systems need to be extended and challenged in light of their socially legitimized range of outcomes, this thesis addresses the following question: How can a multiplicity of perspectives on reality be accommodated, in a just manner, within western academic settings? By the terms, "be accommodated" and "in a just manner," I am indicating to the reader the direction my

¹ The term voice, is interpreted in reference to Walsh's theoretical exposition on the relation between language and cultural difference. Walsh also refers the reader to Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for further readings on the theory of social voice. See, Catherine E. Walsh, *Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice*, (Toronto, OISE Press, 1991). p. 53.

interpretation of the question will take. This paper will address the question from the perspective of critical social theory. Within these parameters, accommodation is not a question of tolerance for simple differences of point of view. It is rather a question which in association with the idea of justice can be referred to social efforts to radically transform ways in which knowledge is perceived and constructed within western society.

If western society is to equitably balance the outflow of its knowledge systems, it must critically scrutinize the political issues which shape its cultural norms and methods of transmitting dominant perspectives on reality to the public. Within the context of this thesis, I will suggest that applications of deconstruction theory may prove significant in fostering the development of an inclusive western epistemological methodology. Such a methodology would include strategies for developing individual awareness of how knowledge can reinforce the positioning of authority within social situations. The methodology would also address issues in education policy. By its design it would seek to challenge conventions followed during processes of knowledge legitimation.² This methodology would deliberately seek the inclusion and the according of an equitable status of authority for cultural differences and transformations of perception into mainstream western epistemology.

My understanding of these issues has been formulated within the boundaries of postmodern theory and it reflects a particular synthesis of readings in postmodern feminist perspectives. With respect to epistemology, these readings express the postmodern view that western culture needs to create new conceptual spaces through which reality can be interpreted. They also share the recognition that there is a critical need for paradigm shifts and a breakdown of social sites of exploitation. In the postmodern sense, culture is understood to construct political subjects. The epistemological significance of this is that knowledge is considered to reflect the dominant outcomes of political struggles.³ The postmodern feminist perspectives reviewed in this paper offer a specific interpretation of the postmodern dilemma. Emerging from North American feminist movements of the 1970s, their theoretical emphases take the form of cultural critiques on language, analyses of subjectivity and a recognition of the personal world as being political.⁴ These feminist perspectives share in the postmodern recognition that difference⁵ must be

² Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy Within the Postmodern*, (New York, Routledge, 1991).

³ Kostas Myrsiades and Linda S. Myrsiades, eds., *Margins in the Classroom: Teaching Literature*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁴ Henry A. Giroux, "Rethinking the Boundaries of Educational Discourse: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Feminism", Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 28.

⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

acknowledged and understood. Not only do they challenge this idea, they take it even further. For them it is not enough to acknowledge the existence of difference. Difference can only be understood within the context of social change, especially in respect to epistemological practices. To be specific, their conceptualization of difference is viewed as a process that must occur through an equitable balance of power and between all perceivers within a given society. That means the perception of difference should not lead to social exploitation, nor should it be solely based upon observations made by a privileged faction of society.⁶

Through its format, the feminist critique on subjectivity challenges the idea that epistemological observations can be formulated independent of any culturally qualifying conditions.⁷ Observations are considered to be grounded in the subjectivity of an individual's cultural experiences. And the knowledge derived through these observations is similarly considered to be grounded in subjectivity. In her book, "What Can She Know?" Lorraine Code presents a feminist critique of western epistemology. By challenging the conventional western understandings of the subjective realm, she offers a comprehensive view on the power that dominant paradigms may wield over cultural perceptions. Her critical analysis of the subject-object dichotomy -- the western value for autonomy in knowing and "knower locatedness"⁸ has significantly influenced the perspective of this paper. The discussion of how dominant paradigms have the potential to skew perception provides the central focus of Chapter Two. Catherine Walsh's discussion of language, power and social voice in "Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice," has been instrumental in shaping my discussion on language. She describes language as a cultural phenomenon with the capacity to restrain thought. This discussion provides the main focus of Chapter One. Finally, Patti Lather's exposition on emancipatory theory and her pedagogical application of deconstruction practices in "Getting Smart" has provided the major theoretical reference for Chapter Three where strategies to transform consciousness from states of oppression to states of emancipation are discussed.

These three theoretical perspectives claim that subjectivity is a political construction, one which is grounded in and reproduced through the language of culture. They also share the claim that westernization has culturally positioned subjectivity in opposition to objectivity. Feminists have observed that the subjective realm tends to be subordinated to

⁶ Ibid., pp. 33-35.

⁷ Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁸ Code, pp. 55-57. The term, "knower locatedness", reflects Code's observation that knowledge is shaped by social conditions.

the objective realm and that subjectivity has been historically and culturally associated with female space. In reference to western epistemology, feminists within the postmodern tradition argue that women are conceptually tied to a subordinated and what is socially perceived to be an inferior domain of knowing. And they say this conceptual subordination is something which is culturally perpetuated through paradigms which reinforce perceptions of subject-object dualities. Paradigms they maintain are political constructions, used to support the rationale behind specific belief systems.

Within the context of feminism, cultural exploitation is seen to manifest itself through hegemony in the form of gender-role situations. In the specific context of feminist interests, women are perceived to be oppressed and dispossessed as knowers due to a hegemonic social mapping of gender experience. Within a broader context of this perspective, however, subjects of oppression and dispossession are not always women. And because of this, many postmodern feminist perspectives on western epistemology can be used to challenge the cultural restraint which westernization may impose over the interpretive capacity of society at large.

Gender-role identity within the parameters of feminist postmodernism is considered to represent a form of social learning. It has been suggested that within a social context, individuals learn how to know as they learn to know who they are within society. For example, feminist psychoanalytic perspectives such as those expressed through Chodorow and Dinnerstein, propose that an individual's identity is psychologically linked to traumatic experiences encountered during infancy. They postulate that the shape of knowledge mirrors an infant's efforts to attain a state of psychological independence from mother. The social value for isolated conceptual and categorical contexts, as well as for an autonomy in knowing, represents to the feminist psychoanalyst a hidden desire to transcend the feelings of dependency, anxiety and fear associated with initial mother-child experiences. This desire, they argue, may provide the original psychological motivation behind social efforts to separate the concept of nature from the concept of self.⁹ They maintain it could also provide the psychological rationale for an epistemology which structures itself on the basis of object creation and object manipulation.¹⁰ In other words, the feminist psychoanalytic viewpoint implies that objective knowledge may mirror an innate desire to experience feelings of control in relation to the environment.

⁹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

¹⁰ Code, pp. 50-52.

My readings in feminist postmodern theory initiated research into what I classify as ground theoretical references. In an effort to clarify my understanding of the critiques of western epistemology postulated by Code, Lather and Walsh, I found it helpful to refer to the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bahktin. Gramsci's theory of praxis has been referred to by both Lather and Walsh in their proposals of strategies which could counter hegemonic force through a use of conscious resistance. Bahktin's perspective on the interconnection of language, ideology and voice has been referred to by Walsh. And Derrida's "Of Grammatology," as translated by Gayatri Spivak has been frequently cited by Lather in her discussion of deconstructionism. Reference to this book further informed my understanding of Lather's suggestions and strategies regarding the implementation of deconstruction methods into emancipatory, pedagogical methodology.

My interpretation and synthesis of these works, as well as less direct references to other sources I shall cite when applicable have helped to shape the focus of this paper. Three areas will be looked at in particular. The first will address the idea that western epistemology both reflects and reinforces a cultural value for principles of exclusion and isolation in relation to knowledge construction. In accordance with the postmodern feminist critique, these principles will be explored in their capacity to function as conceptual platforms, ones which may provide the structural rationale behind western paradigms and styles of research methodology. They will also be identified in reference to the claim that knowledge is political when particular forms of knowledge and particular ways of knowing may be restricted.¹¹ Restriction in this case will be interpreted as a series of social blocks which individuals or groups may encounter in their attempts to construct new knowledge claims. Social blocks within the perspective of postmodernism have been described as a combination of political, cultural and historical forces. These forces are thought to penetrate consciousness through the process of communication. Language in particular is seen as the medium of communication that most clearly illustrates situations where culture may impose on consciousness.¹² In deconstruction theory, language is considered to structure sites where social authority is manifested in a conceptual form. This type of authority is thought to infringe on individual states of consciousness and thereby restrict an individual's power to interpret experience. In critical theory, a social impeding of interpretive power is associated with all forms of social learning. That is,

¹¹ Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, (Athens, Georgia, The University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp.34-62

¹² Walsh, p. 47.

social norms are observed to influence the basic learning situations where an individual may first learn to identify concepts and organize them into conventional meaning-laden categories¹³ right through to more complex learning situations where certain individuals may be barred from access to privileged realms where discourse is constructed.

In the second area of this paper I will discuss efforts by feminists to counter what they have identified as an excessive western valorization of linear analysis. This concerns the power to create and manipulate conceptual and categorical division and autonomy regarding the construction of knowledge. This area will closely examine the feminist claim that western paradigms represent a male-centered, hegemonic perspective on reality. The examination should illustrate how hegemonic perceptions and dominant ideologies might impact on social experience through the conceptual domain. In this case, however, dominant paradigms will be considered in their capacity to direct social consciousness towards specific types of interpretations of experience. For example, binary oppositions, linear analysis and the autonomy of the knower will be discussed as possible consequences of cultural perceptual emphases. These emphases are considered to reflect a dominant cultural perspective on reality. Within the parameters of this discussion, knowledge is considered to represent a form of dialogue between consciousness and a social environment. In reference to this observation, critical theory tends to advocate the use of pedagogical strategies which emphasize recognition of ways in which knowledge can be seen to be dialectically constructed. In such a case, the individual as an interpreter of experience is taught to counter the restrictive influence of interpretive norms by becoming critically aware of the dialogue existing between society and knowledge. This form of learning includes the enhancing of an individual's ability to perceive links between knowledge and culture as well as the development of conscious recognition of ways in which established knowledge may be linked to particular social processes of legitimation and reification. The premise underlying these particular efforts to revise "traditional" approaches towards learning is that social and political infringements are considered to significantly restrict the power of the knower¹⁴ to the extent where an individual's ability to create and express meaning is socially influenced and in many cases subordinated through the institutionalization of dominant cultural standards.¹⁵

¹³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966).

¹⁴ Code approaches this issue from the perspective of epistemological foundations. Walsh approaches this issue from the perspective of language, power and cultural difference.

¹⁵ Walsh, pp. 32-35.

The main thrust of ideas contained in both the first and second divisions of this paper can be summarized by the following statement: Cultural processes have led to a state of western knowledge which tends to be restrictive to the point where all but the most privileged of knowers become disempowered. Due to the hegemony of one class over another, it is the dominant power whose collective interests and meanings are validated and given expression in society (as well as history) and perpetuated through its societal institutions like schools.¹⁶ In such practices, cultural boundaries are observed to impact on the particular way in which knowledge is synthesized and processed through both individual and collective pathways of interpretation.

In the third area of this paper I will discuss the ways in which an individual's power to know may be subverted through barriers created by dominant cultural perceptions. In reference to the ideas explored in Chapter Two, an individual's power to know will be defined as a continual struggle between individual and collective normative interpretations of experience. Postmodern theory has emphasized that this struggle tends to be resolved in favour of the dominant social perspective. Because of these observed trends in outcomes of interpretive struggles, deconstruction theorists have devised strategies which could potentially alter the outcome of such events. Their strategies are specifically designed to disrupt and displace the authority that interpretive norms may impose over an individual's potential "to know experience." The goal of these strategies is to disclose an indeterminate range of interpretive outcomes to conscious recognition. The individual's power to know, in a socially authoritative sense, is observed to be restricted through social norms which regulate processes of knowledge legitimation. By disclosing the source of this restriction on consciousness, theorists aim to liberate socially oppressed voices and emancipate the authority of the individual as an interpreter of reality. These aims could potentially be realized through the implementation of pedagogical strategies in which an individual would learn to identify connections between his or her cultural experiences and his or her ability to interpret these experiences in conformity with or in deviance from the norm and thus achieve status as an authoritative knower within western society. The aim of emancipatory theory can be interpreted as one which seeks to embrace openness, as opposed to closure, through knowledge;¹⁷ and one through which the expanding range of an individual's social interpretation could lead to a more critical awareness of the social

¹⁶ Walsh, p. 46.

¹⁷ See Lather, *Getting Smart*. New York: Routledge. 1991.

processes behind knowledge construction and thereby contribute to the empowerment of a knower.¹⁸

Two major themes will permeate the perspective of this paper. The first concerns the idea that interpretive power may be constrained or limited through the social and cultural structuring of language.¹⁹ The second deals with the claim that social agency and personal responsibility may be linked to efforts to interpret experience.²⁰ The former theme will be discussed in relation to the claim that cultural parameters may impose limitations on an individual's interpretive capacity.²¹ From the perspective of critical theory it has been suggested that these limitations are thought to emerge to the extent that a social structure is able to intersect and influence conscious awareness. By expanding on the first theme, the second will be discussed in relation to the interpretive power that an individual may have in constructing and expressing his or her own perspective on reality. An individual's power to resist dominant cultural forces will be considered in relation to processes of social legitimation. This will measure an individual's status as an authoritative knower in terms of his or her conformity to or deviance from epistemological norms and standards. It has been argued that these norms and standards endow certain knowledge claims with a type of social authority²² and that through their expression of authority, these claims tend to become assimilated into consciousness as reality simply by virtue of their status.

My interpretation of the previously mentioned readings -- with their emphasis on the above two themes -- have led me to consider that the deconstruction perspective may be useful in providing a theoretical background through which socially inclusive and progressive educational research strategies could be derived. In this paper I will endeavor to show that in respect to epistemological goals directed towards fostering the emancipation of the oppressed knower, deconstruction theory, (a) advocates the development of strategies that seek to socially empower the socially disempowered knower and (b) it pursues a route of social empowerment for the knower by focusing on the reflexive and dialectical relations associated with knowledge construction.

¹⁸ Lather.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated from the French by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore. The John Hopkins Press, 1974).

²⁰ Code, pp.72-73.

²¹ Walsh, pp. 31-35.

²² See Code. *What Can She Know?* Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1991.

CHAPTER ONE

Feminist Critical Social Theory

As this thesis will be drawing from the work of feminist philosophers such as Lorraine Code, it is important to define the theoretical parameters bounding their thought. Feminist philosophy emerges from a dual source, "the feminist movement and traditional academic philosophy."¹ It looks at the way culture and institutions may be instrumental in creating situations of social oppression. Issues of domination and hegemony are explored and the assumptions that underlie cultural beliefs are challenged. "Feminist philosophers share with postmodernists a deeply critical stance toward traditional philosophy."² With respect to theories of knowledge, those cultural beliefs that support definitions of reliable knowledge and rational sensory-based experience are challenged. The pre-eminence of reason and autonomy is subject to attack.³ From the feminist perspective, a cultural relation between belief, knowledge and truth is identified and opened to critical scrutiny. Within the scope of this perspective, the relationship is described as a form of hegemonic tension, one which reflects the particular interests of a group of privileged white males. By focusing on issues which they believe are derived through this tension, feminists critically examine western culture and its language base for traces of hegemonic dominance. The standard parameters in both culture and language which serve to define meaning for western society, are challenged. In a broad sense, feminists question the justice of any hegemony-based knowledge. When critiquing western epistemology, feminist philosophers claim that cultural stereotypes limit our way of knowing. They seek to identify what ways of knowing limit our knowing. For example, methods used to test the rationale and legitimacy of a knowledge claim such as justification, verification, styles of measurement and uses of experimental control are often criticized as methods that set standards for legitimate knowledge rather than provide proof of their empirical validity. "Lorraine Code approaches the topics of women as knowers and knowledge of women's experiences from a feminist epistemological point of view."⁴ For

¹ Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, (Boston, Unwin Hyman, 1989). p. xi.

² Garry and Pearsall, p. 2.

³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴ Ibid., p.110.

Code, ethics and epistemology are not divisible but co-function in the production of knowledge."⁵ The experience which knowledge is assumed to be grounded upon, especially gender experience, is considered to be socially constructed, power based and to some extent an artificial experience.⁶ It is thought to be a consequence of cultural parameters and guidelines and is challenged on the grounds that it creates the existing boundaries that separate categories and create contexts of meaning within a knowledge base.

"Feminist philosophy poses serious and sustained challenges to many of the most cherished assumptions of the philosophical tradition. Even such seemingly unassailable ideals as those of objectivity and autonomy come to be recognized as products of certain ways of viewing the world, from within specific and contingent sets of social structures, rather than as having the timeless, absolute value they have long been taken to have."⁷

From a critical epistemological stance, the inequality experienced by knowers is regarded in part to be one of the consequences of cultural dominance. It is through acts of cultural dominance that the ideas and interests of one particular social group come to dominate and or profit at the expense of those of other groups. Cultural oppression is mirrored in the construction of knowledge where dominant forms of interpretive expression can be seen to emerge in relation to the subordination of other possible forms that might exist. The social critiques on western epistemology contained within the scope of this paper make the claims that (a) multiple sub-culture factions do exist within the context of a western society; (b) these factions reflect a diversity of collective perceptions of validity; (c) the diversity reflects what is considered to be useful and necessary to each particular group and (d) these interpretations manifest themselves as conceptual realities and compete through processes of social legitimation to be structured into knowledge. In this case, a body of legitimized knowledge is viewed as a social production. It is one where cultural forces function as interpretive feedback systems and project a standard conceptual mapping of reality over social experience.

⁵ Ibid., p. 157.

⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

⁷ Lorraine Code, Sheila Mullett, and Christine Overall, eds., *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988) p. 3.

Critical Theory and the Paradigm

Like language which implies specific types of meaning through its verbal associations, emphases and style of asserting or negating meaning in the form of statements, the paradigm is identified as one of the epistemological tools available to western society. It is challenged on the grounds that it serves to regulate the production of knowledge claims by fostering the development of epistemological standards. It is described as an interpretive guide with the capacity to structure processes of conceptual organization. From this perspective, paradigms are observed to impose social measurements and social values on the interpretive process:

Paradigmatic instances of knowledge are drawn from observational knowledge of medium-sized physical objects, with the consequence that a distanced, often controlling and manipulative relation of subject to object is the accepted relation. The subject is neutral, purely rational, and detached in his disengaged observation of the object; the object remains inert in and unaffected by the knowing process.⁸

Paradigms are also observed to normalize an individual's ability to understand reality within a social context. In terms of their epistemological influence, critical pedagogues maintain that paradigms direct recognition towards a way of understanding by directing it away from other possible ways of understanding.⁹ The directing of recognition emerges as paradigms are learned, accepted and assimilated into consciousness. The paradigm is seen to wield a power over interpretation. The power itself is considered to gain its force through an exploitation of those relationships which link consciousness to social structure. In applications of deconstruction theory, such as those expounded through Patti Lather, one major criticism of the paradigm is that it is not so much a useful intellectual tool as it is a dictator of thought processes.¹⁰ The paradigm is considered to have the capacity to inject value-ridden conceptual bases into thought processes while it provides the individual with structural guidelines on how to interpret experience.

Dualisms and Western Paradigms

It was mentioned earlier that feminist philosophers critique western epistemology on the grounds that it restricts the power of the knower. Through this critique, standard

⁸ Code, p. 173.

⁹ Lather, p. 108.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 111-112.

paradigms which may be used to establish the legitimacy of a knowledge claim, such as linear measurement, the use of diametric oppositions to organize perception and the value for the autonomy of the knower are continually being challenged. In this section I will focus on the challenge some feminist thinkers pose to what they believe to be a western valorization of diametric oppositions within its epistemological base.¹¹

Lorraine Code, in her discussion of how structures of social dominance may come to penetrate conceptual systems, maintains that the construction of binary dualisms is instrumental in coding themes of dominance and subordination into standard knowledge frames. For example, she describes the object-subject dichotomy as a western cultural construction through which forms of epistemological truths are derived:

"The subject-object relation that the autonomy-of-reason credo underwrites is at once its most salient and its most politically significant epistemological consequence. The relation pivots between two assumptions: that there is a sharp split between subject and object and that it is a primary purpose of cognitive activity to produce the ability to control, manipulate and predict the behavior of its objects."¹²

Code has emphasized that from a feminist perspective, the subject-object dichotomy can be observed to reflect an andro-centered hegemony and that it helps to structure epistemological representations in conformity with hegemony-derived value judgments.

"The mind/body, reason, emotion, public/private dichotomies, like the knowledge/experience dichotomy, all have epistemological implications. The male/female dichotomy runs parallel to them and is likewise marked evaluatively, not just descriptively. In each dichotomy, the lefthand term designates the more highly valued quality or attribute. The referent of the right-hand term is not only devalued but outrightly denigrated. It is a pivotal philosophical assumption that mind and its (ordered) activities are superior to body and its (disorderly) experiences."¹³

Code has observed it is possible to consider that dichotomies represent a cultural mapping of relations between epistemologically-privileged and epistemologically-subordinated perspectives on reality. This description of dichotomies implies that as points of conceptual reference, dichotomies reflect a form of cultural closure, one which is imposed over processes of interpretation. Within the parameters of social learning, the ability to recognize and understand meaning through the conceptual structure of dichotomous relations could represent a particular evolution of cultural perception.

¹¹ Code, pp. 27-31.

¹² Ibid., p. 139.

¹³ Ibid., p. 242.

The Concept of Autonomy in Western Paradigms

From the perspective of feminist thought, the idea of the autonomous knower is another example of a concept that can be traced to roots in a male dominated hegemony.¹⁴

Through this perspective, the value for autonomy in knowing is traced to a particular desire to both dominate and control nature. As a concept it is thought to reinforce a social value for attaining a state of independence from the environment. The western value for autonomy in knowing has been described by feminists as representing a cultural desire to escape emotions of dependency. "The detached observer who can control his emotions with his reason and nature with his knowledge can escape the vagaries and uncertainties of the evanescent sensory world to dwell in a realm of objective truth. . . . Both empiricists and rationalists argue against epistemic dependence either on an inquirer's emotional responses or on other persons as sources of knowledge."¹⁵

Feminists maintain that this desire is reflected in an epistemological methodology which values knowledge derived through variable isolation as opposed to variable interdependence. The value for a separation of concepts and contexts within processes of knowledge construction is challenged as being a hegemonic desire to separate from experience or from emotions associated with experience. "Dispassionate observation and scientific objectivity promise control over unruly emotions. They confer the power that is needed to obliterate frightening perspectival distortions and to establish clarity, certainty, and stability."¹⁶

Feminist thinkers have observed that themes promoting the superiority of valuing the discrete and isolatable variable in the quest of knowledge are predominant within the context of western epistemology and that the domain of scientific inquiry is exemplary of this. Within this context of reasoning, empirical knowledge is considered to be contingent upon dominant forms of cultural perceptions. Lather has observed that "Facts are not given but constructed by the questions we ask of events. All researchers construct their object of inquiry out of the materials their culture provides and values play a central role in this linguistically, ideologically and in the historically-embedded project that we call science."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 117-130.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

¹⁷ Lather, p. 105.

