

*“Morality and authority in existential praxis”*

Thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Masters in Education

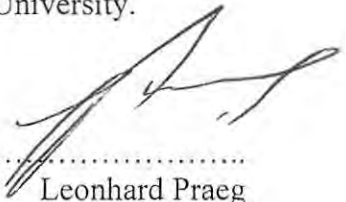
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## Abstract

In this study I am concerned with understanding how the emergence of participatory or, broadly understood, existential approaches to education has shifted the nature of the student/lecturer relationship. Historically, the difference was represented through the *in loco parentis* trope which contains implicit understandings as to the nature of the lecturer's authority and the ethical parameters of the relationship. With the emergence of more participatory approaches this relationship and its constitutive elements have to be re-imagined. In the first chapter I place this enquiry in the contemporary context in which the very identity of the university is changing as a result of massification and the accountability regime. In the second chapter I look at bell hooks' pedagogy as an example of such a participatory approach to education at higher education institutions. I describe her practice as a deconstructive pedagogy that is as powerful as it is because of the operation of a *difference* constitutive of it. In the third chapter I ask whether representing this difference in terms of the pre-modern master/apprentice offers a useful response to the questions raised by an existential praxis.

I hereby declare that this study is my own work and that none of it has been published before. I gratefully acknowledge financial assistance from Rhodes University.



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# Introduction

## 1. On being disinterested

Half-way into this project I lost interest; utterly and completely. The excitement of an opportunity to theorise aspects of my educational practice vaporized bit for bit until, eventually, it disappeared altogether. I thought about this for a while and constantly found myself returning to the verb “theorise”. What does it mean to theorise one’s practice? Of course, the *raison d’etre* of the philosophy of education is the theorising of practice. But to transpose or translate the problem of theorising into a meta-discourse on theorising theory did not strike me as particularly useful. At the same time, another distinction occupied my mind; a distinction implicit in the question raised by members of the higher degrees committee who wanted to know whether this was an M.Ed or a Master of Arts on the topic of education?

“What’s the difference?” I asked Kevin, my supervisor.

“A personal voice” he said. “What distinguishes an M.Ed from a Masters degree is that in the former you are allowed, perhaps even encouraged to speak with the voice of an educator; to introduce your own experience, turmoil, journey into the subject at hand”.

This seemed helpful because, for one, it legitimised an enunciative space (Foucault 1972; 1973) in which I could articulate my disinterest. I soon realised, however, that this legitimacy or freedom did not amount to much if I did not know what the turmoil or journey was about. In the absence of such clarity the project threatened to collapse into a quasi-nihilistic meta-speculation on being disinterested. I realised that the solution had to emerge from inside and that it would not help to defer it to where its meta-articulation would never quite amount to a solution. I needed to return to the resistance itself; the resistance I have been vaguely aware of ever since I started the course-work that preceded the writing of this mini-thesis; the resistance that haunted me and shadowed me through every seminar where, as a group, we sat around a table discussing elements of our teaching practice. This, I realised, was that resistance coming to fruition; the return of the repressed. So I asked myself: what are you resisting? When the thought eventually emerged, it was surprisingly clear: *transcendental violence*.

## 2. Mindfulness

The resistance that has been haunting me is a vague and undefined suspicion that theorising educational practice will, at best, have nothing to do with what I do when I teach and, at worst, make self-conscious something that works exactly because it is not self-conscious. Every teacher is familiar with the experience of a good teaching moment when, on the spur of the moment, you deviate from the lecture plan, spontaneously engage students, make a joke, or say:

“I don’t know”.

At that moment the faces, disinterested until then, light up.

“I could see the penny drop” we like to say afterwards when we try to figure out why it dropped when it did. My inclination has always been the exact opposite: not to interrogate the moment, not to know. Underlying this inclination has been the suspicion that when you start abstracting, understanding and theorising what you did in that moment, you will turn it into the next lecture plan and it will stop working - not because students are extraordinarily perceptive or because of flawed execution the second time round, but because when you did it the first time you had *no reason to do it*; you simply trusted your intuition, i.e. “feelings, hunches, ways of recognizing complex patterns” (Furlong 2000:28). It is the immediacy of trust that students sense, that makes them sit up, prick their ears, and makes you ask: Now what? What am I supposed to do next? And still you don’t know and again you trust that you don’t know and again you do the next thing that comes to mind. In short, the ghost that haunted me throughout the course-work has been the suspicion that good teaching very often happens when you don’t know what you’re doing.

This generates an obvious question: how do we separate good not-knowing from bad not-knowing? Is this not an anti-intellectual argument, a badly dressed-up version of the connoisseur belief that the world divides into talented and untalented teachers? We seem to be confronted with a binary here: either you study, reflect on your practice and become a good teacher or you don’t and (perhaps) remain a bad teacher. I think it is more complex than that. I think I have been grappling with an aporia (Heidegger 1945/2002; Derrida 1992) or inescapable paradox. Good teaching, being alert in the moment, is a practice, more precisely *takes* practice. One needs to practise the trust to be alert and mindful, simply present. At the same time, true mindfulness means forgetting everything that informed your practice, that is,

everything that enables you to be mindful or alert. This “forgetting” is a wilful act of practised forgetting, an active “not remembering”. In other words, to reflect on one’s teaching practice is to engage the process of waking up to what you do, could do, perhaps even should do. But in the act of teaching, the very alertness that makes for good teaching can only occur once we forget what we could, perhaps even should do. One cannot be knowingly present. Mindful as Buddhism maintains, yes. But mindfulness simply means being aware of what you are doing while you are doing it. Mindfulness itself is the result of practicing mindfulness. In the moment when you are mindful it is essential that you forget or stop trying to be mindful. Without practice one cannot be mindful. Yet, to be mindful means forgetting about the practice in order to be mindful. At the risk of labouring the point this, then, is the aporia: good teaching is informed mindfulness that *occurs* only as a function of our practiced ability to stop trying to be mindful. I purposefully use the word “occur” here: we are not good teachers; we do not even become good teachers. Herein lies the rub, then: playing our part cannot be contrived or staged. It must in fact amount to *not* playing our part (as in staging it) but of *being* it. If we are mindful, we can play our part in allowing good teaching/learning to occur. The teaching/learning differentiation is not conducive to understanding this point for it commits us to thinking in terms of good teachers and bad teachers, good learners and bad learners – as if one is not constitutive of the other. To be a good teacher, to enter mindfulness, to *be* mindful, is to enter a de-differentiated space of true inter-subjectivity. This is why one cannot claim credit for good teaching. What does it mean to say: “I am a good teacher?” About as little, I think, as it means to boast one’s humility.

The concept of mindfulness I use here is closely related, but irreducible, to a number of related concepts in philosophical literature in general and philosophy of education literature in specific. These can be listed as follows:

- a) phenomenological concern with the lived experience that precedes our cognitive reflection on that experience (Husserl);
- b) a Socratic “ignorance” that is never simply a lack but an ignorance engendered by the *knowing* that one lacks what is good (Heidegger 1945/2000);
- c) the notion of “intuition” as valid pedagogical strategy that, once cultivated, can restore some of the lost autonomy of the teaching professional (Furlong 2000: 21);

- d) “mindfulness” as open-mindedness or self-conscious criticality (Langer 1989, Grant, 2005);
- e) “Mindfulness” as used in Buddhism (explained below), that is, the attentiveness to the intimacy of death in those moments (*bardos*) that hold particular potential for liberation and enlightenment.

The notion of mindfulness used here carries traces of all of these shades of meaning and more. A very brief and concise positioning of it *vis á vis* these other related concepts would be illustrative.

a. Husserl’s: “Zurück zu den Sachen selbst”

Phenomenology views consciousness in terms of its intentionality, its relatedness to the world in a way that constitutes a move away from the Cartesian separation of subject and object, consciousness and the world. While the Cartesian *cogito* is rationally apprehended (I *think* therefore I am), phenomenology suggests that it is not just mind but consciousness, or even wider, our “being” that is intentionally directed to the world (Kearney 1986) in a way that precedes the subject/object divide. How we denote this “whole” subject in terms not just of mind but of “being” is very relevant here. Phenomenology replaces the scientific or objectifying mind with a “spiritual relationship” (*ibid*, 17), one that Kearney (*ibid*, 23) describes in terms of the “interiority of a spiritual consciousness” (*ibid*, 23). To engage phenomenology is to engage an awareness of our consciousness as intentional activity; means knowing things themselves by interrogating, becoming aware of the interior transcendental consciousness which intends these things (*ibid*, 17). “Mindful” as used here is in part the awareness or alertness to this intentionality of consciousness, its relatedness to students and the process of engaging them. Mindfulness is an awareness of this the relatedness of the phenomenological subjectivity where “den Sachen selbst” are the students and the ever changing and shifting dynamics that mark our inter-subjective encounter with them. While phenomenology provides my use of “mindfulness” with a very necessary intentionality it is the failure of phenomenology to establish a “pure intuition of presence beyond all presuppositions of language and history” (Kearney 1986:114-115) that limits its application. Pre-empting Derrida’s deconstruction of this attempted phenomenology of presence, Husserl acknowledged in his last works that

“the transcendental subject’s world of immediate experience was in fact grounded in the historicity of a cultural life-world rather than grounding it” (*ibid*, 115). My use of the word “mindfulness” treads an admittedly fine line between Husserl’s ambition and his disappointment. Mindfulness, as used here, acknowledges the historicity of consciousness or more precisely, accepts consciousness as an archive of conscious reflection on teaching practice while suggesting that it is nonetheless possible and desirable to suspend, through an active gesture of non-remembering, that knowledge in order to be present, to engage spontaneously and intuitively. This presence is not a logocentric presence but, rather, a temporary, well practiced *presence of mind*.

### *b. Intuition*

In a collection of essays collected under the title *The Intuitive Practitioner: On the value of not always knowing what one is doing* (Atkinson and Claxton 2000) a number of authors advance a reappraisal of intuition as “knowledge in action” or “reflection in action” (Atkinson and Claxton 2000:5). Here intuition is understood as a holistic way of knowing of which the basis is “the whole of what has been known but which cannot, by nature of its size and complexity, be held in consciousness” in the moment of teaching (*ibid*). Implicit here is a reading of consciousness in the moment of acting which resonates with the failure of Husserl’s phenomenological project – namely, that consciousness is a textual archive and that there is no pure intentional consciousness but rather intuition as, in a manner of speaking, the “archive in action” – an archive that is so rich and complex that it cannot be consciously accessed in the moment of teaching. For these authors consciousness-as-archive is constituted by all the acquired knowledge and insight into teaching collected over a period of time in addition to “feelings, hunches, ways of recognising complex patterns” (Furlong, 2000:28). As much as the term intuition helps us to understand the historically constituted nature of consciousness it still derives most of its meaning from within a Cartesian framework where it functions in opposition to rational, conscious reflection on teaching. It is posited against a “deliberate, conscious articulation of knowledge (Atkinson and Claxton 2000:2), that is, against “rational propositions drawn from relevant disciplines such as pedagogy, didactics, psychology or sociology” (*ibid*, 5) or, even more explicitly in terms of a conscious/subconscious binary through which it manifests “unconscious insight” (*ibid*, 5). Contrary to this I

an advancing mindfulness, not as an anti-Cartesian but as a post-Cartesian concept that draws on our “wholeness,” our entire being. Such “wholeness” is necessary to understand the praxis of an educator such as bell hooks (chapter two) who consciously aligns herself with non-Western philosophies and influences. A similar, post-Cartesian concept is perhaps also suggested by Heidegger’s re-appropriation of Socratic ignorance.

c. *I know that I don’t know*

Heidegger perhaps comes closest to articulating the aporetic nature of mindfulness as used here because he takes his cue from Socrates who argues in *The Symposium* that “head and heart are not to be radically separated, but belong together as integral moments of education” (1945/2000:40). For Heidegger the apparently self-referential paradox “I know that I don’t know anything,” “gestures towards a pedagogy in which ignorance lies at the foot of knowledge and contradiction at the font of truth” (*ibid*). This ignorance is not an utter ignorance, but one premised on knowing that one does not know. As Heidegger so beautifully put it in his deposition before the committee on de-Nazification (*ibid*, 41):

*One utterly ignorant cannot desire to become wise, as his condition prevents him from recognizing his deficiency. Ignorance is thus never simple and unqualified, and the knowledge of one’s ignorance results in eros or the desire to know. The philosopher, lover of wisdom, is neither actually wise nor entirely ignorant. Ignorance is a condition of knowledge and wisdom. The claim then to know that one does not know is not so much a self-contradiction as it is a sense of what conceals itself in the revealing.*

This revealing should be understood in terms of the etymology of the word “teach” which derives from the same linguistic family as the German verb *zeigen*, which means “to point or show”. To teach, then is to *reveal*, to point out or make manifest through words (Thomson 2000:139). What needs to be revealed is a certain resourcelessness on behalf of the student that will prompt him/her to attain an answer. This, then, is what Heidegger appreciates in Socrates: through his relentless questioning of students he drove his interlocutors into contradictions and confusion, “reducing them to aporia, lack of resource” (1945/2000:41). Heidegger defines aporia as “a specific kind of lack or want, a perplexity achieved by an encounter with the

previously unthought, an uncertainty about where to go next driven by a desire to progress” (*ibid*, 41). On the basis of this he continues to describe the role of the teacher as follows:

*If the pose of teacherly omniscience and the authority that this pose articulates are disincentives to learn, then the question of education is the question not of how to transmit knowledge but of how to suspend it. The concrete teacher is one who temporarily stages the scene of resourcelessness. Education is not a passing on of knowledge and skills either in the medieval paradigm of master/apprentice or in the modern of seller/consumer. Rather call it a withholding, a delaying of articulation, in order that the student may attain an answer. Ignorance as a mode of suspension interrogates the role of the teacher as the one who knows and of the student as the one who does not. The teacher’s silence is finally what has to be heard.*

I want to include in my use of mindfulness this re-appropriation of Socratic ignorance. At the same time I want to broaden the resulting aporetic nature of the pedagogical interaction to include, not only the tension between students’ temporary resourcefulness and their desire to progress but also the tension of the lecturer who has to actively not-remember in order in order to engage and depart from that divine ignorance which is never simply a lack of knowledge. Mindfulness as used here aims to capture the aporetic dimension of both the lecturer and the student’s experience of the learning encounter.

d. *Flirting with mindfulness*

Langer in her book *Mindfulness* (1989) and Grant in an article *The case for mindfulness in teaching and learning* (2005) engage the notion of mindfulness in a way that amounts to little more than a flirtation. The former, a major source for the latter, fails to position her use of the word *vis á vis* a) simple “open-mindedness” or, more broadly, a critical self-reflexivity and b) the obvious Eastern meaning of the term. This becomes clear where she describes the key characteristics of “mindfulness” (1989) to reside in:

1. the creation of new categories;
2. openness to new information and
3. awareness of more than one perspective.

Her subsequent discussion of these characteristics leaves it unclear why the creativity involved in the generation of new categories and openness to new information and other perspectives do not simply capture what we mean when we say that somebody is very creative or simply open-minded. More troublesome is the failed attempt to position her use of the word *vis á vis* its obvious Eastern counterpart on the basis that she is not “fully trained in Eastern thought” (*ibid*, 79). To her credit she acknowledges that such comparisons fall outside the scope of a book consciously aimed at a popular audience and that she left it for others to explore. This is also not the place to engage in extensive comparisons. Suffice it to say that she is incorrect in limiting Eastern mindfulness to the meditational practice of mindfulness and to delegitimise further comparisons on the basis that she applies the word to “everyday life”. It is exactly the point of, say Tibetan Buddhism, that one should live mindfully and that the practice of meditation is *practising* mindfulness. It is, ironically, only once we acknowledge mindfulness as a cultivated presence of mind that we can begin to appreciate its affinity with Socratic ignorance or a phenomenological awareness of the intentionality of consciousness.

e. Eastern mindfulness

In the ancient school of Tibetan Buddhism<sup>1</sup> life and death are seen not as binary opposites or as arranged in linear fashion on a continuum from birth (life) to death, but rather as one whole – so much so, that death is “a mirror in which the entire meaning of life is reflected” (Rinpoche 1992:11). The life-death whole presents us with a series of “constantly changing transitional realities” (*ibid*) known as *bardos*. Rinpoche’s description of *bardos* is relevant:

*The word ‘bardo’ is commonly used to denote the intermediate state between death and rebirth, but in reality bardos are occurring continuously throughout both life and death, and are junctures when the possibility of liberation, of enlightenment, is heightened. The bardos are particularly powerful opportunities for liberation because there are, the teaching shows us certain moments that are much more charged with potential, when whatever you do has a crucial and far-reaching effect (ibid, 11).*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a vast terrain I cannot even begin to capture the richness of even one Eastern Spiritual tradition. I limit myself here to a couple of comments relevant to my purpose here. They are taken from Sogyal Rinpoche’s (1992) *The Tibetan book of living and dying*; London: Rider

In the greater scheme of things the momentous *bardos* are linked to 1) the natural *bardo* of this life, 2) the pain of dying, 3) the luminous *bardo* of *dharmata* and 4) the *carmic bardo* of becoming. But, as the above quote indicates, *bardos* are not limited to the big transitional experiences that unfold in one's lifetime(s). Given the unity of life and death *bardo* also refers to those moments or experiences when "the possibility of liberation, of enlightenment, is heightened". To live mindfully, in this tradition, is to be mindful or aware, not only in meditational practice but also in daily life, of the intimacy of death and one's mortality. This experience of death and mortality is heightened in those smaller *bardos* when we have to confront who we are: such moments are possibly liberating or enlightening for marking smaller moments of death and rebirth. Useful in this account of mindfulness is the fact that it restores a certain *gravitas* to the existential educational practice which, when engaged in with the necessary care and support, can amount to *bardos*-like moments of liberation and enlightenment that engages the experience of death and rebirth for both student and lecturer. The sole reason why I am not simply using mindfulness in this sense is the fact that the term as used in this context, as rich and inspired as it may be, is embedded in a culture or life-form which bears no archival traces or significations of Western thought. I think it is important to use a term that challenges this Western tradition while containing within itself traces of the very history that necessitates it: radical individualism, transcendence, inter-subjectivity, ignorance and so forth.

Such is the use of the term mindfulness in this section. In deconstructive terms it is questionable whether one can really articulate a post-Cartesian or post-metaphysical category. Perhaps it would be more correct to suggest that the very undefinability of "mindfulness," the fact that its meaning is construed interstitially between the concepts and ideas discussed above, is its strength. As an undecidable term that not only reveals traces of historical discourses but also charts a way forward it inscribes itself in pedagogy as a middle-term between conscious and non-conscious, rational and intuitive, body/mind, East/West, etcetera. It may nonetheless be useful to circumscribe the meaning of mindfulness as used here, more concisely, as: the practiced aporetic suspension (never quite a phenomenological bracketing [*épokhè*]) of prior knowledge, that is, the historicity of consciousness, in order to facilitate the divine ignorance that makes of our encounter with the inter-subjective *other* a learning experience.

This circumscription assumes, however implicitly, that I *can* encounter the other, that it is possible to do so without inflicting a fair measure of violence on him/her. That this is not the case accounts for the awareness of a transcendental violence in response to the question of my disinterestedness.

### 3. Transcendental violence

This relates to a sense that my engagement with education, the theorising of my practice is somehow disingenuous; that I am an interloper of sorts, my presence in this domain transient, temporary. At its worst it is the feeling that I am merely being strategic – getting a degree, pleasing the authorities, doing what needs to be done to gain credibility, publications *etcetera*. Sometimes I feel like a con artist: nobody seems to notice that I don't really know what I'm doing *and I am getting away with it*. At its most generous this unease translates into a feeling of estrangement, as if I am temporarily estranging myself from my real work; that I need to get this over with so that I may continue the real work of theorising. When I consider this feeling of estrangement or alienation, another word creeps into consciousness: unfaithfulness – to myself and to my teaching. As unfaithfulness it is not totally unrelated to the above aporia: that presence is premised on a certain suspension of knowledge and practiced mindfulness. The unfaithfulness, then, is correlative to the awareness that to theorise one's practice is to temporarily deny, step out of and alienate oneself from the momentary and *singular* experience of teaching. It is, therefore, a necessary unfaithfulness, an inescapable absence from practice in order to enhance one's practice by reflection on it.

The *singularity* of teaching moments is a surplus that will always escape our reflection on it. There is nothing in theory, in the act of reflection that can possibly capture or represent the active engagement that constitutes a good teaching/learning moment. But one has to reflect, represent, and this is the impossibility of the aporia: one has to attempt the impossible, not *despite* the fact that it is impossible but exactly *because* it is impossible. What makes it impossible to reflect adequately on teaching is the fact that we are confronted with the other as wholly other; the singular other that is irreducible to any act of comprehension and representation. To articulate this in terms of Levinas' concern in *Totality and Infinity* (1969): the moment I reduce the other – here, the student, our interaction – to an epistemological category of understanding

(by calling them ‘students,’ or the encounter “a good teaching moment”) we prioritise epistemology (the possibility of knowing) over the radical ontological alterity of the other. Levinas uses the word “egology” to refer to this gesture through which Western thought has always assumed that “the ego or subject is the origin of all knowledge and meaning” (Biesta 2001:45) -

*If ... the other can only be thought of as the outcome of the ego's act of conceptualization, and if, as a result, it can only be thought of as an instance of something more general, it can never appear in its 'radical alterity,' it can never appear as 'absolutely other,' as unique and irreducibly singular.*

Against this sacrificial logic of epistemology (sacrificing the singularity of *that* person and *that* moment by conceptualising them as “students” and “teaching moments”) Levinas effectively asserts a version of the “law of singularity” (*ibid*, 46) which, by taking our encounter with the other as point of departure, reverses the sequence in order to prioritise ontology over epistemology. To Levinas’ postulation of the ethical as “first philosophy” Derrida responds in *Writing and Difference* (1978) by arguing that even the notions of “radical alterity” and “singularity” are concepts, epistemological categories and therefore violations of the other’s singularity. In other words, even the concept *singularity* is an epistemological violation of the ontological “singularity” of (our encounter with) the other: “One could neither speak, nor have any sense of the totally other if there was not a *phenomenon* of the totally other, or evidence of the totally other as such” (*ibid*, 123). There is, therefore, a certain inescapable necessity in conceptualising the other, a necessity Derrida articulates as *transcendental violence*.

*It is violent because it **presents** the non-representable (the other as other). It is transcendental because this representation is the very condition of possibility of any recognition of the other as other (in Biesta 2001:46).*

On the basis of this inescapability of transcendental violence Gasché (1994) and Biesta (2001) concur that a “minimal universality” is a necessary, Kantian transcendental *a priori* for talking about the other at all. As Biesta (*ibid*, 46) puts it, “the singularity of the other requires a ‘minimal universality’ to be itself and to be

recognized as such, and that without the risk involved – a risk that is both violent and necessary – no justice can possibly be done to the singularity of the other”.

I think the concept of “minimal universality” is misleading. The necessary violence involved in denoting the singularity of the other as “singular” is not a violence of degree but a violence in principle. There is no more or less conceptualizing the other in terms of their singularity. The moment one says “this person is unique or singular,” one violates their singularity *in principle* by reducing them to the category of “the unique” or “the singular”. There is no more or lesser degree to which this reduction can be signified. To think, to speak, to denote, to reflect, to write, to theorise *is* to violate the singularity of (our encounter with) the other. Rather than thinking in terms of a “minimal universality” I suggest that teaching considered holistically (comprising the practice and the reflection on that practice) is radically *undecidable*.

The undecidable has two dimensions. Firstly, it denotes “the oscillation between two significations or two contradictory and very determinate rules” (Derrida 1992:24) – for instance, respect both for universal rights and the radical, unsubsumable singularity of the example (*ibid*, 24). While this points to a certain conceptual tension between the general and the singular it is the second, closely related dimension of the undecidable that is illuminating here. This is the *experience* that both significations are imperative. It is as necessary and obligatory to respect the general as it is to insist that doing so is violent and that one has to respect singularity. In terms of the example above, the undecidability of teaching consists in an oscillation between the ontological encounter with the other and the transcendental violence involved in theorising or naming it as “an encounter with the other”. Because both are imperative, teaching as a holistic experience is undecidable and my “disinterestedness,” my sense of being an interloper, of being unfaithful is symptomatic of this experience of undecidability. Far from being significations of a lack of ethics, of the *unethical*, my disinterestedness perhaps signifies the exact opposite: by mourning the necessary violence all reflection is premised on, it signals a return to the ethical, a commitment to the alterity of students and the singularity of any encounter.

#### 4. On not confusing teaching with learning

Here, in an attempt to further delimit the ethical nature of the learning encounter, I want to comment on and critique one way of presenting the reconfiguration of teaching practice, namely Pratt's *et al's Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education* (2005). The aim of this brief critique is to link the reconceptualising of teaching practice to the ethical domain delimited above.

There are many ways to juxtapose, contrast or compare the shift(s) in educational practice. Conceptual fundamentalists tend to compare the "old teaching approach/philosophy" with a "new teaching approach/philosophy" and use "paradigm" or "epistemic shift" to justify what is essentially a discontinuous philosophy of history marked by sudden ruptures and changes. Others prefer a more continuous view of change and read the emergence of alternative approaches to the traditional "banking" or "transmission" approach to teaching as exactly that: alternatives *to*, or a widening of the range of possible and viable approaches to teaching, the selection of which always depends on the subject taught, the context in which it is taught, stated outcomes *etcetera*. I'd like to suggest that there are broadly two kinds of models advanced to account for this shift: Enlightenment and Pluralist models. The former narrates the changes in educational practice - roughly from transmission to participatory models - in linear terms of progress. Writers who present an Enlightenment model of change portray "a range of perspectives, usually along a continuum from less developed to more developed ways of thinking about teaching ... In presenting them as a hierarchy of more or less developed views, there is an implied valuing of some perspectives over others" (*ibid*, xiii).

