

Parker, I. (1989) *The Crisis in Modern Social Psychology – and how to end it*. London: Routledge

Chapter three

The conceptual crisis

[pp. 48-71]

[48] Transformations in the economic and political structure of American society changed the nature of social inquiry. We have seen in the previous chapter how social psychology emerged as an experimental science, and how that science supported a particular image of the human subject. This chapter shows that the essential characteristics of those transformations were repetitions of cultural shifts in European culture around a century earlier. The transformations also carried with them conceptual changes -mutations in thought - which meant that the images of the 'subjects' of social psychology when it was born were complementary to their lived experience in the surrounding culture.

The notion of 'modernity' is useful here, for it refers to the culture which prioritizes individual meaning, the human sciences, and notions of progress. I will discuss this more fully further on when I come to Foucault's (1970) work. In brief, modernity is contradictory: its discourse promises scientific truth as the solution to humanity's problems on the one hand, and on the other attributes responsibility and the power to make meaning to individuals. In social psychology, then, we have both a mechanistic study of behaviour which suffocates human agency *and* an individualistic notion of rationality which is predicated upon that agency. This contradiction is often expressed in psychology in the heated debates between those who advocate a positivist and those who champion a phenomenological approach to the explanation of action.

This contradiction which makes up the modern age has been pursued further in the developments outside traditional social psychology traced in this chapter, developments social psychology has, until the paradigm shift, resolutely ignored. Positivism – a [49] 'scientific' method for the understanding of the laws of societies and individuals - found a new sophisticated voice in structuralism, and phenomenology - by which I mean the study of the meanings of human experience - was further refined by practitioners of hermeneutics.

As we saw in Chapter one, both structuralism and hermeneutics have been represented in ethogenic new social psychology: structuralism in the work of Rom Harré (1979); and hermeneutics in the writings of John Shotter (1984). The picture is really slightly more complicated than this because each writer also draws upon the other's ideas to supplement his own. As we shall see, this is part of the logic of the relationship between the two conceptual poles. Because both positions represent aspects of modernity, and are defined by way of the other, neither can offer a solution to the 'crisis' inside or outside social psychology. Each requires

the other and folds into the other under pressure.

In the course of this chapter I will briefly show what structuralism offered and why it failed, and then turn to developments outside social psychology which have gone beyond positivism vs. phenomenology and structuralism vs. hermeneutic dichotomies to take up the texts of post-structuralism.

Structuralism, semiology, and hermeneutics

While experimental social psychology was making its entrance before the First World War in America, Ferdinand de Saussure was asserting in Central Europe that

*A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from the Greek *sēmeîon* 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. (Saussure 1974:16)*

The reconstruction of Saussure's lecture notes containing this suggestion for a new 'science' did not refer to 'structures' (Saussure preferred to speak of 'systems' of signs), nor was language supposed to be the key to the new science (Saussure argued that linguistics would be but 'a part' of semiology). Nevertheless, Saussure became retrospectively dubbed the father of 'structural linguistics', of structuralism, and his 'science that studies the life of [50] signs' effectively became a part of social psychology during the paradigm revolution in the discipline some sixty years after his work. The three key components of Saussure's structuralism are his descriptions of signs, his strictures on relations, and his understanding of the role of rules in the system.

Signs

It is possible to define signs in the context of what Harré (1979) calls the expressive order of society without ever referring to the practical sphere. This first point is one which makes new social psychology a properly semiological enterprise. Its main concern is with the organization of shared meanings. Signs have two components, combining a spoken sound image (or inscription) and a concept. So, for example, if someone uses the term 'social psychologist', they are uttering or writing a sequence of sounds or patterns. This is the signifier of the sign 'social psychologist'. Glued to that signifier is the concept or commonly understood notion of what a social psychologist is. That notion is the signified. If you were to overhear a group of sociologists at a party discussing experimental social psychology, the sign 'social psychologist' might waft around, and you might feel that the concept (or signified) they share when they voice the term (or signifier) bears no relation to the actual referent, to a real social psychologist. In fact, it need bear no such relation to the real to be a sign, and to study the 'life of signs' you need not be concerned with real things at all.