Feminists have argued that themes of exclusion within the context of scientific inquiry and discourse reflect a cultural goal to disassociate from the complications of affective experience. "According to standard scientific orthodoxy, universal and general laws can be formulated on the basis of empirical observations and such laws enable a researcher to predict -- in a purely disinterested manner -- how objects will be affected by or behave in certain controlled circumstances."¹⁸ The ability to isolate experimental contexts from the effects of outside interference is in this case observed to reflect a hegemonic value for maintaining perceptions of stability and control in relation to a changing environment. This value has been associated with a cultural need to simplify perspectives on measurement and to reduce the power of the unknowable or complex variable. Critical theoretical perspectives on scientific inquiry have observed that the empirical validity of information obtained through research is in actuality a compilation of observations based on a masked subjectivity. According to this view, objectivity represents a cultural manipulation of perception and scientific knowledge is seen to be valorized to the extent that a researcher can be perceived to purge research contexts of all elements of subjectivity. Feminist critiques of standard scientific methodology suggest that techniques used to insure the validity of research contexts and methodology are relative to the epistemological perspective of the researcher. They question the degree to which research design, use of experimental techniques and final interpretation of data can be separated completely from the perception of the researcher.

Within the context of postmodern arguments, knowledge is associated with subjectivity. Feminist postmodernists posit that an acknowledgment of the subjective element linked to all knowledge claims through the perspective of the knower could bring western society closer to epistemological justice. Within the context of scientific inquiry, the autonomy of the knower may seem to be upheld when an experiment and its results can be repeated over time and space by a wide range of researchers. However, the feminist epistemological critique of the autonomous knower goes further than this. As a conceptual structure, the western value for autonomy is viewed as a paradigm which allows relations between things to be observed within a specific context. It is through the creation and maintenance of specific observational contexts, they observe, that paradigms have the capacity to direct perception through their emphases:

"Beliefs that knowers can and should be self-sufficient and that objects of knowledge are independent and separate from them, yield a composite

¹⁸ Code, p. 32.

picture of knowledge in which autonomy is a privileged value. A dominant feature of this picture is the assumption that knowledge is a *product* of inquiry that stands alone in the sense that details of the processes of its production are irrelevant to its structure, content, and/or evaluation.¹⁹

In the case of the paradigm of autonomy, as in all other paradigms, it is postulated that an individual is culturally directed towards a specific recognition and assessment of experience. With respect to scientific inquiry, it has been stated that even before the experiment has begun, an experimental context has already been contaminated by the ideology and hegemonic force contained within a cultural perspective.

One of the major challenges feminist critiques pose to the paradigm of autonomy is through their claim that it is one which induces false perceptions of a relation between experience and knowledge. In this case, the perception of a separation between the individual and nature is identified as being an artificial construction. Code has observed that through a perpetuation of culturally induced individual-nature schisms, the interpreter is falsely directed into perceiving him or herself as standing outside of nature. The purpose behind this conceptual structure, she observes, is to support a vision of human -- in particular -- male dominance in relation to the environment:

"The control that a mechanistic approach to nature promises is one of its strongest points of appeal. The controlling, exploitative - and allegedly dispassionate - dominant science in western culture bears the marks of the hierarchical view of the cosmos that (Baconian) empiricist philosophers endorsed. That view, which derives from the idea of a Great chain of Being, places man hierarchically above women (closer to the angels and to God), and human beings above animals, plants, and inanimate nature."²⁰

Code appears to intermesh her critique of the autonomous knower with a critique on the use of dichotomous categorization and linear assessment within western epistemology. For Code, standard western paradigms fail to include a recognition of any qualitative or reciprocal influences that may interact with processes of knowledge construction. She has observed that paradigms contained within western epistemology reflect a social value for exclusion and linearity with respect to methods designed to establish empirical knowledge. In such cases she claims the interpreter who perceives him or herself to be isolated from nature and from the objects which he or she interprets may not necessarily perceive his or her measurements of nature to be established in reciprocity with environmental conditions. In other words, the knower who perceives him or herself to be isolated from the objects

¹⁹ Code. p. 110.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

that he or she interprets can become conceptually distanced from the conditions of his or her own knowing. He or she can also become separated from a sense of social agency, responsibility and identity in his or her role as interpreter of reality. "Out of this conception of the autonomy of scientific knowledge, the conviction emerges that 'real' knowledge must be autonomous, detached from the subjective idiosyncrasies and circumstances of both 'observer' and 'observed;' abstract, independent and depersonalized. . . Scientists can absolve themselves from a moral-political responsibility by invoking the overriding value of objectivity."²¹

In terms of social agency and the quest for "pure knowledge," feminist theorists claim the autonomous interpreter is encouraged to dismiss aspects of selfhood in relation to the construction of knowledge.²² Through the paradigm of autonomy, they observe, knowledge comes to be considered as an absolute and independent state, one which stands outside of self. One of the consequences of this, they claim, is an emergence of a state of knowing where the individual perceives him or herself to dominate nature and where this perception of dominance encourages the individual to pursue knowledge through paths of conceptual manipulation and social exploitation.²³ The perception of dominance is considered to be one which actually diminishes the power of the knower. Problems are thought to arise when an emphasis on the perception of dominance and autonomy works to absolve a knower from the responsibility of his or her knowing. In such cases, the construction of knowledge becomes a process which interferes with consciousness through its capacity to block an individual's awareness of instrumental and artificial manipulations involved in perceptual processes. In other words, the individual who is unaware of the influence that environmental conditions may have on his or her state of knowing may be more susceptible to being blinded by their influence. Critical theorists argue that while perception is taught to recognize objects, it is not taught to recognize that objects co-exist with concepts or that concepts reflect a cultural experience and perspective on reality. This viewpoint does not deny any existence of an objective reality or of a concrete phenomenal world. The point of emphasis here is that knowledge claims can be observed to reflect social priorities and that perceptions of social priorities may change over time. The western emphasis on the objectification of meaning is considered to be indicative of a cultural perspective. It is considered to be only one of way of knowing selected from among many other possible ways of knowing.

²¹ Ibid., p. 35.

²² Ibid., p. 50.

²³ Ibid., p. 139.

"Intricate structures of power are at work throughout any social order to legitimate knowledge and the institutional practices it informs." ²⁴

In his book entitled, "Doing Critical Ethnography," Jim Thomas places deconstruction theory within the parameters of critical social inquiry:

Social Deconstructionists invert hierarchies of power and authority and challenge the dominant features of social structure-as-text and the ways we study. As a consequence, the field of study becomes a text of signs. The variable meanings, applications, and consequences of these signs within their specific context of cultural use become the analytic focal point. ²⁵

Within these parameters, language is addressed as a social power, transmitter of value systems and tool. In her book, "Getting Smart," Patti Lather defines deconstruction theory as "a strategy of displacement aimed at disclosing evidence of political power structuring contained within language."²⁶ Deconstruction theorists who follow this line of reasoning claim that contexts of political authority are communicated through language. A focus on the political structuring of meaning allows the theorist to consider ways in which language may exclude certain potential meaning outcomes from mainstream knowledge bases.

The claim that potential meanings may be excluded through the politics of language can be referred to the idea that standards in language reflect a power struggle between dominant and subordinate interpretations of reality. Deconstruction theorists identify what they consider to be dominant cultural meanings as those expressed through social standards in textual form. These meanings are then identified as being possible sites for interpretive oppression. Within the context of critical theory, the concept of there being "a right way to interpret a given text" is considered to support the authority of social norms and standards. The authority of the text is seen to serve as a social tool, one which will direct an individual to interpret in conformity with conventional perspectives on experience by organizing language in a specific way.²⁷

Lather maintains that the act of textual interpretation is a process that tends to be held static through political structures which shape language.²⁸ She endeavors to establish epistemological, incorporate strategies to displace what she defines as rigid political

²⁴ Code, p. 201.

²⁵ Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 24.

²⁶ Lather, p. 13.

²⁷ Derrida Transl by Spivak.

²⁸ Lather, pp. 81, 93.

restraints on interpretation.²⁹ By doing this, she hopes to disperse interpretative energy more evenly among the populace and make the power of creating authoritative and legitimized meaning accessible to social agents on a more equal basis.

The Deconstruction Field of Observation

Deconstruction theory as a strategy of displacement seeks to direct an individual's awareness closer to the social dynamics that may empower or disempower him or her as a knower. The goal is to focus the awareness of the interpreter on those cultural variables that may factor in his or her ability to bring meaning to text.³⁰ The individual is encouraged to identify the authoritative contexts that structure his or her perception of what composes standard ways of knowing and what defines reality. The interpreter is encouraged to be aware of the cultural structural boundaries which provide him or her with a conceptual base as well as instructions on how to efficiently manipulate that base. In other words, an individual is encouraged to critically scrutinize the constitution of his or her own epistemological territory. The purpose of these measures is to reveal to the individual any political tensions that may oppress his or her ability to conceptualize and socially express meaning.

Deconstruction theory draws attention to what can be considered an unstable and dynamic potential of language.³¹ The theory can be described as one which recognizes a reflexivity between consciousness and interpretive guidelines imposed through a social structure. That is, it is possible to consider through deconstructive analysis how the power of the interpreter may be conditioned through cultural contexts of experience. Within this context of observation, the power of the interpreter becomes something which is relative to his or her capacity to resist cultural forces by acting within his or her perceptual field.³² Critical theory argues that through a critical awareness of these forces, an individual may become more cognizant of the cultural basis of his or her own knowing. Code has observed that cultural conditions, if passively assimilated, serve to locate both knowledge and a knower within specific social domains.³³ In order to counter the restriction imposed through these domains, she recommends that epistemological efforts focus more on an

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 90-100.

³⁰ Sarup, p. 34.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

³² Spivak, pp. 65-73.

³³ Code, p. 27.

examination of the cultural direction that knowledge may be oriented towards because of social processes of interpretive restraint.³⁴

It is possible to surmise that through the eye of a deconstruction theorist, the social agent becomes someone who is advised to be critically aware of normative uses of terms and their possible origin in political hegemony. Hegemony-based norms are considered to play a dominant role in the construction of reality.³⁵ Deconstruction theory confronts the hegemony through text. In some ways, textual language is considered to be institutionally linked. That is, it is considered a process that has already passed through a series of structured social pathways in order to obtain its own venue of expression "as voice." In such cases, political and normative aspects of language are seen to factor strongly in processes of textual interpretation.

Deconstruction theory is also a way of thinking about political processes as they relate to textual interpretation.³⁶ It targets what it perceives to be the structure and driving ideology behind socially legitimized standards of interpretation. Within these parameters of thought, the individual who engages in processes of textual deconstruction challenges outcomes of political power struggles by evaluating the western epistemological condition in relation to the social, political and historical bases that are observed to ground it.

It has been suggested within the parameters of deconstruction theory that a language system can be described as an integral whole, made up of interrelating contexts. Within these parameters, political, historical and social conditions are all identified as co-factors which continually feed into each other in order to produce a meaning context. This form of identification has been used to support the claim that western terminology gains its force through a co-dependency of and a relational significance between definitions. It has been suggested also that meaning is structured through a comparative interrelation of definitions. A specific example of this can be cited in relation to the metaphor.³⁷ In the case of the metaphor, conceptual representation of objects are thought to gain their significance through qualitative and subjective systems of comparison. For example, the meaning of a particular definition, explanation or term is considered to be something which depends on other definitions, explanations and terms for its own particular distinction or significance within a conceptual base. In very basic terms, x is x because it is not y. By referring back to the idea that a premise of superiority in isolation underlies western

³⁴ Thomas, p. 24.

³⁵ Lather, p. 91.

³⁶ ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁷ Sarup, pp. 49-55.

epistemology, the attributes which allow the interpreter to identify x as being x are also those attributes which allow the knower to conceptually separate x from those things which are not x. This separation, however, is one which relies on a particular system of conceptual distinction. In such a case, the total understanding of what x can be understood to represent is something which is obtained through a simultaneous understanding of what x is not. No words, terms or definitions are considered to exist independent of each other in respect to what meaning may be obtained within a language system. Within a social context, language is seen to restrict interpretation through this structural co-dependence of meaning. From a critical theoretical stance, this restriction is observed as something which becomes recognizable as an individual becomes aware of the dependence new descriptions may exhibit in relation to prior descriptions. In line with this position is the observation that an individual learns to interpret language within social contexts as he or she learns to arrange words, signs and symbols into concepts according to the guidelines of social perspectives.³⁸ Terms of social authority are described as phenomena which are transmitted through the social learning processes. Knowledge is recognized as a social construction which imposes limits on the interpretive process. An authoritative structuring of language is observed to be imposed through text in a way which may inhibit an individual's ability to express new forms of meaning through language.

Cognitive processes such as those which regulate perceptual recognition and identification of concepts are considered to be subject to social penetration.³⁹ For example, an individual who learns to identify and recognize concepts is also thought to assimilate a system of conceptual patterning that will influence subsequent organizations of concepts into observations and interpretations. Deconstruction theorists claim that this assimilation does take place and that it carries with it cultural prescriptions for perceiving reality.⁴⁰ They maintain that in this way, social penetration through language comes to transform consciousness. Language is considered to penetrate the synthesis of meaning as an individual comes to develop a social perspective on reality. It has been emphasized that a relationship is observed to exist between language contexts and the social contexts which ground them. It is the acknowledgment of this relationship that allows deconstruction theorists to evaluate the evolution of cultural perspectives as they are expressed through text, as a dialectic occurrence. The earlier mentioned co-dependency of terms has been identified as one factor functioning in this dialectical closure of meaning. Social agents

³⁸ Berger and Luckman.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Lather, p. 40

are also thought to factor in this closure as they relay information between each other and as they depend upon each other for a confirmation of the interpretations which they construct.⁴¹

Within the boundaries of deconstruction theory, the closure of a language system is considered to reflect a particular state of social tension. A social agent's potential to create meaning through language is seen to be effected by trends in an evolution of shifting social processes.⁴² Any co-dependence exhibited between terms within a language system is considered to have both a static and a dynamic potential.⁴³ That is to say, the possibility for social agents to either transform standards for the legitimation of language-based meaning or maintain their stability is related to the cultural dynamics involved in processes of meaning synthesis. The cultural impact of language on interpretation is recognized as taking place through the closure and direction that language imposes over understanding. "Language represents and constructs the personal and the social reality of its speakers but it also reflects, refracts and positions another reality outside of itself -- the reality of the overall power structure in which it exists."⁴⁴ This direction and closure is thought to emerge as language directs recognition towards certain cultural emphases through its highlighting of specific co-relations of terms, definitions and symbols contained within its system. "All cultural experience requires an interpretive reading. Learning the proper rules for coding and decoding the meaning of messages entails developing a way not only for learning the language but also for understanding the multiple contexts in which some languages are necessary, irrelevant or risky."⁴⁵

Deconstruction theorists maintain that cultural emphases transmitted through language have the potential to become sources of cultural exploitation.⁴⁶ They claim that this exploitation can occur when dominant social forms of interpretation serve to promote the interests of particular social groups at the cost of subordinating the interests of other groups. Distortion of public consciousness through a deliberate structuring of text-based meaning is considered to be one of the results of this exploitation. In extreme cases this distortion may occur to the extent where an individual assimilates social standardized

⁴¹ Sarup, p. 14.

⁴² Lather, pp. 55-65.

⁴³ Sarup, pp. 35-37.

⁴⁴ Walsh, p.43.

⁴⁵ Thomas, p.14.

⁴⁶ Lather, pp.55-65.

interpretations of reality even though those standards may actually conflict with his or her own interests and compromise his or her power as an authoritative knower within a society.⁴⁷ It was suggested that standardized conceptualizations of reality reflect dominant social interests. From the perspective of critical social theory, language, as it is expressed through text, is able to convey subtle messages that may be crucial in shaping the self-identity of social agents. Its power, however, exists to the extent that it is supported by the necessary political framework. Such a framework would sustain a conformity between perception and identification of what is designated as normal, real and valid within a cultural context. The power of the individual to resist this normative influence is something that is emphasized in the interest of creating a more inclusive and just epistemological frame.⁴⁸

Social Cues and the Power of Language Frames

Specific applications in deconstruction theory may require that the social, historical and political roots of a knowledge claim be evaluated in order to disclose sources of cultural oppression. Sources of oppression are judged in respect to the distortion they might impose over an individual's knowledge base. This distortion is measured against an individual's power to resist the political and social forces that effect his or her assimilation of knowledge. Cultural tendencies to either adopt or reject specific ways of knowing are considered to reflect conditions of political tension. When deconstructionists seek to "deconstruct the authority of a text," they are attempting to weaken the 'oppressive' bond that standard knowledge makes with consciousness. This procedure attempts to emphasize the political aspects of knowledge and to keep the politics of knowledge production in play. Through this process, deconstructionists attempt to liberate subordinated voices as well as subordinated perceptions of reality.

"All knowledge and concepts are metaphorical in that they provide icons and mapping techniques for interpreting and speaking about social terrain . . . All knowledge ultimately reflects a set of norms and values about what is worth examining and how."⁴⁹

Deconstruction theorists make the assumption that concepts are formed in reciprocity with action. They maintain that an analysis of cultural contexts can help to expose the social mechanisms which ground conceptualizations of reality.⁵⁰ Simplified, this means

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 50-55.

⁴⁹ Thomas, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁰ Lather, p. 39.

that we learn "to perspective," and that our capacity to interpret experience is already oriented in the direction of particular social interests from our earliest perceptual stages. The social capacity to shape and transform meaning is considered to be partly dependent on a cultural co-relation between terms and perceptions of difference. Therefore, definitions contained within a conceptual system and methods of organizing and structuring concepts into interpretations are analyzed as variables conditioned through a variety of collective experiences. The ability to recognize, translate and transfer information in a socially valid way is also observed to be involved in this process of conditioning. Within the realm of authoritative language, culture and concept are thought to merge through the construction of a perspective. Due to this, concepts are examined for their cultural significance and for the cultural measurements they might convey. These measurements are considered to be important as they serve in a social capacity to represent normative assessments of reality to the individual. It is representations of reality that the individual learns to construct through social, historical and political domains into personal understandings of experience and social affirmations of standard knowledge claims.

Social Perspectives and Epistemological Frames

The idea that social perspectives may be learned through an authoritative structuring of language was discussed in the previous section.⁵¹ From an epistemological standpoint, learning was described as a process conditioned through political restraints placed on language and the interpretation of language. Political restraints were defined as those dominant social cues which not only direct interpretation but actually impose an oppressive force over consciousness.

Within the context of feminist postmodernist epistemological critiques, it has been said that western paradigms tend to oppress knowers by directing social awareness away from a recognition of its hegemonic legacy.⁵² The oppressed knower is identified as one who has been discouraged from identifying how an instrumental use of concepts comes to represent reality and justify certain knowledge outcomes. According to this point of view, oppressed knowers are considered to be at a social disadvantage because they have been conceptually blinded to the political motivations factoring within their own knowledge base.⁵³ An example of this perspective can be found in Lorraine Code's critique of western

⁵¹ Thomas, p. 72.

⁵² Code, pp. 49-50.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 72.

epistemology. In the critique she identifies the paradigms of binary-oppositions, social autonomy and linear measurement as epistemological sites conducive to the production of conceptual blind spots.⁵⁴

Discussion

Education theorists such as Lather who incorporate elements of deconstructionism into their methodology and practice point out the importance of social awareness in developing the power of the knower. For them, a collective effort to consciously and critically interpret knowledge claims is one way to decrease the levels of conceptual closure evident in the western epistemological system. Lather has observed that "... the goal of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researcher at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge."⁵⁵ Although cultural practices and language are considered to impose closure over individual states of consciousness, the ability to resist, transform and shift meaning is considered to be theoretically within the power of the individual. This idea refers specifically to points of discontinuity which may surface at those locations where consciousness merges with the semantic structure of a language. Because people have a tendency to interpret from their own experience, variance and discontinuity in meaning will emerge within social contexts. This discontinuity becomes most evident when meaning is exchanged and translated between people. Critical theoretical strategies to deconstruct text make deliberate use of the structured discontinuity evident in language. In efforts to transform consciousness, interpretive loopholes are identified in relation to the variety, difference and similarities in interpretation which become visible through communication. Differences in interpretations are thought to be related in part to the differences in social experiences that ground perception at any time -- depending upon cultural situations and or environmental changes. These points of discontinuity may provide new pathways through which conventional meanings may be transformed.

One example of this potential for transformation is evident in the social space created during the exchange of meaning between speaker and listener. People who communicate with each other presumably bring their own unique set of experiences to language. And as a consequence, their ability to translate each other's messages, as they are conveyed through language, may be subject to points of discontinuity. In general terms, cultural

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 111-172.

⁵⁵ Lather, p. 60.

influences are considered to provide the social contexts which situate meaning and the meaning that can be expressed through language becomes culturally located. Postmodernist arguments claim that culture establishes both closure and disjunction within a language through its reflexivity with a state of social consciousness. For example, a language may provide an individual with descriptions of meaning and conceptual parameters which could influence his or her structuring of thought. These descriptions and parameters, however, are derived through a culture which in turn reflects outcomes of social struggles for meaning.

"It is not surprising that epistemological ideals should derive out of human interests. Indeed, it would be more implausible, more counterintuitive, to believe that they do not: human cognitive agents, after all, have made them."⁵⁶ It is argued that western culture promotes a value for mechanistic and instrumental approaches towards experience and that this value is reflected in its language of description and systems for conceptualizing, organizing and categorizing perceptions. Code has stated that:

"The controlling, exploitative - and allegedly dispassionate - dominant science in western culture bears the marks of the hierarchical view of the cosmos that (Baconian) empiricist philosophers endorsed . . . for all its self-proclaimed objectivity, there is evidence that its hegemony is sustained by *subjective* forces: by interests and self interest. It is difficult to evade the conclusion that the very ideal of objectivity that urges the suppression of subjectivity (emotionality) is itself as much a product of emotional circumstances (subjective enthusiasms and interests) as it is a product of a 'natural' flowering of intellect detachedly knowing the world." ⁵⁷

Although the structuring of concepts and conceptual divisions are identified as being located in the abstract realm, they are considered to have a concrete base in a particular social history of interpretive evolution.⁵⁸ Within the context of this perspective, what can be expressed and what cannot be expressed through a language is observed to reflect the extent of its cultural boundaries and social history. Contained within these boundaries is the individual's conscious effort to either remain within or transcend their influence.

