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Chapter 6

Desire: psychodynamic models

[pp. 104-121]

The new Tory minister for women ... was paid the ultimate compliment [at the party conference] by the chairman Dame Margaret Fry, after she opened the conference with a keynote speech on the family. 'Thank you for a wonderful speech, Angela... and thank you most of all for being so normal.'

(*Guardian*, 10 October 1990)

Traditional academic psychology keeps its distance from Freud, but the turn to discourse and reflexivity now allows a reconsideration of psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic concepts circulate freely through the discourses of twentieth-century Western culture, and this also has a bearing on the appeal of Freud's work to radical psychologists. The exclusion of psychoanalysis by academic psychologists (and its relegation by them to the spheres of quackery and mistaken common sense), and the diffusion of ideas and practices from the orthodox psychoanalytic training institutes (into psychodynamic therapy, counselling and art-house cultural theory) has also made it increasingly accessible, and attractive.

Psychoanalysis intermeshes in a peculiar way with common sense. It simultaneously offers a vocabulary to non-psychologists which allows them to explore and reflect upon emotions and relationships without being disempowered by experts in the psy-complex *and* it operates as a way of talking about repression and the unconscious which draws the speaker into the peculiarly vicious spiral of confessional reflexivity which is such a crucial part of the psy-complex. Psychoanalytic and therapeutic discourses thread their way through culture, capturing people in a variety of subject positions and providing models of the individual, models which work.

In this chapter I will explore recent psychoanalytic accounts of [105] reflexivity, and describe Habermas's and Lacan's discussions of reflexive psychodynamics before turning to the study of discourse dynamics. I will show how the development of a discourse-analytic and reflexive form of psychology calls for psychoanalytic theory, and how such theory throws light on the vexed question of when and where reflexivity may be appropriate or useful.

An attention to language and reflexivity poses a question to psychoanalysis: 'how does psychoanalysis employ the notion of reflexivity?' This is the key to an understanding of psychodynamic psychology (and social psychology), for the answers psychoanalysis can give illuminate the point of connection between the individual and the social, and provide a model of the person which *is* that point of connection. Reflexivity is a crucial characteristic of human action and agency, and the connection between action, agency and understanding is one which runs through psychoanalytic accounts.

PSYCHOANALYSIS: TWO POSITIONS

Within psychology, psychoanalysis is portrayed as an archetypal non-science so effectively that even sympathetic accounts within the positivist tradition (e.g., Kline, 1984) fail to challenge the positivist procedures used to damn it. It is only recently that alternative accounts addressed to an academic psychology audience (e.g., Frosh, 1987, 1989b) have broken from the systematic misrepresentations of Freud in textbooks (Richards, 1989). The caricatured psychoanalytic model of the person in psychology portrays it as being fundamentally asocial, or even anti-social.

The revival of psychoanalytic ideas in psychology has been helped by the debates over the (mis)translations of the *Standard Edition* (Freud, 1953-74) which render Freud's complex and allusive writing into statements of 'fact' (Timms and Segal, 1988), and by Bettelheim's (1986) argument that Freud was working in a cultural tradition in which it was clear that psychoanalysis should not be treated as a natural science subject to experimental verification or falsification, but one of the *human sciences* which appeals to the criteria of interpretation, experiential resonance and understanding. While Bettelheim's claims are debated (e.g., Grünbaum, 1984), they do open up a series of questions that psychology had long thought closed.

Psychoanalysis and Freud's work for that matter are not single closed systems of theory. There is no final state model. Two key [106] concepts, however, can be briefly sketched out. One is that of the unconscious. Freud (1925) describes in one short paper, for example, a children's toy, the 'mystic writing pad' which consists of a celluloid layer (a 'protective shield'), a layer of waxed paper (perception/ consciousness) and a wax slab (the unconscious). An impression which we make on the celluloid presses the paper onto the wax slab and we see the mark, but when we pull a slide across the pad (which breaks the connection between the paper and the wax) the image disappears. What the toy captures for Freud is the way that the writing flickers and passes away, the way a record of the impressions remains in the slab as it becomes ever the more a jumbled, distorted, compressed mass of memories, the way the pitted surface affects the character of the trace made when the paper touches it on later occasions, and the way that the wax is necessarily involved in every image. The unconscious is never absent from writing, language, discourse.

