

## Losing collective memory: What postmodernists forget

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### ABSTRACT

Educational life at universities has been characterised by conservatism. Even though the current administration in Washington may try to rein in some of the excesses of the rightist social agenda (though it too is moving perceptibly to the right), the terms of debate and the existing economic and social conditions have been transformed remarkably in a conservative direction. We should not be romantic about what will happen at our schools and universities, especially given the fiscal crisis of the state and the acceptance of major aspects of the conservative social and economic agenda within both major political parties in the United States. Let me situate the experiences of teachers and students in this time of conservatism within the larger transformation in education and the wider society that the conservative alliance has attempted.

### Introduction

Everyone stared at the department chair in amazement. Jaws simply dropped. Soon the room was filled with a nearly chaotic mixture of sounds of anger and disbelief. It wasn't the first time she had informed us about what was 'coming down from on high'. Similar things had occurred before. After all, this was just another brick that was being removed. Yet, to each and every one of us in that room, it was clear from that moment on that, for all of our struggles to protect education from being totally integrated into the rightist project of economic competitiveness and rationalization, we were losing.

It was hard to bring order to the meeting. But, slowly, we got our emotions under control long enough to hear what the State Department of Public Instruction and the Legislature had determined was best for all of the students in Wisconsin - from kindergarten to the university. Starting the next year, all undergraduate students who wished to become teachers would have to take a course on Education for Employment, in essence a course on the 'benefits of the free enterprise system'. At the same time, all school curricula at the elementary and secondary levels - from five-year-olds on up - would have to integrate within their teaching a coherent program of education for employment as well. After all, you can't start too young, can you? Education was simply the supplier of human capital for the private sector, after all.

I begin with this story because I think it is often better to start in our guts, so to speak, to start with our experiences as teachers and students in this time of conservatism. I begin here as well because, even though the current administration in Washington may try to rein in some of the excesses of the rightist social agenda (though it too is moving perceptibly to the right), the terms of debate and the existing economic and social conditions have been transformed remarkably in a conservative direction (Apple, 1993). We should not be romantic about what will happen at our schools and universities, especially given the fiscal crisis of the state and the acceptance of major

aspects of the conservative social and economic agenda within both major political parties in the United States. The story I told a moment ago can serve as a metaphor for what is happening to so much of educational life at universities and elsewhere.

Let me situate this story within the larger transformation in education and the wider society that the conservative alliance has attempted.

### Between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism

Conservatism by its very name announces one interpretation of its agenda. It conserves. Other interpretations are possible of course. One could say, more wryly, that conservatism believes that nothing should be done for the first time (Honderich, 1990: 1). Yet in many ways, in the current situation this is deceptive. For with the Right now in ascendancy in many nations, we are witnessing a much more activist project. Conservative politics now are very much the politics of alteration - not always, but clearly the idea of 'do nothing for the first time' is not a sufficient explanation of what is going on either in education or else where (Honderich, 1990: 4).

Conservatism has in fact meant different things at different times and places. At times, it will involve defensive actions; at other times, it will involve taking initiative against the *status quo* (Honderich, 1990: 15). Today, we are witnessing both.

Because of this, it is important that I set out the larger social context in which the current politics of official knowledge operates. There has been a breakdown in the accord that guided a good deal of educational policy since World War II. Powerful groups within government and the economy, and within 'authoritarian populist' social movements, have been able to redefine - often in very retrogressive ways - the terms of debate in education, social welfare, and other areas of the common good. What education is for is being transformed (Apple, 1993). No longer is education seen as part of a social alliance which combined many 'minority'<sup>1</sup> groups, women, teachers, community activists, progressive legislators and government officials, and others who acted together to propose (limited) social democratic policies for schools (e.g. expanding educational opportunities, limited attempts at equalizing outcomes, developing special programmes in bilingual and multicultural education, and so on). A new alliance has been formed, one that has increasing power in educational and social policy. This power bloc combines business with the New Right and with neo-conservative intellectuals. Its interests are less in increasing the life chances of women, people of colour, or labour. (These groups are obviously not mutually exclusive.) Rather it aims at providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the ideal home, family, and school (Apple, 1993). There is no need to control the White House for this agenda to continue to have a major effect.