⁵⁶ Code, p. 48.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

Summary

The ideas suggested and explored up to now have been presented in an effort to set the theoretical context of this paper. I have directed my discussion towards a perspective where knowledge systems are observed to represent political interests as well as provide society with its standard frames for interpreting "reality." The significance of this perspective for this paper occurs in relation to the critical theoretical claim that social consciousness is directed and even coerced into adopting certain perspectives on reality through the power of standard knowledge claims.⁵⁹

As initially stated, the position of this thesis will consider that both privileged and oppressed knowers exist within the context of western epistemology. It was also stated that it is in the interest of this paper to explore ways in which deconstruction theory may inspire strategies that will reduce the inequalities experienced by knowers in the western condition of knowledge.

Critical theorists maintain that value judgments are contained in knowledge claims and that it is possible to disclose political interests behind these values.⁶⁰ Knowledge is viewed as a social construction -- a consequence of social struggles. Critical theorists who apply deconstructionism to their practices approach knowledge as a phenomenon which can be deconstructed into parts. The goal of this form of analysis is to reveal what is considered to be an inhibitory authority contained within knowledge claims. Culture, viewed as an amalgamation of historical, political and social relations is considered to define the contexts for this authority, "... culture can be understood as a set of solutions devised by a group of people to meet specific problems posed by situations they face in common."⁶¹ One way in which the western epistemological system is analyzed for its cultural-political roots is through a critical assessment of its paradigms.

In order to emancipate an individual's social consciousness in terms of knowing, critical theorists maintain the individual must learn to identify those social contexts that may condition his or her ability to structure interpretations of experience. The interpreter is encouraged to be aware of the cultural sources that govern his or her own dialogue between consciousness and socially accepted structuring of conceptual territory.⁶² The

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Code, pp. 71-109.

⁶¹ Van Maanen & Barley, "Cultural Organization: Fragments of a Theory." Cited in J. Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, p. 12. SAGE Publications. 1993.

⁶² Lather, pp. 144-145. See also, Walsh for a similar perspective on the relationship between culture and interpretation..

power of the interpreter becomes a political focus with respect to strategies used to critically assess the production of socially-legitimized knowledge claims. Within the context of deconstructionism, a theoretical and strategic use of conceptual displacement is aimed at disrupting the authority expressed through a text. A deliberate effort is made to disclose those subjective and political elements that may be contained within what are commonly understood to be "empirical and objective knowledge claims." From a critical epistemological perspective, once identified these elements are significant regarding the information they could provide on possible sources of social oppression. The oppression itself is measured in terms of mechanisms for perceptual distortion that are observed to be imposed over consciousness.

The western state of epistemology has been credited with justifying its claims to empirical validity by structuring artificial perceptions of objectivity.⁶³ Feminist postmodernists maintain that this structuring represents a privileged, male-centered cultural effort to objectify experience in order to control it. They suggest that the distinction and duality perceived to exist between objective and subjective knowledge is perspective-based. Some go even further to suggest that objectivity, as a concept, is contained within a subjective perception of reality.⁶⁴ From the perspective of a feminist epistemology, Lorraine Code has argued that diametric oppositions, the autonomous knower and the pre-eminence of closed and linear measurement systems all reflect a form of cultural values. From the perspective of critical theory, these examples are considered to foster exclusive pathways with respect to the development of western knowledge. One possible consequence of this exclusivity is that dominant paradigms may have an inherent and culturally structured resistance to any new forms of analysis which may challenge their existing structure. Feminist postmodernists claim that a specific example of this may be found in the western relationship between "rationality" and "empirical knowledge." In this relation they maintain that empirical knowledge is derived through a culturally constructed and maintained objective methodology. Within these parameters of thought, the devaluing of "subjective knowledge" has been identified as an outcome of political tensions.

Postmodernism claims that conventional conceptualizations of reality require re-examination.⁶⁵ This call for re-examination is based on the observation that traditional western conceptualizations of reality are oppressive and restrictive. In the interests of

⁶³ Code, p. 48.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Thomas, p. 25.

achieving a more inclusive and just epistemological frame, paradigms that structure observation and the subsequent construction of knowledge claims are held up for re-examination.

The power to shift, transform and construct new social meaning is defined within the context of this paper as the empowerment of the knower.⁶⁶ As already suggested, this power is measured as an individual's ability to construct new meaning while resisting constraints imposed through authoritative interpretive contexts. This power, however, is not a base ability to oppose standards and overthrow norms. It is rather a more subtle ability where a knower becomes critically aware of cultural conditions which may situate his or her social authority to know. Knowledge in this case is regarded as a social phenomenon and the power of the knower is seen as something that takes its shape in conjunction with the enforcement of social perspectives.

While political conditions may be considered to permeate the standards and norms that dominate perception, within these conditions exists the social accountability of each individual. As a social agent, each individual has the potential power to modify standard interpretations in an effort to promote just and progressive perspectives on reality. It is theorized that degrees of interpretive freedom co-exist with an individual's ability to be aware of and resist his or her own oppressed or privileged position as a knower. Within any cultural or political situation, the individual possesses, in theory, the power to shift old political situations and instigate new ones. And because of this, he or she is able to transform knowledge. From this standpoint, to know is to be political and knowledge is defined as being value ridden and socially located.⁶⁷ The critical theoretical evaluation of interpretive freedom is made in relation to contexts of social legitimacy, authority and validity that may limit a knower's ability to construct new meaning.⁶⁸

In terms of social justice, the conceptual range which western epistemology offers to an expanding cultural base may need to expand. This expansion would have to accommodate a multiplicity of cultural views and answer to a multiplicity of oppressed voices. It is in the interest of this thesis to consider how deconstruction strategies may be useful in expanding the range of social interpretations that may be contained within an epistemological structure. An inclusive model of reality representation would reflect a more equitable distribution of cultural perspectives.⁶⁹ The distribution would be represented in the conceptual system.

⁶⁶ Derived through readings in critical theory.

⁶⁷ Lather.

⁶⁸ Code.

⁶⁹ This idea forms the basic premise in the arguments of both Code in, *What Can She Know?* and Lather in *Getting Smart*.

Ideally, that system should be able to reflect and foster situations where an equitable degree of social legitimation and authority is conferred on new perspectives as they come to be represented in knowledge claims. In the interest of promoting social justice through epistemological systems, knowledge frames must neither create nor endorse situations which will produce privileged knowers at the expense of producing disempowered knowers. In other words, the epistemological system must not be one constructed to repress and subjugate knowers. In her exploration of conceptual oppression, Catherine Walsh advocates the constructing of epistemological frames that will help the oppressed knower reclaim selfhood and "voice."⁷⁰ Questions that should be asked include, "How can the knower use his or her awareness of his or her own knowledge's cultural position in order to create a just epistemological frame?" "Is it only a hegemonic cultural perception which induces a belief in neutral or value free knowledge? and, "What can the acknowledgment of conditionality and subjectivity as contained in knowledge do to inform measurement practices and emancipate the consciousness of the knower?" Such inquiries may be significant in helping to assess the role social perspectives may play within systems of conceptual measurement.⁷¹

A focus on social dynamic aspects that may be involved in processes involved in acts of knowledge transmission may be useful in efforts to disclose the social and cultural bases of knowledge claims. For example, the idea has been put forward that methods used to create new knowledge claims tend to alter as social conditions change.⁷² The ability to measure such transformation may require a recognition of the role co-dependence of terms, social feedback and reflexivity of knowledge may play in the construction of paradigms. These ideas will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. In Chapter Two, the power of a western hegemonic force⁷³ will be discussed in its capacity to inform those perceptions which have influenced the current state of western epistemology. The ideology behind this force will be looked at as a consequence of a particular cultural perspective which has emerged through a specific chain of events. Deconstructionists define history as a unique collection of cultural perspectives described through text.⁷⁴ From a critical perspective, history is considered to be the record of a specific evolution of

⁷⁰ Walsh, p. 53. Walsh maintains that theoretical support for her definition of voice can be found in writings by Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

⁷¹ Lather, pp. 50-69.

⁷² Walsh., p. 31. Lather pp. 111-112.

⁷³ Code, pp. 5-56.

⁷⁴ Spivak; Payne, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds. p. 183.

perceived needs and solutions to those perceptions within a particular environment.⁷⁵ The significance of this definition with respect to this thesis is that western epistemology can be viewed as a type of cultural construction through its historical links. As a cultural construction it may be subject to new forms of interpretation under new conditions of social experience. As social conditions change and the western social base becomes more diverse in its cultural makeup, it may prove necessary to develop epistemological frames which are flexible and more sensitive to variables such as shift and transformation as they occur in an evolution of social trends. Such frames may be able to reflect a more balanced range of social concerns.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Code, pp. 30, 56.

⁷⁶ Code, p. 323.

CHAPTER TWO

The Shifting Reality of Knowledge

The fact that Western societies tend to accord a privileged status to the rationalization of action in terms of abstract universalizable principles is to be explained as simply one possible way of creating a hierarchy of types of normative justification.¹

In this chapter I will continue to discuss the idea that empowered and disempowered knowers may be produced through western cultural restraints. The discussion will unfold through a focus on some feminist critiques of western epistemology, particularly those positions that look at empowerment or disempowerment of knowers from the perspective of gender role creation and cultural hegemony. These positions maintain that a unique set of relations have evolved through western culture, its dominant belief systems and its state of knowledge which has been used to justify the interpretation of gender roles as they currently stand. Within the context of this paper, feminist perspectives on gender role production provide one way of illustrating how critical theoretical approaches can be used to focus on the phenomenon of interpretation. This paper has emphasized the claim that cultural forces influence the structuring of conceptual domains. The feminist position implies that gender role perception is culturally influenced at the point where self-identity is conceptualized. This implication leads theorists to seek explanations on how situations of social power can come to condition consciousness.

Feminists maintain that many of the observable differences which lead to social oppression of women as authoritative knowers are reinforced through the structuring of epistemological language. That is, the language used to describe and convey mainstream knowledge to the public is considered to reflect and uphold the values and interests of male experience while devaluing and subordinating those of female experience. This claim will be explored from the view of feminist epistemological critiques as they pertain to issues surrounding conceptualization and the power to interpret experience. It will also be discussed with respect to the perspective of feminist psychoanalytic theory and the capacity of that theory to examine issues surrounding conceptualization and an individual's power to interpret his or her self-identity. Both points of exploration have philosophical implications for critiques of western knowledge. Their underlying rationale can be linked to claims expressed through cultural theory and postmodern criticisms of standard western

¹ Stephen K. White, *The Recent work of Jurgen Habermas*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.21.

paradigms. Such claims maintain that western culture represents a particular form of social response to environmental conditions. This response is believed to be the result of a specific evolution of historical, social and political interaction. Stemming from this idea, western social perceptions of gender role are associated with the outcomes of the western evolution of social power. From a historical point of view, current social perspectives of gender role may be considered to reflect a series of past social efforts to maintain a particular form of cultural stability in relation to an environment. From a political perspective, the interpretation and decisions surrounding which efforts would be chosen and acted upon in order to maintain cultural stability reflects the collective upholding of a dominant viewpoint. In terms of critical social analysis, no cultural description of criteria used to define cultural stability is ever considered to be an absolute, final or necessarily a just explanation of reality. Much of the interpretive influence that a power structure imposes over consciousness is thought to be linked to an instrumental use of concepts through such avenues as paradigms, ideologies and processes of social legitimation. It has been suggested how these structures could serve as norms and take on a type of standard interpretive authority with respect to social perception.

Paradigm of Nature and Culture - Need Perceptions

Culture as previously suggested can be described as a representation or expression of a particular need perception. Derrida has discussed how the text functions as a desire. This could be interpreted as saying that a specific set of value perceptions are transmitted through language. The feminist views discussed in this paper maintain that the themes and paradigms which dominate western thought gain their status of legitimacy through the power of a white male-based hegemony. This makes the direct claim that western thought represents a particular as opposed to a final and necessary interpretation of reality. In other words, it makes the point that western culture reflects a particular set of need perceptions.

From the critical social perspective, hegemonic forces are recognized as acting within a culture and are commonly identified as sources of social perceptual distortion. It is this distortion that is considered to promote conditions of privilege or oppression for certain knowers. It is through processes of social legitimation that specific need perceptions are standardized and then stored into a culture's epistemological base in conceptual form. It is through the processes of legitimation, therefore, that the binding force of hegemony over knowledge becomes evident. If culture does reflect a historical record of human struggle with the environment, the hegemony reflects the dominant outcomes of that struggle.

I would like to expand on this particular idea of perceptual distortion as it will figure prominently in the upcoming sections of this paper. In order to do so, I will first discuss a perspective put forward by Jurgen Habermas to explain how culture might infiltrate conceptualizations of reality. Habermas provides a theoretical perspective on social need perception and its relation to the structuring of emergent conceptual domains.² He has described social needs as need interpretations.³ The perception of needs is considered to reflect how a particular society has interpreted necessity. Over time, these interpretations may become standardized within a society and as a result they'll be symbolically coded through language. As previously noted, language is thought to restrict and shape interpretation through the conceptual closure it imposes over expressions of thought. Within the context of Habermas' theory, the rationale behind socially legitimated interpretations can be observed through their language structure. And because of this, language can be observed to function in a normative capacity. For example, the structure of a language can be scrutinized for ways in which it might sustain specific interpretive frames or influence the collective flow of information transfer and thereby regulate a standard approach to interpretation. According to Habermas, the potential for a language to regulate the communication of information is linked to the fact that language can both reflect and express a point of view. That is to say, language transmits a subtle message to communicants through its structure because it is not neutral. In this light, meaning is seen as a process that is always coloured in some way through the structuring and nuances of language. Thus language in its dynamic and social capacity is never just a passive relayer of coded information.

Language in relation to this definition of social needs is considered to be a process which is rooted in the bias of cultural perspective. For example, a culture may have its own view on utility and efficiency and as a result its language might reflect particular structural mechanisms which would be used in the framing of a problem or problem solving. These mechanisms would be most observable in collective efforts to conceptualize and resolve problems through a use of language.⁴ In this way language provides a type of lens through which perceptions of reality are focused and which directs one to adjust his or her ability to conceptualize according to a particular perspective. This is because categorical distinctions which allow us to organize concepts and establish a sense of

² Lather has referred to the writings of Habermas in *Getting Smart*, in relation to his views on the interaction of social, interests, beliefs, power and systems of knowledge. See pp. 6, 51, 105. It has been observed that Habermas' works support a defense of modernism; but that his arguments have been used to support some critical, and radical, theoretical perspectives. See, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, *Margins in the Classroom*, pp. 9-12.

³ White, p. 70.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

meaning through them are mediated by language.⁵ While language alone does not create meaning, it highlights certain perceptions of meaning. And as it highlights one definition for any given term, it diminishes the possibility of other definitions being connected with that same term. In this way language demands a specific form of recognition and identification of meaning from consciousness.

This perspective on language allows one to perceive how an individual's ability to interpret social needs could be a learned phenomenon. In this respect need perception might reflect an individual's ability to select interpretations of need from a limited range of definitions made available through a culture. The availability itself would reflect an emphases placed on particular aspects of experience and these would be contained within the boundaries of a cultural perspective on reality. The amount of conceptual closure endorsed through the cultural perspective would in this case reflect a culture's efficiency in transmitting its values to society. The particular shape of the closure would emerge in dialogue with an individual's tendency to assimilate and or resist the influence of socially legitimated forms of conceptual meaning. This degree of assimilation and or resistance could manifest itself in varying degrees of cultural identification.⁶ According to Habermas, "social needs" penetrate consciousness as a set of core values. As such, they create contexts of meaning through which an individual must structure his or her interpretations of experience. That is, an individual is thought to assimilate cultural values as he or she learns to conceptualize reality within a unique framework of social conditions. Through what Habermas terms, "deformations in the lifeworld," an individual's interpretative capacity is in a sense conceptually coerced into acceptance of a particular view on reality and this is reinforced through the social implementation of norms.⁷ In terms of cultural identification, individuals learn to discern their own self identity as a type of comparative measurement, one that is made in reference to social standards and norms.

Habermas claims, "The hearer interprets according to his or her basic understanding of conceptual systems and their distinctions."⁸ This statement illustrates the idea of how a reflexive relation can theoretically be recognized to exist between an individual's conscious state and his or her social environment. For example, it is within the boundaries of a culture that the individual can be observed to confront social prescriptions on how to conceptualize similarities and differences. Habermas defines a need in a given society as

⁵ Code, p. 58.

⁶ White, pp. 69-73.

⁷ Ibid., p. 104.

⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

"a function of what that culture defines as necessary to the flourishing of human life."⁹ The political and reflexive aspect of needs, as expressed through language, appear to emerge as cultural perspectives provide us with measurements, evaluations and specific social resolutions for the problems of experience. Hegemonic influence is also thought to factor at this level to the extent that culture is able to position certain need interpretations over others and crystallize these perceptions symbolically through language.

Cultural Readings and Epistemology

The detached observer, who can control his emotions with his reason, and nature with his knowledge, can escape the vagaries and uncertainties of the evanescent sensory world to dwell in a realm of objective truth.¹⁰

Critical approaches to epistemology postulate that knowledge claims are cultural readings of experience. The more radical approaches go so far as to define empirical knowledge as an outcome of a culturally structured reality.¹¹ In such cases, theorists maintain that reality is observed by individuals in relation to a normative interpretive structure which frames and or filters social perception. Language is defined as a symbolic encoding of cultural perspectives and as a process which penetrates an individual's conscious efforts to conceptually structure meaning. It is, as previously stated, a process recognized as giving a social direction to the process of interpretation.¹² Following from this idea, any information assimilated through a knowledge base is thought to be subject to cultural mediation. As a consequence of this mediation, theorists maintain that in specific reference to the synthesis of empirical knowledge, individuals are never purely in contact with a "raw thing" to be conceptually experienced or represented. In other words, even though contact with the environment may be immediate and direct, individuals will tend to interpret their environment according to a learned perspective on reality. Knowledge within these parameters is considered to be contained within an orbit of collective agreement. The stability of that orbit is supported through mechanisms of reification and systems of information relay.¹³ Knowledge, in other words, is thought to be conditional on its contexts of transmission.

⁹ Ibid. , p. 70.

¹⁰ Code, p. 50.

¹¹ Thomas, pp. 12-16. •

¹² Lather, p. 111.

¹³ Thomas, p. 13.

It is this belief in the conditional nature of knowledge which underlies some deconstruction strategies to provoke epistemological transformation and shift through the medium of the knower. A state of critical and conscious awareness is targeted within the knower. This is done through an emphasis on the reflexive relation recognized to exist between the cultural structuring of meaning and the effort on the part of individual consciousness to either assimilate or resist it. Knowledge in this light becomes a manifestation of cultural tension and a consequence of political and social struggle. It was suggested in a previous section of this paper that knowledge contained a socially dynamic component. This aspect of knowledge, in relation to the concept of cultural closure, becomes a process that is theoretically perceived to be kept in motion through a shifting tension of social power struggles. Deconstruction theorists seek to make what might be in some cases "incidental shifts," deliberate outcomes of interpretive efforts. By a focus on the cultural forces which might influence the interpretation of "textual meaning," any disjuncture sustained through the structure of standardized meanings is used in an effort to access "a less restrictive and more generative interpretive domain." That is to say the goal is to liberate perception from the normative influence of conceptual guidelines at the points where language is seen to be unstable.¹⁴ This reflects a deliberate effort to shift consciousness at the level where consciousness contacts text.

It has been discussed how dominant and subordinate contexts of interpretation are considered to impact on meaning outcomes. By seeking out authority contexts contained within text, deconstruction approaches focus observation on the interplay perceived to exist between those dominant and subordinate meanings sharing the same western epistemological terrain. As already shown, western methods of categorical distinction and conceptual differentiation are treated as political boundaries with the power to confine thought. The individual is advised to be aware of how his or her ability to know is located within these boundaries.¹⁵ This process is intended to liberate a dynamic capacity for interpretation recognized to exist within the structure of the western knowledge base. Emancipation of the knower is sought through a transformation of conscious effort and ability on the part of the interpreter to both shift and create meaning.

¹⁴ Sarup, pp. 34-37.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 50-55.

Conceptual Skew - Hegemony - Authority Contexts

The symbiotic relation between language and culture is related to the world views of their speakers and reflects their cultural emphases.¹⁶

An exploration into the rationale behind conceptual frames provides another important point of focus for the deconstruction theorist. This focus reflects an effort to measure the degree of cultural closure that conceptual frames may impose over social descriptions and interpretations of needs. It has been suggested that the use of binary oppositions contained within western contexts of thought represents a particular cultural view on categorization. It also represents to the critical theorist a prime example of how concepts reflect need perceptions. Derrida has stated that binary oppositions are rooted in an ideology emanating from a desire for authority center.¹⁷ He maintains that many of the dualities prevalent in western metaphysics are constructed on the foundation of a first principal.¹⁸ These "first principals" in an epistemological sense provide basic assumptions upon which knowledge claims are structured. Derrida has theorized that their foundations depend on binary oppositions which through analysis reveal privilege and dominance of certain beliefs contained in language. On a political level, this privilege can be deconstructed as it reflects a state of what people are accustomed to perceiving rather than a state of truth.¹⁹ "Binary oppositions represent a way of seeing typical of ideologies. Ideologies often draw rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not ..." ²⁰

Binary oppositions can be identified as those conceptual distinctions which allow us to perceive things as dualities. Dualities, conceptually, can be described as split representations which depend on a single meaning context in order to be fully understood. Dualities contained within binary oppositions comprise sets of what are interpreted as two mutually exclusive terms which are commonly understood to be complementary to each other. The meaning contained within the context of a duality is locked into a relation of comparison where each term both supports and opposes each other's definition. The understanding of either term, however, is gained through a simultaneous understanding of both terms. For example, light may be perceived to be the opposite of dark or as that

¹⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Quinton Hoare and G.N. Smith ed., trans., (New York, International Publishers, 1971), pp. 122-124.

¹⁷ Sarup, p. 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁰ Ibid.

which is not dark. The concept of light, however, is understood in part through the comparison with the concept of dark. Similarly, subjective knowledge may not be perceived as objective knowledge but one understands the concept of objectivity in comparison to that of subjectivity. Each term contained within a binary opposition reflects a decision to gather together a set of observations within a category and then place those sets into a specific relation with each other. With respect to interpretation, diametric poles as conceptual frames can be observed as relations which set standards through which perception is influenced.

The statement has been made that within any set of binary oppositions, one term is usually, if not always, understood as being superior to the other. For example, strength is superior to weakness, life to death, light to dark and male to female. Feminists maintain that in terms of epistemology, objective knowledge is considered to be more empirically valid than subjective knowledge. Objectivity they claim is associated with maleness and subjectivity with femaleness. They use these points of reference to support the claim that many of the perceived differences leading to states of social oppression can be traced to cultural sites of reification.²¹ For example, western knowledge is criticized on the grounds that it reflects a legacy of conceptual-instrumental manipulation rather than one of objective truth. Facts are considered to be objects of recognition and objective knowledge a representation of a recognized perspective on reality. A source of political manipulation is thought to be responsible for the modes of recognition and representation which have emerged through and continue to dominate western perceptions of experience.²²

From this idea it follows that binary oppositions are considered to have a social instrumental value which serves to promote a specific view on social need. Their political significance as concepts is theoretically traced to what is considered to be a hegemony induced perception of a nature-culture dichotomy.²³ This nature-culture schism is a perception which is considered to wield a strong influence over western conceptualizations of reality.²⁴ According to the feminist perspective, the origin of this dichotomy is traced to a perspective derived through a male hegemony.²⁵ It is identified as a perspective which reflects a need to conceptually separate nature from culture in order to maintain a perception of control over experience in relation to the environment.²⁶

²¹ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., pp. 24-35.