In a Pluralist model, represented by, among others, Pratt *et al* there is no such explicit judgement. Here transmission is considered one valid model or perspective among many. Instead of modelling themselves on Enlightenment notions of progress and revolutionary change, pluralists use an epistemology of cultural relativism to present the difference between teaching perspectives. Perspectives, then, are indicators of the educational culture one inhabits. Write Pratt *et al* (*ibid*,35):

*When you talk with another teacher who believes as you do, there is an immediacy of communication and the feeling of being understood. However, just the opposite holds true when there are disagreements between people holding different perspectives on teaching. It is as if each is from a different culture, where values and meanings are different.*

Which classificatory philosophy is more correct? Is this the right question to ask? I don't think so because to assume that one can judge finally between the Enlightenment and Pluralist models of classification is to act in a way complicit with the Enlightenment ideal - is to deny, by definition, the point made by pluralist, namely that there is no vantage point from which we can judge all perspectives *that is not a perspective in itself*. But the same goes for the pluralists. For, to say that there are only a plurality of views is itself an absolute or objective statement, one that aspires to the very objectivity that that pluralism denies. To critique Pratt's epistemological pluralism we have to rather ask the question: is it a useful account of what actually happens in the classroom? I think that while classificatory schemas like Pratt's may offer some insight into the kinds of teaching lecturers offer, they do not make visible the learning that actually occurs. By conflating the *teaching offered* with *the learning that occurs*, the ethical domain that is the focus of this study is obscured.

##### **5. The pedagogical as “just us” space.**

What is teaching? If you ask this question to a range of people and filter through their responses, pick out themes, approaches, values and so on, one would, suggests Pratt, reduce all responses to five categories or perspectives that are all legitimate approaches to teaching. Each, then, is not a separate method as much as a “unique constellation of actions, intentions, and beliefs” (*ibid*, xiv) which teachers “self-select” (*ibid*) and on the basis of which they arrive at their implicit, sometimes explicit teaching philosophy. As mentioned, the multiplicity of approaches is described by Pratt *et al* in terms of pluralism: “This volume rests on a different assumption, one that values a pluralistic view of teaching and a diversity of commitments and perspectives” (*ibid*, 11). These different approaches or plurality of perspectives on what teaching is are not narrowly cast in categories or labels that are hermetically sealed off from one another. Instead, for Pratt *et al* every teacher has central and peripheral beliefs and values. One's perspective is defined by what is central. In other words, one can espouse a social reform perspective but also be aware of the fact that, peripherally, one also holds and applies values and beliefs that are associated with, say, developmental or nurturing perspectives. These other, peripheral values and beliefs are more likely to change than the core or central values and it is

the latter, relatively stable core values that defines one's perspective *as an answer* to the question: what is teaching?

Such a categorising of teaching uncritically equates the teacher's perspective of what teaching is (from his/her perspective) with the kind of teaching/learning that will actually occur. It equates the kind of learning that *should* occur (according to the teachers perspective) with the kind of learning that will in fact occur (very often, despite the intended perspective of the teacher). To put it even more succinctly, it tends to conflate categorising *teachers* with categorising *learning*. In mathematics "equating" means something like "to be confused with" (Spencer Brown in Rasch *et al*, 2000:37). It suggests a legitimate confusion. Here, the confusion is illegitimate because to equate "categorising teachers" with "categorising learning" amounts to saying that the perspective of the teacher will pre-determine the meaning that will emerge from the learning encounter. Any ethical "ought to" on the basis of which such a predetermination depends, has to be legitimised with reference to the end of teaching. Somebody might maintain "It is *legitimate* that I predetermine the nature of this pedagogical interaction in terms of social reform because education is about the re-production of socially conscious, revolutionary subjects that can go out there and change the world" – a view which, in turn, is *legitimised* by the greater *telos* of social movement and change towards Enlightenment, Freedom, Equality, Democracy or "the end of Apartheid". Here, in this one articulation of a teaching perspective we find a whole series of legitimations that collapse, like dominoes, one onto the other as soon as we accept Readings' compelling thesis in *The University in Ruins* (1996) that the decline of the nation-state equates the decline of the legitimacy of any *telos* external to the pedagogical space itself. I elaborate further on Readings' narrative in chapter one.

The problem is historical. It is not about suggesting that predetermining the meaning of the pedagogical interaction is wrong per se. There was a time, particularly at the birth of the university *qua* modern institution, when the view of society and the view of university as "micro-society" formed a seamless whole. This was true for the university in what Readings calls both its Rational and Cultural stages of development. With the decline of the nation-state and the critique of the project of Enlightenment this seamless whole has been severed. Pratt's pluralism is partly an acknowledgement of this fact. However, pluralism conceals the fundamental ethical result of that acknowledgement, namely that the teacher's perspective on teaching has

very little to do with what is actually going to happen in the pedagogical space. There is no direct relation between a teacher's perspective and the learning that will occur. I may, for instance, approach a class of students with an explicit or implicit understanding of my social reform perspective of teaching and in the course of teaching completely miss the fact – because I have predetermined the nature and meaning of our interactions – that they don't care about changing the world but that they are really using my lecturing style and commitment to model an idea of professional practice. The problem with Pratt's categorisation, then, is that it pre-determines the meaning of what *will/should happen* at a time when it is no longer possible to legitimise that pre-determination with reference to anything outside the pedagogical interaction. An example quoted by Pratt *et al* (2005:10) will make the idea of the pedagogical place as a de-differentiated, "just-us" ethical space even clearer. Describing social reform perspective he writes:

*These teachers believed, for example, that teaching ought to be governed by a commitment to justice or equality, or the need to redress power or value imbalances within society. Their commitment was more to a set of clearly articulated values or ideals than to content, learners, or context. One woman, teaching automotive maintenance for women, was very clear that her agenda was to help women bring about social change such that there would be no imbalance of power affecting employment and advancement in the workplace based on gender.*

Does this teacher's framing of her "teaching as social reform agenda" preclude the possibility that somebody might respond with nurturing or apprenticeship needs? Can those needs be recognised outside the frame that predetermines the meaning of the encounter? The violence implicit in framing learning in terms of a perspective cannot accommodate or make visible a plurality of needs. Implicit in the very notion of "teaching perspective" is the assumption that all students form an homogenous group: that, a lecturer's perspective of nurturing corresponds to a collective and homogenous need for nurturing, that the social reform agenda of a teacher will resonate with an homogenous and collective need on the students' part to reform the social. To deny that this is in fact the case is to deconstruct the learning context back into a "just us" space or, what Readings (1996) calls an "institutional pragmatism". Such a deconstruction acknowledges that students may input and extract a variety of impulses and learning experiences that consists of what we would like to do, what we

usually do, what they would prefer to do, what they need *etcetera*. Ultimately it is only the interaction itself between a number of ethical agents that will determine the nature of the learning that actually occurs. To insist on the heterogeneity of needs peculiar to an encounter or series of encounters between singular individuals and prior to our reflection on the meaning of those encounters, is to insist on the undecidability of teaching practice (considered holistically). It is also a way of returning the ethical to our thinking on what teaching/learning means.

The ethical is in many ways the focus of this study. I am interested in how we could re-imagine the authority of the lecturer and the ethics that circumscribe the lecturer/student relationship in what I broadly refer to as “existential practice” or what one could also, similarly broadly, describe as participatory models of teaching. In this attempt to re-imagine the student/lecturer relationship there is a close connection between the themes articulated so far in this Introduction: mindfulness, the singularity of the student (encounter) and the critique of Pratt *et al*’s notion of teaching perspectives. The critique of Pratt *et al* aims to foreground both the ethical and the singular nature of the learning encounter. The encounter becomes ethical only once the lecturer stops pre-determining the meaning of the exchange in advance by imposing a teaching perspective on it. In the absence of such an imposition the encounter becomes not only an ethical encounter but a radically individual, singular encounter; one whose meaning will emerge as the result of the encounter itself. “Mindfulness” as used in this Introduction serves a dual purpose. In order to honour the ethical nature of the learning encounter so understood and to allow the meaning of the encounter to emerge, a teacher has to be mindful in the sense circumscribed above. But “mindfulness” is also a theoretical frame for the study in the sense that it acknowledges the nature of this thesis *qua* theoretical reflection as a necessary violation of that very singularity. It is in this context that the central concern of this thesis arises: given the radical singularity of the learning encounter, how do we conceive of the lecturer/student difference in what Readings calls the posthistorical university?

In the first chapter I place this enquiry in historical context. I look at two narratives of institutional change that provide a historical background to the changing identity of the university. These are Scott’s (1998) narrative in which the university’s identity as knowledge institution is being eroded by other competing institutions that claim to reproduce knowledge. The second is Readings’ *The University in Ruins*

(1996) which charts the genealogy of the contemporary notion that higher education is regulated by the *telos* of Excellence. Complimenting these two narratives are what I call the narratives of pedagogical change. These narrate a shift away from transmission to more participatory models of change. I critique what I perceive to be Enlightenment narratives of this shift and offer, as an alternative, an immanent critique of transmission that restores the ethical dimension of the learning encounter without recourse to either Pluralist or Enlightenment models of change.

In the second chapter I focus on how these participatory or existential pedagogies re-open questions of ethics and authority. How, in a posthistorical university, when we have become acutely aware of the ethical and singular nature of the learning encounter do we conceive of the ethical parameters of that relationship? In that chapter I look at bell hook's pedagogy – particularly at her description of it in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994). I describe her pedagogy as essentially a deconstructive pedagogy that contains, within itself, a difference that is a *sine qua non* of the practice itself. While this does not offer us a morality conventionally understood it gives us a marker from which to depart in our thinking about the “too close” and “too far” that very often problematise the relationship.

In the third and last chapter I ask whether this *difference* can be represented in terms of the pre-Modern notion of master/apprentice in order to similarly offer us guidelines about how to re-imagine the authority of the teacher. I start by discussing and criticising Heidegger's initial resistance to this trope and then move on to a discussion and re-appropriation of it.

It is my hope that a deconstructive pedagogy conceived in this manner may offer a useful way of conceiving some of the complexities that have always marked the relationship between lecturers and students.

# Chapter One

## *Returning the ethical*

*A certain madness must watch over thinking.*

- François Ewald

### 1. Introduction

In the introduction I considered certain aspects of the existential dimension of reflective practice which, in my case, assumed the form of a hesitation, reluctance or resistance to the idea of reflecting on my teaching praxis. I used “disinterest,” “unfaithfulness,” and “transcendental violence” to articulate different aspects of this existential dimension. In the course of my reflection it struck me that there is nothing particular or specifically contemporary about non-educationalists like myself reflecting on the nature of teaching. In fact, doing so is very much part of the history of the university. Philosophers – Fichte, Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida to name but a few – have written extensively on their pedagogy. They speculate on what we would now call “best practice” and the nature of teaching; they juxtapose and compare content and processes oriented models of teaching and discuss at length the nature of the student-lecturer relationship and so forth. While they seldom dedicated specific works or texts to the topic (there are, of course, exceptions like Rousseau) important philosophers like Heidegger and Derrida who are not primarily or at all known for their reflections on teaching praxis have produced the kind of poignant and insightful comments on pedagogy that testify to deep and engaging thought on the matter. Very often their thoughts on pedagogy are scattered through-out their oeuvres and have to be collected and compiled in collections. Two examples of such compilations are *Heidegger, Education and Modernity* (2002) and *Derrida & Education* (2001).

Reading these it becomes clear that a number of concepts central to contemporary education theory have a long history; that we tend to treat these concepts as if they represent distinctions never made before and, even worse, to narrate the relationship between them in quite a linear, progressive model of pedagogical progress or development. One example is the distinction between transmission (content) and more participatory (process) models of teaching. Educationalists often account for some of the profound changes we are currently witnessing in higher education through a narrative that explicitly juxtaposes *historical*

transmission based teaching with a *contemporary* rejection of transmission. In the process these narratives do two things: firstly, they collapse all historical teaching models into transmission (as if the very figure of Socrates does not militate against exactly that) and secondly, they narrate the contemporary changes in education in terms of a progressive *move away* from this historical approach *towards* a more enlightened emphasis on process and participation in the classroom. In the Introduction I suggested that such models implicitly present an Enlightenment model or educational Progress. There is no such progress and the shift in contemporary education (for, there is indeed such a shift) is much more complex and subtle than this narrative suggests. Two examples will illustrate this point. The pedagogy of *Bildung* always taught “knowledge acquisition as a process rather than the acquisition of knowledge as a product”:

*Thus, for Fichte, pedagogy is pure process. The teacher does not transmit facts ... but rather does two things. First, the teacher narrativizes the search for knowledge, tells the story of the process of knowledge acquisition. Second, the teacher enacts the process, sets knowledge to work. What is thus taught is not facts but critique – the formal art of the use of mental powers, the process of judgement (Readings 1996:67).*

Steeped in this German Idealist tradition, Heidegger, too, stated in his deposition to the committee on de-Nazification in 1945 that “the question of education is the question not of how to transmit knowledge but of how to suspend it” (1945/2002:41). The debate between content and process teaching “recurs regularly” (Readings 1996:67) through-out the history of the university and much of contemporary speculation on the topic is effectively a restatement of problems and solutions that are constitutive of the university. Writes Readings (*ibid*, 62):

*The reason it is necessary to reread Humboldt, Schiller, Schleiermacher, Fichte, and Kant is that the vast majority of contemporary ‘solutions’ to the crisis of the University are, in fact, no more than restatements of Humboldt or Newman, whose apparent aptness is the product of ignorance of these founding texts on the history of the institution.*

Teachers at higher education institutions have always been aware of the fact that there are two very different approaches to teaching, one that emphasises content and the other process and that the latter produces deeper or more fundamental learning than

the former – or, in contemporary parlance, that the former produces surface and the latter, deep learning. What seems to be specific about contemporary education discourse is therefore *not* the fact that transmission and participatory approaches are juxtapositioned or compared, nor the critique of the former in terms of the latter, nor the representation of their difference in terms of *process* and *content* but rather the narration of their relationship in linear, progressive terms.

To respond to this linear, progressive narrative by saying it is “wrong” or “simplistic,” while perhaps true, would not be as interesting as asking: why does the narrative have so much currency? What do we have to understand about contemporary education discourse and the ever changing identity of the university to account for the emergence and popularity of this narrative? I suspect this narrative is a last ditch attempt to postulate a *telos* external to the university that will do three related things: 1) legitimise higher education in terms of the reproduction of democratic citizens, 2) give directionality, reason or purpose to studying by holding out the dream/imperative of social transformation towards greater justice and 3) maintain the continuity or alignment between university and the nation-state project. The last of these (maintaining the continuity between university and nation-state) is of course a condition or *sine qua non* of the legitimacy and directionality mentioned in one and two. Readings’ argument in *The University in Ruins* (1996) is that the university and the nation-state are both modern institutions. They emerged together and have always had a complex relationship. Much of the turmoil that characterises contemporary university life, he argues, is due to the decline of the nation-state and the fundamental shift in the relationship with the university this implies. I discuss his theory in more detail below. Here I want to note that the narrative of educational Progress or Development away from transmission towards participation is a specifically *modernist* narrative. Not only because of the obvious suggestions of Enlightenment but also because, by using as criteria for this progress the quasi-democratic notion of “participation,” it attempts to sustain a lost continuity between the university and the democratic or democratising nation-state.

In the same way that the debate between content and process teaching is a recurring theme in the history of university teaching, the ethics-related questions I am concerned with in this thesis are also not new. The relationship between student and lecturer has always been immensely complex and it’s not difficult to understand why. Historically the very notion of *teaching others to think* is haunted by the dual legacy

of Socrates who not only epitomises good teaching but also the “illegitimate” confusion of *eros* and *logos* (*ibid*, 146). Institutionally, the complexity of the relationship derives from “the strange temporality of education” (*ibid*, 148) in which students appear as “neither adult nor child” (*ibid*, 147). Historically patriarchal Western modernity responded to this ambivalence by infantilizing students and casting the relationship in terms of the *in loco parentis* trope. Even then the ambivalence remained, an ambivalence in which “universities and colleges simultaneously empower students as educational consumers and infantilize them as absent of responsibility through *in loco parentis*” (Desoto 2005:214). If there is anything particular in the way these questions emerge in contemporary education discourse it is as a function of the changing dynamics brought about by consumerism. How we may construe the lecturer/student difference usefully in the absence of the *in loco parentis* trope is the subject of chapters two and three. In this chapter I want to provide background to that re-imagination. This will consist of looking, firstly at the change in the institutional identity of the university and secondly, by re-imagining the de-legitimising of transmission teaching in a way that does not make use of Enlightenment or Pluralist narratives of change. Such a critique will reveal a return to ethics that is symptomatic of what Scott (1998) calls “modernity on the turn”.

## **2. The narratives of institutional change**

There are many ways of narrating the contemporary transformations universities are undergoing. For the purpose of this section I shall focus on two such narratives. The first pivots on Scott’s notion of the knowledge society. The relevance of this narrative is that knowledge is increasingly viewed in commodity terms. The market language of commodities and consumerism pushes ethical questions to the fore because it posits the learner as adult consumer and the teacher as service provider. The second narrative is offered by Readings who, in *The University in Ruins* (1996), argues that universities are modern institutions that assumed a specific form with the rise of the nation-state. The history of the relationship between university and nation-state is the historical locus of the *in loco parentis* trope. As such it is important to contextualise the de-legitimising of the trope in terms of the decline of the nation-state and the role the university historically played in that relationship.

## 2.1 Scott and the knowledge society

*There is a strong case for arguing that, in a society where all institutions must be 'learning organizations', in a society which is suffused with 'knowledge', the need for special-purpose 'knowledge' institutions like universities may actually diminish. In an awful sense, universities may die of success (Scott 1998:14).*

For Scott (*ibid*, 13) three changes in contemporary society are interrelated. They are:

1. the diversity of meanings we attach to the idea of the university;
2. the diversity of activities the contemporary university engages in and
3. the direction into which society is moving – the so-called “knowledge society”.

The university has always been engaged in its own transformation - “endless reform – permanent revolution, even has been characteristic of the university since its beginnings in the Middle Ages” (*ibid*, 14). Yet, there is something distinct or specific-to-the-time in the way universities are currently engaging transformation: it can no longer do so from a position of semi-seclusion, of relative social disengagement. Historically, the university has always been half-inside, half-outside society, signified by the pride with which it always flaunted what it did as somewhat useful somewhat useless – or, as its founding father Humboldt observed, from its inception the institution had been poised between “mere leisure (utter absence of direction) and ... practical utility (total subservience to the direction of the state” (Readings 1996:69). The changes we are now witnessing threaten to collapse this precariously (dis)engaged position; threaten to reduce the university to unequivocal usefulness measured through a calculus of exchange framed by a discourse of accountability. Being an institution whose business had always been the reproduction of knowledge, the emergence of a “knowledge society” threatens its core business. This threat is compounded by the fact that the “knowledge” in “knowledge society” is a specific kind of post-modern knowledge. If modernity is epitomised by the postulation of Transcendental Signifiers – Man, God, Rationality etc. – in whose name knowledge was reproduced and that reproduction legitimised, the post-modern is that condition in which we have become “incredulous” (Lyotard 1984) to these legitimising attempts.

There is therefore a dual erosion of the status and the role of the university implicit in the notion of a “knowledge society”. Not only is the university no longer the sole or even main provider of knowledge but it can also no longer legitimise its reproduction of knowledge by claiming to be the privileged site of access to the Signifiers that legitimised the quest for knowledge. The dual losses of control over its core business and its transcendental legitimation is leaving the university to fight in a social domain where it is increasingly viewed as just one more social institutions among many. The *locus classicus* of this crisis is undoubtedly Lyotard’s *The Postmodern condition* (1984), written as a report on the condition of the university for the government of Quebec. Scott (*ibid*, 14) lists as indicators of the scope of these changes – changes that are quantitative, social, institutional, educational, scientific and organizational (*ibid*, 15) - the following:

1. Massification. Student numbers have doubled and trebled all over the world.
2. De-classification: Students no longer come from privileged backgrounds and neither does a university education destine them for elite occupations.
3. The emergence of competing knowledge brokers: the rise of other, novel institutions concerned with the dissemination of knowledge resulting in “not only a proliferation of universities but also a dilution, attenuation, even adulteration of the idea of a university” (*ibid*, 14) – which, as the above quote sardonically states, may yet result in end of the university.
4. New curricula and technologies. The explosion in communication technology creates different needs and hence different curricula which require of teachers some familiarity with current technology.
5. Bureaucratisation. The burden of administration and size that accompanies the process of globalisation is of such a nature that the administrator rather than the professor is now the central figure of the university (Readings 1996:3).
6. Universities feel the financial pinch. In response they adapt to the logic of the market and adopt the marketing strategies of corporations. Universities have become huge, corporate bureaucracies.
7. Accountability and assessment. Universities are like never before held accountable by the societies that view their business in terms of financial return on investment. From inside the university this accountability is very often viewed negatively, as a kind of “structural adjustment” programme

imposed on the university in order to reproduce a Foucauldian “carceral assessment culture” (Harding and Taylor 2001:77).

8. The movement away from higher learning to lifelong learning. While the former is a function of an institution neither committed to politics nor the market, the latter is a function of institutions embedded in a spatial network of institutions that do not define their identity in the isolationist terms of the university (*ibid*, 1998:16).<sup>2</sup>
9. For countries in the developing world one might want to add to this list of Scott’s the impact of the brain-drain – not only as a function of globalisation (Altbach, 2003; Zeleza 2001) but also, internally, the movement away from historically less to historically more privileged institutions (Koen 2003).

What all these amount to is that, while we may yet save the university, to do so in the name of “higher education” will become increasingly problematic. Much of the cultural capital of “higher” resides in the historical notion of Enlightenment – that “higher” education was somehow more “noble” because it signified *higher* aspirations (Scott 1989:15). This devaluation of “higher” is the net result of the oversupply of rival knowledge institutions that offer equally (if not more) valuable forms of employment-oriented training. The cultural capital of higher education was guaranteed (much like currency on the gold standard) by philosophical notions of Enlightenment and Progress. The de-legitimation of these notions is indicative of a meta-legitimacy crisis, namely the crisis of the nation-state and the meta-narratives that legitimised that as a collective project. “We are now on the brink of a new age – of ‘lifelong learning’ – in which social and economic rather than academic and cultural criteria are dominant,” writes Scott (*ibid*, 15). In this new age life-long learning becomes possible as a result of the emerging partnership between different learning institutions that co-operate as a learning network in which the university no longer has privileged status.

The demise of its special status and the emergence of knowledge networks – within which the university occupies at best the status of a node – can also be read in terms of a de-differentiation. Modernity is marked by the differentiation of social functions and the establishment of the relative autonomy of the different domains

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<sup>2</sup> For a statistical analysis of the implications of these changes for higher education in South Africa, see Koen (2003).

(educational, health, economics etc). In contrast, post-modernity is the inverse of this process (Lash 1990). The growing instability of the former autonomous social domains is symptomatic of this process. The same de-differentiation is also occurring within the university where the traditional and modernist demarcation of the social and natural sciences is giving way to “inter” or “multi” disciplinary domains of knowledge in which, for instance, the emerging chaos/complexity paradigm is restructuring the social science/natural science divide by re-conceptualising traditional objects of study like nationalism, migration, health etc. as hybrid phenomenon (Urry 2003:17).

In light of these changes, Scott (*ibid*, 20) asks: “if this is happening to ‘knowledge’, what is the basis for the university’s academic and scientific authority – from which its wider intellectual and cultural claims are derived? Historically the university’s authority derived from a certain schizophrenia (*ibid*, 21). On the one hand the early modern university was linked to the specificities of the post-Aristocratic nation-state project (acting as a vehicle for professionalization, industrialisation and, later, democratisation). On the other hand, the university always aspired to universality and claimed “to belong to a world-wide community of analogous institutions within which scholars and scientists (and, more arguably, students) have privileged rights of circulation” (*ibid*, 21). This dual and conflicting commitment to the particularity of the nation-state and the universality of humanism accounts, to some extent, for the precarious autonomy of the institution within the geographical borders of the nation-state. One could also speculate that exactly this precarious autonomy formed the structural base of much of the authority of the institution. If this authority is being questioned or eroded it is because this very structural base is being eroded – one the one hand by the demise of the nation-state and on the other hand through the multiplicity of epistemologies that problematise any claim to universality. Place these two factors of erosion in the context of a broad-based mass education network and it becomes clear that the university is a knowledge institution in crisis. In addition to the loss of authority that accompanies the erosion of its structural ambivalence, Scott (*ibid*, 22-23) identifies four additional “change drivers”:

1. the dilution of the university's organisational exceptionalism by the emergence of other educational institutions;
2. the fact that universities have to take on other market related business in order to supplement state subsidies (consultations, corporate research etc.);
3. accountability and the discourse on transparency and usefulness;
4. because of their increasing size and the strain on their resources, universities need to act like corporations.

The future of the university depends on how it processes these change drivers. That, in turn, Scott (*ibid*, 29) argues, depends on how we read the emerging knowledge society. On the one hand, the university may yet become the leading knowledge institution, by no means autonomous or exceptional but nevertheless leading the field because of its adaptability. On the other hand, given the unstable nature of the knowledge society – an instability that derives from the fact that it is increasingly viewed as a complex dynamical system (Baker 1993; Cilliers 1998; Urry 2003; Rihani 2002) - it may survive as “institute of stabilization in a chronically unstable world” (Scott 1989:29). A clue here is the invitation to go beyond the simplistic modernist dialectic that presupposes two poles of interaction, the university and the state/society. A more systemic reading may be the way forward, one in which “a kind of sinuous synergy [will] prevail, with the university sometimes an agent of radical and rapid ‘movement’ and at other times a powerful source of stabilization, stability, even stasis” (*ibid*, 30). In similar vein Delanty (2001:6) writes that the university “is no longer the crucial institution in society for the reproduction of instrumental/technical knowledge and is also no longer the codifier of a now fragmented national culture, it can ally itself to civil society .... The great significance of the institution of the university today is that it can be the most important site of interconnectivity in what is now a knowledge society ... it can open up the avenues of these different kinds of knowledge, in particular between knowledge as science and knowledge as culture”.