The unconscious is not an inert wax-like mass however, but is dynamic. Drives within the unconscious, forces on the border of the physiological and the psychical, animate the mind in the body (the body in the mind). A second key concept is that of infantile sexuality. Freud (1905) describes the infant as a being powered by sensual need, but takes pains (in a famous footnote) to distinguish between the oppositions 'active--passive', 'male--female' (as biological difference) and 'masculine--feminine' (as gender characteristics). The connections between male biology, masculinity and activity and those between the female body, femininity and passivity are cultural matters. Freud describes the way the infant as a 'polymorphously perverse' (obtaining sensual pleasure from many regions of the body) and 'constitutionally bisexual' (caring nothing for the sexual identity of the loved object giving pleasure) being is forced through a painful process of development to restrict the zones of pleasure to the genitals and to repress any desire which is not heterosexual. Again, the forces and powers which destroy our wider-

ranging forms of desire as we move from infancy are cultural matters, relayed by direct coercion and discourse.

The turn to language, and the embedding of reflexivity in language as a conceptual solution to the crisis in traditional social psychology, is paralleled by developments in psychoanalytic theory since Freud. Both hermeneutic interpretations of psychoanalysis and structuralist readings, in turn, reflect a growing concern with language in Western [107] academic life, a concern, indeed, which fuelled the 'new paradigm' (Parker, 1989a). These different traditions operate on different assumptions about meaning and experience, and have different implications for notions of reflexivity. Two traditions I am concerned with here are German and French developments. It is possible to draw some contrasts between the way in which the most prominent living representative of the second-generation Frankfurt school, Jürgen Habermas (1971), using hermeneutics, reads Freud, and Jacques Lacan's (1977) 'return to Freud'.

Habermas and hermeneutics

The German phenomenological stream of work is fairly close to what Bettelheim (1986) had in mind as a human science. The focus is on personal meaning, with interpretation conducted as a variety of hermeneutics, and insofar as its adherents criticise Freud it is for holding too strongly to a natural scientific framework. As the activity of the Frankfurt School testifies, there is strong concern with emancipation, a striving for freedom which is intimately connected with the freedom of others (Jay, 1973). Habermas (1971) develops a general argument about the importance of reflection which is then supported by an account of Freud's work. One gets a sense of the phenomenological presuppositions in Habermas's approach when one reads that the goal of analysis (and here he is *not* talking about psychoanalysis) should be a 'new reflected attitude [in which] the situation comes to consciousness in an undistorted manner, just as it is' (Habermas, 1971: 18), and that 'the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a moment of emancipation' (*ibid.*: 198).

When Habermas comes to discuss Freud and a 'psychoanalytic hermeneutics', his account of defence is of '*an operation that is carried out in and with language*' (Habermas, 1971: 241). (The English translation of his *Erkenntnis and Interesse* as *Knowledge and Human Interests* (re-)introduces the *Standard Edition* terms 'ego' instead of 'I', 'id' instead of 'It' and 'instinct' instead of 'drive') The description Habermas provides of our attempt to hide from ourselves and from needs we cannot face captures key characteristics of his position: 'The text in which the ego understands itself in its situation is...purged of representatives of the undesired instinctual demands: in other words, it is censored. The self's identity with this defended-against part of the psyche is denied; the latter is reified, for the ego, into a [108] neuter, an id [it]' (Habermas, 1971: 240). As we understand the *act of censorship*, we also are able to understand that meanings driven into an unconscious state ('delinguisticised'), and turned into things (It), can be drawn back into discourse. This discourse may be the text which is a person's life history or one of many subjugated discourses which lie in the history of a culture. The production of these mutilations, distortions of the text, is within language, discourse, and Habermas's psychoanalytic hermeneutics is not concerned with 'the understanding of symbolic structures in general. Rather, *the act of understanding* to which it leads is *self-*

reflection' (Habermas, 1971: 228).