²² Code, pp. 55-58.

²³ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 110-113.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 47-51.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

Feminists claim that this perspective has resulted in marked trends towards the conceptualization of experience as well as in approaches taken towards nature. Lorraine Code, like many other critical theorists, maintains that western culture reflects a perspective which has conceptually positioned itself as being superior to nature. This positioning, Code reflects, represents a cultural need to be in control. Through her citing and analyses of the works of psychohistorical theorists, Susan Bordo and Naomi Schelman, Code emphasizes that nature, once reduced to a concept, may become something less threatening to consciousness -- especially when it can be perceived to stand outside of consciousness and when it can be perceived as a concept available to manipulation through conscious effort.²⁷ This does not mean to imply that culture is thought to be the creator of nature. It does imply, however, that culture is a mediator of both social responses to and perspectives on nature. In other words, a culture is thought to incline its members to interpret contacts with nature within a certain range of expectations. Through this range a member of a culture may or may not, in varying degrees, come to assimilate social value judgments as he or she learns how to observe and identify with nature according to paradigmatic standards.

Social Location of Knower and Gender Role

Code maintains that a woman's role in society is connected to her status as a knower. Within the context the traditional western culture, women have not stood out as either dominant or authoritative knowers in naming those concepts that define and describe reality. And this Code stresses is a consequence of their not being accorded a socially legitimated status as knowers. From a critical theoretical perspective, women are considered to be subordinated as social agents and knowers, partly because they have not directly interpreted their own reality.

As a feminist thinker and critical epistemologist, Code perceives the identity and agency of women to be an idea that is conceptually restricted through the force of western paradigms. Code traces the epistemological subordination of women to conceptual associations linking them with "subjective and therefore less reliable domains of knowledge."²⁸ She maintains that this association is perpetuated in situations where women are encouraged to passively, as opposed to actively, construct legitimized perspectives on reality. Women's experiences are defined as being penetrated by male-

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 50-55.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 28-29; 46-47.

based perceptions. That is to say, women learn to interpret experience in a language actively constructed and dominated by men. Women have been excluded from the process of naming, classifying and constructing reality through the force of cultural hegemony.²⁹ This view is further extended to the claim that woman's gender role, once established, actually feeds into the conceptual system and reinforces its own culturally subordinated position.³⁰ For example, a woman's gender role, even that as child bearer and nurturer, tends to be interpreted as one of social support. Although women may share in procreation of the human species as mothers, they do not share equally in the cultural creation and naming of reality.

It is a particular way of conceptualizing reality, Code observes, that facilitates the learning of gender roles. The maintaining of conceptual paradigms, such as binary oppositions are thought to enhance social perceptions of the male-female dichotomy and its associated gender characteristics. For example, an association of social perceptions with binary oppositions may link subjectivity with females and objectivity with males. It may encourage the perception that femaleness is subordinate to maleness. Within the realm of social experience, even more intricate associations allow perceptions and instances of female subordination to be accepted as complements to male dominance.³¹ "Knowledge produced in seemingly objective ways carries an authority that mirrors, reinforces and probably derives from masculine authority."³² Code has observed that female identity is in part a product of male-centered interpretations of experience. Through a critical evaluation of western paradigms, specifically those used to support the validity of objective and empirical knowledge, Code seeks to deconstruct the conceptual subordination of women. Her strategies can be described as efforts to emancipate the consciousness of women by disclosing the restrictions they face through the social and historical basis of their own knowing.

In an effort to identify points of conceptual restriction that may factor within a cultural knowledge base, Code, as a theorist traces the origins of knowledge claims through their roots in cultural experience. From this, an assessment of 'the location' of a knowledge claim is discerned. An example of this could be when the conceptual history of a knowledge system is traced through its series of claims to its cultural past. It has already been suggested that knowledge claims are considered to represent a series of cultural political tensions. For a critical epistemologist, these tensions can provide analysis with

²⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 54-55; Chodorow: Dinnerstein.

³¹ Code, p. 54.

³² Ibid., p. 35.

measurements of past social efforts to resolve problems encountered through experience and in relation to an environment. Knowledge in this way can be considered to represent a culture's system of coding interpretations of perceived problems and their perceived solutions into a communicable form.³³ If this idea is referred back to the concept of the hegemony, western knowledge could be identified as a system which has stored a symbolic record of particular male perspectives derived through contact with a specific environment. This being the case, western knowledge would appear to reflect a specific history and set of need perceptions. One possible consequence of this being that over time perspectives based only on specific aspects of human experience will come to define reality for general and total experience. When the perspectives of a few come to dominate over the experiences of many, as in the case of the hegemony, opportunities for knower oppression and subordination arise.

The above criticism appears to make the claim that conditional knowledge should not come to represent absolute knowledge. Theoretically, specific encounters with the environment, once interpreted, can be described as only being particular perspectives on reality. As such they would represent a specific outcome of experience and reflect a particular type of reflexive relation between consciousness and a social environment. In other words, knowledge claims can be assessed as perspectives based on the observation that they reflect particular interpretations formed in conjunction with a particular set of experiences. It is in this light that knowledge claims can be recognized as being narratives and textual representations of reality. Knowledge claims as narratives and textual representations become symbolic records of past social contacts with an environment. From this perspective, empirical observations of experience which come to be encoded as knowledge are viewed more as a "way of reading" experience. This idea can be further extended to suggest that social perspectives which inform western paradigms may not necessarily represent all possible encounters between all possible groups and all possible aspects of the environment. Therefore, they will not necessarily represent all possible readings of experience. The current state of western epistemology could in a theoretical and broad reaching way be evaluated as an accident of circumstance.

³³ Thomas, pp. 12-16.

The Feminist Psychoanalytical Perspective

One idea continually referred to throughout this paper is that western culture theoretically limits a potential range of knowledge outcomes. The feminist psychoanalytic position presents a unique view of this idea from the perspective of gender role construction. It maintains that western culture and its epistemological system reflects a particular history of social anxiety.³⁴ In addition to this, it claims that the paradigms and terminology emanating from knowledge structures reflect hegemonic andro-centered efforts to control feelings of anxiety and instability experienced in mother child contacts.³⁵ It was suggested in earlier sections of this paper that the perception of the subject-object division could be interpreted as one which reflects a particular desire to separate the knower from the thing known. This desire was linked to the power of a male hegemony, one which may have culturally objectified experience in an effort to perceive it as being subject to conceptual manipulation:

The subject-object relation that the autonomy-of-reason credo underwrites is at once its most salient and its most politically significant epistemological consequence. The relation pivots on two assumptions: that there is a sharp split between subject and object and that it is a primary purpose of cognitive activity to produce the ability to control, manipulate, and predict the behavior of its objects.³⁶

The subject-object dichotomy in this case could be observed as being an expression of society's efforts to rid experience of its emotional uncertainty.³⁷ Feminist psychoanalysts maintain that this uncertainty is something which evolves through an individual's memories of and efforts to conceptually placate feelings of dependency and vulnerability associated with infancy.³⁸ From an epistemological standpoint, Code maintains that these memories and efforts appear to be symbolically reflected in the conceptual division of subjectivity from objectivity. She argues that the subjective realm tends to be devalued within the context of western knowledge as it is associated with excessive emotionalism and elements of instability. The devaluing of the subjective realm is thought to be indicative of a male effort to suppress feelings of anxiety associated with "mother."³⁹

³⁴ See Chodorow; Dinnerstein.

³⁵ Code, p. 52.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Code, pp. 54-55. Chodorow, Dinnerstein, p.4.

³⁹ Chodorow, pp. 60-61. Dinnerstein, p. 4.

Feminist psychoanalysts maintain that a "fear based" oppression of women emerges as society attempts to resolve emotional anxiety and instability through conceptual themes which express isolation and domination. The conceptual construction of woman's role is also observed to result from a type of cultural ambivalence expressed towards women. This ambivalence is identified with cultural-conceptual sources thought to stem from the experience of both males and females as they contact mother during their infancy.⁴⁰ Any traces of fear found to be evident in the patterning of western epistemological perspectives are related to the emotional experience of "infantile fear and anxiety associated with infancy and early childhood contact with mother."⁴¹ The ambivalence is traced to the belief that infants conceptually store ambiguous descriptions of mother into memory as they initially interpret mother from the vantage point of their own undeveloped social perspective. Knowledge is considered to be a cultural encoding of social efforts to resolve these feelings of fear, anxiety, dependency and helplessness. Feminist psychoanalytic theorists claim that fear is structured into the western conceptual system through a hegemonic force. The hegemonic force in this case is identified as being andro-centered and one which upholds the subordination of women through perceptions of validity, efficiency and legitimacy.⁴² The conceptualization of a woman's gender role is therefore considered to be a process which emanates from the description of what a woman's role should be. And as such can be considered in part to be a conceptual construction situated within a realm of ideas.⁴³ The social definition and legitimacy associated with a woman's gender role is potentially subject to the transformation and shift which may occur through cultural evolution.

It was considered in Chapter One that the shift and transformation of trends in knowledge may emerge in correlation with shifts and transformations in cultural perspectives on reality. This consideration is based on the observation that knowledge is reflexive with social conditions.⁴⁴ From a deconstruction perspective, strategies used to transform the conscious awareness of the knower target a locus of intercept believed to exist between consciousness and social structure. It was suggested earlier that the paradigms of binary dualisms and the autonomy of the knower serve an instrumental purpose by conceptually distancing the knower from his or her feelings of anxiety and dependency associated with the environment. The nature-culture dichotomy was presented

⁴⁰ Chodorow.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴² Ibid., p. 54.

⁴³ Kathleen Weiler, *Women Teaching for Change*, (New York: Bergin and Harvey Publishers, 1988), pp. 28, 58-62.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 28, 38, 62. Code pp. 87-88.

to the reader as a specific example of this. From the perspective of critical social theory, this dichotomy not only helps to legitimate the separation of the observer from the observed⁴⁵ but it also conceptually distances the knower from a recognition of contexts influencing his or her own knowing. As a consequence, observation becomes more vulnerable to the social forces that would deliberately and instrumentally structure it.

In relation to the ideas stated above, feminist theorists critique the epistemological value placed on autonomy as they perceive it to be a structural imposition, one which only serves to direct consciousness away from its own anticipation of uncontrollable forces. They claim that the concept of autonomy induces a passive state of awareness on the part of the knower and thereby compromises his or her power to create meaning.⁴⁶ They postulate that western culture promotes the value of the autonomous knower by fostering states of false consciousness within society. A hegemonic interest is thought to reinforce conceptual standards which "produce meaning at the same time as subjects are fabricated and positioned in social relations."⁴⁷ According to these claims, the perception of separateness between the observer and contexts of observation encourages the knower to perceive him or herself as being independent and powerful as a creator of knowledge. From a more critical stand, however, the perception of autonomy in knowing only serves to obscure the recognition of the real power structures at work behind the creation of knowledge claims.⁴⁸ It has been argued that hegemonic interests are seen to create a type of perceptual blindness through their influence on ways in which experience is interpreted. False consciousness is considered to be one of the outcomes of this influence. In this regard it is critically judged as a phenomenon observed to factor in the skewing of social consciousness.⁴⁹

It is possible through an analysis of feminist reproduction and psychoanalytic theory to extract the view that gender role construction is instrumental in reinforcing those social contexts which lead to distortions in perception of self. These contexts would include processes which reify the subordinated status of women through their legitimizing of perspectives which support the establishing of inequality through difference. In the particular situations where women can be observed to be unequal through their difference, it is argued that distorted perceptions of self can be associated with a deliberate structuring of social space. For example, the gender role of women has been associated in theories on

⁴⁵ Code, p. 135.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 139-141.

⁴⁷ Sarup, p. 31. This reference is taken from Sarup's discussion of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory.

⁴⁸ Code

⁴⁹ Weiler, pp. 13-16.

gender reproduction with those social divisions which assign the job of childrearing almost exclusively to the female domain. The tendency for women to dominate the early childhood experience presents to the theorist a concrete variable that can be measured temporally in respect to a child's emotional and cognitive development. In this light, childhood becomes observable as a space in time where most experiences a child comes into contact with can be seen to be mediated more by a mother than a father. This situation is considered to create a state of social unbalance. The unequal distribution of gender representation in parenting situations is considered to have a significant impact on an individual's emerging sense of selfhood.

From a feminist critical social perspective, the tendency for women to spend more time with infants than men becomes a political issue. This is because it is considered to reflect the influence of a particular ideology as well as support a particular form of conceptual structuring with regard to the transference of social codes and practices.⁵⁰ It was previously suggested that political influences acting within a society may have the potential to confine knowledge within a range of interpretive outcomes. In these situations, the interpretive range of an individual is believed to be a reflection of conceptual restriction enforced through the norms and standards experienced within a culture. In this regard, knowledge is considered localized to the extent that it is dependent upon a particular state of social conditions for its structure. The conditions are set by a unique and ongoing dialogue which develops between consciousness and social structure. From a feminist perspective, the localization of a knower reflects the power of the ideology, specifically its power to impact on the interpretation of gender roles. For the social analyst who subscribes to this perspective, the concept of localization is a marker, one which will focus attention on the types of cultural influences an individual may confront through his or her efforts to either obtain knowledge or to be perceived as knowledgeable in a socially legitimated sense. However, an emphasis is placed on the idea that women are culturally distanced from their capacity to take an active part in the conceptualization of their own identity.⁵¹ In particular, the power of the woman to know is viewed as something which is compromised as women tend to be barred from those cultural sites actively involved in the description and construction of reality.

Some of this distancing, as Code has observed, emerges as women in their traditional cultural role as mother function as receptors of ideas within a society. A woman's language, Code argues, is mediated by a male perspective and given its subordinate status

⁵⁰ Chodorow, pp. 10; 34-39.

⁵¹ Code, p. 59.

through the same source. Women as a consequence approach their knowledge of self through indirect routes. They neither name nor create the paradigms which structure their own reality. Western culture reflects a legacy where women may mediate the transmission of but rarely dominate the construction of the social meaning behind language.⁵²

Concept Gender Role - Linear Aspect of Experience

An ideology based and systematic distancing from language has been identified as one of the sources behind the reproduction of a woman's gender role.⁵³ This claim is formed through the reasoning an individual learns to construct of his or her self-identity while progressing through a series of culturally mediated experiences.⁵⁴ Phases of childhood as well as phases of adulthood tend to be categorically associated with particular types of social experiences within the context of a culture. The nature and range of these experiences can be observed as being culturally situated within dominant contexts of collective understanding. The mother-infant relation can be identified as a point where an individual faces his or her first exposures to a cultural environment. Within the parameters of social experience, a mother will communicate her own sense of her role to the child while the child will assimilate this communication in accordance with his or her own relatively undeveloped state of social identity. At this point of contact, the child is seen as being socially unsophisticated and vulnerable to the learning contexts established through contact with the mother. The child, during stages of infancy, is able to offer only a limited amount of resistance to these learning contexts. As a result, varying degrees of anxiety and or emotional instability may be experienced during this stage of life. With respect to cognitive learning, an individual may retain remnants of these earlier experienced anxieties associated with mother within his or her consciousness. Once structured into consciousness, these elements of anxiety could eventually project on an individual's subsequent efforts to conceptualize reality.

The main point behind this line of discussion is to emphasize that an individual may interpret his or her identity in a relational comparison with social contexts. The comparison in this case could be defined as one in which the individual describes reality according to his or her own level of conceptual awareness.⁵⁵ Within the context of a mother-child relationship, a child socially contacts mother before he or she has fully developed his or her

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Weiler, p. 58; Code, p.58-61; 178.

⁵⁴ Chodorow, pp. 41-47.

⁵⁵ Edmund Sullivan, *Critical Psychology and Pedagogy: Interpretation of the Personal World*, (Toronto, OISE Press, 1990), pp. 18, 55-60.

own social identity. Through the process of cross-referencing and relational comparison involved during interpretation, the concept of mother which a child will assimilate into consciousness will tend to be basic if not ambiguous in terms of its construction. That is, a child's early impressions of mother and mother related experiences will be symbolically stored as conceptually primitive interpretations. Some feminist theorists argue that much of the conceptual ambiguity associated with the female domain stems from the fact that a child socially experiences mother in an inequitable distribution with father at those stages where the child is cognitively processing cultural information at a conceptually basic if not crude level of assessment.⁵⁶ Through this perspective, it is possible to consider that the concept of mother, as encoded through infantile memories, will tend to be ambiguous and unresolved.

Feminists such as Code maintain that many of the observable differences that lead to social oppression of women are relational and conceptually based. Code has argued that much of an individual's social capacity to create meaning is relative to the degree of closure a culture imposes over legitimized forms of conceptual expression. She claims that a woman, as a knower, is someone who is culturally bounded with respect to her own power to know due to these restrictions. This idea pertains particularly to the critical analysis of a woman's individual capacity to know and to function within society as an authoritative knower. Code maintains that this power is socially "located" ⁵⁷ as it is grounded in unique situations of social struggles and cultural tensions. Arguing from a critical feminist perspective, Code claims that a self understanding of one's own cultural location or grounding as a knower is crucial to the interests of emancipating and transforming an oppressed consciousness.⁵⁸ Knowledge outcomes according to Code are interpretations of experience. For her, consciousness becomes oppressed as the knower becomes distanced from an awareness of those cultural penetrations which may influence his or her interpretation of reality. It was earlier suggested that the active voice of the knower can be viewed as something suppressed through a hegemonic imposition of values.⁵⁹ The disclosure of a knowledge frame's hegemonic base is one method used to identify the restrictions that "locatedness" may impose on interpretation.

In efforts to disclose a knowledge claim's base in hegemony so that the authority of its paradigms might be challenged, critical feminists have defined the process as "rendering

⁵⁶ Chodorow, pp. 50, 61. Dinnerstein, pp. 100, 106. Weiler, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Code, p. 135.

⁵⁸ This argument is also expressed in the works of, Weiler, Walsh and Lather.

⁵⁹ Walsh, pp. 41-48.

the epistemological base problematic."⁶⁰ This process is a strategy intended to help empower the disenfranchised knower. It is an effort to draw cultural awareness towards the dynamic aspect of conceptual structuring involved in interpretation. Theoretically, this aspect becomes visible through a deliberate effort to critically evaluate the normative structure of meaning contexts. These efforts are intended to lessen the tension that standards enforce over interpretation and thereby allow submerged potential meanings to come to the surface of consciousness. In other words, the individual is asked to really look at the meaning which a knowledge claim may or may not convey. Strategies used to liberate and transform oppressed consciousness are based on observations that "word meaning has contextual dimensions, part of the meaning is static and part is transformational."⁶¹ These strategies also make use of the reciprocity observed to exist between consciousness and the cultural structures which bound knowledge outcomes.⁶² Language as a social tool of meaning transmission is considered to be multiplicitous. The possible range of meaning outcomes derived through language are seen as being shaped through conscious efforts to manipulate interpretation."⁶³ Theorists hope to promote the social agency of the knower by challenging normative assumptions observed to ground knowing and by encouraging the individual to take an active role in describing reality.

Patti Lather is a feminist theorist who uses applications of deconstructionism in efforts to emancipate oppressed social consciousness. She claims that "knowing is contained in our action" and "knowledge contains a set of power relations."⁶⁴ Lather encourages the interpreter to harness his or her capacity to transform meaning. In terms of her epistemological strategies, Lather emphasizes that the interpreter must bring an active and metacognitive awareness to his or her assimilation of socially legitimated knowledge. The individual is strongly advised to directly access those social pathways involved in the structuring of interpretation and selection of those conceptual organizations that will be later structured into legitimized knowledge claims. The synthesis of knowledge in this case is an extremely political process. In a political sense, awareness of one's own location as a knower becomes significant. This is because political contexts are considered to prescribe conceptual limits⁶⁵ as well as infuse western knowledge with its unique mode of cultural penetrations. Deconstruction theory identifies cultural penetrations as a source of

⁶⁰ See Code, *What Can She Know?*, Lather, *Getting Smart*, Walsh, *Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice*.

⁶¹ Walsh, p. 66

⁶² Walsh, pp. 65-68.

⁶³ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist ed., Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁶⁴ Lather, pp. XV: VII.

⁶⁵ Code.

epistemological tension. This is based on the observation that language shapes meaning through an interweaving of terms involved in structures of interpretation. Systems of feedback can be seen to emerge at the point where terms cross-reference with other terms and correlate into meaning contexts as well as at those points where meaning is established and communicated through social agents.⁶⁶ For example, the social structures are thought to reflect past understandings of reality as well as condition the future possibilities for new interpretations.⁶⁷ These influences are believed to effect social patterns of information translation and transference.

The emotional domain of experience must also be taken into account in relation to feminist perspectives on epistemology. The discussion of conceptual ambiguity and anxiety associated with efforts to describe and conceptualize 'mother' -- if in fact this does exist -- could in theory transfer over to a social frustration with any uncertainty associated with knowing. It may be that efforts to resolve frustration have been conceptually incorporated into western paradigms of knowledge. Feminist psychoanalytic perspectives postulate that western culture may reflect a collection of strategies designed to avoid conceptual ambiguity and that these strategies have been incorporated into its knowledge base. These strategies, according to this perspective, would reflect efforts to escape cognitive uncertainty or the anxiety associated with not knowing. In an adjunction to this, not knowing would represent a collection of memories of unresolved experiences derived through efforts of trying to know and separate from mother.⁶⁸

Feminist psychoanalytic theory argues that infant memories reflecting unresolved conceptual ambiguity are located in consciousness with the idea of mother. It further elaborates this idea by suggesting that these cognitive memories are associated with emotional memories of anxiety and instability. Following from this observation, western cultural efforts to repress women are identified as ways of suppressing cognitive uncertainty, conceptual ambiguity and other disconcerting emotions.⁶⁹ The quest for cultural stability, they maintain, reflects past desires to transcend the unstable conditions sustained during infancy. On a level which pertains to the development of a self-identity, feminist psychoanalytic theory claims that primitive contexts of meaning associated with women can be linked to an infant's early efforts to establish a sense of selfhood in relation to mother. That is, an individual may experience an undifferentiated state of social consciousness during infancy and this level of awareness may project onto any subsequent

⁶⁶ Lather, p. 118.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 118-119.