The power of this alliance can be seen in a number of educational policies and proposals not only at the university but in schooling in general. (In fact, it is essential that we see this broader picture. Without it, we cannot fully understand what is happening to institutions of higher education.) These include: (1) programmes for choice such as voucher plans and tax credits to make schools like the thoroughly idealized free-market economy; (2) the movement at national and state levels throughout the country to raise standards and mandate both teacher and student competencies and basic curricular goals and knowledge increasingly now through the implementation of statewide and national testing; (3) the increasingly effective attacks on the school curriculum for its anti-family and anti-free enterprise bias, its secular humanism, its lack of patriotism, and its supposed neglect of the knowledge and values of the Western tradition and of real knowledge; and (4) the growing pressure to make the perceived needs of business and industry into the primary goals of education at all levels (Apple, 1988; 1993). The effects of all this - the culture wars, the immensity of the fiscal crisis in education, the attacks on political correctness, and so on - are being painfully felt on the university as well.

In essence, the new alliance in favour of the conservative restoration has integrated education into a wider set of ideological commitments. The objectives in education are the same as those which serve as a guide to its economic and social welfare goals. These include the expansion of the free market, the drastic reduction of government responsibility for social needs (though the Clinton administration may mediate this in not very extensive - and not very expensive - ways), the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility, the lowering of people's expectations for economic security, and the popularization of what is clearly a form of Social Darwinist thinking (Bastian et al, 1986; see also, Herrnstein and Murray, 1994).

As I have argued at length elsewhere, the political right in the USA has been very successful in mobilizing support *against* the educational system and its employees, often exporting the crisis in the economy to the schools. Thus, one of its major achievements has been to shift the blame for unemployment and underemployment, for the loss of economic competitiveness, and for the supposed breakdown of traditional values and standards in the family, education, and paid and unpaid workplaces *from* the economic, cultural, and social policies and effects of dominant groups *to* the school and other public agencies. Public now is the centre of all evil, private is the centre of all that is good (Apple, 1985).

In essence, then, four trends have characterized the conservative restoration both in the USA and in Britain - privatization, centralization, vocationalization, and differentiation (Green, 1991: 27). These are actually largely the results of differences within the most powerful wings of this tense alliance - neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism.

Neo-liberalism has a vision of the weak state. A society that lets the invisible hand of the free market guide *all* aspects of its forms of social interaction is seen as both efficient and democratic. On the other hand, neo-conservatism is guided by a vision of the strong state in certain areas, especially over the politics of the body and gender and race relations, over standards, values, and conduct, and" over what knowledge should be passed on to future generations (Hunter, 1988).<sup>2</sup> While these are no more than ideal types, those two positions do not easily sit side by side in the conservative coalition.

Thus the Rightist movement is contradictory. Is there not something paradoxical about linking all of the feelings of loss and nostalgia to the unpredictability of the market 'in replacing loss by sheer flux'? (Johnson, 1991: 40).

At the elementary and secondary school levels, the contradictions between neo-conservative and neo-liberal elements in the Rightist coalition are solved through a policy of what Roger Dale has called conservative modernization (Dale, quoted in Edwards et al, 1992: 156). Such a policy is engaged in:

simultaneously 'freeing' individuals for economic purposes while controlling them for social purposes; indeed, in so far as economic 'freedom' increases inequalities, it is likely to increase the need for social control. A 'small, strong state' limits the range of its activities by transferring to the market, which it defends and legitimizes, as much welfare [and other activities] as possible. In education, the new reliance on competition and choice is not all pervasive; instead, 'what is intended is a dual system, polarized between ... market schools and minimum schools'. (Dale, quoted in Edwards et al., 1992: 156- 157)

That is, there will be a relatively less regulated and increasingly privatized sector for the children of the better off. For the rest - and the economic status and racial composition in, say, our urban areas of the people who attend these minimum schools will be thoroughly predictable - the schools will be tightly controlled and policed and will continue to be underfunded and unlinked to decent paid employment.

One of the major effects of the combination of marketization and strong state is to remove educational policies from public debate. That is, the choice is left up to individual parents, and the hidden hand of unintended consequences does the rest. In the process, the very idea of education

being part of a public political sphere in which its means and ends are publicly debated atrocities (Education Group II, 1991: 268).

There are major differences between democratic attempts at enhancing people's rights over the policies and practices of schooling and the neo-liberal emphasis on marketization and privatization. The goal of the former is to extend politics, to revivify democratic practice by devising ways of enhancing public discussion, debate, and negotiation. It is inherently based on a vision of democracy that sees it as an educative practice. The latter, on the other hand, seeks to contain politics. It wants to reduce all politics to economics, to an ethic of choice and consumption (Johnson, 1991: 68). The world, in essence, becomes a vast supermarket (Apple, 1993).