Saussure argued that the connection between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. So, when you talk about social psychologists in a little social world of social psychologists, you may understand something entirely different from what your auntie thinks they are up to when she discusses it with her colleagues in the literature department. You might see how the arbitrariness of the connection between signifier and signified gives rise to a struggle for meaning at the interface of social worlds or speech communities; for example, you will, perhaps, have had to place a different, and more appropriate, auntie signified under the written signifier 'auntie' during the course of reading the previous sentence.

New social psychology steps inside the small social worlds it studies, and, using the accounts of participants, attempts to elucidate the 'life of signs' in those worlds. Unlike behaviourist [51] experimental social psychologists, who stick to the measurement of movements, the 'new paradigm' works upwards to take account of their function as actions, and to discover their meanings as acts. One of the reasons ethogenics adopted the stance of participant observation is its belief that only then can the researcher treat the signs as they are actually used and understood (with the signifiers and the signifieds appropriately glued together).

Relations

For new social psychologists, it is an axiom of their approach that meaning is shared. It is not possible to understand the meaning of any component sign without understanding the others: in language 'there are only differences *without positive terms*' (Saussure 1974: 120). Meaning is dependent on differences and similarities with other meanings. So, for example, the often cited ethogenic study of Oxford United football supporters outlined the meanings of the systems of regalia worn on the terraces (Marsh, Rosser, and Harré 1974). A scarf has a particular meaning as a sign, and would call into being for an observer the idea of the category of fan who was wearing it. It also brings into play a whole range of meanings and relationships through connotation. The scarf carries meaning as a sign by virtue of its relations with other items of clothing, not because the signified is in some magical way woven into the wool.

There are two ways to look at the relations in a sign system. First, there is a range of possible alternatives that can be *selected*: a football supporter may choose to wear a scarf instead of a cravat; a social psychologist may choose a qualitative field study instead of a laboratory experiment. (Remember that we are concerned here simply with the meaning of the items chosen, not their practical value.) Second, the signs can be *combined* in different ways: a football supporter may wear the scarf round his waist or his wrist; a social psychologist may display her 'data' as observed facts at the beginning of a report to be accounted for, or illustrations of a theoretical position at the conclusion of an article to provide confirmation.

For new social psychology, the selection of signs and their combinations by a social actor also carry with them the self-presentations of persons within their own community. The choice

of an inappropriate item of clothing by a football fan or an [52]unacceptable research procedure by a social psychologist has to be warranted; it has to be explained to the satisfaction of other members of the community. At the same time, with that warrant comes the awareness that others are obtaining concepts (signifieds) of the type of person you are which are embedded in the accounts (signifiers) you offer them. So, a football fan reconstructs and lives the image of a 'novice' or 'nutter' depending on his clothing and actions; and a social psychologist will have to struggle to redefine and avoid the image of a hard-faced behaviourist or a woolly humanist, depending on the methods she adopts.

Rules

The reconstruction of the system of signs circulating in a chosen social world on the basis of accounts gathered from members is a difficult business. In part, the difficulty arises from the fact that at some point the researcher will have to step beyond the knowledge displayed by one individual to a shared social knowledge, the system of meanings and rules, which will only have a *collective* existence.