⁶⁸ Code, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁹ Dinnerstein, pp. 164-175, 209.

attempts to define all other women in relation to memories of mother. Code has stated that "in knowing other people, a knower's subjectivity is implicated from its earliest developmental stages . . . ⁷⁰ In a later section of this paper, this idea of subjectivity projecting upon perceptions of objectivity will be explored in relation to western epistemology and its association of women with subjective and subordinated cultural domains.

As earlier pointed out, to the critical feminist the female gender role is considered to be a product of cultural perspective. And as such it is analyzed in relation to the social dynamics observed to surround and penetrate its description. The social role of women is critiqued in its capacity to function as both a conceptual and social norm. Specifically, woman's role as child bearer and nurturer is considered to be a source of social oppression for women because of the reflexivity between consciousness and culture.⁷¹ A woman who blindly acts in conformity with her role, as interpreted in the traditional sense, is considered to reinforce and legitimize the cultural frame and epistemological codes that have defined and described her cultural status.⁷² This observation expresses the belief that female consciousness and self-identity are structured by social agents who are not female. When a woman takes on a passive role, in respect to the construction of her own reality, she is considered to reflect standard and hegemonic-induced perceptions back onto social contexts through mother-child relations. In this way, she is thought to passively contribute to the reproduction of her own source of oppression.

Theorists such as Weiler and Code maintain that a hegemonic source behind female oppression not only subordinates the "female voice" but also influences the social conceptualization of female identity. Women from this perspective are not considered to be the direct constructors of their own social identity. Neither are they considered to be the creators of the authority contexts which define their position within society. The cultural force which describes both male and female identity is considered to be more potent in its ability to dominate and oppress female experience than it is for that of men.⁷³ Feminists observe that men, while experiencing the same cultural influence as women, are encouraged to take a more active and authoritative role than women when it comes down to naming and constructing reality. One of the consequences of this is that women become more culturally and conceptually distanced from their social power to describe and define experience than men. In relation to knowledge, women are also considered to be socially

⁷⁰ Code, p. 36.

⁷¹ Chodorow, pp. 34-39.

⁷² Code, pp. 47, 81, 93, 178. Dinnerstein, pp. 155-156.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 55-59; 176-180.

disempowered as knowers and culturally dislocated from the language of knowledge. This is due to the specific nature of cultural conditions imposed over female experiences of reality.

According to Weiler, cultural oppression of women is socially legitimized as a value. That is, a woman in her role as child bearer and nurturer has been associated with virtue over a considerable span of western tradition.⁷⁴ This association with virtue is thought to figure prominently in the "common sense realm" of social knowledge. In other words, woman as child bearer and nurturer becomes a definition used to support a particular description of reality. The value of mothering is also inclined to take on a moral tone and in these situations it tends to incline individuals to form a certain type of perceptual response to the interpretation of gender role. Feminist theorists maintain that while the social understanding of the biology involved in the female reproductive role might be valid, the conceptualization of a female's role as a mother has been both culturally and conceptually overextended.⁷⁵ They claim that this extension of the role has led to a conceptual skewing of social meaning and the skew is considered to be directed towards the interests of a male hegemony. The skewing is considered to reflect perceptions of reality which may have been valid in relation to past social conditions but now are only maintained through a distortion of social consciousness:

"We should see the original sexual division of labour as a once necessary social form used by and modified by other social forms as these have developed and changed. The sexual division of labour in which women mother has new meanings and functions, and is no longer explicable as an outcome of biology or of the requirement of survival."⁷⁶

In other words, technological advances may have altered the conditions through which women experience the physical aspects of motherhood but they have not necessarily resulted in a comparable degree of transformation in social consciousness.

The Disempowered Knower

Individuals come into being through power relations. The relations inform and structure cultural practices which produce domains of reality.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Weiler, p. 40.

⁷⁵ Chodorow, pp. 13-39.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁷ Taken from Sarup's discussion of Foucault. Sarup, pp. 81-82.

For deconstruction theorists, the knower who is socially distanced from the active site of his/her own knowledge construction is also a disempowered knower. This idea of disempowerment refers to an individual who is socially barred from forming interpretations that are considered to be socially legitimate expressions of meaning. In regard to traditional western epistemology, women have tended to be associated with subjectivity, emotion and the more ambiguous, uncontrollable aspects of experience.⁷⁸ In contrast to this, men tend to be associated with rationality, control and more clearly defined and objective methods of resolving problems confronted through experience. Feminist psychoanalyst theorists have postulated that these types of male-female associations may have been derived through a male perspective on early childhood experience with mother. They claim that these interpretations of reality and knowledge reflect a male effort to escape the social feelings of anxiety and dependency that emerge through infant contacts with mother.

It has already been mentioned that social efforts to resolve the anxiety and dependency associated with childhood could be identified in relation to social provisions made for culturally designated stages of identity development.⁷⁹ These provisions would be reflected in social norms surrounding such issues as the organization of parenting, educational institutions, judicial systems and division of labour. As a member of society, an individual's identity would emerge in relation to these forms of social parameters. According to the theories of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, western forms of these parameters are continually reproduced through an infant's effort to separate his or her identity from mother within the constraints of western social norms and standards. In other words, they maintain that a type of reciprocal tension is created between western consciousness and the way in which western culture constructs meaning. Western reality is considered to reflect a knowledge state which sustains themes of isolation and control. The conceptual isolation and divisions prevalent in western meaning contexts are considered to reflect the infant desire to assert an identity independent from that of the mother.

From a deconstruction perspective, western thought is criticized for the way it separates meaning into isolated components and mutually exclusive contexts of differences. It is believed that an emphasis on this form of separation obscures the way all terms and definitions can be seen to be interconnected within a greater scheme of cultural meaning. For the deconstruction theorist, any meaning or definition is continually deferred-- that means it does not exist in isolation. It is never final or complete because it is part of a

⁷⁸ Code, pp. 67-70.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 36-38.

larger context of meanings and definitions. Any assertion of the integrity of an isolated meaning is thought to be the consequence of a contrived perception. By linking deconstruction claims to the feminist psychoanalytic perspective, it is possible to consider that an infantile need to construct and establish an identity separate from that of mother could be reflected in western efforts to construct a conceptually divisible reality. It is also possible to observe that the so called co-dependency of terms and interdependence of conceptual meanings could reflect an infantile need to establish an identity in relation to mother.

It has been emphasized throughout this paper that from a critical epistemological perspective, a specific form of social tension is thought to influence the structuring of western knowledge. It has been suggested within the constraints of feminist postmodern theory that this tension reflects a hegemony-based desire to maintain perceptions of stability within an unstable environment. It was suggested in Chapter One that the conceptual construction of binary oppositions might reflect a social "need for an authority center."⁸⁰ It was also suggested that structured meanings might gain their impetus through an implied comparison against negated meanings. That is, the structure of dominant meanings are perceived to gain their substance by being measured against what they are perceived not to be and that conceptual assertion gains a certain force through a process of negation. Within the context of feminist psychoanalytic theory, this tendency to assert through negation is traced to an andro-centered effort to dominate mother.⁸¹ The conceptualization of self-identity is considered to be something which emerges in referential comparison to the perceived identity of mother. As consciousness comes to differentiate itself from the entity of mother, it is believed to do so through negative comparison, "...the human self develops in a social field consisting of mutually penetrating subjectivity's: there can be no full blown "I" without a "you" which is perceived as recognizing "I" and as aware of being recognized by it as another "I."⁸² The reason why autonomy is considered to play so important a role in the construction of western knowledge claims is that it appears to represent a social desire to remain independent from vague and undifferentiated environmental contexts.⁸³

According to deconstruction theorists, the closure of a conceptual system sets the contexts which reveal observable distinctions between things. These contexts are thought

⁸⁰ Sarup, p. 41.

⁸¹ See Chodorow; Dinnerstein.

⁸² Dinnerstein, pp. 110-111.

⁸³ Code.

to be instrumental in the structuring of western social perceptions.⁸⁴ From a feminist perspective, it is through a closure placed over social perception that a woman becomes both a subject and object of cultural mediation. It is a phenomenon which is observed to occur as a woman interprets her role in a language defined by men.⁸⁵ The feminist psychoanalytic perspective on gender reproduction maintains that as long as women tend to dominate early childhood experiences, individuals may continue to harbor memories of anxiety in association with the female domain of experience. Both women and men have their thoughts and feelings mediated by culture.⁸⁶ But due to the postulated existence of a male hegemony, a woman is in more danger of being conceptually objectified and subordinated through social conditions than a man. And in regard to her status as a knower, a woman is barred from easy access to those cultural sites where status as an authoritative knower is conferred and interpretations of experience are legitimated."⁸⁷

Discussion

The construction of knowledge is an intersubjective process, dependent for its achievement on communal standards of legitimation and implicated in the power and institutional structures of communities and social orders.⁸⁸

Deconstruction theorists critique western epistemology on the grounds that it fosters an inequality of knowers within a social context.⁸⁹ Much of this inequality is traced to social political roots because knowledge claims are treated as political phenomena with the power to restrict interpretation. Deconstruction theorists maintain that cultural norms have the capacity to direct and distort observational outcomes by standardizing modes of conceptual expression. This form of distortion is recognized as being an oppressive force in the process of knowledge construction. This is because a culture appears to offer individuals a specific range of interpretive possibilities that are often seen to negate or obscure social recognition of other possible choices. Some of the specific examples of cultural restraints on western knowledge cited in this paper included the paradigm of binary oppositions and the paradigm of the autonomous knower. Both paradigms were identified as emanating from hegemonic sources and as having the capacity to influence processes of knowledge construction.⁹⁰ Themes of isolation and domination were also considered

⁸⁴ Thomas, p. 45.

⁸⁵ Code, p. 59.

⁸⁶ Thomas, p. 64.

⁸⁷ Code.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 132

⁸⁹ Lather, Code.

⁹⁰ Code, pp. 110-172.

to be prevalent within the context of western thought. When an individual conceptually categorizes perceptions of these "isolated experiences" in order to interpret them, he or she is thought to reinforce a hidden cultural desire to manipulate and control the environment through a conceptual re-enactment. Critical epistemologists claim that themes of isolation reflect a limited focus on experiential outcomes and actually inhibit a potential range of knowledge outcomes.⁹¹

Within the context of feminist views on the "restrictive capacity" of western knowledge, Code has observed that the concept of objectivity takes precedence over subjectivity in terms of its legitimated social value. She claims that females tend to be associated with the subjective aspect of epistemology while males are associated with the objective aspect.⁹² This association, Code maintains, conceptually enforces situations of oppression for women in terms of their power to know. As well, it effects their potential to be accepted as legitimate and authoritative knowers within society.

Feminist theorists seek to unmask what they identify as a 'western masking of cultural stabilizing mechanisms' in an effort to emancipate 'the oppressed knower.' Feminists who apply deconstructionism to pedagogical practices employ strategies designed to liberate what is believed to be a submerged indeterminacy of meaning buried within a textual structure of cultural norms and standards.⁹³ These designs are intended to bring to the surface ways in which standard forms of interpretation are culturally enclosed and reflect social convention. Patti Lather emphasizes a use of praxis in her strategies to transform the social consciousness of the oppressed. By doing so, she seeks to expand the range of interpretive possibilities that may be accessed through knowledge. Her strategies are geared to draw attention to the political factors restricting the synthesis of knowledge. Individuals are encouraged to express an active social agency with respect to assimilating and constructing views on reality.⁹⁴ In cases where a view on reality deviates from the norm, an individual is asked to evaluate what social conditions make it appear to be a deviation. It may be that the perception of deviation emerges only because it is in conflict with an ideology transmitted through hegemonic forces.

Lather bases her applications of praxis on the political theory of Antonio Gramsci.⁹⁵ Within this theoretical context, praxis is described as a dynamic process through which a conceptual awareness of the world enters the practical realm of social action and becomes

⁹¹ Thomas, p. 45.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 28-29.

⁹³ Lather, pp. 141-146.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 125-140.

⁹⁵ Gramsci, eds. transl. Hoare and Smith.

standardized through norms.⁹⁶ Through the study of praxis, ideology can be analyzed as a historical force which factors in the construction of interpretive norms. The theory of praxis allows the theorist to observe a reciprocal relation between ideology and social structure. Epistemological contexts are thought to emerge at the point where historical conditions intercept current efforts to interpret reality.⁹⁷ "The fusion of legitimated concepts and consciousness organize the cultural tension which 'as a perspective' feeds back into conceptual contexts it engages in and conditions them."⁹⁸

The main goal of emancipatory pedagogical strategies is to liberate the buried social voice by eliciting a transformation of consciousness in the oppressed. In terms of methodology, there is a tendency to promote a value for qualitative and dynamic forms of measurement. The exclusive use of traditional quantitative methods of measurement is considered to be an insufficient gauge of social experience. Linear analysis, a focus on isolation of cause-effect relations, and separation of the observer from contexts of observation are all considered to reflect the rationale of a dominant cultural system. "Rationality works in a closed system, social existence is not a closed system."⁹⁹ What these theorists advocate is an inclusive as opposed to exclusive approach to measurement and assessment. Social feedback, reflexive relations between consciousness and contexts of knowledge, co-dependence of definitions, correlation of concepts into meaning contexts and iteration of interpretive norms over time are considered to be critical variables in any effort to measure the phenomenon of interpretation.¹⁰⁰

It has been observed through feminist critiques of gender roles that conventions and standards in interpretation often continue to gain force through current political structures even though they appear to have emerged through social experiences which are no longer existent. One could imply from this that many of the paradigms which continue to dominate western thought no longer provide valid conceptual tools for the interpretation of problems faced in current experience. In the case of gender role division, Dinnerstein and Chodorow provide a possible illustration of how conceptual interpretations of experience may effect social realities.¹⁰¹ This illustration involves the anthropological argument for gender role interpretation and can be summarized as follows: The current interpretation of gender roles is the result of an evolution of early social strategies and solutions designed to

⁹⁶ Ibid. , p. 369.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 376-377.

⁹⁸ Holquist p. 279.

⁹⁹ John A. Eisenberg, *The Limits of Reason: Indeterminacy in Law, Education, and Morality*, (Toronto, OISE Press, 1992), p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ Code, pp. 160-165; Lather, pp. 104-105; Sullivan, pp. 1-31.

¹⁰¹ Dinnerstein. Chodorow.

address the problem of efficient survival within a particular environment. Early challenges to human survival are believed to have confronted society in the absence of the current technology which we now possess. In the absence of this technology, women may have been more physically encumbered by aspects of childbirth and childrearing. As a result of this, it may have been more efficient for women to remain at home and cultivate the homestead while men went out to hunt.¹⁰² It is possible to consider that this situation was the case in the past. Feminists suggest, however, that although the form of reasoning supporting this division of labour has become less valid over time due to technological progress, the social structure of the division has remained intact. In other words, social conditions have changed and ways of surviving in the environment have changed for both men and women -- yet the reification of gender role has not kept pace with these changes. The question might be asked: Why does the social structuring of gender role persist as a type of norm even when the experiences grounding its initial rationale have changed? One possible answer to this question is that cultural ideological restraints continue to distort the perceptions of individuals. Dinnerstein and Chodorow claim that the fact the traditional interpretation of female gender roles persists -- even in the absence of those physical constraints that have grounded its construction -- points to evidence of a cultural distortion in social perspective. They maintain that the value of the standard interpretation can be attributed to its legitimated social status, rather than to ongoing physical necessity.

Deconstruction theorists claim that one way of transcending cultural restrictions on knowledge is to liberate the interpretive power of the knower.¹⁰³ By deconstructing the conventional interpretation of a given text, they believe that a relation of cultural perceptual tension is reduced. This means an individual who deconstructs the conventional interpretation of a text may be able to perceive how its authority was socially constructed. He or she may also come into contact with his or her own power to create a new interpretation from that same text. The idea that different people may understand the same text in different ways is not new. The point of emphasis here is that multiple translations and interpretations of reality have not been tolerated too well throughout social history. While marginal deviations from the norm have been tolerated within a society, these deviations have tended to gain social force and the status of convention only through a massive political and cultural shift.

¹⁰² Chodorow, pp. 14-21.

¹⁰³ Lather, pp. 141-146.

CHAPTER THREE

Pedagogical Implications of Deconstruction

In Chapters one and two, the theoretical background which has informed and directed my thesis question was illustrated. The question, "How can a multiplicity of perspectives on reality be accommodated in a just manner within western academic settings?" is one which I have attempted to address within the context of postmodern arguments. Feminist postmodernist and critical pedagogical theoretical perspectives were looked at in particular as sources of discussion. Within the contexts of these sources I have attempted to show how the institutional structures of western epistemology are observed to be misaligned with a transforming state of social consciousness. I have also explored arguments within these same contexts which suggest that western epistemology impedes rather than facilitates the progression of knowledge by limiting the power of social voice.¹

By focusing on feminist critiques of western paradigms as well as critical pedagogical and deconstruction perspectives on the construction of interpretation, I have endeavored to show how the western epistemological system -- from a social critical perspective² -- can be described as being political and how, from the same perspective, it can be observed to function in the capacity of a social normalizing process. The goal of this thesis is to explore the idea that western epistemological progression and transformation may be impeded by its grounding in social conditions and that this may occur through cultural processes which impact on the consciousness of the knower.

It has been argued that western knowledge is a consequence of specific cultural processes that structure the validity of knowledge by shaping social perceptions. Critical theorists have observed that within western culture, a limited, privileged group of society has been instrumental in creating the contexts for knowledge validation and that these contexts have been reproduced in western history through sustained relations of social dominance. It has also been argued that efforts to sustain these relations have resulted in incidents of false consciousness and situations where certain knowers come to be oppressed as others are privileged. Western knowledge is considered to fall short in its efforts to inform social action within an increasingly complex, culturally diverse and transforming society.

¹ Walsh, p. 33.

² Code; Lather.

The critical theoretical perspectives reviewed in this paper claim that the western state of knowledge reflects a limited but politically powerful and hegemonic perspective on reality. The hegemonic perspective has been defined as one which reflects the political and social interests of the few as opposed to the many.³ One problem perceived in relation to hegemony induced perspectives is that their description of social needs and values do not necessarily reflect the needs of the total population which they address. Hegemonic cultural perspectives are thought to dominate social consciousness and thereby skew the general public interest and perception in the direction of already established norms. That is, society is recognized as something which can be directed towards or cued into specific modes of perceptions and recognition with respect to the interpretation of "reality." Critical theorists have observed that an individual's capacity to interpret, know and understand experience is mediated through cultural experiences.

If a particular cultural perspective can be observed to influence knowledge construction and if that perspective can be observed to be limited, it is possible to consider that the underlying rationale of its epistemology could fail to address a totality of cultural perspectives. It is possible that within the boundaries of a given society the reproduction of a limited perspective could fail to address a constant transformation and increasing complexity of social conditions. Critical pedagogical theory argues that western epistemology does impose rigid and static restraints on a society's ability to know. This argument refers in particular to the criteria and bases used to legitimate and validate knowledge within the parameters of western culture. It has been observed that within the context of a transforming cultural awareness and expanding cultural diversity, traditional western methods of constructing knowledge may become increasingly less satisfactory to a changing public. Critical pedagogues propose that a political adjustment of the social rigidity surrounding knowledge production may help to foster the development of a more inclusive and progressive epistemology.

Within the context of my thesis question I have stated that deconstruction theories could prove significant in the development of strategies which could foster an inclusive and progressive western epistemology. It has also been suggested, within this context, that the interpretive power of the individual could be addressed as a political issue. Within these parameters of thought, pedagogical efforts are geared towards liberating the social perceptions of the oppressed in order to balance the distribution of social power reflected in knowledge claims. Specific applications in deconstruction theory could be described as

³ Walsh, pp. 31-34.

strategies designed to reduce "false consciousness" ⁴ during the synthesis of knowledge. They could also be identified as social efforts to heighten the visibility of authority structures as they are perceived to condition the genesis of knowledge claims. The intention behind these efforts could be described as the enhancement of critical awareness for the politics involved in the interpretation of "text based realities." Within the scope of these efforts, culture itself is considered to be a form of social narrative.⁵ Specific applications in deconstruction theory could be described as strategies to reduce the tension of cultural hegemony in an effort to direct knowledge in the interest of more progressive and socially just goals.⁶

It is possible to view deconstruction theory as a vehicle for expanding the range of knowledge outcomes legitimated and validated within the context of western society. Its potential, in this respect, may be evident in the deconstructionist strategies used to redistribute the power associated with old and established knowledge claims. Deconstruction methodology appears to seek the legitimated disclosure of an indeterminate range of knowledge outcomes.⁷ At the base of this effort is the premise that the diversity found in social perspectives is legitimate and necessary to the constructing of a complete and progressive epistemological system.⁸

Chapter Three will focus on the implications the above perspectives on knowledge production may have on goals to induce pedagogical shift and transformation. According to my synthesis of perspectives explored in this paper, it is suggested that pedagogical transformation be approached from three general directions. The first direction would seek to implement epistemological change at a theoretical level. Some of the specific changes suggested involve a rethinking of standard paradigms. Standard paradigms, as previously discussed, appear to authorize and structure certain types of knowledge outcomes. In order to counter some of the exclusivity and privilege fostered through the paradigms, it is suggested that political power structures and ideologies giving force to the paradigm be disclosed and deconstructed and that ways be sought to construct paradigms that are more inclusive and less exploitive of a knower's social position. It is also suggested that research methods be changed and that new standards for collection, measurement and evaluation of data be developed. The specific goal of these changes would be to create

⁴ Lather.

⁵ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 23.

⁶ Lather, pp. 13-15.

⁷ This methodology is constructed on the idea that language is based on a continuous interplay between terms, that is "the codependence of signifiers". See Spivak. For a critique on Derrida and deconstructionist thought see Ellis, *Against Deconstruction*.

⁸ Code; Lather.

more flexible and less static paradigms. The second direction would be to implement epistemological change by making use of pedagogical opportunities to implement theoretical shifts and changing approaches towards learning. Epistemological theory seeking emancipation of the oppressed acknowledges a role that social consciousness plays with respect to producing knowledge. As individuals are considered to be culturally situated in their knowing from their earliest stages of social learning, it becomes paramount that a reflexive and critical approach to knowledge be fostered from the earliest stages of formal learning. Finally, the third direction of efforts to implement epistemological change would focus on the practical realm of social projects and experiences. Within the parameters of emancipatory epistemological theory, knowledge is not separated from its social situatedness. And the strategies used to induce theoretical and pedagogical change are approached in full recognition that they are negotiable projects, constructed by both the researcher and the researched in effort to emancipate the voice of the socially oppressed.

Re-conceptualizing Objectivism in Research Design

"Believing strongly that in our action is our knowing, my central focus in the writing of this book is how research and teaching methods can better challenge the relations of dominance."⁹

In her book entitled, "Getting Smart," Patti Lather identifies her theoretical perspective with the postmodern tradition. She claims that her perspective reflects her analysis of feminist, neo-marxist and poststructuralist arguments with respect to their capacity to inform critical theory and its practices.¹⁰ Lather maintains that "... we are in a postpositivist period in the human sciences, a period marked by much methodological and epistemological ferment."¹¹ She elaborates by observing that this period is marked by a search for paradigm shifts, including the recognition that all knowledge reflects a value base.¹² For Lather, "Emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes."¹³ Emancipatory research is described as praxis. Its goal is the transformation of social consciousness and the facilitation of change. Its methodology is "interactive,

⁹ Lather, p. XV.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹² Ibid., p. 52.