Dilemmas

Within discourse analysis, the authors of *Ideological Dilemmas* (Billig *et al.*, 1988) dismiss Habermas all too briefly at the end of their book with a simple characterisation of him as an idealist attempting to specify 'ideal communication forms' (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 162). It is true that Habermas (1970) does presuppose the possibility of undistorted communication, and he describes the attempts of speakers to grasp towards an 'ideal speech situation' as an activity which makes it possible for us to grasp instances of power and oppression in language. However, it is because of, rather than despite, this that Billig *et al.* are close to a Habermasian standpoint. Three close connections between *Ideological Dilemmas* and Habermas's position can be identified before we turn to the possible limitations of the notion of reflexivity as used here.

First, there is an employment of hermeneutics which reads 'implicit meanings' in discourse. Such meanings are 'not hidden in the way Freudian theorists believe' (Billig, *et al.*, 1988: 23), but the descriptions of, for example, a racist unable to employ meanings 'within layers of meaning of language' (*ibid.*) are glossed as 'untrammelled racist obsessions' (*ibid.*: 118). Second, there is a concern with a view of rhetoric which does not attempt to posit a non-rhetorical truth (see also Billig, 1990a), in which it is the ability to employ contrary discourses which is portrayed as a necessary and healthy part of 'dilemmatic' thought: 'unashamed bigots refuse such balancing in order to live unambiguously within their bigotry' (*ibid.*: 144). It is the ability to engage in argumentation which allows thought. They must posit, as Habermas does, the existence of a 'set of [109] general and unavoidable communicative presuppositions which a subject capable of speech and action must make every time he or she wishes to participate seriously in argumentation' (Habermas, 1985: 86). Third, like Habermas, they argue that it is enlightenment which both allows and inhibits the ability for thinking, for 'dilemmas', to flourish. The contradictions which the liberal discourse of equality, rights and responsibilities opens up both has a content with a 'dark side' (*ibid.*: 100), 'darker themes' (*ibid.*: 101), and provides an enlightened 'argumentative' character which is preferable to 'medieval darkness' (*ibid.*: 105). (I note these metaphors here, for they mark this text, as all texts, as one susceptible to a discourse analysis.)

There must, according to this text, always be 'counter-themes' present, albeit hidden in discourse, for it is part of the dynamic of thought that it is marked by contradiction. The very similarity between Habermas and the view that reflexivity is 'an understanding of the ways in which knowledge structures itself in relation to its own development (historical consciousness), and a recognition of knowledge as a social force' (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 161), calls for the employment of a counter-theme in which the negative side of reflexivity is recognised. Psychoanalytic explanations are deliberately disavowed in this strand of discourse analysis, and it is possible ('an implicit meaning') that this is a recognition that there comes a point when 'knowledge as a social force' (which psychoanalysis often is) does not necessarily facilitate reflexivity. It is from this point that the writers move on to acknowledge that a discourse analysis should not be allowed to conceal the violent, non-discursive (Habermas might say 'delinguisticised'), aspects of human conflict.

Lacan and structuralism

The French structuralist (often later referred to as post-structuralist) school is one in which the symbolic architecture of human society is viewed as both necessary and pernicious. Understanding the components of the symbolic order, primarily the family, enables an explanation of, and accomplishes an (albeit reluctant) acquiescence to, the place of the individual (Turkle, 1979). Whilst Habermas develops a positive view of self-reflection then, as facilitating the interpretation of texts and thereby dissolving the various defence mechanisms which maintain repression, Lacan locates unconscious [110] processes in language in a rather more disturbing way. The very 'I' which contemporary common sense tells us is the undivided centre and director of action is a fiction, 'an impossible mirage in linguistic forms' (Lacan, 1977: 23). This sounds as if it does not exist, but the force of Lacan's argument is, rather, that fictions are as important as the real where subjectivity is concerned. And this fiction *is* a powerful centre.

The role of language, and discourse as a set of rhetorical devices, is to facilitate the development of this 'I' as one of a human symbolic community of other 'I's. The relationship between ourselves and others is fraught because discourse makes contact possible *and* distances us from what it replaces, that to which it refers. There is not space here to explore Lacan's assertion that 'the symptom *is* a metaphor... as desire *is* a metonymy' (Lacan, 1977: 175), but it does serve to drive home the way a Lacanian approach leaves little outside language. Communication is not viewed as the transfer of the intended meanings from speaker to listener, but as the production of meaning in which both speaker and listener get caught up (Easthope, 1990). So, Lacan (1977), employing structuralism, re-reads Freud, and offers a negative view of the way in which self-reflection operates to tie the individual even more firmly to relationships, defences and repression. For Lacan 'the ego represents the centre of all the *resistances*' (1977: 23), and so this ego, this 'I', cannot simultaneously reflect on *and* free itself from resistance. Like other post-structuralist writers then, 'Lacan is centrally concerned with the constraining and illusory features of conscious self-identity' (Dews, 1987: 234).