The step beyond the consciousness of the individual 'subject', and back from the personal meanings held by the members of a community, is necessary if the researcher is to engage in a 'science of signs. There is, structuralists believe, an underlying reality - of real structures - which underpins and organizes particular observable manifestations. The total system or 'structure' is what Saussure called language, and the individual items which a researcher will piece together he called speech. New social psychology employed a slightly different terminology to capture the same distinction but talk of a distinction between 'performance' (Saussure's 'speech') and 'competence' (*almost* equivalent to the underlying structure) instead (Harré and Secord 1972). The work of the ethogenist, it is claimed, is to attend to the performances of individuals in order to arrive at their underlying competence. This latter distinction implies that the underlying knowledge is possessed by each and every individual. Saussure did also claim that each item of language was present in every head, but in practice structuralism (and new social psychology) has worked on the assumption that the 'competence' or 'language' is a collective property. Society members contribute to social knowledge, ethogenics argues, as pieces of a jigsaw to make a whole picture. [53]

It follows from semiological descriptions of meaning and structure in language that a historical study of items of meaning must be read with extreme care. Saussure drew a distinction between an analysis which would be concerned with the historical evolution of a system, and a properly semiological analysis which would be concerned with the nature of a structure at any given time. New social psychology has concentrated on the task of elaborating structures of meaning as they exist at the moment they are studied. It has deliberately restricted its focus,

carrying out intensive studies of a specific football ground or school. It would, of course, make a nonsense of the whole structuralist project to imagine that the history of an individual sign could tell us much about its present-day meaning. Nevertheless, it is possible, as we shall see below when we turn to Foucault's (1970) work, to develop some overall 'history' of mutations from one cultural system to another. This notion of change, however, which deliberately devalues the history of meanings which could be given by individuals, also threatens to reinforce the 'scientific' character of structuralism. We are led to believe that there is a social knowledge - or meaning - which, of its nature, escapes and *determines* the individual 'subject'.

Hermeneutics

There is a sense in which the scientific pretensions of structuralism are just another twist to the positivism which informed the mechanistic enterprise of experimental social psychology. Structuralism's notorious 'anti-humanism' follows logically on from the belief that systems of meaning operate despite individual intention, and determine the thoughts, acts, and actions of human agents. However, there is a deeper sense in which structuralism also represents, at a theoretical level, the webs of modernity of which experimental social psychology is a mere thread. It is paradoxical and dualistic in the way experimental social psychology is: social action is reduced to measured movements, but individual responsibility is attributed to the 'subject'. It holds within itself the carefully delimited space for intention and agency to thrive. Who 'selects' signs from the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of language but the subject? Structuralism paradoxically requires, even more explicitly than its positivist predecessors, [54] the individual as a supplement to its mechanistic account. This individual aspect is provided by hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics was originally the study of biblical texts, and practitioners aimed to recover from those texts a true meaning imagined to be the word of God. Now hermeneutics in social science turns on the meanings within texts which are placed there by human agents. Although some recent developments in the approach work with the notion of a 'social text' with meanings that cannot be traced to the intentions of individuals, it still, by and large, rests on the belief that the meaning of human activities can be made open, transparent, and understandable to all (Shotter 1983).

I have concentrated so far, in my account of new social psychology, on the more structuralist version which derives from *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* (Harré and Secord 1972) and which is carried through in the writings of Harré, to the exclusion of the hermeneutics to be found in *Human Action and its Psychological Investigation* (Gauld and Shotter 1977) and in the writings of Shotter. There are fairly extensive disagreements between them with many ramifications which I will return to again in Part two of this book.

We can touch just briefly on the disagreements here. Take, for example, Harré's assertion that 'Pattern, convention and rule emerge even in the apparently most inhumane or most casual

social surroundings. The tendency to identify coordinated social action with co-operative, altruistic action is a sentimentality and should be avoided' (Harré 1979: 70). He goes on to trace the bases of social structure to 'cognitive templates', and in this way, paradoxically, threatens to collapse his structuralist social account into an individualistic explanation of action. Now compare this with the complaint from the hermeneutic side of the new social psychology that Harré's idea of social 'grammars' located in people's heads is a 'threat to self and genuine individuality' (Shotter 1980: 52).