What the narrative of an emerging knowledge society offers us is a clear sense of the way in which the university has lost its traditional moorings. Published after, but without any obvious references to, Readings' seminal *The University in Ruins* (1996), Scott's text echoes many of the points made by Readings – notably the intimate relationship between the university and the nation-state project and the consequences of the strain on that relationship brought about by globalisation. In

addition, it also offers us a clear description of the importance of knowledge in contemporary societies and its reduction to commodity status; a commodity reproduced and delivered by a number of institutions. One of the implications of this dual *widening of delivery* and the *de-mythologising of knowledge* is that universities can no longer uncritically claim to be the site of a (mythological) “rite of passage” associated with the pedagogy of *Bildung*. This in turn has far-reaching implications for the identities of both lecturers and students and for how they conceive of their relationship beyond the hackneyed *in loco parentis* trope.

## 2.2 Readings and the University of Excellence

For Readings what is particular about the contemporary university is that it exists at a time marked by the decline of the nation state<sup>3</sup>. Prior to this decline the university had been intimately involved in reproducing the kind of subjects states needed to perpetuate the historically specific understanding of what the nation-state community is. For Kant and the Enlightenment philosophers this was a rational community of rational agents. The university was seen as a microcosm of this rational community; a small community of rational subjects. The task of teaching, then, was to reproduce and prepare through education such rational subjects. This would be done not through the teaching of facts, but through the art of rational critique.

This notion of the rational society (Habermas’ rational speech community) that underpins the Enlightenment view of the nation state and, as a consequence, the reproduction of rational citizens was soon replaced by a different view in which Culture was used to define or articulate the distinctiveness of societies. This education-as-cultural project reproduced proud representatives of the culture and, thus, of the distinctiveness of the nation-state in question: Thus we have “Oxford graduates,” “Yale Professor,” “Cambridge scholarships,” and Stellenbosch representing an Idea of Afrikaner nationalism<sup>4</sup> etcetera. In both instances – rationality and culture - education was provided with an external *telos-as-legitimation-and-task*:

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<sup>3</sup> The outline of his narrative is applicable outside his concern with Western universities since “[t]he academic systems of the developing countries are, without exception, imported from the North. Indeed, all contemporary universities are based on the medieval University of Paris model with the exception of the al-Azhar University, in Cairo” (Altbach 2003:3). In the next chapter I nonetheless suggest that it is necessary to extend his model in order to incorporate, alongside Reason, Culture and Excellence, the political *telos* of Liberation.

<sup>4</sup> Historically “English universities were dedicated to the intellectual; pursuit of truth, justice, academic freedom, and autonomy, while Afrikaans universities were required to promote social order and to facilitate the advancement of Afrikaans speakers and the Afrikaans community” (Koen 2003:298).

to reproduce citizens in terms of that *telos*. In terms of a Foucauldian archaeology the *telos* legitimised the educational practice and the educational practices legitimised the nation-state project. It should come as no surprise, then, that the decline of the nation-state is accompanied by an extreme legitimacy crisis for higher education. In the name of what and in the service of whom is this education? To what end? The only “end” or Idea left for contemporary tertiary education, Readings (*ibid*, 14) argues, is *Excellence* - a vacuous concept that lends itself to interpenetration by the neo-liberal forces of globalisation.

At a time marked by the decline of nation-statism the transformation of the university has been a shift away from university as purveyor of (national) culture towards a concern with vacant ‘excellence’ (*ibid*, 3-4) – away from the university as “ideological arm of the nation-state” to “the contemporary university as bureaucratic corporation” (*ibid*, 21). The result of this shift is that the university no longer participates in the sweeping historical project of humanity that was the legacy of the Enlightenment (*ibid*, 5). Readings’ conceptual marker for describing the particularity of the contemporary university is that it is *posthistorical* in the sense that it has “outlived itself, is now a survivor of the era in which it defined itself in terms of the project of the *historical* development, affirmation, and inculcation of national culture” (*ibid*, 6). The criteria for measuring this post-historicity is that if the university were still a culture or nationalist driven institution it could have ignored the demands and logic of the market place whereas a post-cultural institution has/is allowing an ever-increasingly globalising market to dictate the production of knowledge (*ibid*, 10). He articulates the scope of this shift clearly:

*For if the decline of the idea of culture is the decline of the University as prime model for the community of the public sphere in the nation-state, the invocation of excellence is ... the attempt to rephrase the virtual public sphere in economic rather than political terms (ibid, 144).*

A concern with “excellence” is born when the cultural project is forgone in favour of “keeping abreast of global development” as a result of which the university is re-imagined in corporate terms. Scott concurs when he, too, writes that we are now “on the brink of a new age ... in which social and economic rather than academic and cultural criteria are dominant” (*ibid*,15).

But, as Readings argues in the last two chapters of his book, the substitution of historical *teloi* with the de-referentialised notion of excellence has positive implications, too. For, in the absence of a *telos* teaching for the first time becomes an ethical domain *exactly because there is no greater telos, or an Idea on whose behalf we engage pedagogically and which supplies a priori meaning to the pedagogical encounter*. In the absence of an external *telos* (or “alibi” as he also calls it), there is only the face-to-face encounter of the pedagogical relation, the thinking and being in the presence of each other.

Like that of Scott, Readings’ narrative erodes the philosophical foundations of much historical thinking on the authority of the lecturer and the ethical dimension of the relationship with students. For, by deconstructing the historical nexus on the basis of which the university articulated and legitimated its identity he leaves us without any alibis in a radicalised ethical domain where identities and relationships have to be re-imagined.

These two accounts offer what I’d like to call *narratives of social and institutional change* because they share a concern with the nature of society, the place of the university in a changing society and how the former impacts on the latter. What makes it difficult to assess the extent of this impact is the curious conundrum contained in the phrase “a knowledge institution in a knowledge society”. The description of society as a knowledge or information society erases the difference that historically made the university what it was, that is, an institution that specialises in knowledge. By insisting that the adjective “knowledge” still meaningfully describes the nature and role of the university, it re-inserts and attempts to re-institutionalise the difference. But it is not the same difference and how this difference ought to be re-inscribed is not the subject of this study. What will be pursued in the rest of this chapter is what I’d like to call parallel *narratives of pedagogical change*. These narratives are concerned, not with the changes discussed earlier but rather with how the practice of teaching changes in this context.

### **3. The narratives of pedagogical change**

I argued at the beginning of this chapter that the prevalent narrative of linear progress away from transmission models of teaching towards more participatory models of teaching is misguided. Scott’s use of the concept of non-linearity to

conceptualise the temporality of shifts – in his case, the shift from modernity to post-modernity – can be useful here as an alternative to both Enlightenment and Pluralist models of change in educational practice. He writes:

*Indeed there appears to be general agreement that modernity is 'on the turn' ... A non-linear term, perhaps a 'circular' and oblique one, has been deliberately adopted here to describe what is happening to that combination of social practices, industrial forms and intellectual and cultural values developed in the 'West' (as an ideal rather than a geographical region however extensive) over the last three centuries – and which we (perhaps arrogantly) take to be characteristic of modernity in a global sense. Other descriptions are defective. High-modernity implies culmination, intensification; post-modernity suggests transcendence, paradigm shift, even rejection. Both phrases capture something important. But both perhaps are too prescriptive, even dogmatic (ibid, 16-17).*

Scott defines two senses in which it is useful to talk of modernity being “on the turn”. The first is indicative of what I would summarise as a kind of “analysis-fatigue” that leaves us merely with a vague sense that, despite our best attempts at analysis and despite the fact that our attempts have become self-conscious attempts, “something is shifting on the surface”. We have become so self-conscious of the way we make sense of the world that “being self-conscious” itself masquerades as making sense – hence the popular appeal of the “ironic”. Secondly, that the mental and metaphorical categories of our understanding – state, market, culture - are increasingly becoming unstable or fuzzy. They wander off in all sorts of directions. What I like about this non-linearity is that it deprives us of the “linear” escape pod and leaves us inside modernity to make sense of it. There is no *post-* or vantage point from which we will one day come to understand, judge and interpret modernity with the insight of accumulated Reason, Humanism or Enlightenment. The inability to do that haunts all the attempts made in educational discourse to position the so-called “old” transmission approach to teaching *vis-à-vis* the “new” or “contemporary” emphasis on process and participation. The linear narration of that difference pretends to place us in time, as if we are getting better at it. It attempts to make a difference (in linear, real time) that can no longer be made in a society where modernity is “on the turn”. But that does not mean the difference does not exist. It means we have to approach it differently – but how?

A good place to start would be to remind ourselves of an important phenomenological truism: that to say “I am now going to teach using the transmission method” is to fundamentally *not use* the transmission method; is, in fact, to make it impossible to simply transmit knowledge. Why? Because once you self-consciously and knowingly name what you are about to do as “transmitting” you are *mindful* of what you are about to do; *mindful* of the strengths and weaknesses of the method you are about to employ; *mindful* in a way that cannot but disrupt the blind perpetuation of simple transmission. The most important thing you are aware of in that moment, however, is that the transmission model of teaching denies the inter-subjectivity of the teaching encounter. It denies the pedagogical as a human encounter – hence the appropriateness of Freire’s description of it in economic terms of exchange, as “banking”. But the self-knowledge contained in the statement “I am using the transmission method”, in its *mindfulness*, testifies or bears witness to the fact that I have been re-minded of the other, of the fact that I know and acknowledge that we are engaged in a human, inter-subjective encounter that cannot be reduced to a simple calculus of exchange. What intrigues me about this mindfulness is that it allows me to interpret and make sense of the experience of being faced with 300 students in a raked auditorium and knowing that there is only one way of teaching them: a solid block of transmission time. At the same time, however, there is also in the back of my head the phenomenological knowing that says: As long as you call it “transmission” you *know what you’re doing*, you can’t simply transmit. *That* knowing, if you are mindful of it the whole time will allow for other interactions to emerge even in that big auditorium. In other words, mindful transmission does not preclude an ethical engagement with students.

Teaching mindfully allows for transmission to “turn against itself” much like modernity, in the words of Scott, is a certain turning against the self. Here, mindfulness as circumscribed in the Introduction signifies an educational practice “on the turn”. To argue that mindfulness makes transmission teaching impossible is very different from arguing that that “we have somehow *moved beyond* it” or “we *have come to* understand” or even that we “*now* know better”. The latter argues from a point of exteriority (the future, the post- the “what comes after”) while mindfulness, by resisting the linear temporalising of learning, engages transmission from a position of interiority by simply asking: what happens to transmission when you know that’s what you’re doing? What happens when we become mindful of what we are doing

while we are doing it? In the rest of this chapter I want to pursue this line of thought and wrestle from transmission teaching a number of inconsistencies that mostly relate to the non-alignment of its epistemology and ontology. If anything drives contemporary educational practice of educators like bell hooks whose work I will discuss in chapter two, it is the desire for exactly that alignment between epistemology and ontology, between the inter-subjective nature of our knowing and the inter-subjective nature of our being.

### **3.1 Transmission**

What follows is not properly speaking a description as much as a critique of the transmission model of teaching. The critique is not offered from an Enlightenment perspective from where it will be judged as somehow “inadequate” for the production of enlightened citizens but rather a reading that critiques the model from the inside. As such it departs from an analysis of its constitutive elements and its basic communicative assumptions. Ultimately, the critique is guided by the general concern of this study with the ethical dimension of the pedagogical relationship. For this reading I will juxtapose the description of the model offered by Boldt (2005) with Readings’ (*ibid*, 154-158) critique of its communicative assumptions.

In *The Transmission Perspective: Effective Delivery of Content* – one of the chapters in Pratt *et al*’s *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education* – Boldt (2005:63) writes that transmission teaching

*recognizes that student learning and personal issues affect one another. However, in contrast to the Nurturing Perspective ... where student physical and mental well-being are a priority, the Transmission Perspective clearly places personal student issues second to efficient course delivery. One reason for this is that formal educational institutions usually define the roles of teacher and counsellor as separate functions. In this way educational institutions and industrial training centres actually encourage transmission teaching. Teachers are hired for their content expertise, not counselling skills ... Paul, for instance, expresses concern for his students and tries to address their learning needs as best he can, but his personal relationship with them is not his primary responsibility ... Transmission teachers do not have to become involved in areas beyond their competence. Especially in formal settings, there are other experts whose role it is to deal with individual difficulties (emphasis added).*

Based on this statement we can list the constitutive elements of the transmission model as follows:

1. Transmission recognises that learning and personal issues are closely related. This corrects the stereotypical view of the model as somehow oblivious or “Cartesian” in its one-dimensionality. The intellectual may be abstracted from the personal but it does not deny the reality of the latter.
2. Instead, it consists of a prioritising or hierarchical ordering of these elements so that the personal is considered, not less important but less relevant to what teaching is about. This follows from the first point above and leads straight to the next, namely that
3. this prioritising is institutionalised which then, through a kind of feed-back logic, serves to legitimise and perpetuate, even naturalise the distinction. In other words, institutions structurally “define the roles of teacher and counsellor as separate functions” in order then to “actually encourage transmission teaching”. This leads to the fourth element, namely that
4. teachers are employed *in*, because *of* and to the extent *that* they re-enact and perpetuate this relationship and its valued detachment of learning from the personal.
5. Lastly, as grand-narrative of legitimisation of this logic we find a quasi-scientific, capitalist narrative of “expert” scientism where teachers focus on learning because that is what they are good at while the personal is deferred, through the institutionalised compartmentalising referred to above, to “other experts” that have the knowledge to deal with the personal – where the personal, again, is treated as distinct from the learning experience.
6. Together these factors construct a teaching dynamic in which “the primary focus ... is the content and that the central relationship is that of teacher-to-content” (*ibid*, 59). Content is viewed as a stable body of knowledge, discretely (as opposed to fluidly, organically) organised so that nothing will change or get distorted through the process of transmission or reception.

When this kind of teaching works well, what impresses according to Boldt (*ibid*, 60) is the “teacher’s mastery of subject knowledge or skills and [his or her] ability to organize for and explain, demonstrate, and problem solve at the student’s level of

understanding". When it does not work it is because of inadequate execution by "poorly organized teachers who jumped without connection from topic to topic, overwhelmed students with facts, offered convoluted explanations and responses to student questioning, or mismatched what they taught (usually by lectures) and what they based their evaluations on (usually in tests)". According to Boldt (*ibid*) there are many other names/descriptions of this model: Fenstermacher and Soltis describe it as the "executive approach", Fox *et al* embed it in their "transfer" and "shaping" theories of learning which indicates transmission and the ability of the teacher *qua* external and detached agent to shape the process before and predict its outcome after. Lastly Samuelowicz and Bain use "imparting information" and "transmitting knowledge" to describe the essentials of the transmission model. All have in common what Boldt (*ibid*, 61) calls the two defining attributes of 1) centring the teacher-to-content relation above the teacher-to-learner or even learner-to-content relation and 2) the emphasis on efficient delivery of content. Before I proceed with Readings' critique of this model a short break-down of the constitutive understandings regarding the nature of the learner, content and context implicit in this model will be discussed.

a. Learner

This pertains to the creation of a "uniform academic base among students" and the assumption that screening will produce this (Boldt 2005:65-66). It pre-empts the question of diversity. Boldt (*ibid*, 63-65) describes the ideal transmission student as

1. learners with a sense of purpose;
2. who want to "learn skills and pick up the knowledge base needed to gain entry-level job positions in careers of their choice".
3. In other words, they "know exactly why they are there and what they want to do with the skills they learn". This will
4. motivate them to take the necessary steps in that direction, which means
5. they will be "willing to actively participate in and follow through with assignments when required by the teacher".
6. Lastly, and this reflects the value statement made above, they "will be comfortable with their life situations and able to deal with personal problems in a way that does not distract them too much from their learning".

Screening is about the creation of such a homogenous group and as technique or strategy cannot be detached from the socio-political factors that will constitute the values or criteria through which such screening will constitute an “ideal speech community” of a specific nature; one in which the *shared values of students ensure that those who are screened for education will not question the very frame that allowed them entrance to the institution*. This is teaching as the ideal speech community in which, given the filtering process, the meaning of words are understood, diversity is framed<sup>5</sup> and knowledge will be put to a use that itself is not questioned (career driven). For instance, a screening policy that tests students’ English language skills serves not only the pragmatic function of ensuring that “the meaning of words will be understood” by everyone at, say Rhodes University, but also the ideological function of maintaining the University’s identity as an English medium university. In a province with three official languages there is no obvious reason why this should be the case. But this is exactly what screening does: the screening criteria are such that they do not allow for the interrogation of the frame itself. For, you have to speak English to interrogate the frame but interrogating the frame in English is to acknowledge that you have no reason for interrogating it since you do speak English. Screening, that is, the creation of homogeneity shuns the ethical in favour of the instrumental. I return to this issue below.

b. Content

Content is viewed as a body of knowledge that is or can be well structured (where opinions of what a good structure is, may differ). The idea then is to identify a structure and then to reduce it to bite sized pieces for teaching through a variety of transmitting techniques. The idea that knowledge is discrete and can be broken into smallest constituent elements represents a deep epistemological assumption to which we shall return shortly. We can call it the mechanistic (after Newton) or resoluto-compositive (after Padua scientists) method. Step three Boldt’s design of an ethics course taught through the transmission model, for instance, reads:

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<sup>5</sup> Diversity will always disrupt the carefully patrolled boundaries of transmission exactly because it raises ethical considerations the model exists to exclude. One could argue that the example of transmission practice described by Boldt (2005:63-65) buckles under the weight of its own acknowledgment of the ethical (in the guise of diversity) with the result that the practice described cannot truly be considered an example of transmission any longer.

*Step 3: Break content and structure it into logical step-by-step pieces that build on each other, from simple to increasingly complex skills and concepts.*

The important thing with this, as with the resolutio-compositive method generally, is the question: what counts as the most basic building block? Where do we start? Boldt (*ibid.*, 67) makes it clear:

*The course is broken into two subdivisions. The first focuses on “teleological ethics” ... The second subdivision focuses on ‘deontological ethics’ and its manifestations ... The instructor begins class with a brief overview ... then ... opens the floor to questions about the ethical theory under consideration ... Halfway through each class, the instructor takes up the issue of capital punishment and demonstrates how it could be justified using the just-presented theory ...*

Clearly here the most simple or basic building blocks are the two theories to be taught and which the students must learn to apply. But there is another way of thinking about this. If ethics is about the rules we use to determine how we ought to behave, the most basic building block could also consist of the ideas students already have about the rules they live by. After all, what if nobody in class thinks or has ever thought of ethics in terms of “ends” or “duties”, yet manages to live an ethical life? Or, what if they always thought they lived an ethical life that could not simply be reduced to “ends” and “duties” only to discover that this is not the case at all? In case of the latter, would it not be interesting to allow them to discover “ends” and “duties” and the difference between the two? In addition, one could argue that both the “ends” and “duties” ethical discourse are premised on a Cartesian individualism and that in a context of diversity such as that of South Africa, some students may come from a background in which such individualism is completely alien. *Ubuntu* (African humanism) makes for a very different ethical obligation, one that is ontologically grounded in our interdependence and in which knowing what one ought to do is a function of understanding such interdependence. The difference between these two teaching approaches is that, while the former takes abstracted bits and pieces of decontextualised knowledge (compartmentalised, processed and digested) as fundamental building blocks the latter takes *the singularity of the pedagogical relation itself as most basic building block of the learning encounter*. In a similarly decontextualised or abstracted “pluralist universe” (one that exists everywhere in

principle but nowhere in particular) these would appear as two equally viable alternatives – as Pratt *et al* (2005) suggest by referring to them as alternate teaching perspectives in their cultural model of pluralism. As a teacher one would be able to choose quite arbitrarily between the different approaches. After all, in a post-Enlightenment world where the grand-narratives of legitimation have lost their credibility (Lyotard) or gone underground (Jameson), from what vantage point would one make a judgement to the effect that the latter is better (not just pragmatically but morally) than the former? We do not need an objective point or set of criteria to make such a judgement, for in the case of Boldt's teaching a course on ethics the critique is immanent. Choosing to take the pedagogical relation as the most basic building block in a course on ethics simply amounts to recognising that *the teaching relationship is always already an instance of an ethical relationship, of an encounter with radical alterity and that when one teaches ethics one engages or recognises an ethical relationship that is conceptually and ontologically prior to any discourse on ethics.*

All relationships have an ethical dimension and the pedagogical one is no exception. One cannot pretend to teach a course on ethics without acknowledging and using as a point of departure the fact that the very act of teaching ethics engages and situates both teacher and learner already in a relationship with an ethical dimension. This relationship is not somehow a clear, transparent, neutral vehicle that can contain, without distorting or modifying, a simple "exchange of information". On the contrary, it is a human, and therefore always already an ethical, relationship. What a transmission model of teaching ethics tries to retain is the notion of individual autonomy. By refusing to see and acknowledge the ethical dimension of that which contains the course on ethics, and by focussing on content instead, the transmission teacher reveals the operation of what Readings (1996:154) terms an "ideology of autonomy": the belief that the learning process culminates, as it should, in the imitation of the professor:

*And the end of the process will be a replication of [his] autonomy, as the student becomes another professor, in turn. Thus, student autonomy is the end product of the pedagogical process, which is nothing more than the replication of the autonomy of the master (ibid, 157).*

Of course, the context in which transmission teaching occurs – formal education settings, often with mostly raked venues (the hallowed shrine of the *ex cathedra*

lecturing) - perpetuates and legitimises this teaching, reproduces it ideologically and conceptually.

c. Context

As Boldt (*ibid*, 69) acknowledges the world of institutional formal learning is well suited to, and encourages, transmission teaching. They list the relevant factors that structure this model as: “the articulation of programs with professions and one course with another course; predetermined standards of achievement; traditions within disciplines; historical patterns of course objectives and goals; employer demands”. In fact, they conclude, “Transmission teaching with its emphasis on efficient (time allotted) content delivery, fits well into this environment” (*ibid*, 70). This may sound like a truism but one should be careful. It is not as if transmission teaching fits (reluctantly) into a world that predetermines the nature of teaching to such an extent that “[t]he hierarchy of control within established educational institutions leaves little room for interpretation of what it means to teach” (*ibid*, 69). This, as Terry Pratchett famously remarked in *Jitterbug Perfume*, is to put “des cartes before des horses”. It is not as if institutions enforce transmission. Rather, the point is structural (or archaeological as Foucault [1972, 1973] would have it). Teaching reproduces the social institutions that reproduce the teaching they need. And what is being reproduced is captured very eloquently by Boldt’s description of the ideal transmission students quoted above: they know why they are at university, where they are going, what they want and, above all, they are “comfortable with their life situations”. If this is an eloquent and alarmingly frank expression of the ideological and axiological foundations of transmission teaching then Readings’ is an equally eloquent articulation of the subtext:

*[T]he goal of [transmission] education is the achievement of a certain mimetic identity by the student: either as replication of the professor or as replication of a place in the system. And with this identity comes autonomy, or to put it more clearly, independence – the end of dependence, the end of obligated relations to others. The student has acquired a certain freedom, a position of self-sufficient identity. She or he has been granted it by the professor, by the consensus of her or his peers, and by the employer. She or he will not have to listen any more – indeed, should not listen any more, since listening would be tantamount to questioning, which indicates, by a twist in logic, dependence (*ibid*, 157-158).*

Transmission teaching, then, is embedded in a socio-political system that requires the reproduction of productive, autonomous subjects who think of themselves as autonomous, consensual members of an imagined community (the nation-state). These autonomous subjects enter or engage the ethical from the vantage point of voluntarism, contract, consensus and do not admit or recognise that they are ineluctably and inescapably tied to others in a network of relations that are always already ethical – such as the pedagogical relation. They may, on occasion, “volunteer” for community work without acknowledging that they are embedded in a network of relations that entail an ethical obligation and that they do not so much “volunteer” *for* as really respond *to* an ethical obligation. The pedagogical relation is one node in this network of social relations and, *mutatis mutandis*, already ethical. In this regard Readings (*ibid*, 158) comments that “[i]n place of the lure of autonomy, of independence from all obligation, I want to insist that pedagogy is a relation, a network of obligation”.

The reproduction of autonomous agents, oblivious to their embeddedness in a greater network which implies an ethical obligation to all others, is firmly lodged in the communicative assumptions of transmission. It is to this fundamental level that we have to turn in order to understand how transmission teaching is not so much wrong as it has always been illusory.

### **3.2 Readings’ transmission**

Much has been written on the Saussurian model of communication used to depict transmission teaching. In this model a sender passes a message to a receiver who receives it undistorted. Dialogue occurs when the receiver alternately assumes the position of sender to return a signal or message to the erstwhile sender who is now the receiver. It is not difficult to understand what is wrong with this picture. Readings (*ibid*, 150) quotes Bakhtin who writes that

*it is not a mute, wordless creature that receives such an utterance but a human being full of inner words. All his experiences – his so-called apperceptive background – exist encoded in his inner speech, and only to that extent do they come into contact with speech received from outside. Word comes into contact with word.*

The interesting thing is that Bakhtin makes a point that is not phenomenological or hermeneutic but deconstructive of the speech/writing binary. In a philosophy of consciousness the individual only knows or experiences the *phenomenon* (appearance) and never the *noumena* (thing itself) – in other words, only the perceived message and not the message as such. Similarly, hermeneutics approaches meaning from within a background or within a horizon of interpretation that is shared. This is communication or dialogue as intersubjectively construed on the basis of both the sender and receiver's hermeneutic horizons or interpretative frameworks consisting of their life-experiences. This is not Bahktin's or Reading's point. Theirs is that communication is "interdiscursive" (Readings 1996:156; also Derrida 1992:25 and Habermas in Brookfield 2005:1130) because "[a]ll consciousness is consciousness of language in its heterogenous multiplicity". Readings' (*ibid*, 156) continues:

*Communication cannot be the transfer of a prefabricated meaning, since the meaning of words does not remain the same from one utterance ... to the next ... Thus, to recognize the addressee is to inscribe within discourse a radical aporia. It is to speak in a way that respects what might be called the abyssal space of reading by the other: the fact that we never know to whom our words may speak. Teaching, then, is not primarily a matter of communication between autonomous subjects functioning alternately as senders and receivers.*

It is this deconstruction of communication into the *interdiscursive* (as opposed to the phenomenological or hermeneutic *intersubjective*) that really drives home the inescapable ethical dimension of teaching. To acknowledge that the individual consciousness of experience is historically constituted as an archive of cultural life, is to acknowledge, not only that our "personal" or "individual" consciousness is socially constituted but also that we are not in charge or control of the meaning of language and, hence, of our own our consciousness. We are never simply ourselves. In the above statement Readings names as aporetic that "we never know to whom our words may speak". I disagree. This is just an uncertainty; one which would become aporetic if combined with an *imperative* to speak. Consider a question and answer exchange. It is not the fact that "I know" that I posed a question that makes of the question a question. Only an answer can confirm that a question was indeed posed (and understood as such). Until such time, I cannot truly be said to have communicated anything. Yet, at the same time the answer cannot precede the question in order to

make of it a question when it was posed. No, in their very linearity the question has to precede the answer; yet, only the answer can confirm that a question was indeed posed.

