

Parker, I. (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Part II

Cultures

[pp. 43-44]

The analysis of texts has to be placed in cultural context, and an understanding of discourse dynamics developed in an account of tensions and transformations in culture. The two chapters which make up this second part of the book draw upon the realist argument outlined in the previous chapter. The ‘metanarratives’, or dominant discourses, of modernity which are traced in Chapter 3 both permit, and close off, explanations of society and individual experience. These discourses can be connected with material changes in the organisation of space and bodies, and political responses to those changes. The metanarratives of modernity are discourses which describe (and prescribe) ‘truths’ about individuals and social behaviour. I take one text in Chapter 3, a novel written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and show how the discourses of science, progress and personal meaning are used. I show how the ‘dilemmas’ which these discourses set up are contested and resolved. As well as offering an example of a discourse analysis of literature, this exercise provides an opportunity for exploring the ways in which power and ideology are produced, maintained and challenged at a discursive level.

Our understanding of these changes is contrasted, in Chapter 4, with the turn to ‘little stories’ that current preoccupations with postmodernity encourage. It is possible here also to sketch the contours of the cultural context in which psychological research comes to focus on ‘discourse’. Descriptions of postmodern culture have drawn attention to the decline of the wide-ranging discourses about individuals and society which arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whilst I explain why the term ‘postmodernity’ is mistaken, I show how the postmodernism found in many social [44] sciences has a reality, and has mixed effects on research. The discourse about discourse which discourse research reproduces, the thorough-going scepticism which it provokes and the reflexivity it advocates are manifestations of postmodernism. The chapter concludes by examining the ways in which reflexivity ostensibly bridges, and the way it actually intensifies, the *modern* gulf between the social and the individual. [end of page 44]