¹³ Code, p. 52.

contextualized and one which gives a central focus to a priori theory."¹⁴ Lather suggests that the question of establishing the empirical accountability of such a methodology is one which involves issues of social perception. For example, she argues that social perceptions of a value neutral and objective knowledge base may need to be rethought. Empirical knowledge as discussed in chapters one and two is challenged within the postmodern feminist perspective as being something which reflects a social grounding in value systems of a hegemony as opposed to being something which represents a recognition of the indisputable laws of nature.¹⁵ Within the parameters of this challenge, the psychological and structural influencing of consciousness becomes a central focus to research design with respect to its potential to enforce the assimilation of cultural norms and beliefs.¹⁶

Within the context of postmodernist feminism, the embracing of a reflexive methodology in relation to research design and theory building is in part a recognition that knowledge is mediated by political ideologies and cultural boundaries. This form of mediation, as previously suggested, is observed to factor in the standardization of conceptual and categorical definitions which regulate our social understandings of experience.¹⁷ Lather has made several references to Spivak in her book, "Getting Smart." Spivak has provided a comprehensive translation of Derrida's, "Of Grammatology" and Lather can be observed to reflect a Derridean concept of deconstruction theory. What Lather seems to have derived through her evaluation of deconstructionist perspectives is a theoretical platform upon which strategies of displacement, praxis and emancipation of the oppressed may be founded.¹⁸ Lather seems to imply that within the deconstruction perspective there lies a premise which could support an epistemological value for the transformation and emancipation of the oppressed voice. With respect to this, the idea of a reflexive research base, Lather argues, could be used to develop emancipatory approaches to data collection and interpretation. In these situations, individual awareness or lack of awareness of social constraints involved during the processing of knowledge could be addressed through a deliberate targeting of consciousness. Research methodology would be considered successful, in an emancipatory sense, not only to the extent that it could transform consciousness but also that the process of transformation would be self

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-55.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lather, p. 55.

¹⁷ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 39.

¹⁸ Lather, p. 13.

sustaining and continuous.¹⁹ That is, all methodology involved during stages of research design and theory construction is cautioned to avoid the trap of becoming "canonical."²⁰ And research methods should ideally be as much enlightened by their results as are the subjects of their investigation:

"For praxis to be possible, not only must theory illuminate the lived experience of progressive social groups; it must also be illuminated by their struggles. Theory adequate to the task of changing the world must be open-ended, nondogmatic, speaking to and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life."²¹

From this perspective, paradigms defined as being canonical are those identified as having the potential to impose static restrictions over the ways in which knowledge is assessed. In order for emancipatory pedagogy to be successful, the individual's ability to locate the social conditions grounding knowledge becomes of critical importance. This is because these conditions are observed to factor in the structuring of his or her own capacity to know objectivity in its socially legitimated definition. The effectiveness of an emancipatory epistemology is measured in relation to an individual's marked ability to both self initiate and continue efforts to emancipate his or her own social consciousness as a knower. In an ideal sense emancipatory research should be able to break through the canonical restrictions imposed over the interpretive process.

Validity and the Legitimation of Knowledge

The idea of emancipating social voice from what are considered to be rigid channels for articulation does not necessarily mean that efforts to develop inclusive epistemology should be random and chaotic. Rather, it is an idea intended to suggest that current empirical research methods may represent a particular style of gathering and interpreting information. In such cases, processes of social legitimation and styles of cultural measurement are considered to influence social perceptions. This influence is thought to shape what comes to be recognized as empirical and objective knowledge. For example, the designation of attributes such as 'empirical,' 'objective' and 'evidence' to certain knowledge claims is considered to reflect a social ranking of perspectives on reality. Critical theorists maintain that social and cultural conditions surrounding the processing of knowledge claims shape the way in which the value of knowledge is assessed. They argue that the idea of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Myrsiades and Myrsiades.

²¹ Lather, p. 55.

"validity" is subject to interpretation and is thereby grounded in a set of relations with other interpretations. This is evident in their efforts to challenge traditional methodology involved in the establishing of empirical knowledge claims. For example, it was previously suggested that the concept of objective knowledge could represent the outcomes of a hegemonic perspective and because of this it could be observed as being contained within the subjectivity of that perspective.²² In a general sense, social contexts have been considered to impact on knowledge outcomes in a dialogic manner. In other words, as social conditions shift, so do social perspectives on those conditions. Lather has observed that efforts to establish an emancipatory epistemology may require paradigmatic shifts, including a re-conceptualization of validity itself. Such efforts, she maintains, are open exercises in social measurement.²³

The Idea of Self, Location of Knower and Measurement

I argue that we must go beyond the concern for more and better data to a concern for research as praxis. What I suggest is that we consciously use our research to help participants understand and change their situations.²⁴

One of the focuses of emancipatory pedagogical research is on the idea that the knower becomes ideologically situated in terms of his or her identity within a social realm.²⁵ Social identity is observed to be conditioned through a complex network of social communications and linguistic relationships. These conditions are considered to mediate consciousness by shaping perceptions of the phenomenal realm according to cultural perspectives. Knowledge derived through social contact is described as being an aggregation of representations and conceptual boundaries as well as a cultural perception of differences and similarities between things. As self identity is thought to emerge in conjunction with the learning of cultural perspectives, knowledge derived through social experience may appear to the individual as being self evident.²⁶

From a deconstructionist perspective, linguistic boundaries are observed to define meaning outcomes through their political force. For example, it is the ideology and social authority behind the language that are seen to structure the conceptualization of differences, similarities and the relationships contained within its structure. Deconstruction theory seeks to reduce the authoritative power of linguistic boundaries with respect to the rigid

²² Code.

²³ Lather, p. 66.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁵ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 34.

²⁶ Robert Con Davis, "Freud, Lacan, and the Subject of Cultural Studies," Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 195.

hold they may inflict over interpretive processes. The strategies which it embraces represent efforts to release an indeterminate meaning thought to be contained within any text. "To deconstruct the desire that shapes a particular act of enframing is to probe the libidinal investment in form and content of the author-text relationship. It is to mark the belief that our discourse is the meaning of our longing."²⁷

Strategies geared to elicit an academic acceptance for a multiplicity of 'textual readings' may indeed require more dynamic and nonlinear assessment models than those which have been traditionally used. Lather, in conformity with a postmodern perspective, has stressed the importance of including negotiation, collaboration, reflexivity and a value for dialectical practices in models of emancipatory research. The inclusion of these elements in research design seems to acknowledge a value for the dynamic aspect of social feedback in regard to constructing academic discourse. Lather identifies "the need for reciprocity, the stance of dialectical theory-building versus theoretical imposition and the question of validity in praxis oriented research" as three major issues surrounding the construction of emancipatory theory and socially empowering research designs.²⁸

One of the problems perceived in relation to traditional and non-reciprocal research models is that they tend to obscure the way in which existing paradigms may shape subsequent perceptions of what knowledge is. Non-reflexive conceptualization of empirical validity and objective reality, as previously discussed, is thought to downplay the political component to knowing. It accomplishes this by directing attention away from ways in which perceptions of the phenomenal may refer back to prior descriptions and perspectives on reality for their definition. The integrity of a definition, once expressed in its conceptual form, is considered to reflect a complex set of descriptions which have been correlated or cross-referenced in accordance with a cultural perspective. Another problem with traditional research methods is seen to emerge when the consciousness of the researcher is ignored as a variable in the construction of knowledge outcomes. This problem Lather maintains is prevalent in all research designs that fail to account for the collaborative and dialectical factors influencing knowledge construction. In relation to social research, Lather argues that more than a minimal value for negotiation and reciprocity must be incorporated into research methods and designs.²⁹ "The goal of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical

²⁷ Lather, p. 83.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

knowledge."³⁰ A successful emancipatory research Lather argues would also possess a catalytic validity. This type of validity emerges as emancipatory theory ruptures the authoritative bonds which encourage a passive assimilation of knowledge on the part of the individual. New knowledge will have less impact in terms of social transformation if society does not accord it the status of legitimacy. Lather states that emancipatory theory plays a catalytic role in efforts to transform the consciousness of the oppressed by "... increasing specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life."³¹ In this way, conditions of ideology and hegemony impacting on the synthesis of knowledge may be better resisted.

"Learning and social agency are dependent upon an agent's ability to hierarchicize and discriminate by way of recognizing, reading and appreciating various legitimated cultural marks and symbols."³² It was previously stated that feminist discourse challenges dominant paradigms of linearity and dichotomy which appear to ground most western knowledge claims.³³ Such discourse maintains that the traditional perception of those paradigms has led to the construction of an exclusive knowledge base, one which devalorizes difference by ranking it as deviance from the norm.³⁴ In the interest of developing an inclusive and emancipatory epistemology, deconstruction theory makes an appeal to new paradigms of measurement. For example, models of qualitative measurement have been suggested as complements, if not alternatives, to quantitative models.³⁵ The traditional perception of the subjective-objective schism has been questioned in terms of the contexts it sets for perceiving relations between the observer and observed. Qualitative models emerge from theories in non-linear dynamics.³⁶ They approach measurement through an observation of the holistic patterning and transformation exhibited by a system. They take into account complexity and movement, aspects that linear and static models of measurement have been unable to assess. Lather, in her discussion of research as praxis has emphasized the importance of emancipatory research being a self sustaining process. In her description of the emancipatory research efforts of Bullough and Gitlen, Lather observes:

³⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

³² Paul Smith, "The Political Responsibility of the Teaching of Literatures," *Myrsiades and Myrsiades*, eds., p. 65.

³³ Code.

³⁴ Walsh. Code.

³⁵ Lather, pp. 53, 104-105, 129-151; Code, pp. 160-161, 175.

³⁶ John Briggs and F. David Peat, *Turbulent Mirror*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989).

"Their research [the case study of a middle-school teacher] design included the teacher's written response to a preliminary interpretation of the data which is an example of the most common form of an emancipatory approach to research - the submission of a preliminary description of the data to the scrutiny of the researched...."³⁷ In this example, there appears a process incorporated into the research design where data results are fed back into the initial stage of central inquiry in the research project. That is, the interpretation of research data has been submitted and resubmitted back to the researched in an effort to establish their pattern of response. The desired pattern, in accordance with emancipatory goals, is one in which transformation of consciousness can be observed. The methodology used in its refeeding of data into the original context of inquiry seems to parallel the use of iteration techniques in models of non-linear assessment.³⁸

Another way in which proposed models for emancipatory theory seem to reflect the influence of dynamic and non-linear modeling is through their analytical focus on the interaction of multiple contexts. Knowledge is considered to be an outcome of dialectical relationships and the boundaries which define its conceptual base are considered to be part of a larger social and political process. With respect to identifying the boundaries of a knowledge claim, the relationship between the observer and observed also becomes significant as it sets a specific context for research. Emancipatory theory recognizes that the observer will influence the contexts of pattern identification involved in the assessment of research data through his or her perceptions. It is also recognized that the perceptions of the observer are influenced by a larger social context. Lather suggests that a multi-disciplinary approach to the gathering and assessment of research data may help theorists balance out the degree of perceptual bias they bring to research. The method of triangulation is one in which multiple sources are used to collect and establish data banks. Research designs incorporating this method would not only require the gathering of data from multiple sources, they would also include a search for divergent as well as convergent patterns in their evaluation of data.³⁹ The incorporation of these elements into emancipatory research design could help to insure that observations of data are not being shaped to fit the theory and may support efforts to establish the validity of "new paradigm research."⁴⁰

In conjunction with the method of triangulation, Lather also proposes that a number of validity checks be incorporated into the construction of emancipatory research design. The

³⁷ Code, p. 53.

³⁸ Briggs and Peat, pp.65-77.

³⁹ Lather, p. 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

first of these is "construct validity."⁴¹ This is described as the process through which research design openly acknowledges its own grounding in a theoretical perspective. By doing so, it identifies its cultural and political position in terms of social "locatedness."⁴² Lather claims that a priori theory factors strongly in praxis oriented research."⁴³ The disclosing of the social grounding behind a research design is a strategy used to expose the conceptual bias of the theory behind it. The authority of the theory is then open to deconstruction and its premise may be critically challenged, even through the research process. Levels of conscious awareness possessed by all individuals involved in the context of a research project become variables in the measurement process. In theory, the researcher can use the self awareness of his or her own cultural standpoint to expand the interpretive range of his or her observations. This is because through an acknowledgment of this standpoint, the theorist may become more aware of the reflexive components involved in his or her own knowing. Lather maintains that theory building should be a process kept in play. She seems to suggest that the perception of each new discovery or lack of discovery should be openly considered to have evolved in relation to a cultural perspective. Old research results could impact on future research designs and their measurement systems.⁴⁴

"Systemized reflexivity" is Lather's second validity check. This process requires a deliberate search for ways in which "a priori theory has been changed by the logic of the data."⁴⁵ It reflects an effort to keep the process of theory construction in play and thereby avoid those restrictive and stagnant traps which have ensnared traditional western paradigms. It provides a somewhat concrete variable of measurement which can be used to discern the degree of social transformation elicited from consciousness in relation to the theoretical design. "Face validity"⁴⁶ is the third research check suggested by Lather. This check appears to incorporate an element of intuition or creative leap into the process of research assessment. It is a systematized effort to resubmit research assessments back to the researched in an effort to discern whether or not the researched will identify their own previous perspectives as being manifestations of false consciousness. One of the problems of this is that although the assessment of research should be accomplished through negotiation with the researched, the researcher must ensure that his or her assessments are

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴² Code.

⁴³ Lather, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

not situated exclusively in his or her own perspective while attempting to foster emancipation of the oppressed voice. It can be questioned just how the researcher can avoid making his or her research an authoritative text. Lather has acknowledged this problem and stresses that "face validity" is a process which must be undertaken in conjunction with construct validity.⁴⁷ Catalytic validity is the fourth validity check included in this sequence. This process, once incorporated into research design, has the goal of refocusing social consciousness of the oppressed so that they can begin to transform their reality.⁴⁸ Lather advocates a use of pedagogical strategies that will include negotiation between both transmitters and receivers of knowledge. She stresses that an emancipatory approach towards learning is one which fully recognizes the dialectical basis of knowledge construction. From a critical theoretical perspective, it is crucial that an observer be aware of how social influences may create trends in interpretation over time. Emancipatory research and pedagogical applications would encourage the learner to expose the cultural and political base which underlies interpretive norms. It is hypothesized that by disclosing the reflexive base of knowledge claims, a learner should become more aware of his or her potential to resist a passive assimilation of information and avoid false consciousness. The individual should be empowered to create new meaning from old interpretive contexts. It is believed that the power to shift and liberate submerged meaning is contained even within states of social ambivalence. In such cases, social ambivalence is considered to represent a dormant or balanced site of social tension which may require a theoretical catalyst in order to shift it into motion. Conventions surrounding conceptual divisions are challenged on the grounds that they are always open for redefinition depending upon prevalent cultural conditions.

Lather claims that reality is continuously remade but that research approaches are contained within epistemological conventions which reflect static and dominant belief systems.⁴⁹ It is the rigidity of the system, she observes, that puts processes of knowledge production in jeopardy of becoming locked within a closed set of conventions and validation techniques.⁵⁰ Over time, a closed epistemological system may appear stagnant and less meaningful to a transforming society.

It would seem that emancipatory and deconstruction theory are vulnerable to the same "epistemological ferment" as other theories. Lather argues that the difference between emancipatory theory and traditional theory is that emancipatory theory acknowledges its

⁴⁷ Lather, p. 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 51.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 70-77, 80, 88, 105.

political agenda⁵¹ and incorporates reflexivity and reciprocity into its research design. The acknowledged political agenda of emancipatory theory, as previously stated, is the amplification of the voice and values of the oppressed. In an effort to realize this agenda, emancipatory methodology must seek to deconstruct authority constructs which hold conventional perspectives on reality in a rigid tension. Emancipatory pedagogical strategies seek to transform their own theoretical background through efforts to transform the consciousness of the oppressed. The goal behind the strategies, as previously stated, is to keep the process of theory building dynamic and in constant play. "Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits the use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which data must be poured."⁵² For example, in the case of "Construct validity," a critical evaluation of the research context is undertaken. This is done in order to disclose the social and political grounding which might influence both the researcher and the researched and subsequently impact on any measurements obtained through an analysis of the research data. In other words, the social locatedness of the researcher as a knower is established as a variable which will factor in the structuring of the research design and the interpretation of its results. Ways of perceiving research contexts and relationships between things that are observed are considered to be effected, in part, through cultural penetrations of consciousness.

Emancipatory methodology also seeks to avoid stagnation through an acknowledgment of a reflexivity existing between knowledge claims and the cultural contexts through which they are derived. In this case, theorists recognize that research itself is prone to take on a cultural slant, one that reflects the power structure and situation of the culture it embraces. The researcher is advised, in addition to being aware of the social limitations of his or her own theoretical platform, to listen and learn from the perspectives of the subjects he or she is researching. Negotiation and collaboration are key words in the building of research design and in the interpretation of its results. Through its deliberate effort to emancipate the interpretive authority of the oppressed, emancipatory theory hopes to reduce the restriction on thought imposed by cultural power structures. As a consequence, it aims to transcend the limitations of its own structure and have its original premise illuminated and transformed through the research process. That is, the emancipatory theorist attempts to

⁵¹ Lather. Lather acknowledges that her applications in deconstruction theory contain the open agenda to emancipate the oppressed. By doing so she claims that her political stand is evident in the process of creating research designs and during the process of measuring research data.

⁵² Ibid., p. 62.

structure mechanisms for growth, change and critical self reflection for both the researcher and the researched into research designs.

In a general sense, emancipatory theory seeks to induce social change, both in its own structure, as well as in the consciousness of society. It becomes, by the rendering of the common sense realm problematic,⁵³ part of the agenda in the development of deconstruction research design. Each research context developed is considered to exhibit its own proposition of objectivity which must then be deconstructed in order to disclose its grounding in subjectivity. Unique conditions for observation are considered to shape each research context with respect to social projects. It is recognized that a social research context probably cannot be exactly replicated in its entirety at another location or at another time with another group of subjects. This realization, however, is not considered to compromise the value of the research. Emancipatory research places a qualitative value on the context specific research. The specificity of the context, if critically assessed with the appropriate validity checks, becomes a concrete variable open to observation. That is, the specificity of context, if critically analyzed, can be used to define the cultural locatedness of both the researcher and the researched. It then becomes a marker which can be used to measure any transformation of consciousness emerging through the research project. Each discovery or lack of discovery which may emerge through the research process is judged in relation to this initial marker of knowledge location.⁵⁴

Lather advocates the incorporation of collaboration and praxis theories into the structure of social research.⁵⁵ She argues that a methodology embracing these venues may be better equipped to challenge those authority contexts which tend to dominate research structures. She maintains that these authority contexts, if left unchallenged, will continue to skew and restrict knowledge outcomes. And she states that in an effort to remedy conditions of false consciousness which may be reinforced through an epistemological cloaking of interests, we must begin to "recognize validity in research designs that are interactive, contextualized and humanly compelling."⁵⁶ Lather has defined the problem of establishing empirical validity and assessment procedures into emancipatory theory as being a political challenge to deconstruction methods of measurement and theory building. She states that, "There are few clear strategies for linking critical theory and empirical research."⁵⁷ She suggests that a focus on the reflexivity involved in theory construction

⁵³ Code.

⁵⁴ Lather, pp. 51-69.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

may keep initial research premises and guiding perspectives more abreast with their grounding in social realities.⁵⁸ In her arguments, there is an implication that political struggles shape knowledge outcomes and that this relation, once observed, can provide the theorist with a concrete example of social experience, one which may be empirically assessed.⁵⁹ The empirical assessment as previously discussed would not necessarily involve the use of empirical paradigms as they are conventionally defined. That is, in situations of emancipatory theoretical assessment, facts would be interpreted as perspectives on reality and strict adherence to the rigors of objective analysis during research would be considered to reflect the dominant perspective of a white, andro centered hegemony. The traditional perception of dichotomy existing between facts and values and subjectivity-objectivity would be openly challenged and deconstructed during the research process. In sum, the construction and accumulation of legitimated knowledge becomes an issue open to negotiation.

Pedagogical Implications

... a radical pedagogy teaches that an individual's understanding of a cultural text is the "result of her or his situatedness in a complex network of gender, class and race relations" and that a new transdisciplinary learning is necessary to read the dominant social system against itself by finding spaces of resistance in the "fault lines of its ideologies." (Zavarzadeh and Morton). Like the therapist mining the unconscious, radical pedagogy surfaces resistance even if the subject positions of students and teachers are in conflict and students resist resistance. ⁶⁰

The ability to consciously resist a blind assimilation of knowledge is one skill which Lather seeks to foster in the individual through her methodology. In efforts to develop the skill of resistance, values transmitted through an exchange of knowledge are treated as representations of cultural and political realities. As such, they are made available to critical scrutiny by both teacher and student. Pedagogical practices should reflect a self critical stance with a focus on "conditions and means through which knowledge is produced." ⁶¹

It was earlier stated that emancipatory theory calls for a continual readjustment of the criteria used to define and describe what constitutes epistemological validity in a knowledge

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁶⁰ Myrsiades and Myrsiades, p. X.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 39.

claim. As education is recognized as being political,⁶² pedagogical concerns are assessed as political concerns. Critical pedagogy in particular is potentially a site for resisting the force of ideologies in its attempt to synthesize new forms of knowledge. Deconstruction theory places its emphasis on breaking down the restrictive capacity of disciplinary boundaries through negotiation and re-negotiation of meaning. In this way, spaces are politically created through which new forms of knowledge can be produced.⁶³ The individual in his or her role as social agent, political being and knower is given a responsibility which could in some lights be observed to take on moral tones. The individual is required to know the historical and ideological factors that delineate reason within a cultural context in order to resist forms of social oppression which could be reinforced through the perpetuation of dogmatic perspectives on reality.⁶⁴ With respect to deconstructing "canonical meaning" contained within a text, the language of critical analysis must be combined with the language of social responsibility. When deriving meaning through textual interpretation, an individual may ask him or herself the following questions: "What is there?" "What does this mean?" "What could be there?" "What could this mean?" "What should be there?" "What should this mean?" These questions must be asked while keeping in mind that the goal of deconstruction theory is to emancipate the social voice of the oppressed. With this goal in mind, the pedagogist is encouraged to engage in epistemological practices which are inclusive and progressive. They should neither exploit nor promote conditions of privilege or injustice for certain knowers.