Such a linguistically based deconstruction of the binary opposition of social and individual consciousness through the acknowledgment of their interdiscursive nature means that there is not and never was an autonomous self that could choose when and if to enter relationships; a consciousness who can “make up his mind” when and where to ask questions about ethical conduct, when and where to “volunteer” – an act of decision-making that ostensibly precedes the question of what I ought to and ought not to do. To admit the interdiscursive nature of consciousness means admitting that we are inescapably bound to others; that *the singularity of the ethical or ontological precedes the epistemological* and that the pedagogical *qua* learning relation is fundamentally and irrevocably an ethical relationship. To say, following Levinas, that the ontological precedes the epistemological is to say something very specific about the way in which my relation with the other simply cannot be comprehended. Any act of comprehension will, as I argued earlier, reduce the other and our encounter to a conceptual category that violates the encounter itself. While Derrida maintains that such a violation is a *necessary violation*, ethics serves as a reminder that as much as my recognition of the other is function of a transcendental violence, the other can and may never simply be reduced to what is represented through such an act of violence. There is always an incalculable, radical alterity; the other as complete other which escapes even my understanding of the other as “radical other” or “complete other”.

#### **4. Uncovering the ethical**

In this regard Readings (*ibid*, 186) writes that the social bond

*is the fact of an obligation to others that we cannot finally understand. We are obliged to them without being able to say exactly why. For if we could say why, if the social bond could be made an object of cognition, then we would not really be dealing with an obligation at all but with a ration of exchange.*

Habermas (in Brookfield 2005:1113) makes a similar point when he writes that freedom “can only be thought of in internal connection with a network of inter-

personal relationships”. It leaves us with what Readings (*ibid*, 185) calls a “community of loose ends”<sup>6</sup> or what I have called in the introduction the pedagogical as a “just us” space in which

*the singularity of the ‘I’ or the ‘you’ is caught up in a network of obligations that the individual cannot master. That is, the network of obligations in which an individual is caught up in is not entirely available to the subjective consciousness of that individual, so that we can never pay all our debts. Indeed, the assumption that we can pay all our debts is fundamentally unethical, since it presumes the possibility of overcoming all responsibilities and obligations, achieving ‘freedom’ from them. Autonomy as freedom from obligation to others, holds out the impossible imagination of subjective self-identity: I will no longer be torn up, divided from myself by my responsibilities to others (ibid, 186).*

“A network of obligations”; the impossibility of being “free from others”, my ontological “responsibility for the other”: what happens when we construe the pedagogical encounter in these general, ethical terms? How do we conceive of the authority of the teacher and the ethical parameters of the student/lecturer relationship? To recast the pedagogical encounter in such radical ethical terms demands a re-imagining of the difference that seems to be constitutive of the learning encounter. In the next chapter I shall look at the pedagogy of bell hooks as an example of a praxis that raises exactly these questions. I shall suggest that a deconstructive pedagogical praxis like hers contains within its own articulation clues and guidelines as to how we should conceive of this difference.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* and Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* for an attempt “to think a community without identity, without a commonly shared core that would ground the social bond” (Readings 1996:227 *ft*) – an idea also expressed by Agamben’s notion of the social bond as *transience*, “the solidarity of those who have nothing in common but who are aggregated together by the state of things” (Readings 1996:187).

## Chapter Two

### *Teaching the difference*

*When we try to change the classroom so that there is a sense of mutual responsibility for learning, students get scared that you are now not the captain working with them, but that you are after all just another crew member – and not a reliable one at that.*

- bell hooks

#### **1. Introduction**

Readings' posthistorical university reconfigures teaching practice along the lines of what he calls an "institutional pragmatics" (*ibid*, 129). In this pedagogy the learning community is a community of "loose ends" which conceives of itself in deep ethical terms: not as a collection of autonomous, free individuals but as a network in which subjectivities are constituted by their interaction. The learning community is an inter-subjective or, more specifically, an interdiscursive space. Learner and teacher alike arrive in this space bringing with them their pain, their conflict, expectations and dreams of what they hope will emerge from the encounter. Being a "just us" space or a "community of loose ends" also means that such a learning community does not conceive of itself in the hierarchical, authoritarian terms associated with the historical phase of the university when education was regulated by a *telos*. As the following quote suggests, there is much overlap between Readings' idea of a posthistorical pedagogy and some of the contemporary forms of participatory or process oriented teaching:

*This pragmatism recognizes that thought begins where we are and does away with alibis. By thinking without alibis, I mean ceasing to justify our practices in the name of an idea from "elsewhere", an idea that would release us from responsibility for our immediate actions. Neither reason, not culture. Neither excellence, nor an appeal to a transcendence that our actions struggle to realize, trying as we may to justify our deeds and absolve ourselves (*ibid*).*

Much of contemporary existential documented practices seem to be pragmatic in a similar sense. They do not aim to produce rational students, representatives of culture or even responsible citizens. In fact, the very idea of "producing" students - as in "the

production of this or that kind of citizen” - has become uncomfortable or unstable because of the severance of the intimate relation between university and nation-state in which the former functioned as the production facility for the kind of subjects/citizens required by the latter. It makes no sense to “produce” if there is at best a vague and fuzzy notion of what we are “producing *for*”. The “for” is the placeholder for the *telos* that always gave direction, purpose and legitimacy to higher education. For instance, to be quite frank, as much as I am obliged to teach towards the OBE specified general outcome of producing or contributing to the production of responsible citizens, it is not an idea that can excite or inspire my teaching. The idea of “producing responsible citizens” is about as vacuous and uninspiring as the notion of “excellence” – which should not come as a surprise because they are both functions of the same accountability regime. This does not mean that my teaching may not, perhaps, on occasion or even as a rule, result in the “production” of such people as are known as “responsible citizens”. I very much like to think that to confront students at an existential, emotional and spiritual level with the meaning of knowledge will make of them better people and that, as better people, they will also be better citizens. But this is exactly it: the aim or *telos* is not out there where citizens engage each other, it is here, inside the pedagogical space where members of a learning community confront each other and they have nowhere to go and no alibis to invoke in order to ease pain or absolve them from not engaging it. The “just us” is a radical space. We engage and confront each other’s stories, prejudices and ideas *simply because that is what people do*. It is what it means to be part of any community – whether a learning community or a nation or a global civil society or whatever. It is about encountering, engaging, imagining other ways of being.<sup>7</sup>

Readings uses as paradigmatic example of his pragmatics the student revolts of 1968. He reads the revolts against both the feudal character of the French institutions as well as their modernisation/bureaucratisation as a revolt in favour of a pedagogy that maintains the timelessness of education, that is, the idea that education does not culminate or end with a degree when the student, in turn, becomes the lecturer. In this sense the revolts were “the persistent and conscious refusal of vanguardism in favour of institutional pragmatism” (*ibid*, 147). The comparison of his

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<sup>7</sup> Whether or not one construes this process in terms of an immanent *telos* or directionality is not important. I touch on the issue in chapter three.

pragmatics with 1968 is based on the fact that, like those revolts, a pragmatism (here: existential practice), has no agenda, no grand *telos*, no über-Subject.

What Readings' pragmatism and other forms of existential practice have in common, then, is that they have radical implications for the identities of those involved in the learning relationship. Readings quotes with much admiration one of the leaders of the French revolt, Cohn-Bendits who said:

*There are 600 000 of us; sometimes treated as mere children, sometimes as adults. We work, but we produce nothing. Often we have no money, but few of us are really poor. Although most of us come from the bourgeoisie, we do not always behave like them. The girls among us look like boys but are not sure whether they really want to be boys. We look upon our professors as part father, part boss and part teacher, and can't quite make up our minds about them (ibid, 147).*

In elaborating his pragmatics along the model of the 1968 revolts, Readings fails to acknowledge that confusion on the learning end of the pedagogical relationship will invariably create a vortex that implicates the teaching end. It's all wonderfully anarchic if students confess so openly that they "*look upon [their] professors as part father, part boss and part teacher, and can't quite make up [their] minds about them*" but can one appreciate and appropriate this confusion and use it as paradigmatic for articulating a posthistorical teaching practice without interrogating the implications of this deconstruction of the student identity for the lecturer's identity? Can one be father, boss or teacher to a student who obstinately refuses to be child, employee or learner? A student who refuses to be identified or named disallows a lecturer from identifying or naming him/herself and, by implication any *difference* that constitutes their interaction.

In *The University in Ruins* (1996) Readings appropriates this indeterminacy simply as what marks the condition of modernity, as metonymic of the way in which we "are and are not part of society" (*ibid*, 148), that is, by the way in which all of us, like students, precariously occupy (without occupying) the public domain in a post-political economic era of consumerism. But he does not consider the deeper and troubling pedagogical implications of celebrating this indeterminacy and of appropriating it as paradigm for his pragmatism. One educationalist whose participatory praxis shares many of the features of Readings' pragmatics and who does deal quite extensively with some of the identity related problems generated by it,

is bell hooks. In this chapter I want to do three things. Firstly, I will read hooks' description of her praxis and show how her journey really pivots around the loss of *telos* and the subsequent re-invention of a posthistorical praxis. As will hopefully become clear, there is much in this story that university lecturers in South Africa will relate to. Secondly, I want to follow that praxis to one of its important logical conclusions, namely the point at which the participatory, post-authoritative nature of the democratic learning community raises ethical questions about the relationship between lecturer and student. This is a very complex terrain. I shall argue that it is not a moral domain conventionally understood. I shall also avoid the psycho-analytic dimension of the relationship which would amount to a study on its own. Instead, in the third moment of this chapter I offer a pedagogical response to these ethical questions. I read hooks' as a deconstructive pedagogy and suggest that such a pedagogy – which centres around the deconstruction of difference – is a function of the inviolability of the difference that enables the pedagogy. Reading hooks' pedagogy as primarily deconstructive will allow me, in the concluding section of the chapter, to re-imagine the possibility of a posthistorical *education toward justice* by reading such a pedagogy in terms of Derrida's distinction between law and justice.

### ***1.1 bell hooks***

My interest in hooks' *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom* (1994) stems from the fact that her text articulates quite clearly the "widening" or transformation of two issues of central concern to contemporary teachers. The one relates to Readings' argument that the crisis of the university is related to the demise of the nation-state and the *teloi* that legitimised nation-statism as project. It is no longer the case that the university can, as it historically did, derive legitimacy and meaning from its relationship with declining nation-states – particularly not in an era of globalisation. As a result education has to be driven or fuelled by something other than an external, telos-directed teleology. The transition Readings maps in a general Western paradigm finds its articulation in specific in hooks' text which is set against the backdrop of the transition from segregation to integration in the United States. While her own schooling occurred under a / the teleological sign of "future democratic America" her own pedagogic praxis is post-teleological in the sense defined by Readings. Here, the issues of race, class and gender that she addresses have become localised instances of global phenomenon.

The United States may be more/less racist, genderised and classist than other societies but, while the specificities may be different, the forms of oppression are similar. Many of my contemporaries can relate to this manifestation of Readings' argument: where schooling and teaching prior to 1994 took place under the teleological sign of "a future, democratic South Africa", the inequities and injustices that exist post 1994 are, again, different in their specificities but general in a way that one can relate to hook's analysis of them. In Readings;' narrative the loss of teleology accounts for the apathy of students and, I might add, the "nihilism" of lecturers who constantly reminisce about the days when students (never themselves) used to get all fired up because they could make the connection between "theory" and "practice", between the study of politics and the use of politics towards a teleology of liberation. The apathy or nihilism symptomatic of the loss of such a *telos* is perhaps not unrelated to the "destructive privatism" that Habermas associates with the concomitant collapse of the public sphere (Brookfield 2005:1137). This is the first "widening" of pedagogical practice that I am interested in. It is the widening from a teaching that is teleologically driven to one that addresses injustices in a non-teleological directed "just us space".

The second widening concerns the impulse, the driving force of education and teaching. When teaching occurs under the sign of a teleology, that End is introjected into the learning encounter in order to fuel or inspire both students and teachers. In the absence of a *telos* that makes the connection between theory and praxis self-evident it is difficult to inspire both teachers and students without radically interrogating and adapting one's approach to the learning encounter. It is easier to get fired up about an immanent teleology than it is to "confront injustices in general" or "make your contribution to making a difference" or "change the world". This is the second widening: in hook's work she appropriates the post-Cartesian categories of "excitement" and *eros* as such driving engines of learning.

In the next section I want to map in more detail these two "widenings". In the section after that I will look at how these problematise the student/lecturer difference. To appropriate, as hooks does, excitement and *eros* as pedagogic epistemology will have obvious moral or ethical implications. For one, the movement from *telos* to *eros* evokes the spectre of teacher and seducer Socrates. As I intimated earlier, his is an ambivalent and very complex legacy. What lends urgency to a study like this is that we need to situate this legacy in the contemporary educational discourse outlined by Scott and Readings in the first chapter. There I intimated that the master trope that

regulated and policed the lecturer/student relationship was a trope that suggested that university teachers, like those at primary educational institutions, act *in loco parentis*. Contained in this trope is all the necessary legitimation for a paternalistically conceived authority and an ethics that, however vague and implicit, invokes a filial discourse (mothering, fathering and incest) as ethical delimitations. In the consumerist discourse of a “knowledge society” where teachers are increasingly reduced to service providers, this trope will, for obvious reasons, face a legitimacy crisis – particularly in the context of a narrative of pedagogical change that casts the learning encounter in terms of an existential pedagogy such as bell hook’s “classroom community”.

## 2. Segregation ... integration ... then what?

In his *Teaching, as Learning, in Practice* (1996:157) Lave wonders:

*what would happen if we took the collective social nature of our existence so seriously that we put it first; so that crafting identities in practice becomes the fundamental project subjects engage in; crafting identities is a social process, and becoming more knowledgeably skilled is an aspect of participation in social practice. By such reasoning, who you are becoming shapes crucially and fundamentally what you ‘know’. ‘What you know’ may be better thought of as doing rather than having something – ‘knowing’ rather than acquiring or accumulating knowledge or information. ‘Knowing’ is a relation among communities of practice, participation in practice, and the generation of identities as part of becoming part of ongoing practice.*

Is this dream as new as it seems? Perhaps not. Here is the German Idealist Fichte who, according to Readings (1996:123), argued in his “Deductive Plan for an Institution of Higher Learning to be Founded in Berlin”, that

*the university is grounded in a notion of **communicative transparency** [which] allows the fusion of ethnic community and absolute idea. The fusion takes place at multiple levels. Pedagogically, Fichte refers to teaching as the self-unveiling of the students to the professor and of the professor to the students. Self-unveiling has nothing to do with classroom nudity but with a dialogue that is supposed to **fuse the teacher and the students into a single corporate body** with ‘a common spiritual existence ... in which they have learned early on to know each other in depth and to respect each other, where all their reflections take off from a base which is identically known by all and which provides no matter for dispute among them.*

The Idealist suggestion of a fusion of minds does not hide the fact that in true teaching we, too, are inspired in a very real sense that I will clarify with reference to hooks' praxis, to "return to the place we departed from".

hook's background and her ideas of education were shaped by the experience of being black and growing up in segregation US. As a consequence she thought of writing as a private act and teaching as a form of community service, about "giving back to one's community" (*ibid*, 2). This community rootedness had distinct directionality since the teachers who taught her were inspired by the Idea of changing a specific racist society. Teaching was "rooted in the antiracist struggle," the classroom, a place where she experienced "learning as revolution" (*ibid*) – in short, learning and teaching was conceived as "counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (*ibid*). Here, then, was a close affinity between teaching and society: democracy and non-racist practices in the classroom can bring about democracy and non-racism outside the classroom in society. Implicit here is an idea constitutive of the history of the university and quite clearly articulated by German philosophers in both the Rational (Kant) and Cultural (Fichte, Schleiermacher) stages of the institution's development, namely that the university is a microcosm of the social (conceived as macrocosm). In order to accommodate hook's journey into Readings' schema, a corrective or extension of Readings' theory is necessary. Readings quite explicitly limits his analysis to the historical transformation of the university *qua* Western institution. His focus is "on a certain Western notion of the University, which has been widely exported and whose current mutation seems likely to continue to frame the terms of transnational discussion" (1996:2). What is excluded by this frame is the transformation of universities in former colonies. A focus on these will make it clear that alongside the *teloi* he identifies - Reason, Culture and Excellence – another had been operating, namely the idea of Liberation. This is the university as site of struggle.

There is an intermediary stage in the development of colonial universities where the *telos* of Liberation similarly assumes alignment or continuity between education and the End of education, between the university as microcosm and society as macrocosm. In the *Bildung* narrative this relationship was one of preparation for future participation in the macrocosm while in the social transformation paradigm of hooks, driven by the *telos* of Liberation, it is the radical and structural transformation of the macrocosm that is at stake. Both, however, are premised on the belief of

similarity (micro reflects macro) and continuity (the micro serves as preparation for participation or transformation of the macro). This dynamic changed with racial integration. The teleology of liberation was replaced by the mundane and everyday struggle for greater justice:

*School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. **It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle** (ibid, 3; emphasis added).*

The fundamental shift related to the ethical dimension that until then characterised learning and teaching for her. “The banking system of education ... did not interest me. I wanted to become a critical thinker. Yet that longing was often seen as a threat to authority,” writes hooks (ibid, 5). What followed was a more general reformulation or redefinition of the “struggle” – no longer in terms of the narrow focus of a liberation struggle but rather in terms of “greater justice for all” and a revolt against the Foucauldian disciplinary structures of the social: “During college, the primary lesson was reinforced: we were to learn obedience to authority ... The vast majority of our professors lacked basic communication skills, they were not self-actualized, and they often used the classroom to enact rituals of control that were about domination and the unjust exercise of power” (ibid, 4-5). The result was, at first, the apathy (Readings) or destructive privatism (Habermas) associated with the loss of teleological direction:

*My reaction to this stress and to the ever-present boredom and apathy that pervaded my classes was to imagine ways that teaching and the learning experience could be different (ibid, 5).*

Her re-imagination entailed a re-appropriation of the ethical in a way that, in terms of the analysis offered in chapter one, amounted to aligning the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the learning encounter. The resulting “engaged pedagogy” is described in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). Here the classroom is reconfigured in post-historical, communal, that is, ethical terms as a “learning community”. This community, while not labouring under the immediate End of Liberation nonetheless carries and sustains, in a widened or broadened manner, her “commitment to a

politicized revolutionary feminist movement that has as its central agenda the transformation of society” (*ibid*, 71). Of course, this occurred in the greater 80’s and 90’s context marked by the death of socialism as the Great Left Alternative and the subsequent re-definition of the struggle against capitalism and consumerism. This redefinition assumed the form of a global movement away from “simplistic declarations of the importance of social transformation to ‘speak in more self-limiting and precise ways about the asymmetrical relationship between the system (state and work) and the life-world’ ” (Welton, in Bookfield 2005:1128). In fact, quoting Welton, Brookfield comments that “[g]iving up the old Marxian dream of total change is necessary in Habermas’ view if we are to work to achieve realistic and specific social changes in particular contexts”.

In reference to hook’s politics and pedagogy what is interesting about this reconfiguring of the ethico-political in terms of “specific social changes in particular contexts” is that it reconfigures the learning community no longer as driven by the immanent possibility of realizing a teleology, but rather by the *excitement* of learning itself, in other words, by the pleasure of learning as a condition, a *sine qua non* (“that without which not”) of a broader, more holistic or encompassing quest for justice.

### 3. “Excitement”: the journey from *telos* to *eros*.

In the Introduction to *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (*ibid*, 7) writes:

*Excitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter the classroom setting in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute agenda governing teaching practices.*

This excitement is interesting because it resonates with two concepts already used in this study - teaching as “just us” space and “alibi”. In terms of the former, teachers at the posthistorical university no longer teach to manifest an immediate goal or End. Rather, the emphasis has shifted to engaging students in such a way that they will, as Socrates put it, lead a life worth living – knowing, of course, that this will involve increased mindfulness on the part of the student with respect to issues related to race,

class, African-ness, post-coloniality, gender etc. Lecturers no longer take their cues from the promises of teleology, the narratives of legitimation that have come and gone only to leave the learning space a truly ethical “just-us space” in which pedagogy unfolds in the name of nothing other than itself.

What intrigues about Readings’ posthistorical pragmatics as much as hooks’ “democratic community” is the place of “responsibility” in it: that we only “*bear* responsibility” when we no longer defer it. Part of the excitement of the learning encounter, then, is that it demands of us to take responsibility for an experience that is at once exhilarating, frightening, comforting, terrifying and liberating. How can one moment be so complex, contain so many dimensions, dimensions that range from the liberatory to the terrifying? I think the learning encounter contains this complexity if and when it is not placed in the service of anything other than itself. The five perspectives of Pratt critiqued in the Introduction to this study, for example, are some examples of such “other things” that reduce the complexity of the encounter to, for example, a transforming or nurturing experience. These perspectives of Pratt are, in a sense, more intimate versions of the *teloi* analysed and discussed by Readings. They effectively function as markers, external to the encounter itself, to predetermine its meaning. To put it the other way around, it is only the de-differentiated or complex nature of the interaction (which terrifies while liberates, comforts while challenges etcetera.) that enables the relationship between the lecturer and student to assume any of many forms (nurturing, reform, modelling etc). This, then, is what defines the nature of the learning experience in any of the categories described by Pratt: not the teacher’s intention but the interaction or the encounter that has a de-differentiated sense of immediacy given the mindfulness of those who participate in it. On that basis the teacher must be perceptive and receptive to what students extract, to the stories they employ in order to make sense of the encounter and respond appropriately. To assume otherwise, namely that the teacher can or should decide what form or structure – hence what meaning – the encounter will assume is just to impose another “alibi” or transcendental signifier on the interaction, just another way of avoiding taking responsibility for what might emerge in that radical pragmatics (Readings) or exciting (hooks) moment of teaching. This, I would argue, is what hooks insists on when she states: “Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals ... and interacted with according to their needs (*ibid*, 7). And elsewhere: “We communicate best by choosing

that way of speaking that is informed by the particularity and uniqueness of whom we are speaking to and with ... The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself" (*ibid*, 11). An engaged pedagogy means engaging the student mindfully by suspending the historicity of consciousness that predetermines the nature of learning in order to allow that divine ignorance to emerge that will mark the encounter as learning experience. To determine the meaning of the encounter *a priori* in terms of a frame (it will result in reform, nurturing etc.) is not to engage in the sense that I would interpret hooks' engaged pedagogy to suggest. We never remain who we (thought we) were once we enter the pedagogical relationship. Exactly this "not knowing what is to become of me" is the locus of the excitement hooks writes about.

#### **4. A philosophy of excitement and freedom**

Excitement is a result or a function of an open-ended inter-subjective engagement. It is not up to either the teacher or the students to generate it. Rather, excitement is symptomatic of the exchange that (re)defines those who participate in it. As such, hooks locates the possibility of excitement firmly in the communal nature of her teaching praxis. She writes that

*in a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence ... There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources ... Excitement is generated through collective effort (ibid, 8).*

The fascinating thing about acknowledging the generation of excitement as legitimate pedagogic strategy is that it counteracts the apathy that is born exactly at the moment teaching stops being teleologically directed. "To emphasize that the pleasure of teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience" (*ibid*, 10).