Harré's version of new social psychology is also closer to structuralism when it appeals to underlying structures with causal powers. Shotter, on the other hand, prefers to stick to the surface as a general rule to avoid imagining there is something 'behind' meaningful human action. In recent years this has led him to a position he characterizes as 'mundane realism' (Shotter 1984). [55] The differences between the two wings of new social psychology are important for two reasons: they highlight the problem of scientism in the structuralist approach: and they demonstrate the dualism which lies hidden in the 'new paradigm' alternative to the explicitly dualistic 'old paradigm' experimental social psychology. Although the new social psychology provides valuable criticisms of experimentation, it does not escape the polarity of mechanistic positivist science and individual phenomenological experience which is a conceptual reflection of the modern age. It is trapped within a representation of the world as organized by the metanarratives of humanized science, progress, and individual meaning. Structuralism, then, which appears to produce a watertight positivist account of the laws and rules of meaning is actually contradictory. It holds within its own structure the intentionalism of hermeneutics. We should now turn to the way the contradictions in structuralism have been explored and deconstructed by post-structuralists.

The contexts of post-structuralism

The political ferment in and around Paris in 1968 affected all academic life. Radicals who were involved in the protest movements started to question the ideological function of the human (and natural) sciences, and liberals who had long been uneasy with the order of things in their disciplines found a space to air their grievances. While the political projects of the Left failed, the period around 1968 saw huge cracks appear in the cultural superstructure of the system they fought. This superstructure -modernity - came under threat in different disciplines in different ways. Modern laboratory-experimental social psychology was disrupted by a conceptual 'crisis' which threw up the new social psychologists influenced by Saussurean ideas hoping to reform it, but outside the discipline, structuralism was already under attack.

Structuralism promised a science of language in work on literature (Barthes 1977), a science of society in anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1966), and a science of modes of production in politics

(Althusser 1971). The hope was that this scientific approach would produce an objective explanation of societal and personal phenomena. At the end of the 1960s, however, this dehumanizing revamp of positivism came under attack by some who wanted to [56] revive humanism (in the guise of phenomenology or hermeneutics), and, more radically, those who wanted to go beyond both structuralism and humanism. This was the context for the publication of a number of wide-ranging critiques of the modern human sciences by Jacques Derrida (1973, 1976, 1978). Derrida's work could provide social psychologists with useful ways of thinking about texts and suggestions on the 'deconstruction' of social psychology's texts. It will also, despite post-structuralist opposition to the term, help us to grapple with the problem of *ideology*.

Texts

Pieces of writing called 'texts' normally promise to do two things, and, correspondingly, can be read in two ways. The first is to do with the ostensible function of a text to represent some state of affairs by providing a written summary of information about a particular topic. We are invited to believe that when we read Milgram's (1963) experimental social psychology text about obedience, for example, the introduction, table of results, and conclusion will re-present for us the essence of 'obedience'. Social psychology textbooks integrate this knowledge with findings on other topics such as 'attraction' or 'prejudice' and dish it up with some general nostrums about social interaction. These too, then, pretend to represent a reality outside the text. A powerful, culturally determined distinction between what is written and what is 'real' is at work here. A correlative assumption is that we can check the veracity of texts by sampling reality for ourselves.

Another way to read a text is to treat it as the carefully wrought thought of the writer. The text can, we suppose, be interpreted, and supplemented with information about the author, to reveal other deeper, and more accurate, meanings. Social psychologists have, traditionally, been less interested in this. They have been concerned with the real world rather than real intentions of writers. This process of interpretation has been pursued more extensively within literature: it is a variety of hermeneutics. However, the premise is once again that the text represents what is outside the text, and that we can hold to a distinction between the written and the real. If this were true we could go to the author and ask what was really meant. A cluster of problems, ranging from mortality and memory to self-presentation, makes this an impossible endeavour. [57]

New social psychology also trades in this distinction, and its use of structuralism retains a notion of a reality which is represented in its texts. Ethogenic researchers, for example, gathered football supporters' explanations of their activities and produced an account which purported to represent the real meanings of the football-terrace community. In structuralist parlance, they captured the 'signifieds' held within the signs circulating in the social world studied, discovered the

relations between them, and reconstructed the shared system of rules which made up the language of that world. Ethnogenic texts, then, pretend to represent what their subjects really mean.