Contradictions

In the elaboration by Hollway (1989) of the *Changing the Subject* (Henriques *et al.*, 1984) position, a deliberately (linguistically interpreted) Lacanian account of the falling of signifiers to the status of signifieds is presented. This is supplemented with a (Kleinian-inspired) description of defence mechanisms, but the account of the defences is of them as constitutive of relationships: 'If we cease to view individuals as determining the boundaries around beliefs, positions or meanings and if we understand defence mechanisms as relational rather than intrapsychic, then it is possible to understand that multiple, potentially contradictory positions in discourses can be divided between people in a way which brings one [111] or both of them advantages (as well as losses)' (Hollway, 1989:72). A paradox, perhaps a necessary paradox, in this account is that the author is both present and absent in the account (Cf., Widdicombe, 1990).

There is an 'I' (in descriptions of diary entries and thesis extracts) and 'my' (in descriptions of method and analysis) in the text which invites debate. In this sense, the

text is 'open'. But there is also an 'I' who knows what some of the interviewees were like, and is able to add comments about the effects of one character's childhood relation with her mother (e.g., why 'mothering "signifies" in such negative ways' for Beverly: 77) or another's similar behaviour in his other relationships (e.g., 'Will's anti-sexism': 68). This second 'I' is not so fully present as to allow debate over the position from which such interpretations were being offered. In this case, perhaps of necessity, there is a point of commentary in which the level of reflexivity is carefully guarded. There are a number of occasions in Hollway's (1989) text when the position of the author facilitates the introduction of knowledge about relationships, but does not problematise the relationship between the author and that knowledge.

At one point, it is claimed that, while a Foucauldian description of discourse allows an understanding of power and change, it is necessary to add psychoanalytic accounts to bring in 'each person's uniqueness', and that this involves a guarantee that 'the content is put back into language' (Hollway, 1989:84). It would seem from this, and here would be one theoretical conclusion of these arguments, that a reflection as to the content of accounts and into the nature of relationships maintained by the defences should be continually pursued, that such reflexivity was necessarily a good thing in and of itself. However, in practice, some relationships are left unexplored (and it would be difficult to reflect further than Hollway already does on past relationships). Feelings are admitted and employed only in so far as they will make clear certain processes and (gender) relationships. The issue here is not that this text, which uses Lacanian theory, does not engage in a thorough enough reflection on its own presuppositions. Although such a criticism could be made, this is actually the opposite of the point I am making here. Rather, it is precisely because this text manifests, in its reluctance to reflect fully on the position of the researcher and the content of her subjects' accounts, its character as a Lacanian-inspired study of language, contradiction and identity that it works. The question which [112] Hollway's work provokes us to reflect upon is what reflexivity is *for*. I will return to this point after comparing Habermas's and Lacan's accounts.

Similarities: language, reflection and truth

I will outline Habermas's and Lacan's contrasting assessments of the role of reflexivity in discourse here because of the very different implications the two accounts have for a discourse-analytic understanding of subjectivity, but first it is worth drawing attention to three similarities between the two writers.

First, both Habermas and Lacan view the accession to language as a positive achievement, and this is because language is organised as the symbolic medium of human communities. For Habermas (1970), it is the hope of undistorted communication which makes language possible, and his (critical) defence of modernity, enlightenment, is premised on the rational *and* rhetorical debates which it opens up. Lacan is less positive about the possibility for 'true discourse', but, affected by a French (Durkheimian) sociological tradition which stresses the importance of community, he makes an (albeit implicit) contrast between secure identity in traditional communities and the modern individual who must 'oscillate between narcissistic rivalry and a correlative neurosis of self-punishment' (Dews, 1987: 236).