If this is the locus of excitement, if we acknowledge that excitement restores directionality to learning in the absence of an external *telos* by allowing the meaning of the learning encounter itself to emerge as a result of the encounter itself, what then

is the relationship between excitement and transgression? What does it mean to say, as hooks does, that “the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, [is] to transgress” (*ibid*, 7)? I would argue that the link between excitement and transgression becomes clear only once we acknowledge that for hooks excitement has a spiritual or, more precisely, a sacred dimension. In this she draws extensively on the writing of the Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh who, by the time of an interview with hooks in 2000 had, “[a]s teacher and guide ... been a presence in my life for more than twenty years” (2000:1). For hooks “excitement” is a post-Cartesian term that captures the way in which process oriented learning involves ourselves in the intellectual and spiritual growth of both students and lecturers – our “self-actualizing” (hooks 1994:13). “Growth,” for hooks, must be understood in the spiritual sense of being related to the sacred (*ibid*, 13) since it involves us at a very deep level in the interplay of destruction and rebirth, chaos and order outside of which or in the absence of which there can be no “growth”. It is a process that is always painful to experience or witness:

*Looking out over the class, across race, sexual preference, and ethnicity, I saw students nodding their heads. And I saw for the first time that there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain (ibid, 43).*

To engage that pain is to engage the sacred dimension of excitement. The word sacred derives from the Latin word *sacer* which is sometimes translated “sacred” and sometimes “accursed”, signifying that it encompasses the maleficent as well as the beneficent (Girard 1977:257). Many languages and cultures share this understanding of the sacred in that they have only one term to denote the interplay of order and disorder, of difference lost and difference retrieved (*ibid*, 257). Freud, in *Totem and Taboo* (1919) writes that the Polynesian term “taboo” – which is the same as the Latin *sacer* – branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means “sacred,” but on the other hand, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden. Excitement understood in sacred terms points to what I have called the de-differentiated moment of teaching: the phenomenological moment when the learning experience engages the primordial nexus of terror, liberation, salvation, doubt, joy, exuberance, fear and certainty (in other words, birth and death) that exists prior to its differentiation into different “needs” and “teaching perspectives”. Excitement, in all its terror, is anterior to us

making up our minds about what happened. Necessary and useful as they may be, the teaching perspectives elaborated on by Pratt *et al* that emerge from teaching/learning, may or may not coincide with the way participants in the learning community eventually interpret, narrate or make sense of that interaction. Excitement and an acknowledgement of the de-differentiation of which it is a function will take us exactly beyond this frame where our certainty about our needs or our teaching perspectives are questioned, interrogated and de-differentiated in a moment when we truly acknowledge the communality and inter-subjectivity of our engagement. After all, one cannot enter any (pedagogical) encounter and limit the interaction to knowing who you are, what you need and from what perspective you will take what you need *while at the same time* acknowledging the uncertainty implicit in describing the encounter in terms of inter-subjectivity. To acknowledge such inter-subjectivity is to acknowledge that the other approaches the encounter with their own “life world” or, in terms of hermeneutics, their own “horizon of interpretation,” that we are hostage to the other (Levinas 1969) and that the meaning that will emerge is function, at best, of a “fusion of these horizons”.

It is against such a hermeneutic backdrop that I read hooks’ use of the word “transgression”. By conceiving excitement in terms of the sacred she insists that learning takes us back in order to remind us of a “wholeness” anterior to the interpretation of the usefulness of learning in terms of intimate social ends like nurturing, development, reform or grand social *teloi* like liberation or the perpetuation of culture that legitimise the nation-state project. By virtue of the fact that society exists, is in fact premised on differentiation – races, classes, genders but also our roles as parents, lecturers, students, bakers, barbers, mothers – such a forceful, existential engagement of our humanity is dangerous for the simple reason *that it encourages a mindfulness of all differentiations as political categories*. Equally profoundly is that it undermines, de-legitimises or “resists” talking and thinking of learning/teaching in managerial terms. In the absence of such mindfulness “transgression” is simply linked to “resistance” in order to derive its meaning solely from one, or a specified number of, differentiations: transgression becomes a resistance *to* race, *to* class or *to* gender. On the other hand, transgression considered in terms of the sacred and as related to spiritual growth or development, is inwardly directed. Through a temporary suspension (never, as I said, a phenomenological bracketing) or de-differentiation it mobilises our “wholeness” against the naturalness of all differentiations. This notion

of transgression is intimately linked to a very specific understanding of freedom. The subtitle of *Teaching to transgress* is *Education as the practice of freedom*. Freedom from what? we may ask. In the absence of a pedagogical teleology this amounts to freedom from all forms of oppression including, but not limited to, domination relating to race, class, colonialism, gender etc. It is the freedom to be “whole” based on a recognition of that wholeness we glimpse in the de-differentiated interaction of the learning encounter.

##### **5. “Wholeness” as post-Cartesian, spiritual pedagogy that connects “the will to know with the will to become”**

All holistic approaches to learning – whether that of Dewey, Montessori or Steiner - are progressive in some sense. But I rather want to focus on the term “holistic” because it think, rightly understood, one can get more progressive mileage out of that term than the ideologically over-determined notion of “progressiveness” itself. “Holism” always implies a spiritual discourse of sorts and hooks’ use of the term is no exception. She takes her cue from Thich Nhat Hanh who considers the teacher as healer and emphasises “wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit” (*ibid*, 14). This enables her to consider students as “whole” human beings, striving “not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world” (*ibid*, 15). It also encourages students to consider and acknowledge their lecturers as “whole human beings with complex lives and experiences” (*ibid*, 15).

Given this spiritual dimension engaged pedagogy emphasizes “well-being”. This means that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (*ibid*, 15). This resonates well with excitement interpreted in post-Cartesian sense as involving the person as body-mind “whole”.

This emphasis on “wholeness” and the concomitant notion of the teacher as healer does not sit easy in education discourse for the simple reason that it de-differentiates the most fundamental binary that tertiary education (conventionally understood), is based upon, namely the body/mind split. In fact, much of hooks’ vocabulary can be said to be post-Cartesian in this sense: teaching through excitement, excitement as sacred, learning as healing, the assumption of “wholeness” etc.

Engaging holistically implies a range/number of responsibilities in the classroom setting:

1. in a classroom as community everybody has a “a responsibility to contribute” (*ibid*, 39);
2. both lecturer and student take on the responsibility of exploring the connection between the will to know and the will to become. For lecturers, that they will offer “knowledge that is meaningful” (*ibid*, 19), that is, that they will not offer students information “without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences” (*ibid*, 19).
3. Thirdly, it means taking responsibility, to some vague and undefined extent, for students lives outside the immediate learning situation while being mindful of not slipping into the role of “therapist” (*ibid*, 19-20).
4. Lastly, that everyone effectively takes on the responsibility to engage and interrogate the traditional lecturer/student hierarchy or difference:

*When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks (ibid, 21).*

These together make of the classroom “a democratic setting” (*ibid*, 41) which foregoes the idea that the classroom should be a safe setting in exchange for creating a community inspired by the goal of real learning. Instead, the “unsafety” of hooks’ democratic learning community derives from what situated learning theorists like Lave (1993:15) refer to as its “multifocal character” which foregrounds conflict as a ubiquitous aspect of human existence that results from the fact that people who help to create a learning community together will all speak from a multiplicity of interest, locations and experiences. The building of a classroom community is a function of the interplay of these responsibilities that all dovetail with one another.

*Often when students return from breaks I ask them to share with us how ideas that they have learned or worked on in the classroom impacted on their experience outside. This gives them the opportunity to know that difficult experiences may be common and practice at integrating theory and practice: ways of knowing with habits of being. We practice interrogating habits of being as well as ideas. Through this process we build community (ibid, 43).*

There is an intimate conceptual nexus here between sacred excitement, intersubjectivity, community, freedom and transgression. “When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-discovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other” (*ibid*, 61).

In the language of post-modernism one could also say that the perpetual suspension of differentiations in the name of “wholeness” is transgressive exactly because of its relentless commitment to the impossibility of complete freedom. In the concluding section of this chapter I shall argue that, in this sense, hooks’ notion of freedom is potentially extremely radical because it functions in the domain of “deconstruction as justice” (Derrida 1992). The ease with which hooks moves between critiques of race, gender and class dominations is, I suggest, a function of engaging our “wholeness” that precedes even our recognition of the differentiation of oppression in terms of race, class and gender. To recognise your wholeness (through an excitement that is sacred) is to recognise the principle of domination irrespective of any form it may take. To insist on “freedom”, then, is simply to insist on arriving at a point where we will be able to recognise *and be* (free to be) the place from which we started – this not in the Idealist, sentimental sense suggested by Fichte in the opening quote of this chapter, but rather in the deeply existential and spiritual sense of what it means to be human.

This, of course has radical implications for the way knowledge is structured, institutionalised and power exercised through those structures. Or, as hooks puts it: “Once we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we’re automatically challenging the way power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalized space” (*ibid*, 137). Beautiful, profound, radical and encouraging as this may be, the question emerges: what kind of contradictions,

paradoxes, problems and/or tensions are generated when we translate this project into the institutional one of teaching at a social institution whose very existence is premised on a set of differences or pre-established identities which cannot and perhaps should not tolerate their de-differentiation? If we have to de-differentiate or deconstruct all social differentiations, binaries that make of us male/female, believers/atheists, liberals/conservative, upper-class/middleclass etc. – and if mindfulness consists of a radical deconstruction all these differentiations in order to access a wholeness that precedes them, does such a deconstructive process also include de-differentiating the lecture/student differentiation? I don't think so. If I may pre-empt the conclusions of this chapter, the deconstruction towards impossible justice is *a function of retaining the integrity of the one difference that enables the deconstructive process*. In the demand to honour the integrity of the one difference constitutive of the learning encounter lies the key to re-imagining ethics and authority beyond the infantilizing *in loco parentis* trope. In the rest of this chapter I shall consider the ethical dimension of a deconstructive pedagogy while in the last chapter I use the master/apprentice trope to outline the authority structure of that pedagogy.

## **6. Eros and logos: the spectre of Socrates**

The de-differentiation of the student/lecturer difference takes many forms. It can manifest in pedagogies that do not acknowledge the difference as a starting point (Gibbs *et al* 2004:187) – a denial which Readings summarily dismisses as “a misplaced pedagogical commitment” (1996:156). It also manifests more informally in deep friendships between lecturers and students – particularly in those cases where lecturers consciously employ “love” or care as pedagogical mode of instruction. At its most extreme the de-differentiation manifests in romantic or sexual relations between lecturers and students. My concern in the remainder of this chapter is with the “intimacy,” broadly conceived, that results from an existentially driven praxis which postulates the learning community as “democratic” and in which love or care is incorporated as legitimate epistemology. As such the use of the term “intimacy” includes, but is not limited to, romantic love or sexual intimacy between lecturer and student. Having said that, to analyse such a wide meaning of the word “intimacy” would require a study far beyond the scope of the present one. For strategic purpose then I want to address the dangers of intimacy by focussing specifically on the

question of romantic or sexual intimacy in the pedagogical relation. My sense is that if one can get some clarity on the most extreme de-differentiation of the student/lecturer identities much of our understanding of the limits of intimacy more broadly conceived will follow. I want to delimit the analysis that follows with three further caveats. Firstly, I am not concerned here with pedagogical relationship of which the boundaries are clearly circumscribed by laws pertaining to minors or sexual harassment but only by pedagogical relationship in institutions of higher education where students are considered free moral and legal agents. Secondly, that higher education is marked by what Readings names “the strange temporality of education”. I will return to what this means below. The third caveat is hooks’ statement that “Eroticism, even that which leads to romantic involvement between professor and students, is not *inherently destructive*” (in Cho 2005:84; emphasis added). In carefully setting up the frame I am trying to avoid two things: one, forming general rules or moral principles of judgement that will allow one to argue either that such intimacy is always inherently right, permissible or acceptable or the inverse, that such intimacy is always inherently wrong, unacceptable and inadmissible. The impossibility of such rules, I will argue, follows from the “strange temporality of education” that I will shortly elaborate on. The second thing I want to avoid is a deep psycho-analytic exploration of what Cho (2005:81) summarises as three positions one can take with regard to classroom eroticism: 1) the erotic position according to which “one should not be afraid of love’s slippage into the domain of sexuality, because it is precisely through this slippage that love realizes its full pedagogical potential” (*ibid*); 2) a caring pedagogy that holds “love can play this role [in teaching knowledge] only insofar as it is not sexual” (*ibid*) or 3) the technical position according to which “love is inappropriate to education since it might lead to bias” (*ibid*).

While the second option - presenting generally applicable rules - is inappropriate given the strange temporality of education, the latter - providing a deep psycho-analytic analysis of the options available, is beyond the scope of this study. Readers interested in the latter are referred to Cho’s penetrating analysis in *Lessons of love: psychoanalysis and teacher-student love* (2005). It may sound that not much remains beyond this delimitation, but I disagree. Much clarity on this issue can be had from exploring hooks’ statement and by asking ourselves: if such intimacy is not *inherently destructive* or inappropriate, then in what, given the context of this analysis so far, does such destructiveness nonetheless reside? To begin with I will argue that

*the strange temporality of education* bears a striking resemblance to the condition of post-modernity as such and that the desire to articulating clear, general rules is not so much misplaced as it is doomed to disappointment given the condition itself.

## 7. The strange temporality of teaching

*[T]he position of the students has always been that of a troubled relation of the public sphere. The public sphere is proposed as the birthright of citizen, but the students have to go through a period of training in order to accede to*

*their birthright* (Readings 1996:148).

As argued in the first chapter, the university has always had a troubled relationship with the state and society in general. Somewhat useful, somewhat useless it had always been involved, on the one hand, in the reproduction of the nation while, on the other hand, insisting on its autonomy and the right to pursue research agendas the immediate usefulness of which was never apparent. Much of this ambiguity derives from the way in which German philosophers like Schleiermacher, Humboldt and Fichte conceived of the modern university as social institution. Beyond that the ambivalence of its relation to the state and society is also a result of the fact that it is “home” to an age group who politically are citizens by birthright but who culturally nonetheless have to go “through a period of training to accede to that right”. If the university *qua* modern institution occupies a kind of nowhere place in the political economy of the state and nationalism it is, in part, because the students occupy a “nowhere” or transitory place in society. The troubled relation of the institution is a reflection of the troubled relation of its population – those whose entry to the *civitas* it exists to facilitate. It is this condition which Readings (1996:148) describes in terms of the “strange temporality of education”. For Readings the strangeness of the time of education relates to the fact that students are both too soon and too late:

*Born too soon without knowledge, and yet born too late to live that knowledge except as tradition received from elsewhere, students name the temporal predicament of modernity. On the other hand, too soon: they are born into culture, but they still have to learn to speak its language* (*ibid*, 148).

I think “temporality” should best be understood not in terms of time alone but rather also in relation to space, that is, in terms of space-time. For, the strangeness of the time of student life – half inside, half outside civil society – is the temporal reflection of a spatial strangeness embodied by the physical institution in its relation to the civil. To accommodate both strangenesses I suggest we refer to the strange spatio-temporality of education where education is broadly used to include the time of learning (for students) as well as the space or locale of learning (the institution).

Students occupy a place somewhere in-between the domestic and the public domains. They have left home but they have not yet entered the public domain. They are in a “cultural half-way house” where they have all the rights of citizens but culturally speaking still *have to go through a period of training in order to accede to their birthright*. In Freudian terms the spatio-temporality of their strangeness relates to the fact that they are leaving a filial domain of bonds and privileges in order to enter a public domain characterised by contractual relations (Van Zyl 1990:8). The domain of bond is filial or, in the greater narrative of phylogenic-ontogenic re-enactment, the *feudal domain* that every individual re-enacts on his or her way to maturity. Bonds embody a necessary inequality of the kind found between parent and child, lord and serf, man and God. Writes Van Zyl (1990:8):

*What distinguishes bond from contracts is that attendant upon the bond is a right to violence in the interest of nurture, in contemporary terms in the interest of training or education ... The bond, and therefore constraint and punishment by violent means is, at least ideally, confined to pre-contractual relations, to families themselves and to pseudo-familial relations like those in schools where educators are significantly in loco parentis.*

Significantly Van Zyl here limits the legitimacy of the *in loco parentis* trope to schools where educators act *as if* parents, or *in the place of* parents. This means that the trope can only be extended to higher education though a kind of violence that “infantilizes” students by reducing the spatio-temporal strangeness of their transition towards the contractual domain, to its filial dimension. This does not mean that the trope has no relevance; only that it is not exhaustive and always implies a wilful misapprehension of a cultural ambiguity or ambivalence. Historically, this trope derived its blanket or encompassing legitimation as exhaustive trope from the continuity that existed between, on the one hand, the hierarchical and paternalistic

view of education as predominantly a process of transmitting from a “full vessel” into an “empty vessel” and, on the other hand, a patriarchal Western modernity. In such an order of things, the fictive nature of parental substitution, captured by the “in loco” or the “as if”, was discursively excluded or sacrificed (Girard 1977) to sustain the cultural logic of paternalism. The sweeping changes represented by what I called the narratives of institutional change and the narratives of pedagogical change implicitly challenge this exclusion by revealing students as, also, part-adult, - if not as independent political agents, then, at least as independent consumers. In short, the redefinition of their autonomy not in political but in economic terms re-asserts the as-if nature and restores to education its spatio-temporal strangeness. It is in this sense that Readings continues to read the strangeness as metonymic of modernity itself. Students are positioned such that they enact a general sense in which “we are and are not part of society, that we always function in society before we understand what it means to do so, and that we do so until death” (*ibid*, 148). I want to push the metonym a little further and argue that the strangeness, the sense of not belonging epitomised metonymically by students, is familiar or recognisable as modernity “on the turn” or, what some would prefer to call, post-modernity. The comparison resides in this: caught in the spatio-temporal interstice between the filial domain of the bond and the contractual domain of civil society students are subject to both the logic of bond and contract and therefore to neither. Neither the language of privilege, punishment and obedience that typifies bond relations nor the language of autonomous rules and contractual relations apply. Therein resides the strangeness: being representatives of two regimes of discipline, students are subject to neither. It is the “as if” of the trope that denotes this strangeness. From this it follows that it is impossible to articulate meta-rules for conduct pertaining to students since those rules will necessarily derive from a logic, idiom or form of exchange (Van Zyl 1990:8) that will be either filial or contractual. This accounts for what some consider the “complexity,” and others the “impossibility” of devising moral rules and principles to delimit, define and regulate relations between students and lecturers. What the student condition is metonymic of, then, is not so much modernity as post-modernity or “modernity on the turn”. This is the idea that we all live or engage multiple epistemologies, even ontologies, without having recourse to grand-narratives of legitimation that will help us interpret, decide once and for all on the rules we have to live by. In a very specific sense, then, we have

become incredulous to ethics – if, under ethics, we understand, with Bauman (1993) the codification of rules and norms in terms of universal laws.

Bauman's work is premised on a clear distinction between morality and ethics (Biesta 2004:242). Biesta (*ibid*) paraphrases this distinction as follows:

*Morality concerns 'the aspect of human thought, feeling and action that pertains to the distinction between 'right' and 'wrong''. Morality is, in other words, a dimension and possibility of human life. Ethics, on the other hand, refers to rules, codes, and norms. It is the codification of what counts as moral action – a codification in terms of (universal) laws. The idea of ethics not only implies that it is possible to articulate such laws, but it also expresses a particular belief regarding what it means to lead a moral life, namely, the life of obedience to the moral law(s).*

For Bauman modernity represents an era of ethics, of a time when it was assumed that it was possible to codify the laws on the basis of which we could judge behaviour as (im)moral. It is precisely the fact that we do not believe this any longer and that we have become incredulous of the attempt to articulate such universal laws, that marks the present condition as post-modern. The use of post- here is important because it is not understood by Bauman or Biesta in a temporal sense but rather similar to the way in which Scott defines post-modernity in non-linear fashion as being “on the turn”. In the previous chapter I critiqued transmission from the perspective of such a “turn” – refusing, in the process, to critique it from a temporal sense of enlightenment or progress. Instead, I offered a critique from within by showing that transmission was always already inconsistent within itself or, given the interdiscursive nature of communication, that transmission was not as much wrong as it was always already impossible. Similarly, here, Bauman defines the post- to imply “that the long and earnest efforts of modernity have been misguided, undertaken under false pretences,” and that ‘modernity itself ... will demonstrate (if it has not demonstrated yet) ... its impossibility’ (Biesta 2004:243).

Where does this leave us in terms of the question of lecturer/student intimacy? Two points: on the basis of Readings and Freud's description of education in terms of a strange spatio-temporality, the domain of education can be reconfigured in deconstructive terms as “undecidable”. In other words, the undecidability of the higher education domain is such that we cannot invoke general or universal laws through which to articulate an ethics on the basis of which we can interpret such

intimacy as (im)moral. Does this mean that the domain cannot be comprehended or interpreted in terms of morality at all? No, for as Bauman makes clear, the condition of post-modernity – of which the education domain is metonymic – does not imply the end of all morality but rather the end of codified morality (Biesta 2004:243). For Bauman, the end of a modernist ethics open up the possibility for a post-modern morality – that is, a morality that will have to conduct itself from inside without recourse to universally codified ethics. In as much as morality, here, can no longer defer to alibis, that is, the transcendental signifiers that guarantee the standard or legitimacy of ethics, it is only in post-modernity that morality becomes a true moral endeavour. Only in this immanent domain am I forced to take responsibility for my choices and actions for what they mean to others. Being responsible means making moral choices without being able to frame or pre-emptively legitimate those actions or decision with recourse to the transcendental. Does this mean that in “judging” student/lecturer intimacy we are at the mercy of ad hoc decision and situational morality, open for interpretation? Is there nothing we can use as an immanent marker or point of reference to guide behaviour in this undecidable domain? <sup>8</sup>

I want to argue that there is such a marker and that in order to engage the marker we must suspend – in a way that the introduction circumscribed as mindfulness – the question of morality; not because it is irrelevant but because any moral discussion on the question of intimacy invokes the reality, desirability of a difference that, however conceived, is constitutive of the learning encounter. The option I will explore a little later in this chapter is one that consists of shifting the debate away from a moral discourse (which is highly unstable given the undecidability of its referent) towards this difference. I shall reformulate the question to read: what does the difference allow us to achieve in a deconstructive praxis (of which I shall argue hooks’ is an example)? And secondly, can this be achieved in the absence of that difference? This is perhaps a particularly analytical, even philosophical response to the question and it is by no means the only response available to us when modernity is on the turn. hooks, for one, has intimated another

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<sup>8</sup> I am purposefully not commenting on the judgment of such intimacy on the basis that power relations between lecturer and student are asymmetrical because this argument simply begs the question. Society exists as a network of asymmetrical power relations. This does not prevent individuals from entering and contesting asymmetry in those relations. Invoking the asymmetrical nature of the relationship here *as a moral principle* is parasitical on doing so on behalf or in the name of students who, it is assumed, cannot speak for themselves – which, of course, is to invoke the *in loco parentis* trope in a manner that collapses the *as-if* nature of the student’s identity and/or violates the undecidability of the domain.

avenue, one which is profoundly deconstructive for turning the “supplement” of traditional educational practice – that which had to be excluded, marginalised, repressed, denied (*eros*) - into the very condition for the possibility of her praxis. It is an approach that side-steps the “danger” of conflating *eros* and *logos* by consciously and holistically eroticising *logos*.

## 8. Eroticising *logos*

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hook’s offers the following anecdote:

*During my first semester of college teaching, there was a male student in my class whom I always seemed to see and not see at the same time. At one point in the middle of the semester, I received a call from a school therapist who wanted to speak with me about the way I treated this student in the class. The therapist told me that the students had said I was unusually gruff, rude, and downright mean when I related to him. I did not know exactly who the student was, could not put a face or body with his name, but later when he identified himself in class, I realized that I was erotically drawn to this student. And that my naïve way of coping with feelings in the classroom that I had been taught never to have was to deflect (hence my harsh treatment of him), repress, and deny. Overly conscious then about the ways such repression and denial could lead to the ‘wounding’ of students, I was determined to face whatever passions were aroused in the classroom setting and deal with them (ibid, 193).*

Frank as this story may be, and such frankness accounts for a large part of the appeal of hook’s oeuvre, she does not explain what “facing whatever passions were aroused in the classroom setting” or “dealing with them” means. This leaves a range of possibilities open that would exclude denial but include a variety of options ranging from talking about it with the student in question, talking about it in class, teaching on the subject of “expressions of care and love in the classroom” (which she has done, see 1994:198) to indulging the desire. Like Readings, she acknowledges a very complex phenomenon but leaves us hanging. As quoted earlier, Readings (1996:156) brushes over this issue by labelling it a “misplaced pedagogical commitment” (*ibid*, 156) or the illegitimate “conflation of *eros* and *logos*” without being more specific as to what the misplacement or illegitimacy is in respect of. Implicit here is the notion that intimacy is illegitimate because it does not enable learning. Yet, others would maintain exactly the opposite. Beat poet and lecturer Allen Ginsberg, for instance said in an interview, not only that he believes “the best teaching is done in bed” but that

such teaching “should be institutionally encouraged” (in Miles 1989:492-493). In quoting this interview Miles suggests that Ginsberg was “indulging in hyperbole” (1989:493) in order to shock his interviewer. The hyperbole (as poetic or rhetorical exaggeration) resides in the casual or matter-of-fact way in which Ginsberg assumes what Cho (2005) call the erotic position. Whether or not this was intended as hyperbole it is a powerful de-legitimation of the assumed naturalness of separating *eros* and *logos*. What the logic of exaggerated inversion does is to engage and question the very complexity that resides in the contemporary revelation of the “as-if” or fictive nature of the *in loco parentis* trope. Added to this, once we appreciate the undecidability of the higher education domain or the strange temporality of education as metonymic of post-modernity, we realise that we can no longer respond to such an inversion in a (modernist) ethical manner.

In fairness, hooks’ does address the issue towards the end of *Teaching to Transgress*. She does so in a manner that brings us to the second “widening” of her pedagogical practice that motivated my interest in praxis. She explicitly widens the meaning of *eros* to “love” in general, assuming in the process a position that reveals some affinities with the work of care pedagogic theorists like Noddings and Valenzuela who, in their respective texts *Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984) and *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (1999) assume what Cho appropriately classifies as the “caring position”. While these theorists assume that love plays a role in teaching as long as it excludes sexual intimacy, hooks, as quoted earlier, differs by finding nothing “inherently destructive” in it.