Enlarging the private sector so that buying and selling - in a word competition - is the dominant ethic of society involves a set of closely related propositions. It assumes that more individuals are motivated to work harder under these conditions. After all, we 'already know' that public servants are inefficient and slothful while private enterprises are efficient and energetic. It assumes that self-interest and competitiveness are the engines of creativity. More knowledge, more experimentation, is created and used to alter what we have now. In the process, less waste is created. Supply and demand stay in a kind of equilibrium. A more efficient machine is thus created, one which minimizes administrative costs and ultimately distributes resources more widely (Honderich, 1990: 104).

This is, of course, not meant simply to privilege the few. However, it is the equivalent of saying that everyone has the right to climb the north face of the Eiger or scale Mount Everest without exception, providing of course that you are very good at mountain climbing and have the institutional and financial resources to do it (Honderich, 1990: 99-100).

Thus, in a conservative society, access to a society's private resources (and, remember, the attempt is to make nearly all of society's resources private) is largely dependent on one's ability to pay. And this is dependent on one's being a person of an entrepreneurial or efficiently acquisitive class type. On the other hand, society's public resources (that rapidly decreasing segment) are dependent on need (Honderich, 1990: 89). In a conservative society, the former is to be maximized, the latter is to be minimized.

However, most forms of conservatism do not merely depend in a large portion of their arguments and policies on a particular view of human nature - a view of human nature as primarily self-interested. They have gone further; they have set out to degrade that human nature, to force all people to conform to what at first could only be pretended to be true. Unfortunately, in no small measure they have succeeded. Perhaps blinded by their own absolutist and reductive vision of what it means to be human, many of our political leaders do not seem to be capable of recognizing what they have done. They have set out, aggressively, to drag down the character of a people (Honderich, 1990: 81), while at the same time attacking the poor and the disenfranchised for their supposed lack of values and character.

But I digress here and some of my anger begins to show. You will forgive me I trust; but if we cannot allow ourselves to be angry about the lives of our children, what can we be angry about?

### **What post-modernists forget**

Important elements of the neo-conservative and especially the neo-liberal agendas are increasingly dominating the university. The growing class and race polarization surrounding *which* universities one gets to go to (or doesn't get to go to), the funding cuts for unproductive (a truly revealing metaphor), humanistic, and/or critically oriented programmes, the increased pressure towards efficiency and raising standards, the calls for a return to a common culture, and above all the growing integration of university teaching, research, funding, and many of its other functions into the industrial project - all of these and more are indicative of the effects of both strands of the complex restructuring of our daily lives.

Unfortunately, major elements of this restructuring are hardly on the agenda of discussions of some of the groups within the critical and progressive communities within higher education itself. This is especially the case if we examine what kind of knowledge is now more and more being given the official imprimatur of the institution.

While the conflict over post-modern and post-structural forms continues to rage - in part because of some of the overstatements by what are affectionately known by some of my colleagues as the posties as well as because of the aggressive attacks coming from movements associated with the conservative restoration (Apple, 1993) - too little focus has been placed on the political economy of what knowledge is considered high status in this and similar societies. Thus, while the humanities and the social sciences are engaged in clever rhetorical and cultural battles (please excuse the masculinist and militarist turn of phrase; the word is not mine) over what counts as appropriate knowledge and what counts as appropriate forms of teaching and knowing (the culture wars), what are commonsensically known as the sciences and technology - what I have called (following the lead to Walter Feinberg) technical/administrative knowledge - are receiving even more emphasis at schools at all levels in terms of time in the curriculum, funding, prestige, support from the apparatuses of the state (Apple, 1985) and an administration in Washington that is committed to technical solutions and technical knowledge.

What I shall say here is still rather tentative, but it responds to some of my intuitions that a good deal of the storm and fury over the politics of one form of textual analysis over another or even over whether we should see the world as a text, as discursively constructed, for example, is at least partly beside the point and that we may be losing some of the most important insights generated by, say, the neo-marxist tradition in education and elsewhere.

In what I say here, I hope I do not sound like an unreconstructed Stalinoid (after all I've spent all too much of my life writing and speaking about the reductive tendencies within the marxist traditions). I simply want us to remember the utterly essential - not essentialist - understandings of the relationships (admittedly very complex) between what knowledge is considered high status and some of the relations of power we need to consider but seem to have forgotten a bit too readily. I shall not only refer to relations of power at the university but to emerging and crucial transformations that are occurring in elementary and secondary schools that educate (or don't educate) students who ultimately go (or don't go) to institutions of higher education.