Second, both writers are concerned with the nature of truth. Habermas (1971)

devotes a great deal of space in *Knowledge and Human Interests* to attacking Nietzschean perspectivism (in which the world comprises a multitude of incompatible accounts, some of which triumph through the exercise of will and coercion). The critical theory tradition to which Habermas adheres must presume the nature of truth in order for critique to be possible. Habermas's (1981) defence of the possibility of truth informs his attacks on poststructuralist (and, more recently, postmodernist) theories. It is important to note that, unlike other post-structuralist writers (such as Foucault and Lyotard), Lacan does not accept Nietzsche's grim account, preferring instead a (more Hegelian) view of consciousness as arising out of a dialectic of recognition. That recognition under-pins the function of language to tell the truth, and speech reveals an individual's desire for truth (and others).

Third, both place a value on individual identity. This is evident in Habermas's description of distortions in communication, though his [113] claims that perfect transparent understanding could be achieved are tempered by a recognition that there will always be an extent to which 'the ego necessarily deceives itself about its identity in the symbolic structures that it consciously produces' (Habermas, 1971: 227). Whilst fragmentation and disintegration are celebrated in various post-Lacanian writings (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari, 1977), for Lacan such fantasies are a consequence of the development of conscious self-identity. The unconscious is produced in the shutting away of what is other to the 'self': 'the fantasy of the fragmented body is itself an index of the strength of the ego' (Dews, 1987: 234). The denial of self-identity, of truth and of communication, then, would, for both Lacan and Habermas, lead to something approaching psychosis. While their perspectives on the effects of reflexivity can be contrasted, this has to be understood in the context of their acceptance of the necessity of some degree of conscious reflection.

INTERPRETATION AND REFLECTION

The contrasting descriptions of, and reflections upon, reflexivity discussed so far can be explored further by considering one sample piece of discourse. The phrase I want to consider is '*I don't know what came over me*', and I will also use 'interpretations' of this phrase below to draw links with current developments in discourse analysis. It is a phrase I have used, and which you may also have used. I have often been puzzled when I have spoken or heard it, and wondered what it might mean above and beyond, below and compressed within the bare words. It is interesting, in addition to the issues it raises about particular relationships between a speaker and listener, for the general problem of accounting for our use of discourses we dislike. When we speak, we are often 'spoken' by discourses, and positioned as subjects in ways we may often try to resist. Our personal relationship to language is tense, contradictory, ambiguous. This is one crucial aspect of discourse dynamics that a critical psychology should address.

The statement 'I don't know what came over me' can be deconstructed. As part of a discourse it may function to refuse responsibility for action. As a rhetorical device within a (specifically male) discourse which justifies sexual excess, for example, it would reproduce images of gender tied to activity and passivity. It would also be possible to situate this within psychoanalytic repertoires of [114] not immediately explicable unconscious forces which have developed from popularised versions of Freud. Within the phrase allusions (to coming) can be located in particular repertoires of sexuality. The

interrelationship of these meanings, these repertoires, can be explored, and the historical reasons why they connect could then be understood in terms of power. Such an understanding requires just the kind of reflection on the social conditions for the emergence of discourse that Habermas and (less explicitly) Lacan recommend. However, it is when we move into the fine grain of the phrase that the issue of reflexivity becomes more apparent.

In this single statement of eight words there are: (i) the evocation of immediately unaccountable feelings ('what came over', 'what' it was, with the uncomprehended 'it' as a resource which may be a mere accounting device or the placing of something which needs to be explored further, which is as yet 'Id'); (ii) the splitting of experience (such that the 'I' at the beginning of the statement is the 'I' that 'don't know' how it happened to an other, 'me', 'me' as object rather than the subject of events, but a 'me' who was once and will again be 'I'); and (iii) the appeal to an implicit temporally grounded excuse for, and moral comment on' action (in which the position of the 'I' as subject is metaphorically above the 'me', and is marked as a place from which to comment as an 'Above-I'). Did you check that the statement contained eight words?