For hooks the widening of the concept *eros* implies a post-Cartesian assertion of our “wholeness” with respect to body and mind. It is crucial, she writes “that we learn to enter the classroom ‘whole’ and not as ‘disembodied spirit’” (*ibid*, 193). There is a place for passion in the classroom and *eros*/the erotic does not and may no longer be denied, excluded in order for learning to take place. This is completely consistent with her use of excitement as pedagogic mode or learning as I discussed earlier in this chapter. To understand the place of *eros* in the classroom means embracing it as a motivational force that engages our ways of being. One cannot be excited and acknowledge what I have elaborated on as the deep, spiritual dimension of learning that involves us in the pain of growing and, in the process, exclude love or *eros*. But, she writes, to “understand the place of *eros* and eroticism in the classroom,

we must move beyond thinking of those forces solely in terms of the sexual, though that dimension need not be denied” (*ibid*, 194). Quoting from Keen’s *The Passionate Life* she states “that in its earliest conception erotic potency was not confined to sexual power but included the moving force that propelled every life-form from a state of mere potentiality to actuality” (*ibid*). In this way, the erotic does not only become legitimate but indeed indispensable to learning and teaching. She continues by quoting Keen more extensively, a quote that is worth repeating in full:

*When we limit ‘erotic’ to its sexual meaning, we betray our alienation from the rest of nature. We confess that we are not motivated by anything like the mysterious force that moves birds to migrate or dandelions to spring. Furthermore, we imply that the fulfilment or potential toward which we strive is sexual – the romantic-genital connection between two persons (ibid, 195).*

As I argued earlier such an insistence on our “wholeness” and on the right or perhaps even the obligation or responsibility to bring excitement and passion to the classroom can be terrifying for embodying a radical understanding of transgression and freedom. “In many ways this is terrifying,” writes hooks (*ibid*), because “the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears” (*ibid*). Eros, in this way, becomes an “epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know” (*ibid*, 195). It also becomes a way of defusing the particularity of a single sexual attraction by recasting or reinterpreting desire in terms of *eros*. When confronted by students with the fact that she apparently favours one student above the rest, she responds by effectively insisting widening or extending the meaning of *eros* in line with Keen’s suggestion:

*Why do you feel that the regard I extend to a particular student cannot also be extended to each of you? Why do you think there is not enough love or care to go around? (ibid, 198-199)<sup>9</sup>*

It is the very insistence on our “wholeness” and the recasting of *eros* in terms of such a wholeness in order to forge a post-Cartesian epistemology that distinguishes what I refer to as the eroticising of *logos* from Readings’ “illegitimate conflation” of *eros*

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<sup>9</sup> In the process she effectively aligns herself not so much with care pedagogy as with what Cho (2005:81) describes as a possible fourth, Lacanian position on the issue of intimacy.



and *logos*. The distinction resides exactly in the widening. Joining *eros* and *logos* would be illegitimate as long as the meaning of *eros* is limited to the sexual. It is exactly the widening of its meaning that, in my opinion, creates the scope for a legitimate eroticising of *logos*. As hooks acknowledge, such a widening does not, cannot and should not exclude sexual intimacy. And this is the rub: in order to produce a legitimate exclusion of the sexual we have to narrow the meaning of *eros* down, slice it up again in a manner that would violate its valued wholeness in order to lawfully distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate manifestations of *eros*. Apart from the implicit violence, such a separation and institutionalisation of it as lawful separation would have to found and legitimise itself with recourse to a (modern) ethics incompatible with postmodernity both as cultural phenomenon and as institutional undecidability. To expect of hooks, then, to provide a final moral solution or answer to the question of lecturer/student intimacy is to insist on a violence at odds with her pedagogy. What we can do, and what I want to do in the concluding sections of this chapter, is to provide “difference” as an additional marker to circumscribe the moral from within. In doing so I want to shift the question away from “what prohibits intimacy between lecturer and student?” towards the question: “What kind of teaching praxis is premised on the difference and can such teaching occur in the absence of such a difference?” Once the function of difference is understood, its violation is implicit and constitutive.

## 9. Teaching as difference

There is a fine yet incommensurable difference at play when we view teaching as deconstructive praxis. This becomes apparent when we view, for instance, Klein’s description of this difference at work in Derrida’s teaching praxis (in Cahen 2001:16):

*In one of Derrida’s seminars, the sources is always deferred. He is one of the rare teachers, perhaps the only one, who comes to class everytime (sic) with a written, finished, framed text, which he reads for months ... The charisma, if there is any, is transmitted not by the spontaneity of his voice, but by the musicality it confers to his writing. The reading of his teaching, anti-socratic, (sic) has for effect to set at a distance the philosophical eroticism, like that of Alcibiade in the Banquet who confuses his love for the master with his love for wisdom. When a written text is read aloud, it institutes a **benevolent but impersonal distance** between the master and his audience, it interposes a formality, a formal mechanism, **which is the true subject of the seminar**. For*

*deconstruction is also a machine, a force directed in the sense of a logic or of an unusual grammar, which allows **the construction of unheard of relations and unfastens (sic) conventional ties** (emphasis added).*

Intriguing in this quotation is the idea that the true subject of the seminar may consist in “a benevolent but impersonal distance between the master and his audience” and that this enables the “construction of unheard of relations” and “unfastening of conventional ties”. In other words, that *the deconstruction of social differentiations is a function of not “confusing” the force of deconstruction with the difference between teacher and learner that enables such a deconstruction to occur*. In this statement the existence of a primary difference is a *sine qua non* (“that without which not”) for the unfastening and reconstruction of ties. This is exactly what may appear as question-begging, for one may legitimately ask “why can the teaching/learning relation not become one of the relations that, as Ginsberg suggested, may be erotically unfastened and reconstructed along the way?” To suggest this, I would argue, is to misapprehend the very manner in which “teaching” and “learning” derive their meaning, not from what *teaching means* and not from what *learning means* (in other words, their positive identities: De Saussure) but from the manner and to the extent that each constitutes the other as meaningful activity. Viewed in terms of a Saussurian semiotics, teaching derives its meaning from not being learning and learning, from not being teaching. Blanchot, in *The Infinite Conversation* (1993) articulates this beautifully. There he writes that “[t]he master gives nothing to know which does not remain determined by the indeterminable “unknown” he/she represents” – an unknown which affirms itself “by the *infinite distance* between A and B”. He continues to compare this with the way one teaches/learns to speak language as such:

*Now, to know by the measure of the ‘unknown,’ to go to the familiarity of things while reserving their strangeness, to relate to everything by the very experience of the interruption of relations, this is nothing other than to hear someone speak, and to learn how to speak. The relation of master to disciple is the very relation of the spoken word, when in it **the incommensurable becomes measure, and the non-relation becomes relation** (in Cahen, 2003:18; emphasis added).*

Key in this statement is that whatever the master gives to “know” is determined by or is a function of the fact that he/she speaks from the distance of an “unknown” that

s/he represent in his/her capacity as master – an unknown, which consists in the fact that the student cannot comprehend or be what the master is or knows. That, after all, is what it means to call one “master” and the other “disciple” or “student”. The master introduces or initiates the student or disciple or apprentice into a certain familiarity but this familiarity is always *interrupted* by the distance, epitomised by the unknown the master represents. As much as it is a relation it is an interrupted relation, one that is always interrupted by an incommensurable difference. Reading this insight in terms of the above comment on Derrida’s pedagogy, we may say: *difference is the teaching and teaching is the difference*. To learn in a master-disciple relation, then, is to relate to things by the very experience of the *interruption* of that relation. Learning occurs as the intimation of a familiarity that is always interrupted by the incommensurability of the master as “unknown”. This, writes Blanchot, “is nothing other than to hear someone speak, and to learn how to speak” – in other words, “the relation of master to disciple” magnifies what happens when one teaches/learns how to speak for to teach/learn to speak is to experience the incommensurable becoming measure and the non-relation, relation”.

It is however to the statement contained in reference to Derrida’s pedagogy – “*When a written text is read aloud, it institutes a benevolent but impersonal distance between the master and his audience, it interposes a formality, a formal mechanism, which is the true subject of the seminar*” – that I want to return in order to tie up some of the loose ends of this chapter. I find it intriguing that “distance [can be] the true subject of the seminar”; that, as I put it, teaching can be the difference and the difference can be the teaching. This, particularly in view of the suggestion that the distance so conceived enables the de-differentiation of a deconstructive pedagogy. In the last section of this chapter I will argue that the status accorded distance or difference in this statement can be understood in view of Derrida’s analysis of justice and the law; an analysis which, once placed in the context of education, will also suggest a reading of hooks’ politics of transgression and freedom in ethical terms, that is, in terms of a concern with justice in the Derridian sense. In doing so I will focus on Derrida’s *Force of law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’* (1992).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Also relevant here is Biesta’s “*Preparing for the incalculable*”: *deconstruction, justice, and the question of education* (2001) to which I will not make any direct reference.

## **10. Eros and justice: “preparing for the incalculable”**

In focussing on this, apparently unrelated text of Derrida's, I want to pull together two strands of the argument advanced in this chapter. This first relates to hooks' teaching praxis while the second concerns two responses I offered in response to questions regarding ethics raised by her praxis. As for the first, I argued that in hooks' praxis there is a close nexus between a number of concepts central to her philosophy: excitement, the sacred, spiritual “wholeness”, transgression and freedom. These concepts function in a particularly post-Cartesian semantic domain because they all operate, interdependent on one another, in a conceptual field or domain that departs from the assumed unity of body and mind. In the absence of teleology learning is driven by the excitement of real knowledge which connects theory and practice in a manner that engages both student and lecturer in a painful process of self-actualisation; this occurs by alerting participants or making them mindful of their humanity. This, in turn, occurs through a process of de-differentiation that interrogates the binaries operative in the construction of our identities and upon which the social is premised. Such a process of de-differentiation is at once terrifying and liberating because it engages the individual in a process of death and rebirth that is particularly spiritual or sacred in the sense defined earlier. To formulate this in the abstract theoretical terms of deconstruction, we can say that learning involves a perpetual process of deconstruction that can never depart from an assumed or essential self but which can, through our commitment to deconstruction as process afford us glimpses of a wholeness that is always presupposed by social differentiation. This may sound essentialist but I clarify the meaning of this statement below.

This deconstructive pedagogy, I argued in the second strand of the argument, raises very complex questions about the student/lecturer relationship. Given the undecidable nature or the strange temporality of higher education I resisted offering a moral response to these questions. Instead, I articulated as indispensable to both learning and any moral discourse on the issue of intimacy, the importance of a difference as a function of which all learning/teaching becomes possible. For the following section it is important to emphasise that neither hooks' description of her praxis nor my interpretation of that praxis presupposes an essential self, a pure transcendental subjectivity that we can “know”; a knowledge on the basis of which one would merely employ or use deconstruction deductively to arrive back again at a

self we always already knew. The relationship between, on the one hand, the “humanity” or the “knowledge of our wholeness” and, on the other hand, the learning encounter as deconstructive is far more complex than that. Derrida’s distinction between law and justice can, I believe, contain this complexity in a way that also places hooks’ politics of transgression and freedom in an illuminating political theoretical context.

#### **11. ‘Wholeness’ is to learning as justice is to law.**

Law is inseparable from the violence that creates it and the violence necessary to enforce or sustain it. To enforce the law means to employ a form of legitimate or authorised violence. The violence that allows us to enforce the law is not exterior to the law, something that may or may not be added to the law. Rather, “enforceability and the violence it implies is “essentially implied” in the very concept of justice as law (Derrida 1992:5). The word enforceability “reminds us that there is no such thing as law (*droit*) that doesn’t imply *in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its concept*, the possibility of being ‘enforced,’ applied by force” (*ibid*, 6). The legitimacy of the power employed in the enforceability of law derives from the historical foundation of the law in question. When states, for example, are founded (formed or re-formed) on the basis of a violent, revolutionary overthrow, a new legal order is instituted violently. The subsequent (violent) enforcement of those laws draws its legitimacy from that founding moment. Laws, then, are inseparable from two forms of violence: the originary or foundational violence that instituted them and the subsequent violence necessary to sustain or maintain the legal order. The interesting thing about originary violence is that, at the time of its occurrence, a time marked by violent overthrows, revolutions and genocides, the violence that gives birth to a new state or legal order “could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal” (*ibid*, 6). The founding moments of states are neither just nor unjust, neither legal nor illegal. At best they are “illegal” or “unjust” in terms of the order they are replacing and/or possibly, in a future retrospective sense, “just” or “legal” in terms of the order they may bring about. The question of whether this transition from the old to the new will in fact occur – that is, the question of the interpretation of that violence - is suspended at the moment of revolution, anarchy or (potential) overthrow.

*[T]he operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law (droit), making law, would consist of a **coup de force**, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no previous law with its founding anterior moment could guarantee or contradict or invalidate ... Here the discourse comes up against its limit: in itself, in its performative power itself. It is what I here propose to call the mystical. Here a silence is walled up in the violent structure of the founding act. Walled up, walled in because silence is not exterior to language (ibid, 14).*

The very historicity of laws, the fact that they are born from a violent struggle and sustained, in the name of that struggle in the time to come, that very historicity Derrida uses, following Montaigne and Pascal, to make a distinction between justice and the law. The laws that come to pass are not the embodiment of justice as such. They are best historical attempts to articulate a certain conception of justice. “The justice of law, justice as law is not justice. Laws are not just *as* laws. One obeys them not because they are just but because they have authority (ibid, 12). Laws, then, represent a certain calculation *with* or *of* justice but they do not represent or embody justice as such. Justice always exceeds the law and this is what keeps history going. The structure that Derrida circumscribes in this way – justice as separate from law, law as violent calculation of justice enforced through legitimate violence – is one in which law is essentially and always subject to revision, challenge and deconstruction. Law is subject to deconstruction either because it is founded on “textual strata” - historical documents, declarations, manifestos, in short, all “legitimate fictions on which it founds the truth of its justice” (Montaigne, *ibid*, 12) – or/and because the ultimate foundation of any law is unfounded, that is, neither legitimate nor illegitimate. It is the very self-authorization of law that not only allows for the possibility of deconstruction but which calls, in the sense of an imperative, for a perpetual deconstruction in the name of justice, in order that justice may come to pass. What, then, is the relation of our knowledge of justice – that, in the name of which, we deconstruct laws? If it is not a knowledge we have *a priori*, what is the experience or knowledge we invoke when we act “in the name of justice”? A clue to this is what Derrida, following Montaigne, calls the “mystical foundation of authority” alluded to in the above extract. The “mystical” refers to the fact that at the founding moment of the birth of (lawful) authority, in that performative moment, language cannot interpret or judge the (il)legitimacy of the foundation of laws. The mystical refers to the silence

that is “walled up in the violent structure of the founding act” (*ibid*, 14). Knowledge of the just, the *that* which we “know” is not represented by the law is, as Derrida writes, “not unrelated” to the mystical (*ibid*, 16). It suggests that we know something we cannot fully know. It is as if we are calling upon an experience we have never experienced. In this sense, justice is aporetic for it is “the experience that we are not able to experience” (*ibid*, 16). At the same time there cannot be any justice without this experience, however impossible and aporetic it may be (*ibid*, 16). In short, “[j]ustice is an experience of the impossible. The relationship between this aporetic knowledge and the law Derrida (*ibid*, 16) sums as follows:

*Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule.*

The relevance of this distinction between law and justice for this chapter resides in the fact that Derrida does not (have to) postulate or assume that anybody knows what justice is in order to deconstruct laws towards greater justice. We do not anywhere have knowledge in ourselves or via access to a transcendental source, to a blue-print of justice per se; a blue-print in the name of which we deconstruct laws and which we are trying to bring home or represent. Rather, by their very historicity, their self-nominated legitimacy, their fictive foundations in textual strata and their birth in an indecipherable moment of originary violence, laws present themselves in terms of, or *as*, the possibility of their own deconstruction. Hence Derrida’s statement: *deconstruction is justice* (*ibid*, 15).

At this point I want to identify the exact point where the two strands of the analysis of this chapter – hooks’ praxis and my response to questions raised by it – intersect. In the first, I interpreted her praxis as driven by a perpetual de-differentiation (deconstruction) towards our “wholeness”. This raised the question of whether or not the student/lecturer difference can or should be part of such a de-differentiation. In the second strand I focussed on deconstruction as teaching praxis which, in the way practiced by Derrida, always institutes “*a benevolent but impersonal distance between the master and his audience ... which is the true subject of the seminar*” (emphasis added). What meaning is generated by this intersection? I

want to suggest the following: that the 'wholeness' hooks writes about is to the learning experience (the "seminar") as justice is to law. To formulate this differently: from a deconstructive perspective, the very difference brought into question by hooks' own articulation of her praxis is, in fact, constitutive of it. This will become clearer when we re-read the above analysis of hooks' praxis in terms of the logic Derrida employs to distinguish between justice and the law.

1. The differentiations that account for the social are calculations of the economic, the political, the spiritual and the sexual. Any society necessarily exists as the function of such a system of differentiation (Girard 1977). These differentiations are "like" laws in the sense that we cannot imagine the social in the absence of laws or the differentiations they embody, protect, promote, guarantee etc.
2. "Like" laws, these differentiations are not just necessary but in some historical sense of the word always just. By this I mean that they are always expressions of a historical conception of justice, that is, of "the way things ought to be".
3. "Like" laws, social differentiations are mere calculations, attempts to express fully or satisfactorily what is essentially incalculable: freedom, happiness, self-actualization, what it means "to be human" etc.
4. Because they are, "like" laws, calculations of the incalculable, they are necessarily always historical, based on "textual strata" which, because of their historicity cannot but express or represent themselves in terms of their own future deconstruction.
5. "Like" the deconstruction of laws, our deconstruction of these differences (their de-differentiation) is always driven by an acknowledgement of their incompleteness; we acknowledge that while they aspire to representing the incalculable, they do not.
6. "Like" the deconstruction of laws is driven by an aporetic (non)experience of justice, our deconstruction of social differentiations is driven by an aporetic (non) experience of our "wholeness".
7. Neither "justice" nor our "wholeness" are adequate *a priori* starting points from which we can judge the inadequacies of laws or social differentiations. We do not deconstruct towards a knowledge we always already have. Rather, the "more" (justice, wholeness) is an aporetic knowledge (the experience that

we have never experienced) of the overflow, the residue, that which laws and differentiations do not capture, that which lies beyond their violent institution and enforcement. What drives deconstruction is not a transcendental knowledge but simply an intimation of what lies beyond the imperfect instantiation and violent maintenance of a particular, historical vision of the just as embodied in the differentiations born from it.

8. By suggesting that “wholeness is to a deconstructive learning encounter as justice is to the deconstruction of law, I am suggesting that, like our quest for justice, education is an attempt to calculate the incalculable.

The benefit of viewing a deconstructive pedagogy in terms of this distinction between justice and the law is that it makes it possible to imagine what “teaching towards justice” means in a post-historical world where justice is no longer linked to a telos like Liberation, Integration or Democratisation. Justice is no longer imminent, “just around the corner”. It is an ongoing and never-ending project. The world will never be absolutely just but it is the possibility of absolute justice that makes us work towards justice. This is what Derrida (1992), following Heidegger (1945/2002), calls its aporetic structure: the combination of the impossibility with the imperative. In this sense justice is always an attempt to calculate the incalculable. This calculation is done through a perpetual deconstruction of law. In that sense, Derrida writes, *deconstruction is justice*. In as much as teaching amounts to a similarly never-ending deconstruction of social differentiations (law) towards greater wholeness (justice), we can therefore add that *teaching is justice*.

## 12. Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the ethical dimension of a deconstructive pedagogy which, by understanding itself in terms of “democratic participation” (hooks) or “loose ends” (Readings) raises questions that have historically been obscured by the *in loco parentis* trope that represented less participatory and more hierarchical pedagogies. I argued firstly, that given the undecidability of the higher education domain the response to these questions can not be moral in any conventional sense of the word and secondly, that we must take as point of departure for understanding the “proper distance” between lecturer and student to be a function of the difference that

constitutes the learning encounter as such. If, for the lack of a better phrase, “moral guidelines” become a function purely of the difference that constitutes learning, can we not also argue that authority, too, is perhaps also just a function of difference? Explicit in the pedagogical practices of Derrida and Blanchot quoted in this and the previous chapter is the articulation and representation of the difference that enables a deconstructive pedagogy in terms of the master-disciple trope. In many ways this signals a return to a Medieval or pre-modern thinking about education. Can we read such a return to the original trope as another instance of “modernity on the turn” – *as if* higher education is returning to the logic of its inception? How useful is it to respond to the question “What does the authority of the teacher reside in?” by answering “It resides in the demonstration of mastery”? Is this a useful redefinition of “authority” after the nightmare of instrumental, masculine, paternalistic, Western modernity? I shall argue in the next chapter that perhaps authority simply resides in unfamiliarity, in the performativity of difference.

## Chapter Three

### *Modelling the difference*

*Thinking is a craft, and therefore has a special relationship to the hand.*

- Martin Heidegger

#### **1. Introduction**

In what Readings describes as the post-historical time of the university, that is, when “higher learning” is legitimised by the vacuous and dereferentialized notion (*telos*) of “excellence”, there are those who argue that what I have called the spatio-temporal strangeness of the university will always distinguish it from other knowledge institutions. Most interesting among these is Young’s “The idea of a Chrestomathic University” (1992) in which he suggests we accept the ambivalent status of the university first articulated by Humboldt as a *sine qua non* of its identity. In this way we retain the position of the institution as both inside and outside the market economy, as functioning as “a surplus that the economy cannot comprehend (1992:122). This identity will effectively deconstruct the inside/outside binary by refusing to be simply useful or useless to the state (*ibid*, 124). This Derridean notion of the university as supplement forever at play, undermining or destabilising the system is appealing if only because it allows some continuity in the history of the institution. There may be very good reasons for continuing to describe the university in terms of an essential “undecidability” even if Readings himself dismisses the suggestion for reasons that will be problematised below.

To argue for the “usefulness” of continuing to view the university in terms of its undecidability we may return to the fact that the strangeness of the university derives from its position half-way between the filial and contractual domain, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is a transitional institution – poised precariously at the moment when an individual is about to finally leave the filial domain of family and school but *before* they do so. This has always been the appeal of the idea that lecturers act *in loco parentis* – although the understanding of authority implicit in this trope has been hugely problematised by the radicalisation of student identity (in the aftermath of 1968) and the increasing dominance of a consumerist discourse that posits the student less as child and more as consumer. That said, because the

university remains involved in the developmental journey of the majority of students (mature students being the exception), the *in loco parentis* trope has not lost all its currency. It has become self-conscious and problematic. Yet, as I suggested, because of its status as transitional institution some form of hierarchical, filial authority remains in place. However, given the very nature of its ambivalence, it is probably more correct to accommodate this self-consciousness by saying it is *as if* it remains in place. This is a necessary *as* opposed to a fictitious *as if* given the university's precarious, ambivalent status. It is also an *as if* that reflects across the board: it is *as if* the university is useful and it is *as if* it is useless. In terms of the transition from the filial to the contractual we find that the university, by rounding off the filial journey, at once asserts and transcends the filial discourse. At the same time it introduces students to the contractual domain while negating attempts to reduce its constitutive relations to contractual terms. This means the university is by definition (not) part of the economy, not reducible to the contractual, public domain. It stands with one foot in the domestic, filial domain and the other in the public, contractual domain – hence the lasting appeal and currency of the idea that lecturers act *as if* (“in loco”) they were parents. To put this more abstractly, the university reproduces the conditions for the possibility of reproducing the social (workers, educated citizens etc) but it can do this only by virtue of the fact and to the extent that it itself, *qua* institution, is not reduced to these reproductive forces.

To acknowledge this general *as if* character of the university is to suggest that the university will always re-enact its founding ambivalence; is to suggest it remains tied to its origin. As Readings (*ibid*, 145) notes in a different context:

*As an institution it has a history – and a history that is structured by the contradictions attendant upon the performative act of the foundation of any institution. The history of an institution is persistently marked by the structural contradiction of its founding. The institution is founded, is grounded, in being called forth into existence as a radically new institution. It will exist in a place where it did not exist before, and hence its foundation is never natural or assured.*

The general “irreducible contradiction of its founding” Readings refers to here is the tension between “the production, distribution, and consumption of *commodities*, and the production, distribution, and consumption of *knowledge*” (*ibid*, 146). I am suggesting that this tension is not limited to its economic or even political meaning

but is also reflected in its social function, namely its indeterminate status as *as-if* institution tasked with perpetuating/resolving the filial and introducing/resisting the contractual. The reason Readings does not accept Young's suggestion of the University as "supplement" – and consequently would not accept my suggestion of the constitutive undecidability of the university - is because he makes a mistake in logic, more precisely a category mistake. He assumes that his critique of the rise and fall of the philosophical Subject of Enlightenment *qua* carrier of Reason or Culture (historically reproduced by the university) is also valid for the reproduction of the developmental journey of the individual subject. The reproduction of philosophical Subjectivity should not be confused with the development of the social subject. Although there is significant overlap between the two, the one cannot be reduced to the other without committing a logical error. As suggested in the previous chapter this confusion gets Readings into trouble when he takes the uncertainty of 1968 as paradigmatic of his own radical, institutional pragmatism.

Referring to Cohn-Bendits' remark "We look upon our professors as part father, part boss and part teacher, and we do can't quite make up our minds about them", Readings (*ibid*, 147) comments:

*The students are neither adult nor child, and what matters about 1968 is that the narrative of **Bildung** – of simple passage from infancy to adulthood, from dependency to emancipation ... - has been rejected by the students in the name of an uncertainty. An uncertainty about maturity, about labour, about wealth, about class, about gender. The ambivalence goes along with a radical pragmatism: the refusal of vanguardism that wants to fight 'on the spot', in the thick of things.*

It is significant that in paraphrasing the uncertainty articulated by Cohn-Bendits, Readings omits reference to the uncertainty involving the identities of those involved in the learning relationship (quoted above and discussed in the previous chapter). Instead, he takes as paradigmatic the uncertainty relating to maturity, labour, wealth, class and gender. The reason for this omission, I suspect, is to cover up the pedagogical implications of taking 1968 as paradigmatic of his radical pragmatism. More precisely, it functions to hide the category mistake involved in conflating the philosophical Subject with the social subject which amounts to the complete identification of the historic development of Western civilisation (metonymically represented by Subjectivity) with the development of the contemporary individual or,

what we may clumsily (and not unproblematically) call, the ontogenetic and phylogenetic meanings of *Bildung*.