The growth of the multiple positions associated with post-modernism and post-structuralism is indicative of the transformation of our discourse and understandings of the relationship between culture and power. The rejection of the comforting illusion that there can (and must) be one grand narrative under which all relations of domination can be subsumed, the focus on the micro-level as a site of the political, the illumination of the utter complexity of the power-knowledge nexus, the extension of our political concerns well beyond the holy trinity of class, gender, and race, the idea of the decentred subject where identity is both nonfixed and a site of political struggle, the focus on the politics and practices of consumption, not only production - all of this has been important, though not totally unproblematic to say the least (Clarke, 1991; Best & Kellner, 1991).

With the growth of post-modern and post-structural literature in critical educational and cultural studies, however, we have tended to move too quickly away from traditions that continue to be filled with vitality and provide essential insights into the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy that dominate schools at all levels. Thus, for example, the mere fact that class does not explain all can be used as an excuse to deny its power. This would be a serious error. Class is of course an analytic construct as well as a set of relations that have an existence outside of our minds. Thus, what we mean by it and how it is mobilized as a category needs to be continually deconstructed and rethought. Thus, we must be very careful when and how it is used, with due recognition of the multiple ways in which people are formed. Even given this, however, it would be wrong to assume that, since many people do not identify with or act on what we might expect from theories that link,

say, identity and ideology with one's class position, this means that class has gone away (Apple, 1992).

The same must be said about the economy. Capitalism may be being transformed, but it still exists as a massive structuring force. Many people may not think and act in ways predicted by class essentializing theories, but this does *not* mean the racial, sexual, and class divisions of paid and unpaid labor have disappeared; nor does it mean that relations of production (both economic *and* cultural, since how we think about these two may be different) can be ignored if we do it in non-essentializing ways (Apple, 1992).

I say all this because of very real dangers that now exist in critical educational studies. One is our loss of collective memory. While there is currently great and necessary vitality at the level of theory, a considerable portion of critical research has often been faddish. It moves from theory to theory rapidly, often seemingly assuming that the harder something is to understand or the more it rests on European cultural theory (preferably French) the better it is. The rapidity of its movement and its partial capture by an upwardly mobile fraction of the new middle class within the academy - so intent on mobilizing its cultural resources within the status hierarchies of the university that it has often lost any but the most rhetorical connections with the multiple struggles against domination and subordination at the university and elsewhere - has as one of its effects the denial of gains that have been made in other traditions or restating them in new garb (Apple, 1992). Or it may actually move backwards, as in the reappropriation of, say, Foucault into just another (but somewhat more elegant) theorist of social control, a discredited and a-historical concept that denies the power of social movements and historical agents.

It is both the power of conservative social movements and the structural crisis into which they intervene which concerns me here. In our rush toward post-structuralism, we may have forgotten how very powerful the structural dynamics are in which we participate. In recognition of this, I want to focus on some of the dynamics of knowledge at the university, especially on the continued reconstruction of the role of the university towards the complex and contradictory economic and cultural 'needs' of economic rationalization, national and international competitiveness, and its associated agendas. In order to go further we need to think about the process of commodification, especially about the ways in which knowledge and institutions are redefined so that they can be employed to extract surplus value. Oddly enough, I too must commodify knowledge in order to understand how it fits into the flow of capital.

## The political economy of cultural capital

What I propose is somewhat dangerous. We have spent years trying to dereify knowledge, trying to show it as both a process of meaning construction and the embodiment of past constructions. To treat knowledge once again as a thing risks losing those gains. However, such a move is essential if we are to understand the continuing transformations that are going on in higher education. In making this case, I need to recapitulate a number of arguments I made in *Education and Power* (Apple, 1985).

I want us to think of knowledge as a form of capital. Just as economic institutions are organized (and sometimes disorganized) so that particular classes and class fractions increase their share of economic capital, cultural institutions such as universities seem to do the same things. They play a fundamental role in the accumulation of cultural capital.

Now I am using the idea of cultural capital in a particular way, one that is different from that of, say, Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, for instance, the style, language, cultural dispositions, and even the bodies - the *hexus* and *habitus* - of dominant groups is the cultural capital that through a complicated process of conversion strategies is cashed in so that their dominance is preserved. Thus, students from dominant groups (and for Bourdieu these centre largely around class) get ahead because of their 'possession' of this cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984).

There is some strength to such a conception of cultural capital. However, it assumes that the fundamental role of educational institutions is the distribution of knowledge to students, some of whom are more able to acquire it because of cultural gifts that come 'naturally' from their class or race or gender position. Yet such a theory fails to catch the university's role in the production of a particular kind of cultural capital, technical/administrative knowledge. The production of this 'commodity' is what many universities are increasingly about, though many of the debates over the corpus of knowledge that should be taught at the university, over what is to count as 'tradition', still seem to assume that the only role the universities play is distributing knowledge (preferably after deconstructing and then reconstructing it with students) (Apple, 1985; Apple, 1990). This misses the structural point.