The statement 'I don't know what came over me' has appeared twice so far, now three times' and then in parts, and each reading addresses you as reader in a different way. (Its repetition may also become an issue. Did you check that the statement contains eight words?) The reading of texts is crucial to discourse analysis, for discourses address subjects, they appeal to the attention of the reader in distinct intellectual and emotional modes. One traditional way of interpreting such texts (traditional in both psychology and in psychoanalysis) is to turn attention to the speaker of the text. 'I don't know what came over me' becomes a 'problem' to be investigated, and when the reasons an *individual* intended (consciously or unconsciously) it are discovered, the puzzle is solved. In contrast, discourse analysis often finds itself with texts in which there are only readers (for it is often impossible to turn to the author to ask them what they meant). It is not possible to investigate the author of the text, and it would not necessarily help the (discourse) analyst to divine a speaker's/writer's intentions in order to locate the statement [115] in a repertoire. Instead, we need to turn attention to our place in the text as it addresses us. The 'I' evoked *in* the text as it is read is what should concern us. It is your and my reaction, the way in which the text engages you and me as subjects which is important, for the connotations of the phrase will help us to locate it in broader systems of meaning which operate regardless of individual intention.

I have suggested some discourses in which the statement 'I don't know what came over me' could live, and some further thoughts on what is being said within it about the relationship between an 'I', 'me' and 'it'. It would, of course, be reductive to say that this is the interpretation, and leave it at that. We have to contextualise it. One of the problems with the traditional academic psychological textbook treatments of psychoanalysis is that the impression is given that it is possible to provide definitive interpretations regardless of context (Richards, 1989). As part of a human science, however, a variety of psychoanalysis which is applied to texts, and the discourses which inform those texts, can only offer plausible suggestions as to what may underly a text and what it may conceal. This is where the accounts Habermas and Lacan offer are useful, for they call for descriptions of the dynamics underlying discourse which are concerned with relationships, symbolically maintained relationships which contain particular distortions

which have to be unravelled. Lacan leaves little outside language in his account, but just enough for language to produce an 'ego' experienced as real (Parker, in press). I now want to bring Habermasian and Lacanian readings to bear on the statement, readings which *require* a further specification of possible occasions in which the statement would be read/heard.

Interpretative contexts

I contrasted Habermas's and Lacan's conceptions of reflexivity, but not in order to arrive at a judgement as to which is correct and which mistaken. I will now outline some contexts for my sample statement, in order to support two suggestions about reflexivity. The first is that we need a judicious blend of the two notions of reflexivity, of (i) the way it is possible to reflect on discourse and (ii) what the effects of that reflection are. We can employ *both* notions of reflexivity, and it is useful to do so on different occasions. When and where we adopt the line that events and relationships are rendered usefully transparent through reflection or the argument that these matters [116] would be obscured further by an attempt to reflect is a strategic decision. The second suggestion is that neither notion of reflexivity on offer is sufficient. We have to go beyond the accounts that people offer, or texts that we read, both to decide when to adopt a Habermasian- or Lacanian-inclined reading and to contextualise the things we are analysing. I will describe occasions on which a Habermasian view and sympathy for reflection may be of value and occasions on which a Lacanian reading more suspicious of the benefits of reflexivity would be appropriate.

First, consider the use of the phrase in the context of a political scandal, perhaps in the extreme case of an officer in a dictatorship explaining orders which led to deaths of dissidents. Another use might be by a union bureaucrat explaining his or her agreement with a disastrous wage and conditions agreement in a meeting with management. In these instances, the warrant 'I don't know what came over me' can be explored further, and the form and function of the phrase can be understood as being a *distortion* of a state of affairs. The phrase operates both to individualise the issue and to obscure what has been going on. We could say that we need to see things 'as they are'. Following Habermas, we could say that an understanding of how and why the phrase operates to justify murder or betrayal, and how and why the speaker has investments which are concealed by the use of the phrase, would be emancipatory.

But consider other occasions, perhaps in the context of someone excusing themselves eating a box of sweets which were a present for someone else. Another setting 'might be the attempt of a lover to placate their partner after saying something hurtful. Now, in these instances, the warrant 'I don't know what came over me' could be interrogated further, but it is perhaps more appropriate to adopt a Lacanian view of the way in which a reflection on the use of the statement re-positions the addressor and addressee in relation to one another. Perhaps, in the worst of scenarios, the attempt to reflect operates to intensify the problem because a double-bind has unwittingly been set up. At the very least, the statement represents what is happening, and the re-establishment of a relationship is accomplished by the fact that a warrant was offered, rather than what the *content* of the warrant was. The drive to reflect makes it impossible to accept attempts to repair a split with a simple 'I didn't mean to say (what I said)'. In some senses, of course,

such a statement, any statement, could not be so simple, but what these [117] occasions demonstrate is that there are times when 'reflexivity' itself becomes a problem rather than a solution. Discourse analysis advocates reflexivity because 'talk has the property of being both *about* actions, events and situations, and at the same time *part* of those things' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 182). Being 'part of' the action makes it impossible for the analyst to treat subjects as if they were objects, but it also calls for a different view of what 'subjects' are.