However, texts are tissues of meaning which have powers to weave new pictures of the real every time they are read or re-read. If it is true, as Saussure claimed, that in language there are only *differences* and no 'positive terms', then it would not be possible to capture a 'true', positive, meaning. Derrida (1976) takes this further and argues that each attempt to move beyond a text to find the true meaning is doomed, for the study of the outside is a *reading* which is given meaning by a context.

The context effectively operates as another text, hence the well-known phrase '*there is nothing outside of the text*' (Derrida 1976: 158). Texts, then, do re-present meanings, but those meanings are transformed meanings from other texts, and the meanings change across situations and over time. The implications of this line of argument for a scientific structuralism are dire, since it would make the recovery of 'true' meanings and 'structures' impossible. Texts should now be defined as delimited tissues of meaning which may be written, spoken, or reproduced in *any form* that can be given an interpretative gloss.

Deconstruction

Traditional notions of the text 'work' by privileging what is outside the text - as the container of the real - over the text itself. The text merely represents it. This opposition between what is 'true' and what is not is one of the many metaphysical oppositions Derrida reveals and overturns in his deconstructions of western thought. Deconstruction could be characterized as one process by which we can expose and subvert the restriction of meaning in a text. It might be tempting to think of deconstruction merely as a method. [58] We should resist this temptation, though for simplicity's sake I will run through three possible steps to a deconstruction of meaning in a text.

For Derrida, one of the exemplars of a metaphysical opposition which restricts meaning, and which deludes us into imagining that there is a single true meaning to be found, is that between speech and writing. Traditionally, we understand speech to be closer to thought than writing. As we speak, we appear to be putting thoughts into words as if we were filling them with meaning, and as we hear ourselves speak it is as if we were hearing our thoughts. Writing, on the other hand, seems more obviously mediated and is liable to read in different ways in different contexts.

The first step to a deconstruction is to identify just such an opposition, and to show how one of the terms (in this case, speech) is dominant in the truth stakes over the other (in this case, writing). There are other issues in this particular example, for the privilege speech is accorded over writing helps guarantee the sovereignty of the autonomous person - the idealized individual much beloved of western thought in general, and of social psychology in particular. New social psychology, which is sympathetic to individualist humanist arguments, reinforces the distinction

between speech and writing every time it inveighs against the use of questionnaires or documents in favour of 'asking people' and gathering 'real' accounts (Harré' 1981a).

The second step is to subvert the opposition between the two terms by demonstrating that the privilege the dominant term enjoys can be made untenable. In many respects, for example, speech undergoes the same sort of vicissitudes as writing between being produced by one person and received by another. When we are speaking we do not have complete control over what we say. Instead, we are at the mercy of a language which is filled with meanings that we have, in a sense, to borrow and reproduce when we use it. Language is gendered, and it is also organized to restrict the experience of those outside the dominant culture. Standard English suppresses working-class speech and dialect (and the reader who doubts this should attempt to deliver a paper to a social psychology conference in something other than middle-class form). Speech accommodation also reproduces different categories of speech style and boundaries between what is acceptable and who should be discounted. Within social groups, certain [59] names, terms, and phrases may be reserved for those who have rights to speak. In many ways, then, speech is a specially woven tissue and it operates as if it were a variety of writing.

The third step of deconstruction involves the sabotaging of the conceptual opposition. This can be done by extending the meaning of the term 'writing' to include what we commonly label 'speech'. Alternatively, we could employ a different term which would prevent the opposition from reasserting itself. In the present case, we would want to do this because we want to expose structures of coercion in language; and in order to do that we have to resist the comfortable myth that there is a space for unmediated, genuine communication between people which is free from the operation of power. Two things can be drawn out of the third step of deconstruction in this context. The first is conceptual, and the second practical.