An advanced corporate economy requires the production of high levels of technical/administrative knowledge because of national and international economic competition and to become more sophisticated in the maximization of opportunities for economic expansion, for communicative and cultural control and rationalization, and so forth. Within certain limits, what is actually required is not the widespread distribution of this kind of high status knowledge to the populace in general. What is needed is to maximize its production (Apple, 1985).

Thus, there is a complex relationship between the accumulation of economic and cultural capital. This means that it is not essential that everyone have sophisticated 'technical/administrative knowledge in their heads, so to speak. Thus, whether you or I or considerable numbers of our students have it is less important than having high levels of increasingly sophisticated forms of this knowledge available for use.

Broadly speaking, technical/administrative knowledge is essential in advanced industrial economies. The way it is employed in ours, though, is the critical factor. Given the enormous growth in the volume of production and the transformations in its organization and control, there has been a concomitant need for a rapid increase in the amount and kinds of technical and administrative information. This is coupled with the continued increase in the need for market research and human relations research which each firm requires to increase the rate of accumulation and workplace control. All of this necessitates the machine production of information (and the production of more efficient machines as well). These products - the commodity of knowledge - may be non-material in the traditional sense of that term, but there can be no doubt that they are economically essential products. When one adds to this the immense role that defense related industries have played in corporate accumulation, the increasing role of agri-business in the corporate monopolization of food industries and technologies, and so forth, the importance of this kind of cultural capital increases.

In his analysis of the history of the relationship among science, technology, educational institutions, and industry, David Noble (1977) earlier argued that the control of the production of technical cultural capital was an essential part of industrial strategy. Capital needed control not simply of markets and productive plant and equipment but of science as well.

Initially this monopoly over science took the form of patent control - that is the control over the products of scientific technology. It then became control over the process of scientific production itself, by means of organized and regulated industrial research. Finally, it came to include command over the social prerequisites of this process: the development of institutions necessary for the production of both scientific knowledge and knowledgeable people, and the integration of these institutions within the corporate system of science-based industry. "The scientific-technical revolution", as Harry Braverman has explained, "cannot be understood in terms of specific innovations ... " Rather it "must be understood in its totality as a mode of production in which science and exhaustive engineering have been integrated as part of ordinary functioning". Thereby innovation is not to be found in chemistry, [biogenetics], electronics, automatic machinery ... or any of the products of these science-technologies, but rather in the transformation of science itself into capital. (Noble, 1977: 6)

Thus, as I have developed at greater length elsewhere, as industry tied itself more and more to the division, control, and replacement of labor and to technical innovations, if it was to expand its markets, products, and consumption it needed to guarantee a relatively constant accumulation of two kinds of capital, economic and cultural. These needs required much larger influence in the place where both agents and knowledge were produced - the university (Apple, 1985).

Noble's previous statement about the importance of patent control illuminates a critical point for it is here that one can see an area where the accumulation of technical knowledge plays a significant economic role. Controlling the production of technical knowledge was important for systematic patent production and the monopolization of a market. While a primary aim of a good deal of, say, industrial research was to find technical solutions to immediate production problems, the larger issue of the organization and control of knowledge production was essential if one was to "anticipate inventive trends and take out patents to keep open the road of technical progress and business expansion" (Noble, 1977: 128). The control of major aspects of science and technical knowledge was accomplished by use of patent monopolies and the organization and reorganization of university life (and especially its curricula and research). Thus, as Noble again shows, industry and the ideologies it has spawned played and continue to play an exceptionally important role in setting structural limits on (not determining) the kinds of curricula and pedagogical practices deemed appropriate for a significant portion of university and technical institute life. Given the economic crisis we currently face, one should expect an even greater influence of the (multiple and sometimes contradictory, of course) interests of capital in the future as well, especially given the Clinton Administration's neo-liberal construction of a national industrial policy in which as many aspects of the state and capital (as well as other aspects of civil society) should be integrated into rational planning models for achieving a restructured and more competitive economy for the twenty-first century.

Thus, with the Clinton Administration's move toward a corporatist model of industrial policy, we shall undoubtedly see more of an integration between universities and larger economic goals. The effects of this on what knowledge is considered to be of most worth, if I may paraphrase Spencer, will be momentous.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. puts it rather succinctly in the following quote, where he points out who some of the losers of these policies will be.