DILEMMAS, CONTRADICTIONS, DYNAMICS

The 'model' of the 'person' which critical psychology has been searching for but has so far been unable to find is one which conceives of subjectivity as *the point of contact* between the individual and the social (rather than opting for one or the other). The activity of reflection is crucial here, but not the key to something else. Two general issues follow from this: first, that it is appropriate on some occasions to refrain from reflection; and, second, that different texts may be read in different ways because of the way they are constructed. Just as there are different occasions in which certain analyses of 'I don't know what came over me' could be employed, so there are different research circumstances in which particular varieties of discourse analysis are appropriate. An underlying assumption here, of course, is that whatever variety of psychoanalysis we adopt, the vocabulary Freud developed allows us to reflect on our reactions to these texts, and on how the discourses they describe affect us.

One single notion of reflexivity is not sufficient, and a problem shared by Habermas and Lacan is that neither provides an adequate account of the relationship between language and 'the real'. For Habermas, the concern with the possibility of an 'ideal speech situation' is part of a conception of social structures and their amelioration in which it is the systematic distortions which are the problem rather than the interests they serve. For Lacan, 'the Real' (Habermas's 'outer nature') is 'impossible', always outside 'the Imaginary' (Habermas's 'inner nature') and 'the Symbolic' (roughly corresponding to Habermas's 'society') (Dews, 1987). Alternative formulations, a little easier to accept, mark the distinction between what is possible and what is impossible to change: 'the opposite of the possible is certainly the real' (Lacan, 1979: 167). In order to determine how to use the notion of reflexivity, we need other criteria. We need both a moral position (in which we are able [118] to appreciate the role of accountability, rights to speak and desire) and a political position (in which we have an understanding of the wider circumstances in which the statements are made). A combination of these positions would amount to something approximating a critical realist view of discourse, social structures and experience. Reflexivity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for an understanding of relationships and how they are reproduced in discourse, and it is not necessarily a step in the right direction when taken on its own. If it is employed as if it was the solution on its own, it may be worse than no help at all insofar as it fails to problematise power relations.

Two caveats to my argument are necessary here. First, it should be said that in these discourse approaches, there is an identifiable political motivation, with the authors' commitment to anti-racist politics (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Billig *et al.*, 1988) and feminism (Hollway, 1989) clearly marking the content and presentation of these texts.

(Another text, *The Politics of Mental Health* (Banton *et al*, 1985), should also be mentioned here as employing Foucauldian styles of both discourse theory and psychoanalysis to develop a critical account of mental health practice. It has had some influence on the development of discourse work in psychology, and carefully uses a reflection on its own accounts as a way of problematising power relations.) The contradictions, and possible pitfalls I identify, are mitigated by a political stance in these cases. A problem is that as discourse analysis becomes more popular, is recuperated, it will be less likely that such checks will operate.

A second caveat is that these cases do, or could, employ psychoanalysis merely as a research tool. It is not possible to draw strict analogies between the analysis of a text and a psychoanalysis in which the person speaks back, and insofar as there is a therapeutic effect in this work it is secondary to the political effects of researching particular topics and empowering those who are studied and who read the accounts. In a therapeutic setting, the following of paths of description or reflection is judged, carefully chosen as the moment warrants, perhaps somewhat in the manner I have suggested it should be chosen in discourse analysis. The problems I identify are, again, problems that will attend the popularisation of a 'method' in psychology in which such moral/political judgements become less important than the drive to collect results.

In addition to the question 'what model of the person is [119] presupposed by discourse analysis?', and a second question 'what notion of reflexivity does psychoanalysis adopt?' (if it promises to provide the answer to the first question), we need to introduce a third question (which I have been addressing through the course of this book) which is to do with how we step back and offer a wider account which contextualises the activities of psychology, reflexivity and psychoanalysis. The solution is not simply to opt for one of the styles of discourse analysis, but to read them again with different notions of reflexivity in mind, to bring some psychoanalytic concepts to bear on these writers' discourse, and to assess how these concepts could play harmful and helpful roles.