First, take one of the conceptual fruits of Derrida's work on speech and writing. There is a term which would apply to both, and which would render them open to a critical study. This is the term which signals that *all* investigation is mediated by socially shared and culturally constructed meanings. If this account is correct, then, as I pointed out at the beginning of Chapter one, even such a seemingly 'natural' experience as direct perception is impossible. The term is one we have already discussed and defined earlier in this chapter - 'text'. The work deconstruction can accomplish for us, then, is to open up texts to show how meaning is organized and what function that organization serves. We can use it to show what interpretations are powerful, and then we can explore how and why they enjoy that power. In this sense deconstruction can be one useful conceptual weapon in the struggle against ideology.

Second, there are political consequences which flow from a deconstruction. It would be possible to think of American and European social psychology as two pairs of an opposition, or the old paradigm and new paradigm as opposing approaches. I opened up the conflict between the warring sides as the first deconstructive step, and I championed European social psychology and supported the new paradigm as the second step. Out of the wreckage, however, should come

something entirely different. A successful deconstruction of social psychology would end it, and in its place we would have alternative understandings of subjectivity and [60] social relations based in politics. *Politics* (a critical view of power and ideology, and support for resistance and conflict) emerges as the third term as social psychology falls away. However, because such a deconstruction would be tackling an academic *institution*, and not just a set of concepts, we have to link the practical measures (at the end of Chapter eight) to our unravelling of the way it functions expressively, ideologically.

Ideology

There are two unhelpful ways to describe ideology. One is to say that ideology is simply a system of beliefs. This definition of ideology is the one often adopted in mainstream sociology. In social psychology it has recently, to all intents and purposes, reappeared in the research on 'social representations' (as you will see in Chapter five). The disadvantage of this position is that we lose any critical edge in our use of the term. We need to retain some conception of ideology as being restrictive or coercive in its effects. It renders invisible the operations of power, and nowhere more so than when we are led to accept that it is a necessary glue which holds people together. Both structuralism and post-structuralism unfortunately tend to advocate a thoroughgoing relativism which invalidates everything (including oppositional arguments), and thus effectively could just as well be condoning everything. For political reasons I want to keep some distance from Derrida's (and Foucault's) hostility to the term 'ideology'.

The other, less unhelpful, way of describing ideology is to say that it is a system of illusion or lies. If this were the case then it could easily be dispelled by asserting truth. The problem with this position is that, as far as social interaction is concerned, we face insurmountable difficulties in saying what the truth is. It may be possible to discover larger-scale laws in economics, or to display inequalities of income and opportunity in sociology, but as we narrow our focus on to the smaller-scale domains held together by texts, nearly every account of social life can, to some extent, be contested. Post-structuralist notions of the text throw into question the possibility of arriving at a definitive true meaning, and, further, offer a critique of 'truth' as such. Nevertheless, post-structuralism helps us demystify the 'truth' in the dominant culture, and is politically useful if it is turned to that task. [61]

Theories of ideology have invariably trodden a tortuous path between these two positions and have usually fallen into the one side or the other. They have slipped, I believe, when they have attempted to give a definition of ideology, or to set out criteria which could be used to identify it. It is more useful to keep resisting the temptation to refer to ideology as a thing. It is not a property of social meaning, but a label which identifies the coercive function of meaning in specific contexts. The criteria for using the term ideology do not rest in the object to be discovered but in the power of the subjects who are in conflict with it. It becomes salient when

we can ask what sets of statements *do* and what institutional restrictive functions those statements serve.

A deconstructive reading, as defined by Derrida (1981), is an ally of such a critical stance towards ideology which does not appeal to a truth outside the text:

the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he [sic] commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*. (Derrida 1976:158)

Ideology should be a function of politically charged rhetoric. This politics takes form when we bring in notions of history, power, and resistance.