The struggle to obtain funding for research, for buildings, and for new and better programmes caused the university to increasingly adapt to the priorities of corporations, foundations, government, and other elite donors. A new union emerged with business, industry, and the federal government as the principal partners of the university. At the local level, this meant that resources, human and material, were poured into programmes that did research and provided services for the corporate elite. Indeed, on most campuses the resources devoted to such programmes would dwarf the resources that go to programmes devoted to grappling with the problems of distressed central city neighborhoods. This is also a reflection of the fact that money available for research on social issues of concern to business and industry is much greater than the money available for research on local issues of concern to blacks, Hispanics and working-class whites (Gates, 1992: 21).

Noble's and Gates' s points are of course relatively economistic and essentializing. They capture neither the relatively autonomous activities of universities nor the micro-politics of science and its practitioners. They ignore the struggles that have been going on, on the ground, so to speak, as well. Yet, they do provide an essential insight into the process by which high status knowledge is produced in a time of economic crisis and the fiscal crisis of the state.

They do help us recognize that universities are caught in a structural contradiction between the task of distributing knowledge and maximizing its production. As the institutional logic surrounding the commodification process recuperates more and more of the daily teaching and research activities at universities within its orbit, the emphasis tilts toward the latter while at the same time attempting to limit the former to only that knowledge which is economically essential or to move

other, more critical, forms of discourse to the margins. They, collectively, slowly become the institutionalized Other.

Thus, increasingly, in the process what is perceived as economically useful knowledge is given the institutional imprimatur. Anything else is nice work if you can get it, but increasingly beside the point. (The neo-conservatives, however, know better. They realize that the struggle over culture and consciousness is essential. This is why the issue of language, collective memory, and how we should 'name the world' is seen by them to be so important (Apple, 1993; Apple, in press).)

I am of course speaking very generally here. This is not a smooth and rational process. There are struggles over this - over what counts as high status knowledge, over the state's role in supporting its production, and within institutions of higher education both over why these particular forms of knowledge should gain the most resources and power and over the relatively autonomous status hierarchies within the social field of the academy, hierarchies about which Bourdieu, for instance, has been so perceptive (Bourdieu, 1988). Rather, I am pointing to general tendencies, tendencies I am certain have an impact on each of us in varying ways - on funding for research, fellowships, and scholarships, on the distribution of new faculty positions, and more than a little occasionally on tenure decisions and on layoffs of faculty and administrative staff.

### **Will our future students know better?**

So far I have given an outline of my intuitions about the contradictions and dynamics surrounding the political economy of high status knowledge in the academy during a period of economic crisis. The concomitant cultural relations and authority have their own, partly independent, dynamics and struggles, of course, as we witness every day in the culture wars in our institutions. I have discussed these latter issues concerning the cultural politics of what counts as official knowledge in history, language, literature, the arts, and so forth at much greater length elsewhere, and do not want to rehearse them again here (Apple, 1993; Apple, in press). Rather, I now want to briefly turn to parts of the reconstruction that is occurring at the level of the elementary, middle, and secondary schools throughout the USA and what this means to what students will actually expect from their higher education.

As we witness the steady transformations of what knowledge will be converted into capital at the university - the complex conversion of cultural capital into economic capital<sup>3</sup> - there are similar things occurring at other levels of our educational institutions. These may have major effects on our students. Among the most important will be whether a large portion of our future students in institutions of higher education will see anything wrong with the commodification of knowledge for private gain. This is a complicated issue involving the formation of subjectivity(ies) among students. But perhaps some examples of what is happening at, say, our middle and high schools can illuminate some of the dangers we are facing.

I turn to this because one of the most crucial issues we will face will be what our students will be like - what they will know, what values they will have - when they arrive. Because of this, it is utterly essential that we focus on elementary and secondary schools as well as our institutions of higher education.

At the level of our elementary and secondary schools, the most organized and well funded curriculum reform efforts are being developed around proposed national curricula in mathematics and science. And even though the Clinton administration has proposed making the arts the equal of more basic subjects such as science and mathematics, this will have mostly rhetorical weight, not the weight of policy, especially since many large school districts such as Los Angeles are having to eliminate art instruction and lay off art teachers at all levels. Similar things are occurring in other, less essential curricular areas, as well.

To take but one other example, in history it is Diane Ravitch and her relatively conservative colleagues who provided the outline for the social studies textbooks in California. Thus, because of the dominance of the textbook as the official curriculum in American schools and because nearly all publishers will only publish what will sell in states such as California and Texas because these states are in essence the largest guaranteed markets, the perspectives on history that the vast majority of students will receive will be a narrative of relatively self-congratulatory progress seen largely through the eyes of dominant groups (Apple, 1988, 1993; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991).