These debates serve to emphasise that people cannot' as discourse analysts admit, have 'perfect insight' (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 177). These debates also serve to deconstruct, by the same token, the claim that discourse analysts who recognise the potentially reflexive nature of their work are 'simply more honest' (*ibid.*: 182). The recent developments inspired by post-structuralism, both in uses of the approach and in hermeneutic rebuttals, provide ways of thinking about the value of reflexivity, reflexivity that Habermas emphasises and the negative aspects of which concerned Lacan. An overall advantage is that the employment of psychoanalysis would serve to protect discourse analysis against a recuperation by 'scientific' behaviourist or cognitive theory, and bring it, without retreating into 'humanism', closer to developments outside psychology.

Dilemmas and contradictions

The choice of models of the individual in a discourse-analytic psychology carries with it a host of issues and complications, and the way I have posed the ecological and psychodynamic alternatives in these last two chapters has been to 'suspend disbelief' and sympathetically explore each of them. For an ecological psychologist, the speculations about internal cognitive states (and it is difficult not to treat the structural division of the

mind into libidinally charged agencies, the operation of defence mechanisms, the account of the perception of relationships as marked by transference and so on as cognitive matters of some kind) make the psychodynamic model as unappealing as some of mainstream cognitivist psychology's pictures of the mind. For a psychodynamic writer, the ecological approach could be suspected of romanticising an unmediated contact between [120] the individual and the world, and then between the individual and others. The fantasies of direct perception are no less dubious (and rooted inside the mind, and in infancy) than the cognitivist desire to predict and control.

The reflexive strands of discourse theory, in the sociology of science and then in the playful writings of some of those in the Discourse Groups, would want to problematise all such 'models': 'why fix the image of the person in this way?' In part, the opposition to models here is symptomatic of a deeper suspicion of any overarching theoretical framework (or 'metanarrative'). Those taken with rhetoric would question, quite rightly, the ways in which images of the individual and the social are used to bring off different effects. The rhetoric of ecology, for example, has resonances with friendly green attitudes and functions as an opposition to hard scientific cognitive psychology. This makes opposition to it seem reactionary and bad-tempered. Psychoanalytic rhetoric plays the trick, of course, of constructing an opposition between traditional experimental psychology and psychodynamic varieties, and then discrediting opponents (and anyone else who demurs) by alluding to mechanisms of repression and defence. What the theories do is more important than what they are. The discourses of ecology and psychodynamics are bound up with overall representations of the world, and a focus on these representations could also highlight the way experimental practices have absorbed Gibsonian 'alternatives', and the way psychoanalytic practice allows some categories of person (merely) to speak and some to interpret. How we choose between models of the individual, then, is complicated by the rhetorical and representational issues discourse analysts address. These issues in turn bring us back out of the limited frame of these two chapters, back to the wider context explored in the three parts of this book.

Dynamics

The different discourse traditions focus on different aspects of the powers of language, but the texts they work on are embedded in relatively enduring structures of power and resistance. The vocabularies of ecological or psychodynamic psychology are also framed by cultures preoccupied with the nature of the individual. In some respects the argument traced through the course of the book is clear. I followed the line that Foucauldian work on language is a [121] useful resource for discourse analysis, but that it is possible to employ criteria for the identification of discourses and that a realist account is necessary to contextualise those discourses. This means that we need to resist the view popular in postmodern accounts that there is nothing more important than language and the view popular in psychology that internal cognitions allow us to use discourse. In other respects, I have been less certain. I have wanted to argue that we should make discourse analysis say something about institutions, power and ideology, but that it is not intrinsic to the approach that it do that. I took up the claims that a postmodern state of culture is now in place, and argued that it was not (perhaps because I wished it was not). Now (in a manner disturbingly in keeping with the postmodern spirit), I have proposed models of

the individual which are not revealed truths, but simply descriptions, vocabularies, repertoires. What is mistaken and what is correct about these different vocabularies will have to be developed in debates which are rooted in individual and discourse dynamics outside psychology. [end of page 121]