Giroux⁶⁵ claims that "critical pedagogy needs to develop a theory of teachers as transformative intellectuals who occupy specific political and social locations." This claim refers back to the idea that the production of knowledge is not a neutral enterprise. Self identity is viewed as being in part socially inscribed through processes of cultural feedback and affirmation. An individual's perception of himself or herself as a knower is observed to be situated within a broader context of social, cultural and historical variables. Wherever education may take place, "the self becomes a primary site of politicization."⁶⁶ Within more formal academic settings, such as the classroom the authority that a teacher wields in terms of interpretive influence should be used as a pivot point through which

⁶² Ibid., pp. 34, 38.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Lather.

⁶⁵ Myrsiades and Myrsiades, p. 43.

⁶⁶ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 38.

transformations of consciousness may be set into motion. This type of authority is considered to be something which can be continuously reworked and re negotiated.⁶⁷

"As part of their use of a language of critique, teachers can make problematic how different subjectivities are positioned within a historically specific range of ideologies and social practices that inscribe students in modes of behavior that subjugate, infantilize and corrupt."⁶⁸ The way in which a teacher is prone to deal with issues of student differences in approaches to knowledge as well as resistance to forms of knowledge assimilation is considered to be related to that teacher's political location as a knower.⁶⁹ Teachers are observed to occupy politically significant positions during the process of knowledge transmission. They work within "constraints of discursive possibilities, particularly literate discourse."⁷⁰ Teachers who approach the act of knowledge transmission in a linear and non-reflexive way are thought to reinforce the reproduction of cultural conventions toward knowing. This is seen to occur because there is no active negotiation of meaning taking place during the learning process:

... it is the teacher's responsibility to submit to a continual reworking of his or her authority in the classroom. It is no use to put authority into play merely in the shape of the text's codes and the explanatory codes of our culture. We have, that is, to recognize that our own authority as teachers is constituted in and by those very same and other codes. These two need to be *interlected* [italics mine]. This is akin to the radical reshaping or reworking of texts, insofar as we must count ourselves among those texts. The authority of our explanations of the cultures we deal with is necessarily coded, and students therefore necessarily read us.⁷¹

By incorporating processes of negotiation and collaboration and a recognition of reflexivity in knowledge into teaching practices, the student voice might be amplified to reveal many of the cultural, emotional, social and psychological sensibilities which impact on his or her learning. "...teachers cannot know either what students will repeat, copy, mimic, and remember or what they will forget. It is the question of resistance to knowing, a resistance that is not merely emotional or personal but cultural. What new shapes of knowing and writing arise within that dynamic."⁷²

⁶⁷ Smith, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 7.

⁶⁸ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 39.

⁶⁹ Suzanne clark, "Discipline and Resistance: The Subjects of Writing and the Discourses of Instruction", in Myrsiades and Myrsiades, pp. 121-136.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 71. Interlection: interpretive interruption, occasioned by, "differing subject positions of readers." , p. 70.

⁷² Ibid., p. 131.

In pedagogical applications of deconstruction theory, texts and other forms of academic discourses are viewed as historical markers and history itself is considered to be a form of cultural narrative.⁷³ Pedagogical efforts to teach the interpretation of text become significant in deconstruction practices because they exhibit a process of authority-structuring within learning contexts. By teaching students that there is one right way to interpret a text, critical pedagogues maintain that we are supporting its "canonical" meaning. The attribution of canonical qualities to the ideas of text and discourse illustrates the way in which interpretation is observed to be culturally learned.⁷⁴ To the deconstruction theorist, each text is perceived to write more than one message.⁷⁵ In order to emancipate student consciousness in relation to the decoding of a text, strategies are sought that could allow multiple interpretations to legitimately transcend the boundaries of conventional paradigms. A shift in consciousness is elicited from the student so that he or she might resist structural impositions placed on interpretation by the normatively obvious or conventionally apparent meaning of a text. Strategies used to set this shift into motion are structured through a critical use of language and conceptual evaluation by "dislodging signs occupying privileged positions and creating realities."⁷⁶

Inclusive epistemology demands a multiplicity of readings and classroom curriculum must promote or construct classroom relations that "engender fresh confrontation with value and meaning."⁷⁷ Applications in deconstruction theory may be significant in providing strategies that would address this demand. It has been previously suggested that these strategies would deliberately seek interpretive shift. Efforts to disclose "submerged" meanings in a text would demand that the consciousness of each individual be actively engaged in the process of constructing meaning. By deconstructing the authority of a text at those points where its language becomes unstable, deconstruction approaches try to harness a creative energy of thought by rupturing the cultural bonds which contain it. The individual who is at the center of emancipatory interests is called upon to challenge and resist the authoritative models which appear to create perceptions of differences at the conceptual level. Through a critical assessment of those models, "the power-saturated discourses that monitor and normalize our sense of who we are, and what is possible, are open for debate."⁷⁸ In terms of pedagogy, the perception of difference can become a

⁷³ Michael Payne, "Canon: New Testament to Derrida", Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 183.

⁷⁴ Jerry McGuire, "Entitlement and Empowerment: Claims on Canonicity", Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., pp. 153-171.

⁷⁵ Payne, . p. 183.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 184.

⁷⁷ Lather, p. 144.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

dynamic locus of observation. In this case, critical consciousness would be fostered in an effort to allow a learner to recognize how observations can become intertwined with structures and processes of social legitimation.⁷⁹

Creativity

As our society has become more diverse, the need for interpretation of texts and communication of ideas about texts has become more pressing.⁸⁰

Language has been defined, within the context of this paper, as having the capacity to restrict interpretive ranges because it reinforces a cultural regulation of conceptual expressions. In epistemological situations, a specialized use of language is often involved in the interpretation of paradigms. This specialization can draw the interpretive focus into an increasingly finite system of perception. Although finite, the system might contain an intricate set of word associations, all supportive of a standardized perspective on reality. For example, specific meanings will be associated with specific meaning contexts and the individual learns to perceive while learning a language of the perception. Over time, specific perspectives on reality may become standardized, although theoretically there is always the potential for conscious effort to disrupt any conventional word associations which have been established. As the language of knowledge becomes more and more specialized, the constraints surrounding the legitimation of new interpretations increase. There may not be a language adequate to support new thought -- and new thought, in order to be legitimized, must be able to transcend the authority and language of old thought. Prior learning experiences may set the precedents for subsequent ones. In rigorous and formal academic settings where a specificity in language is required, certain individuals may be labeled as inferior knowers because their interpretations and articulation of their understandings do not meet the appropriate standards. It may also be difficult for different individuals, coming from different social backgrounds, to readily decode the specifics of a language constructed through a dominant mode of cultural perception.

Critical theory strives to implement an epistemological value for pedagogical encouragement of multiple readings of text.⁸¹ Within these parameters of thought, an individual, as a social decoder of conceptual reality, is one who is required to actively

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

⁸⁰ Linda Shaw Finlay and Nathaniel Smith, "Literacy and Literature: Making or Consuming Culture?", Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 86.

⁸¹ Lather.

negotiate and re-negotiate meaning. He or she is required to consciously define and redefine meaning. He or she is called upon to actively organize and reorganize those standard conceptual configurations which penetrate his or her own efforts to assimilate and articulate meaning. The individual is required to both acknowledge and critically evaluate the political source of values which impacts on his or her own struggles to acquire knowledge. In this way, the individual as a social agent has a responsibility towards him or herself and others in regard to creating reality. This idea is based on the assumption that an individual occupies and effects historical and political space through his or her own location and actions as a knower. From an emancipatory perspective, consciousness should make a deliberate effort to disclose hidden political interests contained within knowledge claims and then seek to determine the extent to which they may promote oppression and injustice. "Educators must also come to view ethics and politics as a relationship between self and the other. Ethics, in this case, is not a matter of individual choice or relativism but a social discourse grounded in struggles that refuse to accept needless human suffering and exploitation."⁸² In efforts to legitimately liberate new readings of text, the issue of normative restrictions surrounding the decoding and interpretation of language becomes a central focus of observation.⁸³ An individual's conceptualization of what is meaningful is considered to be structured in part through socially normalized or "canonical"⁸⁴ standards of interpreting experience. These norms and canons are considered to reflect a dominant cultural viewpoint to the extent that this point of view is observed to represent a hegemonic evolution of values, norms and standards that contribute to the development of a skewed perspective on reality. Over time any cultural effort to sustain a skewed perspective on reality may be reflected in conceptualizations of reality which deliberately distort social consciousness. In situations of false consciousness, individuals will come to assimilate a skewed perspective on reality with minimal resistance. They will not recognize their perceptions as being distorted or self exploitative. Critical theorists claim that over time, a hegemonic perspective has skewed the development of western cultural perspectives on knowledge in the direction of dominant social interests. The hegemonic perspective, as previously stated, has been deemed unjust because it appears to promote a social value for exploitation. This value for exploitation has been observed to span an approach to both nature and society. Its underlying rationale has been observed as being conceptually reinforced through an epistemological system

⁸² Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades eds., pp. 38-39.

⁸³ Walsh.

⁸⁴ Finlay and Smith, Myrsiades and Myrsiades eds., pp. 84-86.

which creates perceptions of differences, categorizes them and then hierarchically ranks them in terms of value. By virtue of its being a hegemony, the dominant perspective is observed to represent neither the totality of western society nor account for cultural transformation and shifting demands encountered through social change and growth. Efforts to deconstruct the authoritative restrictions placed on interpretation are based on the assumption that many potential or alternative viewpoints will tend to be subordinated through the dominant perspective of the hegemony. Subordinated perspectives are considered to lack social authority to the extent that they have not been accorded full status of social legitimacy. They are defined as those perspectives on reality which have been excluded from mainstream knowledge and are forced to remain external to or on the periphery of dominant theoretical designs. In regard to pedagogical goals aimed at resisting hegemonic force, it has been stated that:

When, through discussion and reflection, students examine their initial interpretation of A text, some surprising things happen. Their capacity to create knowledge, rather than merely to remember it, is affirmed. Hence whatever is said about the text will be in dialogue with the code established by the students; other interpretations will not be impositions, but responses in conversation about the text. Once students think and share their thoughts, all others, including the teacher, must rethink their own previously given or accepted meanings.⁸⁵

Metaphor and Meaning Shift

It has been suggested that one of the goals of deconstruction pedagogy is to unleash the indeterminate and transformative potential which may be contained in acts of interpretation. The goal itself targets the social consciousness of the individual as well as launches an attack on conventional processes of language interpretation. Language as previously stated is considered to be unstable within the parameters of deconstruction practices. The understanding of how a language works in order to convey its meaning as well as the individual's ability to discern points of instability and mechanisms for shift in language are observed to be socially learned skills. From the perspective of critical theory, the ability to learn these skills are thought to be socially mediated through cultural constraints. One of the possible consequences of this mediation, is that certain individuals will be socially inhibited for various reasons in their capacity to grasp and process language in a way that will accord them social power and authority as knowers. In order to illustrate this

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

point in a specific context, I will discuss the concept of the metaphor. In many critical theoretical references, the metaphor has figured as an example of how social experience and learning may come together to impact on the processes of interpreting and understanding language. The idea of the metaphor, in relation to the deconstruction of text, has been discussed by Derrida in "Of Grammatology." In his discussion, the metaphor stands out as a locus which exploits a structured cross referencing of meaning in order to obtain meaning:

"Metaphor must therefore be understood as the process of the idea or meaning (of the signified, if one wishes) before being understood as the play of signifiers. The idea is the signified meaning, that which the word expresses. But it is also a sign of the thing, a representation of the object within my mind. Finally, this representation of the object, signifying the object and signified by the word or by the linguistic signifier in general, may also indirectly signify an affect or a passion . . . We must therefore come back to the subjective affect, substitute the phenomenological order of passions for the objective order of designations, expression for indication, in order to understand the emergence of metaphor, and the savage possibility of transference.⁸⁶

In the case of the metaphor, a duality and shifting of meaning contexts becomes a process which is socially legitimated. That is, metaphorical language is taught and an individual learns decode metaphors according to social convention. To be specific, in order to grasp the meaning of a metaphor, one must have an understanding of both the conventional static definition of a term and of how this definition can be superimposed onto another definition in order to obtain an alternative, transformative meaning. In other words, the metaphor incorporates meaning shift and plurality within its context. For example, if I understand metaphorically that Elaine is a rose, I must understand those attributes conventionally associated with a rose and then superimpose those attributes over my concept of Elaine. These attributes will be textually grounded. The understanding I obtain is through a dual imposition of textual meaning and this comes through a fluctuation of meaning contexts associated with a state of consciousness and conventional learning. That is, my understanding of Elaine as a rose will be tempered first by what I understand a rose to signify and second how literally or figuratively I am able to relate to what a rose may signify to my conception of Elaine. Critical theory would consider that my conceptual associations leading to my understanding of this metaphor reflect my social situatedness. They would also consider that my desire to decode the metaphor might be influenced by the context of authority surrounding my need to interpret it. For instance, if I need to decode

⁸⁶ Spivak, pp. 275-276.

the metaphor in order to pass an exam, there could be only one acceptable way to interpret it. This one acceptable way could be connected to a past understanding of texts associated with the legitimate way to understand Elaine, how to understand rose and how to understand both in association with each other. These understandings may be culturally and historically situated and socially learned, reflecting a comprehensive past of dominant and legitimated viewpoints.

Metaphors can of course become much more complex than the basic example I have cited. The point I wish to emphasize is that in order to grasp the metaphor, consciousness can be observed to shift between what a term is conventionally understood to mean and what it is alternately proposed to mean through the language shift of metaphorical imposition. Because two meaning situations are juxtaposed within metaphorical shift, usual and apparent meanings come into conflict. The conflict, however, is legitimately resolved through a skillful interplay of language contexts and a cross-referencing of historical narratives. The ability for an individual to understand a metaphor is relative to his or her ability to comparatively relate it to something else. This ability can be observed to be contained within the authority of conventional language structure because there is usually considered to be a right way and a wrong way to interpret the metaphor.

It was earlier suggested that an individual's social experience may be linked to his or her understanding of the metaphor. From the deconstruction perspective,⁸⁷ transmission of metaphorical meaning is based on conventional understandings of social contexts, particularly those which govern authoritative and privileged forms of interpretation. Derrida maintains that the metaphor evokes relationships by forcing the interpreter to understand through relational comparison.⁸⁸ The metaphor is grasped as the interpreter understands a term to mean what it means while at the same time understanding the same term to mean something else. The metaphor is the relation between conventional and alternate meanings.

Particular contexts of understanding are brought to the forefront of consciousness and juxtaposed when an individual attempts to decode a metaphor. It is this interplay of contexts which can be observed to illustrate the reflexivity involved in knowing. For example, an individual who has not learned the conventional associations of terms contained within a metaphor may not be able to fully grasp its meaning. It is possible to consider that the cultural situatedness of a knower could influence his or her ability to consciously grasp the particular social nuances transmitted through metaphorical meaning.

⁸⁷ Spivak, pp. I: x.v-lxxv.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 275.

This could subsequently effect his or her assimilation and translation of meaning. As Derrida has observed, language is metaphorical.⁸⁹ And this idea suggests how all language can be observed to convey meaning through not only a cross-referencing of learned social meanings but also through an individual's ability to manipulate these meanings in conformity with standard interpretations.

From a social perspective, it is the collective aspect of communication which allows metaphors to gain force during the synthesis of meaning. Understandings of conventional definitions must be shared in order for the metaphor to convey its use of shift and comparison. By manipulating those contexts of meaning that are already established in consciousness as being real, a metaphor plays one conceptual interpretation of reality off another. The consequence of this being that the idea of a new reality context is established. If the initial meaning contexts contained within the metaphor are abstract representations of reality, it is possible to observe that the new meaning obtained through the metaphorical relation is even more abstract. This idea becomes significant to deconstruction practices because it draws attention to the intricacies involved in the decoding of conventional meaning. Any assumptions surrounding the right way to decode any particular metaphor convey a sense of cultural standards. That is, the decoding of a metaphor depends on a manipulation of meanings which have already been established within a culture's knowledge base. When evaluated from a critical perspective, metaphors can be observed to reflect those realities that are taken for granted.⁹⁰ It has been suggested that it is in those cases where language based realities are taken for granted that false consciousness may ensue and that a culture may allow its social structure to "constitute more than simply reflect reality."⁹¹

The idea of the metaphor as it is conventionally understood to function can be used to illustrate how words can be culturally bound into specific contexts of meaning, thereby limiting their potential to inspire multiple meanings. A type of irony seems to emerge as metaphors appear to reinforce conventions in interpretation while at the same time depending upon a shift from conventional interpretation in order to convey their meaning. This is an issue which is emphasized in deconstruction practices. To be specific, the metaphor is critically used to illustrate how individuals' are taught to manipulate language mechanisms in conformity with and in support of social interests and standards. The element of critical consciousness involved in this assessment emerges as individuals realize

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 271.

⁹⁰ Sarup, p. 53. Spivak, pp. 271-276.

⁹¹ Sarup, p. 42.

that they are not always taught to use these same shift mechanisms to create meanings that will deviate from or challenge standard interpretations. In this way, individuals may be inspired to realize how even creative forms of interpretation are confined within the political and social parameters of the norm.

A conventional use of language is observed to require a specific organization of conceptual space, especially with regard to its transmission of legitimated perspectives on reality. It is thought that perspectives on reality tend to be developed in accordance with a culture. It is also observed that individual consciousness is drawn towards specific modes in perception, due to the boundaries of cultural perspectives. As I have previously discussed in Chapter One, social processes may be considered to have the power to enforce and or reinforce the acceptance of certain interpretive standards. Historical, cultural and social factors may be observed to penetrate or even constitute boundaries which could influence a knower's perceptions. Such factors could also be observed to effect a knower's ability to understand and construct meaning through the use of metaphorical language. By deconstructing the conventional interpretation of meanings expressed through metaphors and the way in which they are interrelated in order to derive meaning through them, the deconstruction pedagogist may be able to cultivate a student awareness of the political function of language.

Language, Social Measurement and Interpretive Shift

Language can and has been described as a cultural effort to simplify experience or at least simplify the understanding of experience.⁹² This idea has been previously discussed in relation to the conceptual medium that language can be observed to provide for the representation and organization of experience. It has been suggested that perceptions of reality, objectivity and empirical thought, reflect symbolic encapsulations of experience, ones which are contained at the conceptual level. The postmodern argument has provoked many expositions on the way in which western perceptions of reality can be considered -- not only as an encapsulation of experience but as a compacting of experience in accordance with the views of a dominant perspective. The complaint made by critical theorists in relation to language is that although language appears to be able to structurally accommodate multiple interpretations by way of description, western culture demands conformity and adherence to standards with respect to legitimated descriptions of reality. These demands are observed to be the result of exploitative political influences and the

⁹² Sarup, p. 42.

consciousness of the individual is identified as being one channel through which exploitation may be resisted.

Deconstructionists claim that language is unstable and that this instability may be used to legitimately access a shift in conventional understandings of cultural narratives which exploit and oppress consciousness. From the perspective of emancipatory critical theory, the variability of social experiences ground the synthesis and assimilation of knowledge. This variability is observed to make any extraction of meaning through language a complex issue in terms of social projects. Interpretation, therefore, becomes a complex issue. In the preceding section of this paper I explored an idea of how social learning could impact on the interpretation and understanding of language through the example of the metaphor. I suggested that the metaphor, while using mechanisms of interpretive shift in order to convey its meaning, remains a process which tends to be constrained within the boundaries of conventional meanings. In another effort to illustrate the same point, I will refer to Bakhtin's ⁹³ discussion of humour and parody contained in his book, "The Dialogic Imagination." This reference will be explored in its capacity to illustrate a possible relation between conventional interpretation and interpretive shift.

Bakhtin, according to my interpretation, addresses the idea of a socially located consciousness in his discussion of humour and parody. He approaches the idea of humour and parody contained within a text as a process which emerges or becomes apparent through the merging of consciousness with specific language contexts and social conventions. He defines this merging as a conscious shifting of language meaning contexts from their normative location to alternative locations. In order to grasp the humour, he maintains that an individual must be able to simultaneously understand both the normative and alternative locations of the meaning contexts. Humour, in other words, becomes language meaning taken out of one context and placed in another while at the same time juxtaposing both contexts in order to obtain an integral meaning. "The creating consciousness stands, as it were, on the boundary line between languages and styles. In parodying / travestyng consciousness it is oriented toward the object but toward another's world as well." ⁹⁴ For example, a man dressed in woman's clothes parodying a woman may or may not be perceived to be funny. One could assume that it would appear to be funny because it represents a willful transgression of boundaries, a situation taken out of its conventional context, yet demanding interpretation. One could also assume that it would

⁹³ Lather, Walsh and Weiler have referred to the writings of Bakhtin, particularly in relation to their discussions of, possible relations between social authoritative constructs, and language meanings. See Lather, pp. 112, 116; Walsh, pp. 39-47; Weiler, pp. 129, 139.

⁹⁴ Holquist, pp. 60-61.

not be funny because it exemplifies a violation of moral and ethical codes and humiliates a woman by mocking her identity. Both of these assumptions can theoretically be linked to perceptions of self empowerment and perceived to be related to specific social and historical situations. It is possible, Bakhtin maintains, to consider that a recognition of basic parody and humour is a recognition of one's power to change conventional meanings associated with experience. It could be possible that the person who laughs at the man dressed in woman's clothes is silently acknowledging to him or herself, "Yes, this is possible; and it is only convention which makes it appear to be ludicrous." It could also be possible that the person who is offended by the man dressed in woman's clothes is silently acknowledging to him or herself, "This is wrong. Identity has been described by external factors; and I have been described. Please don't laugh at me, or my lack of empowerment." Perhaps I am stretching a point but I am doing so in an effort to illustrate how understandings of meaning could be linked to states of consciousness and social contexts.

This description of understanding humour and parody can be compared to the idea of understanding metaphor in language which was previously discussed. Both the recognition of metaphor and the recognition of humour seem to require a simultaneous overlapping of those categorical divisions which separate meaning contexts from each other. Both seem to require a conscious effort to elicit a duality of meaning from a single situation context. The capacity to derive humour from a situation may be culturally and socially located because meaning appears to be that which is always in dialogue with an interpreter's state of consciousness and his or her personal grounding in social contexts. The ability to understand that a single situation context may possess duality or even multiplicity of meanings can be related to an individual's social perspective on reality. "The occurrence of humour, parody and irony emerges as a dialogue between possible meanings."⁹⁵ One can consider that the understanding of a humorous situation is in part related to an understanding of conventional meanings associated with "normative" situations.