Yet the cuts in particular humanities programmes and the reassertion of certain narratives, while important, do not even begin to cover the entire range of transformations we are witnessing. Let me give what I believe is the best example.

There is a new generation of cooperative relations between education and industry now being built. Among the most 'interesting' is something many of you may not know much about. It is called 'Channel One'. Channel One is a commercially produced television news programme that is now broadcast to thousands of schools in the United States. A description of it is overtly simple: ten minutes of international and national 'news' and two minutes of commercials produced very slickly by Whittle Communications - one of the largest publishers of material for 'captive audiences' in the world - and broadcast directly into classrooms.

In return for the use of a satellite dish (which can only receive Channel One), two VCRs, and television monitors for each classroom, schools sign a contract that over a three to five year period 90% of all students will watch the broadcast in schools 90% of the time. Compliance is monitored. For many chronically poor school districts, and an increasing number of seemingly more affluent ones, the fiscal crisis is so severe that textbooks are used until they literally fall apart. Basements, closets, gymnasiums, and any available spaces are used for instruction. Teachers are being laid off, as are counsellors and support staff. Art, music, and foreign language programmes are being dropped. In some towns and cities, the economic problems are such that it will be impossible for schools to remain open for the full academic year. In the context of such a financial crisis, and in the context of a rhetorical strategy used by Whittle that knowledge of the world will assist students in getting jobs and in making our nation more competitive internationally (commercials for Channel One, for instance, point out that some students think that Chernobyl was Cher's original name or that silicon chips were a kind of snack food), schools throughout the nation have seen Channel One as a way of both teaching important knowledge and as helping to solve their budget problems.

In *Official Knowledge* (Apple, 1993), I have analyzed the strategies Whittle has employed as a rhetoric of justification, the ways Channel One enters into classrooms, the contradictions in its content and organization of the news - its linguistic codes, its constructions of the Other, etc. - and what teachers and students actually do with it. What is important here, however, is that for between 35% and 40% of all middle and high school students in the nation, we have *sold* our children as a captive audience to advertisers. The students themselves are positioned as consumers and commodified and purchased as a captive audience by corporations willing to spend the money for commercials on Channel One.

Now students and teachers sometimes engage in carnival with material on Channel One, especially with the commercials. They ignore the news and pay attention to - and sometimes play with - the advertisements in a manner Bakhtin might enjoy. Yet, once again, our educational institutions are being reconstructed as a site for the generation of profit. For years, students will be members of that captive audience. Their daily experience - their common sense - will have been formed around the transformation of knowledge (and themselves) into a site for the production of profit. What would seem so strange for the same to be justifiable at universities? Thus, why should we be surprised that particular definitions of economically useful knowledge increasingly dominate many institutions of higher education when we are even now selling students in our middle and secondary school?

## Conclusion

This is a complicated and tense period intellectually and politically. Post-modern and poststructural theories are becoming more influential in critical educational studies (a label I would prefer to use rather than the more limited one of critical theory or critical pedagogy). There are significant parts of these approaches that are insightful and need to be paid very close attention to, especially their focus on identity politics, on multiple and contradictory relations of power, on non-reductive analysis, and on the local as an important site of struggle. I have no wish at all to widen a divide at a time when alliances are crucial. However, there are also significant parts of these approaches as they have been introduced into education that simply make me blanch because of their stylistic arrogance, their stereotyping of other approaches and their concomitant certainty that they've got the answer, their cynical lack of attachment to any action in real schools, their seeming equation of any serious focus on the economy as being somehow reductive, their conceptual confusions, and finally their trendy rhetoric that when unpacked often says some pretty commonsensical things that reflexive educators have known and done for years. Let me hasten to add that this is true for only a portion of these approaches, but all of this gives me cause for concern.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, there is a fine line between necessary conceptual and political transformations and trendiness. Unfortunately, the latter sometimes appears in the relatively uncritical appropriation of post-modernism by some educational theorists. For example, there certainly are (too many) plans to turn schools over to market forces, to diversify types of schools and give consumers more choice. Some may argue that this is 'the educational equivalent of ... the rise of "flexible specialization in place of the old assembly-line world of mass production", driven by the imperatives of differentiated consumption rather than mass production' (Whitty, Edwards, and Gewirtz, 1994: 168-169). This certainly has a postmodern ring to it.