Contradictions

Notwithstanding Derrida's warning that we cannot move outside the text, we have to refer to the 'real' in some way in order to provide an adequate account of power and the development of different forms of power in different cultures. When we are dealing with small-scale social interaction in a particular culture, however, it is pointless and hopeless to appeal to reality. The understanding we can give of the social and historical status of different texts should, then, be informed by our understanding of the role of discourse.

Discourse

A discourse is a system of statements which constructs an object. This fictive object will then be reproduced in the various texts [62] written or spoken within the domain of discourses (that is, within the expressive order of society). So, for example, social psychologists may draw upon a discourse of 'authoritarianism' and they will use the notion of 'authoritarianism', which has been constructed as an object by that discourse, to explain different social and political phenomena. Each time they use the term they will, by the same token, be reproducing the discourse. We find academic or popular texts circulating which draw upon and support that discourse. Another example, referred to in Chapter two, is the discourse relating to 'the crowd'. The obsessive attempts to combat the effects of, or even the idea of, the 'crowd mind' paradoxically reproduced the discourse. Many texts, such as Le Bon's (1896) book, drew upon that discourse.

Foucault attempted, in historical research first published in France during the 1960(s), to show how particular systems of discourse affected western culture. Paradoxically, his influential book *The Order of Things*, which was popularly understood to be the bible of structuralism, was actually an account of how structuralism came about as a contradictory component of modernity (Foucault 1970). The book described overarching structures of discourse - termed *epistemes* -

which determine what it is possible to speak of, and think (though there will always be some swimming against the stream). The *epistemes* (or epistemological structures) are wider-ranging than Kuhn's (1970) paradigms, and the mutations which create and destroy them are not necessarily historically progressive.

The *epistemes* are described (rather too conveniently) by Foucault as lasting roughly 150 years each. We should be extremely cautious about adopting these time windows as rigid schemas, but they can help us to pick out dominant cultural preoccupations. The Renaissance, for example, was governed by a symbolist view of the world and language which encouraged interpretation aimed at recovering an ultimate meaning of things in the true word of God. His signature was everywhere, and hermeneutics was in full flower. This epistemological configuration mutated in the middle of the seventeenth century into the Classical Age. Now rationalism reigned, and natural science proved a (mechanistic) model for ordering the world and language to give a true picture. It was in this climate that the French *idéologues* thought they could accurately represent thought and so dispel illusion (Billig 1982). [63]

Mechanistic approaches did not entirely disappear at the close of the eighteenth century, but the production of meaning and knowledge started to be attributed to individual human beings at the dawn of the Modern Age. While the Classical Age developed themes of representation, the Modern Age, modernity, focused attention on the individual, for the individual was seen as responsible for producing that representation. At stake now was not only the representation of the real world but also the representation of meaning. The twin aspects of the contradictory meaning of the verb 'to represent', which came with the term when it appeared in the English language four centuries earlier, now found cultural support: 'to represent' was to make present to the mind *and* to stand for something which is not present. In modernity, the human being was not only the clarifier of true meaning, but its producer, its centre. Now psychology, and social psychology, could be born (Parker 1988a).

Discipline

In modernity, human agency is a valuable commodity, and humanist sentiments are, at first sight, progressive. Foucault goes on to show, however, that the belief that individuals are endowed with the ability to produce meaning, truth, is a trap. The human being is seen as both the object and also the subject of understanding. Foucault's later work described how although this paradox may be a mere academic puzzle to philosophers and psychologists, it is an unpleasant lived experience for inhabitants of the modern world. 'Subjects' in modernity are fixed in place from without by apparatuses of discipline (Foucault 1977), and from within by processes of confession (Foucault 1981).

The traditional way in which power is defined in social science is as the exercise of one person's will over others. As we saw in Chapter two, however, this conception of power is

inadequate when put to the test. It may have been appropriate up to the end of the eighteenth century (though even then it would not account for everything) when the paradigm case would be the exercise of the will of the monarch against the body of the criminal in public punishments and executions. We can dub this type of power sovereign' power. The transition to modernity, however, was accompanied by the elaboration of mechanisms of surveillance and [64] control which transformed the operation of power within society and between people. Foucault (1977) refers to the rise in population, the concentration of production, and the emergency control measures adopted to deal with the Plague as practical springs for the transition to this type of power.