It is theoretically possible to connect the cultural situatedness of knowing to an individual's ability to grasp humour. This connection illustrates a way in which the understanding and social location of a knower may be reflexively interlocked. For example, the grasping of a humorous perspective can be seen to emerge in relation to an individual's capacity to recognize a situation in both its conventional and unconventional contexts. This is similar to the situation of the metaphor where one context of

⁹⁵ Holquist, p. 76.

understanding is deliberately played off another context of understanding in order to create a new perspective which is shared between the two. An ability to conceptually manipulate contextual comparison, meaning juxtaposition and displace situation conventions is thought to occur during the translation of humour. Bakhtin in his discussion of the roles of rogue, clown and fool in literature,⁹⁶ states that they can be considered as allegories to conceptual borders. For example, the clown evokes humour as it trespasses conventional situation boundaries and conveys meaning out of its standard and normative context. Humour is grasped by understanding the meaning of both contexts at the same time. The displacement of the proper into the realm of the improper discloses the irony of the situation. The irony is achieved through interpretive displacement.

In relation to some of the goals of deconstruction theory such as its efforts to disrupt conventional meaning and liberate suppressed interpretive energy, an analysis of meaning contained in humour may be significant in illustrating how some of the measurement contained in conventional social understandings may be disclosed. Meaning derived through humour can be observed to depend upon a state of individual consciousness. The possible significance of this, in terms of developing deconstruction pedagogical strategies, is that a critical analyses of humour could be used to draw attention to social habits associated with the way in which meaning is organized through language and language contexts. It could be used as an example of how a normative understanding of a social context may effect the establishment of meaning in new situations. Bakhtin claims that the clown "makes use of the right to be other in this world by evoking the right not to make the common cause."⁹⁷ This idea could be related to deconstruction theory in the sense that it highlights the idea of resisting conventional meaning within a legitimated context of established social norms and interpretive standards. Humour, in some ways, can be observed to evolve through the disassociation of language based relations from their counterparts in social value judgments. The humour can only be understood, however, by retaining -- in memory -- the conventional association between the two while they are being deconstructed. This can only be observed to the extent that the meanings obtained through the shifting and displacement of interpretive contexts are taken for granted. For example, a situation may appear humorous when taken out of context only because one presumes to know what its conventional context should be. It is possible that the basis of these assumptions could be grounded in false consciousness. In the case of both the metaphor and the parody, the transgression and shift of conventional meaning associations

⁹⁶ Holquist, p. 159.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

can be observed to take place. The fact that these transgressions and shifts may be considered to be legitimate or non threatening could be because they stand on the periphery of experience and as a consequence, serve only to support the reification of conventions in interpretation. As Bahktin has observed, the ability to derive meaning through humour transcends the standard boundaries of literality only as a mask. "Parody, joke, humour, irony, grotesque, whimsy are but narrowly restrictive labels for the heterogeneity and subtlety of the idea."⁹⁸ It is possible that more direct and obvious attempts to shift and transform conventional meaning may be perceived as socially disruptive.

Accessing Shift - The Pedagogical Goal

The discussion on pedagogical implications that will immediately follow constitutes the final section of this thesis. In this section I will make an effort to synthesize the ideas contained in chapters one, two and three. The purpose of this will be to suggest to the reader the possible significance of these ideas with respect to the development of an inclusive epistemology. From my understanding of the readings discussed in this paper, I suggest the following recommendations: An implementation of paradigm shift should be undertaken at the theoretical level and at this level, a rethinking of conventional paradigms is recommended. Strategies that have been discussed in relation to this rethinking include a disclosure of social power structures behind the paradigms. In conformity with deconstruction practices, this form of disclosure involves the deconstructing of the political aspects of meaning in relation of how they are seen to be structured into text. Aside from the effort to theoretically challenge pre-existent paradigms, it is recommended that emancipatory theorists also seek ways to construct inclusive paradigms. These have been discussed in relation to ways that research methods can be restructured in order to establish more inclusive standards for evaluation and measurement gained through research data. The underlying premise grounding all emancipatory research is that paradigms must be kept in play and that the emancipation of the oppressed must be the goal.

An implementation of epistemological change must also take place at the social level as it is believed that knowledge is grounded in social experience. Strategies to heighten social awareness would be paramount in both theoretical and pedagogical design if the goal is to foster a consciousness that is able to resist hegemony and the restrictive effects of a dominant ideology. Pedagogues implementing deconstruction practices advise that opportunities to develop a critical consciousness and recognize the reflexivity in

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

knowledge should be made available from the earliest stages of formal learning. The pedagogist is advised to make use of classroom opportunities to promote transformation of consciousness, empowerment of all knowers, a value for multiple readings and a negotiation of meaning. "Deconstruction pedagogy encourages a multiplicity of readings by demonstrating how we cannot exhaust the meaning of the text, how a text can participate in multiple readings without being reduced to any one, and how our different positionalities affect our reading of it." ⁹⁹

Finally, it is recommended that social projects that can be used to emancipate the voice of the oppressed be increased. From an epistemological standpoint, many of these projects would involve research into social situations in an effort to develop contexts of progressive and inclusive theory.

Looking Towards New Paradigms of Measurement

Within the context of this thesis, the idea of developing an inclusive and progressive western epistemology has been approached in reference to feminist postmodern theory. This form of discourse challenges the traditional paradigms on the grounds they have been generated from a limited, but dominant "Euro-model of knowledge legitimation." ¹⁰⁰ The challenge takes the form of problematizing the western social legitimating process of knowledge:

"In recognizing the importance of institutional structures and language in the construction of subjectivities and political life, it [postmodern feminism] promotes social criticism that acknowledges the interrelationship between human agents and social structures, rather than succumbing to a social theory that lacks agents or one in which agents are simply the product of broad structural and ideological forces." ¹⁰¹

Issues of measurement and the assignment of values to knowledge claims become points of emphasis within these critical pedagogical practices. Measurements and value systems are believed to be outcomes of social discourses which are thought to be in essence a type of narrative in themselves. That is, forms of measurement and assignment of values are observed to be linked to cultural perspectives and are therefore viewed as comprising a

⁹⁹ Lather, p. 145.

¹⁰⁰ Giroux, Myrsiades and Myrsiades, eds., p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 35.

"reading of experience." From the perspective of emancipatory theory, they become interpretive structures open to deconstruction practices.

The postmodern theoretical challenge to westernization, once posited, is left with its own challenge of designing models of research which could support the rationale behind its goal to replace old paradigms. These designs tend to be theoretically based on a re-evaluation of categorical differences, particularly those imposed through a recognition of binary oppositions. For example, it is continually emphasized that definitions of subjectivity and objectivity should be rethought. It is also recommended that dominant paradigms¹⁰² shift their emphasis from an exclusive focus on linear and quantitative analysis.¹⁰³ To be specific, knowledge is considered to be reflexive and negotiable. It is suggested that knowledge be assessed through measurement systems which take into account dynamic factors such as feedback and that an assessment should be made of how subjective conditions may qualify knowledge outcomes. There is an overall call for change in methods which constitute difference and ranking of difference within the context of western culture.¹⁰⁴

The basic premise through which postmodern critiques of westernization are structured is the claim that knowledge is not neutral. Within the context of critical theory, knowledge is continually defined as something which emerges relative to cultural, historical, social and political conditions.¹⁰⁵ Deconstruction perspectives consider the conditions themselves to be textual representations. And as a consequence, knowledge is observed to be indefinitely abstracted in its potential. The striving for empirical and objective knowledge is considered to be a reflection of a cultural struggles. Feminists such as Lather propose a new way of defining empirical and objective knowledge. For example, it has been argued that the idea of objectivity itself is grounded in a history of political struggle and is therefore situated in a social perspective. A problem arises, feminists observe, because the conventional western recognition of objectivity obscures the conditions of subjectivity which ground it. Objectivity would be more objective, they maintain, if it were to overtly convey its situatedness in knowledge claims. In this way it could at least present theory with a concrete example of a relationship between culture and knowledge. In sum, it is recommended that the understanding of objectivity be expanded to include its subjective aspects.

¹⁰² Lather. Code. Walsh.

¹⁰³ Code.

¹⁰⁴ Lather. Myrsiades and Myrsiades.

¹⁰⁵ Kai Neilson, "On the Status of Critical Theory", in *Interchange*, vol. 23, no. 3. (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992). pp. 265-284.

Conventions in measurement, with respect to establishing "validity and legitimacy" in relation to knowledge, are also openly challenged. Deconstruction practices work from the assumption that the concept of validity is itself a site of textual authority, one which represents conditions of social privilege.¹⁰⁶ In this case, the political grounding of the definition of validity becomes an open field for reinterpretation. It is critically analyzed in an effort to discern what hegemonic interests it can be observed to uphold. The attribution of validity to certain types of knowledge outcomes is considered to impact on the type of data collected, methods for obtaining it, and methods of interpreting it. "The idea of validity is considered to be a process which is justifiably problematic."¹⁰⁷ In more specific terms, validity is considered to be relative to specific modes of conceptualization and degrees of observer bias exhibited during research endeavors are considered to impact on and be impacted upon by its description. A connection is considered to exist between the observer and the observed, one which will lead to perspectives on knowledge. It is also recognized that larger social situations will regulate contexts between the researcher and the researched in social projects. That is why it is considered crucial that submerged social awareness be amplified so that they might come to recognize and transcend the restrictions placed on their knowing through structural impositions. Inclusive theoretical design has as its goal the establishment of an epistemological system where variability and change in interpretive trends will be accommodated and encouraged through social processes of legitimation.¹⁰⁸

Pedagogy

The ways we speak and write are held to influence our conceptual boundaries and to create areas of silence as language organizes meaning in terms of pre-established categories...There is no final knowledge.¹⁰⁹

Within the contexts of a postmodern perspective, knowledge is viewed as a dynamic process. Critical pedagogy argues that progress cannot be made in western epistemology without a socially legitimated appreciation for the shifting and transformative aspects involved in knowledge construction. As part of the challenge to traditional western methods of knowledge production, it has been argued that individuals are generally not

¹⁰⁶ Lather.

¹⁰⁷ Code.

¹⁰⁸ Lather.

¹⁰⁹ Lather, p.111.

taught to use their power to reorganize old meanings or to create new ones. The ability to know, it has been further argued, is restricted by authoritative situations encountered during learning. It is maintained that individuals are generally taught to construct their knowledge and form their interpretations through a conformity with normative structures. An individual's particular ability to send or receive information in accordance with the normative structure has been observed to impact on his or her attained status as a knower.

In accordance with its goal of seeking social transformation, the deconstructionist perspective seeks to foster an individual's potential to recognize and make use of the dynamic and shifting aspects contained within language. These mechanisms are used as tools to deconstruct old meanings and create new ones, all leading to the empowerment of the knower. "The task is to construct classroom relations that engender fresh confrontation with value and meaning."¹¹⁰ It is recognized that relationships exist between senders and receivers of knowledge. These relationships allow for a communicable shift in meaning because they involve a sending of an interpretation which may vary in relation to the interpreter's perspective and also because the receiver could interpret in a way that may be either affirmed or negated by the sender. Deconstruction pedagogy can be observed to base its practices on the assumption that interpretation of knowledge, to the extent that it is shared, is vulnerable to situations where authority impedes its development. "In developing a deconstructive pedagogy, our search is not to designate an object or describe a context but to foreground a relation between knower and known, teacher and taught, from an embodied perspective."¹¹¹

Although language is observed to exhibit restrictions on interpretation through its representation of historical, political and cultural authority, the possibilities of social struggle and resistance to the norm are considered to act as counterpoints to this infringement on transformation. Due to this, struggle and resistance are incorporated into pedagogical strategies as tools which can be used to displace the force imposed by authoritative meaning contexts.¹¹² Deconstruction theory argues that a recognition of dynamic, shifting and transforming aspects of knowing can be used to both transform and emancipate consciousness. It implies that if these aspects were ranked favourably in terms of social legitimation, students might be able to access more of their ability to create and transform meaning during their efforts to interpret text.¹¹³ In this way, students might become more empowered as knowers and knowledge might progress at a pace more akin

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 143.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 56.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 59.

to that of social change. It has been previously stated that the interest behind developing an inclusive and progressive epistemological system is the construction of a knowledge base through which an increasingly diverse and changing society will be justly represented and served.

The consciousness of the individual is another important point of focus in the interest of developing strategies for pedagogical change. This is because cultural interference is observed to impose itself at the level of consciousness as an individual learns to pattern his or her own understandings of reality. In regard to this focus, deconstruction practices seek to deconstruct the oppressed self identity of the individual as a knower. In this case, strategies constructed to reveal a "reflexive situatedness in knowing" become significant to the individual. It is postulated that approaches towards teaching interpretation be reworked. For example, in moving away from traditional methods of interpreting text where the student is asked to question, "What is the right reading and how can I find the right reading?" the student can be encouraged to ask him or herself, "Why am I reading this way and what produces this reading?"¹¹⁴ This restructuring of questioning techniques approaches knowledge through a recognition of its social and psychological components. It also makes knowledge construction more subject to practices of negotiation. Critical pedagogy advocates a move from pedagogical practices where the individual is a passive assimilator of information, to practices where the individual is encouraged to be the active negotiator of meaning. As knowledge is not presently considered to be synthesized in accordance with inclusive paradigms, theorists recommend that students be encouraged to identify ways in which cultural infringements on their perception may either facilitate or impede their learning in relation to their social context. This form of learning could become very concrete to the extent that an individual could learn to empower him or herself socially by realizing how culture may have shaped and continues to shape them. Their personal assessment of this realization, if engendered, could impact on the individual's active decision to either resist or accept assimilation of further "cultural indoctrination."

Social Projects

Throughout this paper, it has been suggested that the status of social legitimacy and authority tends to be accorded to certain types of interpretations of reality within western culture. From the perspective of critical theory, this status both reflects and reproduces

¹¹⁴ Lather, p. 145.

situations of epistemological privilege. The deconstruction of this privilege, as it is expressed through text, becomes a central focus in efforts to liberate socially oppressed and culturally submerged perspectives. It is continually recognized that emancipatory pedagogical practices cannot proceed without acting in conjunction with the projects of the oppressed. As a consequence, much epistemological research takes on the form of social and humanities based research. That is, it tends to be interdisciplinary in its methodology.

The deconstruction theorist seeks to extend the ownership of textual meaning to an indefinite range of knowers. In other words, textual meaning should not be dictated to the reader as canon.¹¹⁵ In situations of social research, knowledge is treated as being situated in particular conditions of human experience. That is, knowledge is not only used to frame a context of inquiry but it is also treated as being problematical in order that its limitations in and power to transcend interpretive conventions be fully exposed in research projects. Lather has cited an example of Patai's work on Brazilian women. In this case, the researcher, Patai, has interpreted her own research findings as constituting descriptions leading to the construction of a text.¹¹⁶ In relation to this specific instance, Lather has observed that, "Written texts, then, are 'a point of intersection between two subjectivities.' [Those of the researcher and researched] ¹¹⁷ which could easily have produced a different story with different emphases given different interview conditions." ¹¹⁸ Lather stresses Patai's own observation that by situating the researcher's perspective and experience at the center of inquiry, that relation of dominance may be perpetuated through research design.¹¹⁹ One could infer from this that the emancipatory theorist is again cautioned against taking a non-reflexive stance in relation to his or her efforts to conduct research and attempts to establish theory.

With respect to social projects, deconstruction approaches advocate that conscious awareness on the part of a social agent be drawn towards a recognition of a dynamic contingency in language based meaning. By grounding a critical study of language within the context of social experience, deconstruction strategies are directed towards fostering a recognition of ways in which language can be observed to take on specific configurations of meaning within specific cultural contexts. It has been previously stated that one can observe an historical component in relation to meaning construction. This has been illustrated in the way in which paradigms are considered to influence the expression of

¹¹⁵ Myrsiades and Myrsiades.

¹¹⁶ Lather, p. 93.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 93-94.

thought within western society. Social feedback has long been considered to influence the ways in which individuals may adjust their beliefs and actions to cultural situations and environmental conditions. In order to reroute the direction of this adjustment away from strategies which exploit and oppress, critical theoretical approaches seek to balance the power and privilege that has been traditionally associated with knowing. It seeks to use self reflective approaches in order to reveal and examine ways in which meaning may be synthesized in relation to those social situation contexts which enclose it. The idea of a knowledge grounded in reflexivity is emphasized because it has been defined as a focal point which can be used to highlight connections between social situatedness and social authority as knower. This reflexivity is established in relation to deconstructive practices which seek to illuminate conventions that establish associations between social position and social authority as a knower.

The building of a new and inclusive epistemological theory has been described as a process through which research design and measurement necessarily adopts new paradigms through a progressive and negotiated evolution of thought. In other words, it is not the theorist who informs society of what should be known but it is presently the responsibility of the theorist to seek social projects and pedagogical designs that will emancipate the position of the oppressed knower. From the emancipatory stance, knowledge production ideally should be a continual state of progress through which society seeks to further the development of knowledge and the ability to know for all its members on an equitable basis. At present, the emancipatory theorist must challenge and deconstruct conventions in knowledge legitimation which continue to reproduce the invisibility of the oppressed voice. In pedagogical practices, it is important that the individual be able to deconstruct the authority grounding his or her own perspective on knowledge through strategies which disclose the ways in which its presumed correctness or incorrectness reflect degrees of conformity with or deviations from the norm authorized standards. It is critical that steps be taken in order to include deconstruction methods into classroom curriculum in order that students learn at an early age how to discern the reflexivity of knowledge and how to uncover the social and political boundaries which may contain their own knowledge. In conjunction with this, they must still learn to continually challenge their own knowledge in order to keep their development of social consciousness an active project.

Within the context of emancipatory theory, epistemological ground is evaluated as political ground. Deconstruction practices are used to disrupt the regulative and reproductive effect that the authority of text may impose over the interpreter's conscious state. The deliberate use of strategies to reverse the authority structure imposed in

traditional approaches to textual interpretation are used to draw creativity out by releasing unstable spaces locked between conventions. This act, in its radical extreme, could be considered as a political act of conscious resistance. To the deconstructionist, it is a recognition that all knowledge reflects acts of political and social struggle and that in an effort to emancipate the oppressed voice, authority must be continually challenged in order to keep it in play. It is through the deliberate dissolution and or inversion of the authoritative voice contained within a text that an oppressed knower should gain some insight into his or her own power to interpret experience.¹²⁰ In acts of epistemological resistance, deconstructionists focus on what they perceive to be a point of intercept between consciousness and textual meaning. The text is considered to convey its own unique sense of meaning only to the extent that the conscious state of interpreting it shares in and accepts its message. Within the parameters of social discourse, the individual may have a vested interest in accepting a particular interpretation of a text. The individual who seeks social transformation is encouraged to be aware of the structural boundaries and authoritative contexts that define his or her own conceptual territory. Deconstruction theory seeks to collapse the authority of interpretive influences in their conventional sense in an effort to promote interpretive shift, creativity, inclusivity and progress through the politics of constructing meaning.

"There is a discontinuity in interpretation as we establish ourselves in relation to other. Never certain of complete and identical transference during translation." ¹²¹

Culture has been observed to socially influence individual understandings of reality by mediating those situations where interpretation is learned. The language of a culture in particular has been identified as one site where conceptual limitations may be imposed over an individual's potential to express meaning. Critical theory emphasizes that culture, although it may reflect a hegemonic perspective, is finally a form of dialogue between a society and the environmental conditions which bound it. These dialogues are thought to reflect an established cultural perspective on either what does or should promote efficient and sufficient survival within a given environment.¹²² Deconstructionists observe that such a perspective would constitute a text -- that is, it would represent a particular reading of experience rather than a complete and final truth. This observation is based on a recognition or belief that political tensions create, within knowledge, contexts which encourage specific perceptions requiring specific systems of measurement which in turn

¹²⁰ Ibid..

¹²¹ Sarup, p. 11.

¹²² Thomas, pp. 9-13.

skew the mass interpretation of social values towards a particular direction of cultural growth. As society transforms, stabilizes or bifurcates, there may arise a dissatisfaction with conventional methods for interpreting reality. It is possible that over time the consequences of a political skew in interests and perspectives could become amplified through its own systems of feedback and reproduction. Through this amplification, people could come to interact with nature in a way which is culturally prescribed and with regard to nature, they would perceive what they have learned to perceive.¹²³ In a specific reference to the idea of cultural skew, it has been suggested that the western conceptualization of a culture-nature dichotomy may have at one time represented an immediate situation of confrontation between humans and the environment. As individuals may have passed down interpretations and resolutions of this confrontation over time to their descendants through teaching, the individuals who have learned through social communication will tend to approach subsequent contacts with nature from a biased position. A more specific illustration of this type of cultural amplification may be evident in the feminist analysis of the anthropological argument on gender role learning. In this case, the dominant perception of division of labour between males and females could be observed to be a cultural amplification of what was once considered to be a social resolution to the environmental problem of survival.

In conclusion, culture tends to be analyzed through critical pedagogy and deconstruction practices as a dynamic text -- something which offers to society a particular reading of experience. Culture has been described as a of synthesis of social efforts developed to resolve the collective need, demand and desire.¹²⁴ One of the problems observed in relation to western culture is that its systemization of these efforts only address the interests and needs of a limited, privileged section of society. Western cultural standards are considered to fail in their efforts to produce a social awareness that will justly and progressively address the interests of a changing and increasingly complex society. The state of western epistemology is criticized as one which represents a set of stagnant social values and as one which is now restricting, rather than facilitating, the process of social growth through knowledge. As much of the reproduction of knowledge is thought to be transmitted through language, deconstruction focuses on strategies that will subject conventional analyses of text and related decoding practices to severe and extreme reversals and inversions of order. These strategies are undertaken in an effort to reveal how the "authority of a text" can impose limitations on individual and subsequently

¹²³ Walsh.

¹²⁴ Sarup, pp. 22-24.

collective states of social consciousness. Liberating submerged interpretations of the oppressed becomes the driving impetus behind efforts to establish emancipatory theory. The designing of social research projects that are inclusive, reflexive and self transformative ¹²⁵ become central points in deciding on what modes of inquiry will be used. Within these parameters of thought, individuals learn to interpret through text by assimilating a succession of external images. Because an individual appears to decode text according to learned conventions, such as proper verbalizations, word associations, cross-referencing and organization into meaning contexts, the ability to interpret is considered to be mediated through consciousness by culture. Pedagogical designs with the goal of "re-claiming lost voices" in order to balance and further the justice of western epistemology are encouraged to work towards disclosing ways in which the politics of language communicates reality to individuals. If it is possible to establish through research the validity of the claims made by critical theory and applied deconstruction practices, it might be possible to more consciously implement a legitimate value for paradigm shifts at the higher levels of epistemological synthesis. It has been observed that the struggle between society and nature is ongoing and that knowledge will emerge dialectically through this struggle whether society intends it or not. What society can change, however, is the form of dialogue it establishes between cultures, the situations of privilege and oppression it creates for its members and the stance of exploitation it takes towards the environment. It may indeed be a learned perception which has led to the existence of those negative conditions observed to be reproduced within western society. If this is so, then it is possible that modes and methods of both interpreting and communicating reality may require a critical approach leading to a deliberate transformation of learned social consciousness.

¹²⁵ Lather.

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