Yet, like many of the new reforms being proposed, there is less that is 'post-modern' about them than meets the eye. Many have a high-tech image. They are usually guided by 'an underlying faith in technical rationality as the basis for solving social, economic, and educational problems.' Specialization is just as powerful, perhaps even more powerful, as any concern for diversity (Whitty, Edwards, and Gewirtz, 1994: 173-174). Rather than an espousal of 'heterogeneity, pluralism, and the local' - though these may be the rhetorical forms in which some of these reforms are couched - what we may also be witnessing is the revivification of more traditional class, gender, and especially race hierarchies. An unquestioning commitment to the nation that we are now fully involved in a post-modern world may make it easier to see surface transformations (some of which are undoubtedly occurring) and yet at the same time may make it that much more difficult to recognize that these may be new ways of reorganizing and reproducing older hierarchies (Whitty, Edwards, and Gewirtz, 1994: 180-181). The fact that parts of post-modernism as a theory and as a set of experiences may not be applicable to an extremely large part of the population of the world should make us be a bit more cautious as well.

Part, though certainly not all, of what I have said here is based on a critical (and self-critical) structural understanding of education. While not economically reductive, it does require that we recognize that we live under capitalist relations. Milton Friedman and the entire gamut of privatizers and marketizers who have so much influence in the media and the corridors of power in corporate board rooms, foundations, and our governments at nearly all levels spend considerable amounts of time praising these relations. If they can talk about them, why can't we? These relations don't determine everything. They are constituted out of and reconstituted by race, class, and gender relations, but it seems a bit naive to ignore them. There is a world of difference between taking economic power and structures seriously and reducing everything down to a pale reflection of them.

I am fully cognizant that there are many dangers with such an approach. It has as part of its history attempts to create a grand narrative, a theory that explains everything based on a unitary cause. It can also tend to forget that not only are there multiple and contradictory relations of power

in nearly every situation, but that the researcher herself or himself is a participant in such relations (Roman and Apple, 1990). Finally, structural approaches at times can neglect the ways our discourses are constructed out of, and themselves help construct, what we do. These indeed are issues that need to be taken as seriously as they deserve. Post-structural and post-modern criticisms of structural analyses in education have been fruitful in this regard, especially when they have arisen from within some of the various feminist and post-colonial communities (see, e.g., McCarthy and Crichtlow, 1993). Though it must be said that some of these criticisms have created widely inaccurate caricatures of the neo-marxist traditions.

Yet, even though the linguistic turn, as it has been called in sociology and cultural studies, has been productive, it is important to remember that the world of education and elsewhere is not only a text. There are gritty realities out there, realities whose power is often grounded in structural relations that are not simply social constructions created by the meanings given by an observer. Part of our task, it seems to me, is not to lose sight of these gritty realities in the economy and the state, at the same time as we recognize the dangers of essentializing and reductive analyses.

My point is not to deny that many elements of post-modernity exist, nor is it to deny the power of some aspects of post-modern theory. Rather, it is to avoid overstatement, to avoid substituting one grand narrative for another (a grand narrative that actually never existed in the United States, since class and economy only recently surfaced in critical educational scholarship and were only rarely seen here in the form found in Europe where most postmodern and post-structural criticisms of these explanatory tools were developed. It would help if we remembered that the intellectual and political histories of the United States were very different than that castigated by some of the post-modern critics). Reductive analysis comes cheap and there is no guarantee that post-modern positions, as currently employed by some in education, are any more immune to this danger than any other position.

I could say considerably more here, for I have only touched the surface of the emerging trends towards commodification and privatization that education is currently facing. My major point, though, is to caution us, to correct a tendency among our 'more advanced theorists' to marginalize concerns surrounding political economy and class relations. It is to remind us that this is still capitalism and that makes a difference to our daily lives and to the lives of those students who are not only at our universities but who may venture into those buildings later on. Ignoring the complex relations between cultural capital and economic capital will not make the situation any easier. The world may be text, but some groups seem to be able to write their lines on our lives more easily than others.

## Notes

1. I put the word 'minority' in inverted commas here to remind us that the vast majority of the world's population is composed of persons of colour. It would be wholly salutary for our ideas about culture and education to remember this fact.
2. Neo-liberalism doesn't ignore the idea of a strong state, but it wants to limit it to specific areas (e.g. defense of markets).
3. I do not want to romanticize the history of this. Universities did not have a mythical 'golden age' when they were cut off from the interests of business and industry or other elites. Indeed, exactly the opposite is the case. See, for example, Barrow (1990).
4. I say *approaches* here because it is easy to stereotype post-modern and poststructural theories. That would be unfortunate, since the political differences, for example, among the various tendencies associated with both are often substantial. For an example of how one might combine aspects of post-structural and neo-Gramscian approaches together, see Curtis (1992) and Apple (in press).

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