

Parker, I. and Shotter, J. (eds) (1990) *Deconstructing Social Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Part Two

POWER AND SCIENCE

[pp. 89-90]

The texts examined so far are located in practices; the next five chapters situate social psychology in sets of practices in which psychologists enjoy power and their subjects are at the sharp end. For social psychology as a laboratory-experimental discipline with roots in America at the beginning of this century, the 'subjects' are these individuals manipulated by experts who attempt to extract data from them. Ian Parker sketches out the links between social psychology and scientific management, and then goes on to show how the 'subject' does not fare much better in the alternative forms of social psychology that emerged at the end of the 1960s. There is in both the orthodoxy and popular critiques a dangerous notion of abstraction at work. In order to deconstruct the power of the discourses that make up social psychology we have to go further and look at the surrounding culture, including the recent 'post-modern' changes in western culture which have made deconstruction so popular. Crucial discourses are those that allowed modern individual subjectivity to come into being as a body observed and regulated by psychology as part of government. Nikolas Rose carefully traces the ways in which these discourses enmesh its subjects in regimes of power. Taking Foucault as a guide, it is possible to produce a 'genealogy' of psychology which shows it produces certain types of truth. Deconstruction facilitates a continual unravelling, and (like genealogy) it does not pose a critique from another 'true' standpoint. This is unnerving, and Edward Sampson makes it clear in his chapter that there is a point at which the undoing of concepts, discourses and practices may have to stop. His use of Foucault is taken forward to raise questions about what changes might be occurring in western culture after modernity has run its [90] course, and extended to allow for an alternative progressive vision of 'embedded individuality'. John Bowers is more pessimistic, and the links between power, science, and the discourses which make up cognitive psychology (and cognitive social psychology) are starkly elaborated in an overview of abstraction from the Turing test to the Strategic Defense Initiative. Here again is a powerful example of the way texts, and the discourses that inform them, produce 'truth' - this time permitting us to see the intimate and necessary links between cognitivism and militarism.

These academic deconstructive, and associated genealogical, studies of power are subversive. The problem that faces a social psychologist doing research, engaged in the practices we are arraigning, however, has not been addressed. How can subjects resist? Kum-Kum Bhavnani's chapter brings the deconstruction of power into direct contact with the political issues, and shows how her practice as a researcher can empower those who are usually used and then forgotten. An opposition that urgently needs deconstructing (all the more so as it is an opposition that post-structuralism often encourages) is that between the silence social psychology routinely imposes on its subjects and the giving of a voice to them. While pluralists may be satisfied with letting everyone have their say, it is clear not only that this is insufficient but also that this solution is at times downright unhelpful. In order to deconstruct power, there must be an understanding of the overall political context that distributes it. [End of page 90]