Constitutive of the German Idealist tradition was the notion of *Bildung* – a pedagogical philosophy aimed at overcoming, in the individual, the fragmentation associated with modernity. Wholesale social fragmentation, it was argued, could be overcome by a holistic de-fragmentation in the individual, that is, through the “ennoblement of character”. Here was a perfect identification or collapse into each other of social and individual development. For, *just as* society was ready to journey from an original unity through fragmentation to a holistic de-fragmentation (Hegel), *just so* the individual was interpreted as developing through infancy and adolescence to maturity. The two narratives were conjoined by the notion of Enlightenment into which it was assumed both societies and individuals would mature. This offers us a classic example of the way in which, according to Readings, universities have until now reproduced the subjects and subjectivities that legitimised the nation-state. It was this *assumed* seamless unity of the social and individual journeys, the assumption of their identical culmination in Enlightenment that, according to Readings, was finally and decisively rejected in 1968:

*The students are neither adult nor child, and what matters about 1968 is that the narrative of **Bildung** – of simple passage from infancy to adulthood, from dependency to emancipation ... - has been rejected by the students in the name of an uncertainty.*

In other words, what was rejected was the possibility that, through students, “society might represent itself to itself, might define itself through the autonomous exercise of its own will” (Readings 1996:148). I would argue that what was rejected in 1968 was not the idea *per se* that tertiary education involves a process of maturation *from* dependency (the filial) to emancipation (in the public *contractual* domain) but rather the historically specific assumption of *Bildung* that individual development is identical (and therefore useful) to the development of society; in other words, that the individual journey is useful for the articulation and representation of the social journey; moreover, that the meaning of the individual journey was exhausted by the manner in which it reflected and sustained the social journey to Enlightenment. In other words, what was rejected was the exploitation by the *Bildung* ideology of this developmental process, its reduction to a simple ontogenetic version of a phylogenetic

social development culminating in Enlightenment. But rejecting *Bildung's* exploitation of the individual development journey should not entail rejection of the fact that universities will always be the site of an individual developmental process.<sup>11</sup> Yet, this is exactly how Readings interprets 1968: as the wholesale rejection of a patronising developmentalist logic that allowed students to claim a position of absolute and radical uncertainty; an uncertainty which he then uses as *locus classicus* for his vision of a future university that embodies the immediacy of a radical pragmatics. This vision of a radical pragmatics is premised on the equal radical uncertainty that marked and inspired 1968. This Readings does by collapsing the social project of Enlightenment and emancipation and the individual journey of maturation into each other and by reading the rejection of *Bildung* ideology as a rejection of both. The result is a radical de-differentiation of the university, the purported aims of education (its usefulness to labour, Enlightenment etc.) but also its constitutive relationships. On the other hand, however, and this is the problem, he very eloquently acknowledges the transitory nature of the university and that “the position of the students has always been that of a troubled relation to the public sphere. The public sphere is proposed as the birthright of citizens, but the students have to go through a period of training in order to accede to their birthright” (*ibid*, 148).

It seems to me that this “strange temporality of education” is valorised at great expense and that Readings cannot valorise the de-differentiation that 1968 stands for while at the same time acknowledging that the university is a transitional institution, one through which students receive the training upon which their accession to the public sphere is conditional. To acknowledge the latter is to acknowledge that to arrive at university in this sense is to arrive in or step into a *difference*, the difference constitutive of those who act on behalf of the public sphere (teachers) and those who seek entrance to it (learners). In short, the radical de-differentiation of 1968 cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned in the first two chapters Readings uses this to explain the world-wide phenomenon of student apathy. “Students in 1968 decathected by revolting; nowadays they do not cathect in the first place. I am not talking here about dropout rates so much as about the widespread sense among undergraduate students in North America that they are “parked” at the University – taking courses, acquiring credits, waiting to graduate. In a sense, this is their reaction to the fact that nothing in their education encourages them to think of themselves as the heroes of the story of liberal education, embarking on the long voyage of self-discovery” (*ibid*, 138).

elevated to the status of ideal pedagogy exactly because of the difference constitutive of the institution as such<sup>12</sup>.

It seems then that what was to have emerged from 1968 was not the freeze-frame of an ideal de-differentiated state to be emulated in contemporary educational practice but rather a challenge to constantly re-imagine the difference; that the process of re-imagination might, on occasion, skirt complete de-differentiation but that cognisance of the university as transitory institution always temporalises such de-differentiation. It is, after all, only against the backdrop of the university as the locale for a rite of passage that such acts of re-imagination, such temporary moments of de-differentiation acquire their meaning as “revolutionary”, “innovative”, “challenging” etcetera. The aim of this chapter is to map this difference and to re-imagine it in the pre-modern terms of master/apprentice.

## 2. The master/apprentice difference

In his deposition to the committee on de-Nazification – arguably the most explicit articulation of his pedagogy - Heidegger (1945/2000) pointedly denies the usefulness, even appropriateness, of conceiving the lecturer/student relationship in terms of the master/apprentice trope<sup>13</sup>. In this chapter I shall address this issue in three steps. Firstly, because there is some continuity between the subject of the previous chapter and his criticism, I shall start by summarising Heidegger’s argument and point out two important inconsistencies in his argument. This will re-open the discussion on the appropriateness of the model. I shall then give a brief outline of the trope in terms of Pratt *et al*’s description of it as one possible “teaching perspective”. In the third instance I shall draw on the critique of Pratt *et al* offered in the introduction in order

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<sup>12</sup> I find Readings’ text unclear on this issue. On the one hand he does construct the de-differentiation of 1968 and the resulting uncertainty as foundational to his pragmatics; on the other hand he acknowledges the transitory nature of the university which, as I argued, re-introduces *differences* that cannot conceptually and ethically be de-differentiated. To complicate matters further he calls the claim that “teaching raises no difference between teachers and students” a “misplaced pedagogic commitment” (*ibid*, 156) asserting, instead, that the “scene of teaching belongs to the sphere of justice rather than of truth: the relation of student to teacher and teacher to student is one of *asymmetrical obligation*, which appears to both sides as problematic and requiring further study” (*ibid*, 161; emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> In a series of lectures delivered between 1951 and 1952, of which the introduction is published as “*What calls for thinking?*” (1978:341), Heidegger changed his mind on this issue. There he explicitly construes learning on the master/apprentice model without, however, addressing the questions and criticisms raised in the deposition. In what follows I shall think through the deposition and Heidegger’s criticisms of the model in order to re-appropriate the model. At the end I shall briefly comment on the shift represented by *What calls for thinking?*

to conceive of the trope in a way that avoids the legitimate objections of Heidegger. This will amount to re-appropriating the master/apprentice model in terms of the analysis of the preceding two chapters.

### **3. Heidegger's criticism of the apprenticeship trope**

In his deposition Heidegger offers an internal or immanent critique of transmission against the backdrop of the historical evolution of the university as modern institution. The following is a summary of his argument (Heidegger 1945/2002:31-42). Specific page references have been omitted.

From its inception as modern institution the university defined itself through a dual process of abstraction and generalization. The abstraction consisted in reducing education “to theoretical understanding alone, to seeing the world in a contemplative way in order to bring into view general principles that govern the manifold of phenomenon”. This marked an important transition in education away from “mere socialization into the customs of the tribe” to a rational education perceived as the theoretical grasping of the particular in terms of the general. This move was premised on the idea that it was possible and desirable to attain an objective (*sub specie aeternitatus* or “god-like”) view of everything including what it meant to be human. Modernity, as far as the birth of the university was concerned, represented a move away from education as praxis along the line suggested by Medieval and, now again, contemporary participatory models of education, to education as theoretical, abstract generality apprehended by mind. By doing so the university wrongly elevated itself as “privileged site of access to what is real, where all things submit to the theoretical gaze”. As a result it imposed a “monopoly of theory over education, which gives primacy to the theoretical relation to the world over other, concrete ways of relating to things”. In South Africa, as in many countries, this means that higher education institutions came to operate within a regulated framework founded upon a binary division (Koen 2003:297) between the theoretical domain of the university and the vocational domain of the technikon. As formulated by the 1996 National Commission on Higher Education:

*The universities and technikons are intended to be complementary sectors with formally equal status but with differential missions. The binary distinction between the two sectors is based on the universities' role in general formative and professional education and basic and applied research, and the technikons' role in vocational and career education and 'product related' research and development (in Koen 2003:298).*

For Heidegger, to construe the university's domain of knowledge in these theoretical terms is to fundamentally misapprehend or misconstrue what learning is about, for true learning "originates in mood [*Stimmung*], springing from the *thaumazein* or astonishment of which Aristotle spoke as the concrete bond between life and thought". Contrary to the theoretical attitude, and pre-empting his appropriation of Socratic ignorance, Heidegger suggests that "[h]esitation before possibilities both visible and concealed, itself a kind of unknowing, is how we progress into knowledge".

Implicit in this evocation of "wonder," "astonishment," and "unknowing" is a point articulated in the first chapter namely that we cannot fully articulate or calculate, through an alienating gesture of abstraction and generalisation, our indebtedness to the world and others; that we are captured by the world and the presence of others and that an acknowledgement of this renders our relation to the world and others as first and foremost *ethical*. To restore wonder, astonishment and unknowing to the learning process "obliges us to consider that our relation to the world must always remain, in some larger sense of the word, ethical". As Readings also suggested, existing in relation to others means that "who we are" can never be fully calculated. To attempt to do so is, in a very real sense, *unethical* because it aims to extract or remove ourselves from a world. "Wonder" and "astonishment" remind us of our fundamental relatedness to the world. As Heidegger notes, "this relation cannot be theorized in the puritan language of science without already begging the question of value".

As useful as it may be to remind us of this true or primordial relation that precedes our desire to theorise it objectively, Heidegger's critique, because it extends to *theorising as such*, is contradictory. For, his critique of the theoretical *qua* alienating movement of abstraction and generalisation is not only a critique of the abstract theoretical domain but also an instance of it or a contribution to it. In other words, his critique of "abstract generality" is itself presented in terms of such abstract generality. He theorises the alienating effect of theorising. This paradox or

contradiction can be opened up, unlocked and re-presented in terms of the disinterestedness articulated in the introduction to this study. There I framed this study by arguing that the singularity of the student (encounter) is always violated by the need to theorise and reflect on that student (encounter) and that *that* alienating effect of reflection caused a certain reluctance or unwillingness on my part to embark on this study. Heidegger's reading of the *raison d'être* of the modern university allows me now, here, to relate that disinterest or reluctance in the "abstract general terms" of what knowledge has always been perceived to consist of in the modern university; that what I was resisting, in a sense, had been the very historical understanding of what knowledge is and that my disinterest was indeed, as I sensed at the time, indicative, not of an absence of the ethical but, on the contrary, a deeper, intuitive commitment to the ethical that Heidegger argues precedes the theoretical. Similarly, Heidegger's insistence that we need to return to learning as "a way of being" and of honouring the integrity of learning can be represented in terms of what I there called a commitment to the singularity of the encounter. The difference between the position I took in the introduction and Heidegger's suggestion is that I, via a Derridian response to Levinas, appropriated the theoretical in terms of a necessary, transcendental violence. This allowed me to say that theoretical reflection, while representing a necessary transcendental violence can and perhaps should nonetheless be temporarily suspended through an act of mindfulness (active forgetting) in the moment of teaching. Without such a re-appropriation of the necessity of theory, Heidegger is left only with the paradox or inconsistency of theorising the alienating effect of theory. But, and this is the deconstructive element of his inconsistency, what Heidegger also fails to articulate is that his praxis itself is informed by his own reflection and theorising of Socrates' pedagogy. This reflection informed his own Socratic praxis and, in his own re-enactment of the divine ignorance as legitimate pedagogy, would have had to have been suspended or actively forgotten in the act of teaching in order to attain or aspire to the ignorance of Socrates. I return to the role of Socrates in a discussion of the second inconsistency, below.

For Heidegger, the very conception of the modern university in terms of theoretical abstraction and generalization committed teachers to a transmission pedagogy, one in which "the pedagogical relation between teacher and student is understood in homologous terms as a practical instance of the more general relation of subject to object". In other words, a theoretical objectifying attitude to the world

cannot but replicate itself in the pedagogical relation itself. Here is his damning summary of the resulting transmission pedagogy:

*The teacher stands as **typos**, the mould, from which students will emerge as exemplars. As a verb, **typto** reminds us of the violence of education in subject-object terms, for it has the meaning 'to beat' or 'to pound,' as when combating an adversary or, more to the point, pressing a coin. The student is to be beaten into an image, fashioned [**plattein**] as if he were a drachma coin to be put into circulation.*

The monetary metaphor is apt for it invokes images of the student as autonomous entity which, once released from the educational domain will circulate in a political economy of individualism that simply replicates itself over and over without ever interrogating or questioning its own value. In doing so, it begs the question of its own value as currency. Like money off the gold standard the value resides only in the exchange without any reference to anything beyond it. Transmission, then, becomes possible because of the objectifying origin of theoretical knowledge in the modern university. It considers the student, human beings or, in Heidegger's vocabulary *Dasein*, as an entity or *substance* in the Greek-Scholastic sense of the word. But, argues Heidegger, Aristotle's writing on "substance" also briefly acknowledges or suggests an alternative and this is that "substance" is also conceivably a *category of relation* and that "being is the same as being somehow related to something". Although Aristotle raises this possibility only to immediately deny the possibility of conceiving the relatedness of being-as-substance, Heidegger claims exactly this insight in order to consider its implications, namely that "the essence of education is thus inextricably bound to *the meaning of being*" (emphasis added). And this, he suggests, is "the unthought" of the modern university: "that theory is ever only an abstraction from life and must always be referred back to it for meaning". On the basis of this recovery of the ethical Heidegger suggests that the very idea that the learning encounter is an exchange, contractual in nature, *is itself one of these abstract generalities* that derived from the inception of the university as theoretical domain.

*Instead of starting with a conception of the teacher/student relation at once inflected by both head and hand [hooks' body and mind or 'wholeness'], the university conceives the pedagogical process in conformity with the model of abstract exchange derived from theory, according to which the fundamental*

*relation is that of mind to the world, regarded as a relation of subject to object.*

This is one of those moments hinted at in the previous chapter where I pointed out that much of what is taken to be peculiar to contemporary resistance to transmission teaching is, in fact, historical and constitutive of the history of the university. I am referring to the lamentation, justifiable but not exceptional, expressed by contemporary educationalists that there is such resistance to the introduction of more participatory models of teaching. Here Heidegger comments that “[t]he contractualizing of pedagogy has, in fact, achieved such an axiomatic status within the university tradition that discussions of educational reform, even supposed radical ones, simply take it for granted, ignoring ways of conceiving pedagogy innocent of contract as counter-intuitive”. Heidegger’s own radical counter suggestion to transmission is to re-appropriate the pedagogy of Socratic ignorance. Only this reconnection of body and mind, head and hand, can restore the original ethical dimension of learning-as-a-way-of-being and re-instate wonder and astonishment to the learning experience. For Heidegger the master/apprentice model is just one more instance of what he calls a “negative determination” of identities for it defines the students “only in relation to the prior notion of the teacher as what the teacher is not”. For him, even this model “implicitly makes use of the metaphysical distinction between being and becoming by defining the student as on the way to *becoming* (emphasis added) *like* the teacher, as aiming to be that which the teacher *is*”. This model, he argues, is “utterly misguided” on two counts. The first derives from the implicit metaphysics that assumes the teacher *is* while the student *becomes*. But it is also misguided in a second sense which relates to the theoretical identity of the university and the way in which, to mix his vocabulary with mine, singularity is subsumed under the manifold which is a result of the university positing itself as domain of abstract, theoretical generality. For Heidegger the latter remains inescapably tied to an exchange model of education:

*What becomes apparent in the lecture and the seminar is the division between the many, the particular manifold, and the one, the general equivalent that dominates and governs it ... before the teacher, there is formal equality within the collective of students. Instruction is thus modeled (sic) on exchange: to teach, the teacher disregards the differences and distinctions within the concrete student manifold and addresses himself to the faceless, abstract*

*student that is his counterpart. Likewise, to learn, the student abandons the idiosyncratic expressions of his life for a generic way of thinking that raises him to the level of the teacher.*

In response to this Heidegger writes that in his own teaching praxis he strived “to confound commodity exchange in the classroom” by adopting as paradigmatic of the learning encounter the Socratic conversation. The result is what he calls “concrete teaching” and is in its description not far removed from hooks’ “engaged pedagogy” because through it he strives to honour the singularity of students who now “embody the pedagogical scene concretely in ever shifting and undefined ways, such that their respective identities may be thrown into doubt”. Through such a Socratic dialogue the students(s) are brought to the aporetic resourcelessness I discussed earlier, one in which perplexity is achieved through an “encounter with the previously unthought, an uncertainty about where to go next driven by a desire to progress”. In this way, Heidegger concludes,

*[t]he concrete teacher is one who temporarily stages the scene of resourcelessness. Education is not a passing on of knowledge and skills either in the medieval paradigm of master/apprentice or in the one of seller/consumer. Rather call it a withholding, a delaying of articulation, in order that the student may attain an answer. Ignorance as a mode of suspension interrogates the role of the teacher as the one who knows and of the student as the one who does not. The teacher’s silence is finally what has to be heard.*

My suspicion here is that Heidegger makes the same mistake that Pratt *et al* make in elaborating their five perspectives on teaching, namely to conflate what teaching is presented as, with what actual learning will occur. Simply put, to consciously not think of yourself as a model does not mean your behaviour will not be modelled. There is a profound paradox here that only becomes visible once we stop conflating these two. The paradox is this: in my teaching experience, the more I establish or “stage” the learning encounter in terms of humility and Socratic ignorance, the more students model themselves on that humility. The more humble one becomes, the more one becomes a model of humility. In other words, the very difference and authority that humility aims to suspend in the name of good teaching is re-instated in the name of humility itself.

I think this inconsistency in Heidegger is related to his inconsistency in his theorising the theoretical identity of the university discussed above. There I mentioned that his theorising of the abstract generality of university knowledge is both a critique and an instance of it, a critique of the tradition and a continuation of it. Similarly here, his critique of the master/disciple modelling process in the name of humility is also an instance of him modelling his pedagogy on that of Socrates. Heidegger states: "Once again, the figure of Socrates points the way forward". Crucially here, he does not say "Socrates points the way" but rather "the *figure* of Socrates", in other words, Socrates as trope, exemplar, model. Heidegger's critique of modelling, then, is also an instance of modelling itself just like his critique of abstract generality is also an instance of it.

If it is true, and I think under certain circumstances it is, that, as Heidegger states, "[t]he institution of the university as such confers upon the teacher a recognition of status, an authority that can impede communication" it is nonetheless also true, that *that* status, *that* difference is a *sine qua non* or condition for the possibility of communication. In the rest of this chapter I argue that the master/apprentice is indeed a useful, perhaps even inescapable way of re-imagining that difference. I say inescapable because it is in a sense implicit in all the other perspectives identified by Pratt *et al* and hence categorically different from them. Modelling is implicit in nurturing, development, transmission and social reform in a way that neither of the latter are implicit in the former. To teach "from a perspective" of social reform, for instance, is also to act explicitly or implicitly, consciously or non-consciously, intentionally or unintentionally as a model of somebody who takes the possibility of social reform seriously and whose pedagogy is a praxis of such reform. By the same token, to teach "from the perspective of transmission" is to act as a model, however problematic it may be in the absence of doing so mindfully, of an expert who shares his/her expertise, is also to be perceived as a model of professional practice. Unlike the other "perspectives" the master/apprentice trope seems to do no more than articulate the fundamental differential structure constitutive of the learning encounter. My concern with modelling therefore stems from the fact that it alone seems to be an inescapable dynamic that represents this difference. It offers us a way of meaningfully articulating a difference beyond its authoritarian abuse or its nostalgic denial. To re-appropriate that trope in the context of this study it will be necessary to provide a brief summary of what it entails. Such a summary derives

much, but not all, of its signification from contemporary theories of situated learning which view scientific or academic learning as just one further example of everyday practice. The assumptions of situated learning are usefully summarised by Lave (1993:17) as follows:

*Knowledgeability is routinely in a state of change rather than stasis, in the medium of socially, culturally, and historically ongoing systems of activity, involving people who are related in multiple and heterogeneous ways, whose social locations, interests, reasons, and subjective possibilities are different, and who improvise struggles in situated ways with each other over the value of particular definitions of the situation ... and for whom the production of failure is as much a part of routine collective activity as the production of average, ordinary knowledgeability.*

Given the extensive way in which these assumptions reconceptualise the epistemological and ontological assumptions of learning (conventionally understood), I limit myself here to those aspects that have a direct bearing on the master/apprentice trope. In doing, so I focus on the philosophical-educational dimensions of the trope and not on its psychological aspects as articulated in social learning theory in general and the social cognitive theory of, for instance, Bandura in particular. This is consistent with a similar methodological choice I made in chapter two where I avoided the vexed and complex psycho-analytic dynamics of the student-lecturer relationship in order to focus on the function of the student/lecturer difference in a deconstructive pedagogy.

#### **4. Modelling the difference: the master/apprentice trope**

In starting to write this section and using the vocabulary of the master/apprenticeship model or trope I am immediately suspicious of the word “master”. It carries with it so much Western, patriarchal, even colonial baggage that it seems forced or unnatural to describe oneself as a “master”. It is difficult, if not impossible, to access the pre-modern, Medieval meaning of the word or to appropriate its meaning from the practical world of craftsmanship. I take some comfort in the knowledge that it shares this fate with a range of holistic, post-Cartesian concepts such as those discussed in the previous chapter. To nominate oneself as master and one’s students as apprentices is about as “strange” to the unreflective practitioner as it is to talk about the learning encounter as “spiritual journey” or, even more extreme, of

invoking, as hooks does with so much abandon, the “sacred dimension of excitement”. Yet, if I have maintained through-out this study that much of the terms of the educational debate is historical and not peculiar to contemporary discourse, this *is* perhaps a contemporary difference: the shift toward and embrace of post-Cartesian concepts in order to re-configure education in terms that derive partly from Western history, partly from its own deconstruction by theorists like Heidegger and Derrida, partly from other, apparently unrelated traditions like Buddhism<sup>14</sup> and, relevant to this chapter, partly from tropes traditionally associated with vocational training. If there is anything exciting about contemporary discourse it is exactly this move towards a post-Cartesian unification of the human being – in itself already advocated by individuals like Heidegger but increasingly adopted by theorists and practitioners alike. Until such time as there will have emerged some kind of consensus or agreement in the community of practice that is higher education on the meaning and applicability of these terms, they cannot but remain *unstable*, perhaps even *undecidable* in a profound, yet exciting way. “Master” and “apprentice” are two such words – this despite the fact that this study itself is submitted in partial fulfilment of a “Masters” degree in education. Perhaps, given the instability of the terms used here, I can do no more than invoke that tradition while attempting to anchor their meaning differentially, that is, not absolutely but in reference to the context provided by the preceding two chapters.

In the way used and described by Pratt *et al*, masters possess extensive knowledge in a particular field and they are able to apply that knowledge in different and often difficult practice settings. They can do this because they have well-organized, flexible and accessible schemas which facilitate the acquisition of new information. Their schemas are complex and sophisticated. Part of this complexity consists of well-developed strategies for acquiring new knowledge and integrating it into an existing schema. To put this in terms of complexity theory, their schema can be conceived, not as closed systems but rather as open or adaptive, perhaps even self-organizing systems. This self-organizing characteristic is due to the fact that their knowledge and understanding is forged, not abstractly, decontextualised from the contexts that would demand “application,” but rather within those very contexts, making their schema a living, organic entity that evolves through interface with the

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<sup>14</sup> Or a combination of these. See for instance Zimmerman’s *Heidegger, Buddhism, and deep ecology* (1993).

context. Masters are motivated, not by some criteria external to learning – careers, award, goals etc. – but by the process of developing or growing their identities in their communities of practice. Identity here refers not only to their individual identity but their intersubjective identities as members of such a community. Knowledge, then, is constitutive of their identity as persons, of whom they are in a social, cultural sense. Masters display a tacit or implicit knowledge that displays three characteristics (*ibid*, 87-92).

1. they can access knowledge or understanding in the act of performing the task in question which illustrates the contextualised, performativity of their knowledge;
2. they are often unaware of when, how and where they acquired the knowledge in question which means that
3. they are usually unable to describe the knowing or the knowledge that their actions reveal.

The latter is intriguing because if learning is always contextualised it follows, as a logical and existential necessity, that they always know more than they are aware of. This confirms the intersubjective and interdiscursive epistemological and ontological assumptions of the master/apprenticeship model. It re-iterates a point made throughout this study whether in relation to ethics or epistemology or ontology, namely that I am co-constituted by my interactions, by my intersubjective interdependence on others and my encounter with them, I am a function of such interactions and I can never fully comprehend, that is, calculate who I am, what my debt to others is and what I know.