There is a model form described by Foucault (1977) which captures the essential aspects of the new disciplinary power. In the Panopticon there is a central guard tower which is circled by cells which are backlit so every activity of the prisoner can be seen. The prisoners cannot see the guards, for the crucial point is that they should believe themselves to be seen. The deliberate exercise of intended effects is not necessary, then, for power to operate. The subjects of power can do the work themselves. If you have ever been the subject in a social psychology experiment (or even in an interview project accounting for your actions) you will know what this experience is like. It is not accidental that social-psychological research provides a good example of how disciplinary power works. Were its many and varied projects carried out, you would not even be able to go to the toilet without feeling you were being watched.

Within institutions, the control apparatuses and the mechanisms of surveillance had the function of regulating behaviour and identifying abnormalities and pathologies. Each person was encouraged to look within to discover their faults and flaws. Along with discipline, then, went the process of confession which gave a new modern twist to notions of individuality. (The concept of an 'I' and the production of autobiographies appeared in Europe in the twelfth century.) The idea that a truth exists deep within the person, which may be held down by power and which may be liberated through confession, is one of the individualist myths of modern culture. If we experience difficulty in finding this truth (a truth which has, in addition, been increasingly sexualized), we become all the more convinced that it is the more deeply repressed. Thus 'it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret' (Foucault 1981: 61).

Power

The notions of discipline and confession are descriptive devices designed to illuminate power, and they serve as theoretical points [65] of *resistance* to that power. To use the terms 'discipline' and confession' is to indict the key opposition which makes up modernity *and* which is hidden inside the project of structuralism. On the one hand, positivist and behaviourist attempts to quantify and reduce human action to units of behaviour and to regulate that behaviour (for

example, in old social psychology) function as a disciplinary power. On the other hand, the attribution of responsibility and agency to the individual subjects (and in new social psychology the giving of 'rights' to account for their actions) can function complementarily as incitement to confess. Power not only constrains and excludes; it is also productive. Just as discourse produces objects or topics of investigation, it also produces *subjects*.

Laboratory-experimental social psychology was built as a disciplinary apparatus. New social psychology emphasizes individual accounts, but instead of escaping power, it participates in the correlative mechanisms of confession. New social psychology does expose the mechanistic character of the discipline and (as a reflection of explicitly structuralist ideas) is more open to the developments in the theory of language offered by post-structuralism, but the continuing crisis in social psychology is part of broader cultural and political crises. This means that in order to realize the critical potential of new social psychology we have had to add a sense of its historical position. Now the crisis could be transformed from being simply a condition of uncertainty and suspense into a turning-point. To accomplish that involves putting to work analyses of power and ideology.

The idea of power we can develop from this work is one which is concerned with the reproduction of relations between people in which resistance is suppressed. It does not rest on the intention of a power-holder, and so it is possible to give an account which situates it in the operation of discourses and texts. A deconstruction applied to those texts, then, necessarily starts to unravel the power relations which hold them in place. What we understand to be ideology and conflict in the course of revealing power and resistance are the *effects* of those relations in discourses and texts. Ideology is not a thing.

Post-structuralists (and Foucault has been particularly vocal on this score) are right to say that when we use the term ideology we risk understating the power of the truth which holds disciplines [66] together in this culture, and we risk setting up a truth as an alternative to the lies we have exposed. As will have been quite clear so far, I do not agree that those risks should lead us to abandon the term. When I use the term politically, I am concerned not with what it refers to, but with what it *does* and what institutional conflicts it brings into play. To talk of ideology in the deconstruction of texts and discourses is to support resistance. This is the whole point of taking the paradigm revolution in social psychology into the realms of post-structuralism. [end of page 66]