Given the nature of this learning model it is not possible to break down a discussion of it in terms of the constitutive elements of “learner,” “teacher,” “content” and so forth used in the discussion of transmission offered in the first chapter. Instead, my presentation of this model is guided by two questions: 1) how is learning understood in this model? and 2) what are the noteworthy aspects of “mastery” (Pratt *et al* 2005:84).

a. The nature of learning

The first important element about learning here is that it consists of acquiring cognitive schemas. This is not a rational, cerebral or Cartesian notion of “cognition:” but, in my reading, the notion of “cognitive schemas” involves the whole person in the sense that our emotions, spirituality and intellect all go into making our cognitive schema. Perhaps “*interpretative schema*” would be a better phrase than “cognitive schema” which could be misleading. As Rumelhart (in Pratt *et al* 2005 86) puts it, these schemas are “a kind of informal, private, unarticulated theory about the nature of events, objects, or situations that we face. The total set of schema[s] we have available for interpreting the world in a sense constitutes our private theory of the nature of reality”. The second important element is that our interpretative schemas get more complex the more we learn. Learning consists in an increasing awareness, understanding and, if successful, processing of the complexity of our social reality. In such an understanding learning has occurred when a learner can form a coherent interpretative scheme out of her encounters with this complexity - not to assert dominance or control but simply to function as an individual. Inversely, non-learning is not the failure to appropriate knowledge suggested by cognitive approaches to learning, but rather related to situational factors pertaining to the obstruction of participation through embarrassment or the abuse of authority – by lecturers and peers alike (Fuss 1990; hooks 1994) – anxiety about participation or when learners are not encouraged to make connections between *knowing* and *being* (Lave 1993:16). The failure to learn is not the failure to acquire knowledge but the “failure” to form a tentative, albeit arbitrary (in the sense that it does not reflect reality *an sich*) but nonetheless coherent, and useful interpretative schema out of the encounters with social complexity. A third important element of learning so conceived is, what Pratt *et al* (*ibid*, 86) refer to as “the social and relational contexts within which schemas are constructed”. Unlike the transmission model, there is no conceptual difference here between process and product, between the products of learning and the process through which learning occurs:

*Within this [apprentice] perspective there is no separation of the process and the product. What is learned is intimately linked to where, when, how, and with whom it is learned. Thus, context and content, process and product, interact to form the concept of 'situated learning' (ibid, 87).*

b. Situated learning

The word “situated” returns us to the ethical domain elaborated on in the critique of the conceptual assumptions of transmission approach to teaching. Because of the three elements of the nature of learning listed above, this model removes learning from the cognitive domain of conventional understanding (the Cartesian ‘*cogito*’) in order to situate it intersubjectively as a function of our engagement with the learning community – notably the master/apprentice interaction as an interaction between less and more developed interpretative schemas. The word “function” is important here. It is easy to think of the engagement of individual and learning community in dialectical terms according to which the individual changes society and society the individual, towards a higher synthesis of sorts. The problem with the dialectic is similar to the one Readings has with “intersubjective” because it still takes the autonomous subject as unit of analysis or point of departure as if we are not always already constituted socially or intersubjectively. “Function” is, I believe, more useful because it allows us to glimpse around the corner of Cartesian metaphysics with its binary separation of subject/object, self/other to imagine, however incompletely, the deep, ethical reciprocity suggested by “interdiscursive”. In such a post-Cartesian learning community

*there is a reciprocity between individuals and social groups. Learners do build, revise, and integrate their schemas related to the tasks and relations of their work or communities; but, simultaneously, the community of people also changes. The knowledge, skills and network of relationships being learned change ... and, eventually, the very nature of a profession's work, or a family's traditions, or the larger community changes (ibid, 87).*

It is only in such a radical post-Cartesian learning space – one in which the very notion of “my” interpretative schema has mere analytical usefulness – that it becomes possible to talk about learning in terms of acquiring or exploring different ways of

*being*. Perhaps even more challenging, “that there is no such thing as ‘learning’ *sui generis*, but only changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life” (Lave 1993:5-6). This emphasis on “being” highlights another important concept for apprenticeship models, namely “tacit knowledge”.

c. *Tacit knowledge*

The outcome of situated learning is a knowledge embedded, rather than abstracted, from the context in which it is acquired or within which it would find its application (*ibid*, 88). This knowledge is key to intelligent action where action is understood not as the application of knowledge but meaningful living in terms of the interpretative schema. Once an understanding has been incorporated into our interpretative schema we may act in ways that we do not always understand intellectually or emotionally but which nonetheless derives, directly, from our engagement with a community of practice. When we do so in a manner that is meaningful and consistent we may say that the learner has become a skilful practitioner. In addition to this there are other criteria for what constitutes skill, such as that knowledge should be readily accessible, that the practitioner can anticipate what is going to occur and that the interpretative schema is flexible enough to allow for adaptations or to improvise” on the basis of changing circumstances (*ibid*, 88).

Apprenticeship learning subverts the traditional teaching/learning binary conventionally perceived by casting it in participatory terms. In this regard all participatory models of teaching have to address and respond to a potentially complex question. If apprentices have to learn something they do not know, yet it is maintained that will learn so by participating, do these models not assume knowledge or understanding that is really the product of participation? On what basis can apprentices participate in a situation the outcome of which is that it will furnish them with the understanding or knowledge necessary for participation? Where do we position the learner, physically in relation to the master and the knowledge to be acquired?

d. *The strange spatiality of apprenticeship*

This is a logical question and is rooted, yet again, in the pervasive set of assumptions that come with transmission teaching. Only if we accept the “empty

vessel” and “full vessel” binary of transmission – where teaching/learning is a linear flow from one to the other – does this question arise. Learners, however, never know nothing. They do not arrive at the learning situation *tabula rasa*. The question is not how to reconcile the assumptions of participatory learning (that people already understand/know) with its outcome (that they will come to understand/know) but rather, how do we position the learner and his/her interpretative schema so that their interaction with a group or a master will expand or enrich their already existing interpretative schema? Lave and Wenger (1991) have introduced the term “legitimate peripheral participation” to describe this peculiar location of the apprentice.

Novices, or in this instance students, enter a community of practice and work alongside more experienced participants. The “alongside” means that they start with simpler tasks so that their learning is scaffolded towards more complex tasks. As the tasks increase in complexity so do their interpretative schemas. It is only in terms of this progression towards greater complexity (of both task and schema) that it is acceptable to say that students start out on the periphery of the community of practice – hence the term “*legitimate* peripheral participation”. The situated learning that starts out with peripheral participation culminates in mastery. It is important to note that this “culmination” is not subject to Readings’ criticism of transmission teaching as geared towards creating autonomous students that will have succeeded once they can assume the place of the lecturer. Neither is this process subject to Heidegger’s criticism that the dynamic is regulated by a metaphysical distinction between students *becoming* and lecturers *being*. The first criticism is inapplicable given the participatory or intersubjective ontology of the master/apprentice model. If your starting point is *not* the autonomous individual (“substance”) of transmission teaching, then the learning process cannot in any sense be represented as culminating in, or be complicit in the reproduction of, autonomous subjects. Heidegger’s criticism is likewise not applicable because there is not the assumption that masters ever have the complete or exhaustive interpretative schema. Saying they have more complex schema than students does not amount to saying that they are somehow at the end of the learning process – an immanent teleology that is implicit in the suggestion that lecturers *are* while students *become*. The situated learning that leads to mastery (not as epistemological end but pedagogical function or identity) has three dimensions. Illustrated with examples drawn from an academic community of practice they can be described as follows.

a. Situated learning is an activity.

Learning is an activity. It is not about supplementing theoretical knowledge or *thinking* with their practical application through *doing* (probably the most fundamental and misguided Cartesian legacy of them all). The possibility of situated learning demands of us that we break down or transcend this dualism, and engage with learning in such a manner that it occurs through students' active participation even in understanding or processing what could so easily be described as "intellectual" or "theoretical" knowledge. To return to the example used by Pratt *et al* in the first chapter (the teaching of a course on ethics). It is by recognising the pedagogical encounter as an everyday ethical encounter that students and lecturers will learn, not just the importance of ethics in our lives but also the different ways in which people live ethically. In that example, to have asked the students "what are the general rules that you employ in deciding what you ought and oughtn't do in any given situation?" and to have these rules critically examined by their peers in order to increase the complexity of their interpretative schema, would have structured the learning experience in terms of mastery and legitimate peripheral participation. The latter dimension of the interaction ("legitimate peripheral participation") comes into play exactly because the lecturer would have asked him or herself that question countless times before, evolving in the process a very complex interpretative schema on ethical matters. The subtext here is that in teaching structured on the master/apprentice model the process of learning consists of observation, modelling, scaffolding, fading and coaching (*ibid*, 97).

1. Observation of both the master and others who have different levels of proficiency in thinking, analysing defending or interrogating their understanding of ethics;
2. Modelling - when the master explicitly shows the novice how to question, criticise and refine their interpretative schema. This refers to the *performative* or *demonstrative* dimension of teaching. What students learn here is not so much the content (although that, too, is important) but the understanding, demonstratively or performatively modelled to them, of the "in what way" or the "how does it come about that" knowledge is acquired. There is an interface here between the spiritual dimension of hooks' pedagogy, the theoretical

framework of situated learning and the literature on spiritual modelling that cannot be further explored in this study. Suffice it to say that this would consist in elaborating the idea that knowledge, like spirituality, is primarily “caught, not taught” (Oman and Thoresen 2003a: 149) through a process of emulation or “observational (spiritual) learning (see Oman and Thoresen 2003a, 2003b; Bandura 2003 and Silberman 2003).

3. Scaffolding: the support the master provides learners through-out the process of acquiring proficiency or increasingly complex interpretative schema.
4. Coaching occurs through-out the process and consists of overseeing learning – providing feed-back, comments etc.
5. Fading – the process through which the teacher as master increasingly fades into the background to encourage what Bandura calls self-efficacy or domain-specific self-confidence (in Oman and Thoresen 2003a:205). It is the ultimate “end” of coaching and scaffolding in the sense that it increasingly enables the apprentice to think or act independently of the master, not in order to achieve the illusory autonomy of individualism but to act, in turn, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally as model or master to others.

The performative or demonstrative dimension of modelling adds a further layer to lecturer/student difference presented in the previous chapter. There I argued that in a deconstructive pedagogy the lecturer demonstrates his critiques or readings and that this demonstration lends teaching a performative dimension that re-enacts the student/lecturer difference, thus making difference the teaching, and teaching, the difference. At the risk of possibly labouring the quotation but nonetheless doing so because in this context it acquires additional meaning, such a deconstructive pedagogy “*institutes a benevolent but impersonal distance between the master and his audience, it interposes a formality, a formal mechanism, which is the true subject of the seminar*”. Again, it is the last phrase that fascinates because it suggests that in such a model – and the model is quite explicit in the quote – the true learning is the social identities, their meaning, and the process of ever increasing the complexity of the interpretative schema associated with them that is “the true subject of the seminar”. In the master/apprentice model learning is not just the learning of knowledge. Situated knowledge means that part of the learning consists in learning to

be certain identities - here, “student” or the different gradations of apprenticeship. This brings me to the second dimension of situated learning.

b. *Situated learning of social differentiations*

Conceptually this dimension is so closely related to the above that it is really just a different emphasis of the same dynamic. If situated learning is active and activity denotes participation or *being* part of a community of practice, then it is by its very nature social. But it is useful to analytically isolate the social dimension because it allows us to see that, even though apprenticeship can be used in many social formations (formal, informal, physical, intellectual) their different settings alter the understanding of certain terms (*ibid*, 89-90). For instance, as far as the craft of shoe-making is concerned we can talk about apprenticeship in a very, historically specific manner. However, to talk about first year students as apprentices seems awkward because of the instability or undecidability of the master/apprentice trope discussed earlier. This instability results from the fact that we have only recently started to judge formal learning by criteria traditionally associated with informal, practical learning (instead of the other way around). It is important to bear this in mind because despite their similarities there are also important differences between viewing formal and informal learning in terms of the master/apprentice trope. The most obvious and relevant of these is that the kind of apprenticeships discussed by Lave (1996) expects of the apprentice to reproduce a technique within the context of the social stratifications associated with that craft or technique. The apprentice she reports on in that study “were learning relations among the major social identities and divisions in Liberian society which they were in the business of dressing” (*ibid*, 151). The transfer of the trope to higher education invokes a very different obligation, namely for students *qua* academic apprentices to refuse to uncritically participate in the reproduction of the social and its very often oppressive race, class and gender differentiations. I argued in the previous chapter that hooks’ engaged pedagogy<sup>15</sup> consists predominantly in just such a systematic de-differentiation. Similarly, the master trope invoked in the description of Derrida’s praxis also has as its aim “*the construction of unheard of relations and unfasten[ing of] conventional ties*”. It is

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<sup>15</sup>. I think her pedagogy would lend itself to fascinatingly complex analysis in terms of the master/apprenticeship model exactly because it so clearly invokes the paradox of humility discussed here.

exactly this moral and professional obligation not to reproduce the social stratification that distinguishes between formal and informal master-apprentice learning. In fact, so dedicated is hooks to this project that it threatens to draw the student/lecturer difference into the deconstructive process of de-differentiation. Does superimposing the master/apprentice trope on that difference give us any further guidelines or clarity on why such a de-differentiation of that difference, while not “inherently destructive,” is nonetheless pedagogically problematic – regardless of whether it presents itself in terms of romantic involvement, deep friendships or a therapeutic relationship? I think it does. In the concluding section of this chapter I shall suggest that the Greek understanding of *arête* (virtue) is one of the more helpful elements of skills based master-apprentice learning to implicitly transfer to an academic setting.

c. *Situated learning as cultural practice*

Brown *et al* (in Pratt *et al* 2005:90) write of this dimension of situated learning that

*the necessity for successful learning to involve authentic content and process means that they must reflect what ordinarily occurs within the culture – the accepted practices and customs of members of the community.*

Members of an academic community of practice are constituted as such in a material and ideal sense. Materially, by occupying the same physical space, institutions, lecturing schedules etcetera, and ideally through a constant dialogue about what it means to belong to an intellectual community of practice. This is fascinating and of the utmost importance because the university is a singular community in at least one crucial respect, namely that its very *raison d’etre* is the critical reflection on what being such a community *means*. All other imagined communities (Andersen) – corporate businesses, nations, states etc. – function, to a large extent, only in so far as they successfully mythologise, that is, naturalise their communality as a “given”. Nationalism is the classic example of this. On the other hand, a businessperson who asks him- or herself whether a life spent in the pursuit of material wealth is a life worth living is possibly a person who is about to undergo an important life change exactly because he or she is interrogating and in the process demythologising the given or assumed value or meaning of their membership in a capitalist community of practise. This is not the case for that community of practice that defines itself as a

spatio-temporally strange community of critical practice. In fact, as I have suggested, such critical reflection is constitutive of that communality. We cannot simply *do* uncritically or un-reflectively as if the community in which we do what we do is a natural given. But neither can we simply reflect without either doing or sharing that reflection on what we do (which is a further dimension of doing) with others in that community.

Perhaps, by way of conclusion, the notion of situated learning in a community of practice also offers a profound post-Cartesian response to the metaphysical dilemma that has been haunting me through-out this study. In the first chapter this dilemma manifested in the tension between the singularity of the learning encounter (the *doing*) and the critical reflection on that encounter (the *thinking*). In the previous chapter it translated in Heideggerian terms as the opposition between *theoretical* knowledge and *being*. For Heidegger the loss of unity between doing and thinking, theorising and being can be pinpointed at exactly the time when the university emerged as modern institution. In his deposition he writes that the move to abstract generality “marks the transition from traditional education as mere socialization into the customs of the tribe [along the lines of a master/apprentice model discussed here] to rational education as ascending from the concrete particular to the abstract universal and back again” (1945/2002:31). The resulting construction of the domain of knowledge as a disembodied cognitive domain “gives primacy to the theoretical relation to the world over other, concrete ways of relating to things” (*ibid*). His theorising of this historical evolution of the university presents itself as an act of remembrance or commemoration of this separation, that is, as a critique of what theoretical dominance *conceals* from us, and as an attempt to reveal by reminding us of the phenomenological-existential substratum that is sacrificially excluded or repressed in the process. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the result is a contradictory attempt to *theorise the violence of theory*. His critique of the theoretical tradition is also an instance or continuation of that tradition. In light of the above discussion of situated learning in a community of practice, this deconstruction can now be restated by saying that his *thinking* also constituted a *doing*. An important insight into the contemporary discourse on education emerges from this. As a document presented to the committee on de-Nazification Heidegger responded to the charge that he, in his interpretation of the charges, was guilty of a “subversion of identities, of crossing the line between education and politics, university and state; of

exceeding the limit beyond which philosophy becomes ideology [*Weltanschauung*] and teaching turns into propaganda” (1945/2002:28). Historically the deposition also marks a time of introspection when the German university had to reinvent itself and its relation to the state because, unlike the historical Humboldt-university which “arose out of the national ferment generated in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars” (*ibid*, 31), at the time of the deposition it would no longer do “to serve up warmed-over platitudes from the bygone tradition of German Idealism” (*ibid*). The result, then, is a two-fold or layered introspection: Heidegger’s own concerning his involvement with National Socialism and that of the university *qua* post-war institution. Heidegger’s own introspection assumes the form of an attempt to account for his actions in terms of the historical identity or role of the university. He attempts to extract himself from what the university is about – to offer a *sub specie aeternitatus* theory of its genealogy - in order to account for the role he played in its involvement with National Socialism. While this personal imperative to reflect on his practice may account for the inconsistency implicit in theorising the theory based identity of the university, it also reveals something fascinating about the possibility and meaning of such an act of self-reflection in the context of a community of practice *that defines its very communality in terms of such acts of self-reflection*. One cannot extract oneself, in order to theorise one’s role and place, from a community of practice when that very community defines its identity in terms of such acts of self-reflection. The distinction that Heidegger postulates in the process, namely a distinction between being and theorising, collapses under the weight of this identity of the university community because in the process of theorising the difference he was *being* exactly what we expect an academic to *be* and *do*, that is, not just to perpetuate social differentiations but to critically engage them. In other words, his theorising amounted to a *doing* or a way of *being* that always already subverts the distinction made at theoretical level. This, in a more general way, relates back to the academic community of practice *qua* critical or self-reflective community. Every statement that critically asserts that there is, say, “no academic community of practice at Rhodes university” or even the statement “at Rhodes there is no community of practice that reflects on issues of pedagogy”, undermines its constative meaning by performatively contributing, thus constituting in the act of making the statement, the very communality the statement suggests does not exist. As with Heidegger the *doing/being* of these statements undermines their *saying*. This is not just an obnoxious inversion or deconstruction for

it reveals a second, related but more general insight, namely that any community of practice is an *ethical* community in a way that precedes any attempt to calculate or theorise what this could possibly mean. Given the epistemological and ontological assumptions of situated learning this ethic reminds us that we always *are* and *know* more than we can comprehend or understand; that it is not possible to calculate our indebtedness to the other. In a sense Heidegger's deposition – that is, the obligation to reflect, to offer a decontextualised calculation of who he is and what he has done – and the impossibility of doing so, is metonymic not just of the human condition but also of what it means to be part of what Readings calls an (educational) community of “loose ends”; one in which

*the singularity of the 'I' or the 'you' is caught up in a network of obligations that the individual cannot master. That is, the network of obligations in which an individual is caught up in is not entirely available to the subjective consciousness of that individual, so that we can never pay all our debts. Indeed, the assumption that we can pay all our debts is fundamentally unethical, since it presumes the possibility of overcoming all responsibilities and obligations, achieving 'freedom' from them. Autonomy as freedom from obligation to others, holds out the impossible imagination of subjective self-identity: I will no longer be torn up, divided from myself by my responsibilities to others (1996:186).*

Ultimately, what the committee on de-Nazification expected of Heidegger was as impossible and unreasonable (unethical) as it was necessary (ethical). It necessarily - but impossibly so - placed Heidegger in an aporetic state of resourcelessness in which he had to calculate the incalculable, that is, calculate and account for his debt to others. Perhaps the impossibility of doing so revealed itself in the deconstruction of *being* a member of a community of practice in a way that any attempt to theorise or account for, could only contradict itself.

## 5. Conclusion

In his short essay *What calls for thinking?* (1978) Heidegger assumes a very different position *vis a vis* the usefulness of conceiving the lecturer/student difference in terms of this master/apprentice trope. He goes as far as to suggest that the trope presents “the true relation between teacher and taught”. He writes:

*Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than – learning [to acquire the skill of learning is the “true subject matter of the seminar”]. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we learn nothing from him, if by ‘learning’ we now automatically understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he still has far more to learn than they – he has to learn to let them learn. (ibid, 356)*

Students learn *to learn* while teachers learn *to let learn*. In a way this “letting” captures in embryonic form many aspects of the ethical and authoritative dimension of the relationship teased out in the previous chapter. To know that teaching resides in “letting learn” is to existentially and ontologically embrace a difference that is demonstrative or performative in the sense that it demands actualisation in *being* master and *being* apprentice. It is ontological in the sense that every attempt to suspend it through, for instance, Socratic humility will only re-assert itself by being modelled. The “letting learn” acknowledges that the “being too close” and the “being too far” that generate questions about the ethical and authoritative nature of the relationship, compromise what it is most important for students to learn, namely to learn what learning means. All instances of the “too” are ways of disempowering students of the most fundamental learning experience that consists in stepping into learning, assuming the position of learner, in short, of learning what learning means: the “too close” by seducing them into that space (romantically or in friendship or therapeutically, that is, by making it feel *safe*), and the “too far” implicit in traditional notions of parental authority of forcing them into it, of *making* them learn. The subtle and excruciating play between “too far” and “too close” is what makes teaching hard; is what makes it “more difficult than learning”. This interplay is perhaps what Blanchot’s was after when he wrote in *The Infinite Conversation* (1993) that “[t]he master gives nothing to know which does not remain determined by the indeterminable “unknown” he/she represents” – an unknown which affirms itself “by the *infinite distance* between A and B”. To be “too close” is to be too familiar and to be “too far” is to be too unfamiliar. If, for Heidegger the task of the master is to let learn, it is for Blanchot “to go to the familiarity of things while reserving their strangeness.” There is an infinite distance between learner and teacher, master and apprentice, an incommensurability. Yet, teaching only happens when we interrupt that incommensurability; when the non-relation suggested by the incommensurability

temporarily, briefly, becomes a relation. This does not mean that we can ever double-think or even temporarily suspend the infinite distance or level the playing field in order to speak/teach/learn from within the “not knowing” of Socratic ignorance. In this chapter I argued that given the strange spatio-temporality of higher education, its undecidability, such an attempt will, ironically and perhaps suitably militate against itself by restoring the infinite distance between student and the admirably humble lecturer. This is perhaps only fitting because the ways in which we *are*, our *being* in this strange place and the singularity of that being always exceeds our theoretical grasp - even and perhaps particularly when such a theoretical grasp is resolutely anti-theoretical or hyper conscious of its transcendental violence.

## Conclusion

1.

Thinking back over the process that brought me to these concluding remarks, the process involved in thinking through a particular set of problems and the journey I went on in response to them, I am struck by the presence of Derrida in the text. He seems to crop up at every important moment to make a crucial difference to my thinking about my teaching praxis. The most important of these is probably the moment when I don't reference anything he thought or wrote but, instead, a moment in which he was observed *doing* something. Pivotal to this study is the moment when Derrida, through the reading of his texts, placed a "*distance between the master and his audience ... a formality ... which is the true subject of the seminar*". In more than one sense, Derrida's praxis *makes a difference*.

2.

It is in the nature of imagining the scene of teaching that we have to either imagine teaching or being taught, being the teacher or being the student. Structurally there is no third position to occupy – even in the imagination. It is in the very structure of the event of teaching that when one imagines, say, the scene in which Derrida stands up, or sits down to read one of his texts – that we can only do so by imagining that we are either the teacher or the student. Since, in this instance the place of the teacher is already occupied by Derrida, the imagination has no choice but to place itself at the table, among the other students. This means one cannot imagine the scene in which Derrida stands up or sits down, ruffles his papers and starts to read without implicating oneself, in some sense, in being taught. But this scene, too, has a history. I have implicated myself like this before without being aware of it at the time. When I sat down to write the introduction to this study, I had to actively forget another time when Derrida stood up in order to start reading a paper.

3.

What always intrigued me about the keynote address *Force of Law: the "Mystical Foundation of Authority"* (1992) Derrida delivered at the Cardozo Law School in 1989, is, yes, the beautiful distinction between law and justice but, prior to that, the fact that the paper starts, in French, with *C'est un devoir, je dois m'adresser*

*à vous en anglais*.<sup>16</sup> Not to do so would be rude; would be to act in bad faith; would mean not honouring the terms of the agreement to speak at the colloquium; would perhaps even be *unjust*. And so, a conversation on justice starts by Derrida self-consciously understanding his participation in that conversation in terms of justice. What always intrigued me about this is Derrida's mindfulness, his presence of mind; that he understands *the fact* of his participation as raising the kind of questions to be discussed *through* his participation. *There is no way of talking about justice that does not itself raise the question of justice*.

This, one could say, is typical of post-modernism: all this talking about talking, thinking about thinking *etcetera*. Perhaps in the introduction I should have listed "post-modern self-consciousness" as another term or phrase that resonates with my understanding of "mindfulness as knowing what you do while you are doing it". That I did not, is explained by the fact that when I sat down to write the introduction I had to actively forget, in order to be mindful and to retain my presence of mind, this scene in which Derrida stands up to start speaking about law and justice; this scene which, in a way I cannot control, implicates me in being taught. Yet, when I wrote the opening line of the introduction I realised that my "disinterest," my resistance to writing this thesis was part of the journey of writing the thesis in a way similar to which Derrida's talking about justice invoked the question of justice itself. In doing so I was consciously aware of the fact that I was imitating his mindfulness, his self-consciousness. What I clearly understand now in a way that I did not understand at the time of writing the introduction is that I was quite literally modelling my writing on Derrida. I was modelling not so much *what* he thought as *how* he thought. I modelled a certain *practise* of thinking. This is not a particularly embarrassing or even a humble thing to acknowledge. It is simply a way of situating myself in a community of practice; a community in which Heidegger imagines the scene of teaching in terms of Socratic ignorance; in which Derrida imagines the scene in Heideggerian terms as aporetic and in which I imagine the scene in terms of Derridian self-consciousness. All thinking, including the writing of this thesis, starts out as legitimate peripheral participation and culminates, as this study hopefully will, in mastery; in being recognised as master.

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<sup>16</sup> "This is an obligation, I must address myself to you in English" (1992:3).

4.

There is a certain fragility in the transition from legitimate periphery to the legitimate centre. One does not nominate oneself as master or even declare one's mastery. One becomes a master when one is acknowledged as one. This is a fragile moment exactly because one has to step out of the space of learning and into the space of letting learn. There is a moment of sadness, even loss, in that transition; a sadness that relates to the expectation that one must henceforth speak as if one knows, as if one understands. The sadness of the master amounts to a loss of innocence. By accepting the nomination "Master" one accepts, finally, that one will never understand fully. One may try to recapture this innocence by either negating or exaggerating the difference that makes of one a master and of others, students. But finally, all questions of authority and ethics in the relationship with students arise as a function of the extent to which we do or do not embrace that loss in order to let learn.

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