

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

*Part Three*

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SUBJECTIVITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

[pp. 153-154]

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The texts, discourses, and practices that hold social psychology together have a particular power. The deconstruction of texts and power focuses, in Part 3 on the question of subjectivity. Texts engage and trap people in a range of subject positions, and it then becomes almost as difficult for a social psychologist to escape as it is for those they study. Continuing a theme raised in Part 2, one consequence of this is that attempts to simply give a voice to subjects (or respondents or interviewees) end up reinstating the privilege a benefactor has as one who can generously bestow rights to speak. John Shotter draws attention to this problem, and takes up the idea that an alternative progressive social individuality should be pitted against the competitive, possessive subjectivity western culture has produced. Traditional social psychology always contains within it specifications for the ideal subject. These specifications are sometimes called 'models of man'. Intergroup theory is one such theoretical framework, and, put under a little pressure by Mike Michael, the supposed concern with the 'social' collapses to reveal a mechanistic picture of the (masculine) individual.

Deconstruction as a method for the subversion of texts from within has been useful to radicals in social psychology, and poststructuralism has been looked to to indicate how the work could be done. At the same time, however, a much looser sense of 'deconstruction' has been informing some critiques. This work would lie under the third meaning of deconstruction we outlined in the Introduction. David Pilgrim prefers to keep his distance from Derrida and Foucault: his work both attempts methodologically to respect the subjective reality of the participants in the study, and the topic of his research is psychotherapy – an [154] endeavour which attempts to respect and release personal meanings. This raises some issues which then set the context for a consideration of deconstruction and psychoanalysis. What Derrida is to texts, and Foucault is to power, Lacan is to subjectivity. Janet Sayers, then, brings, together an account of Lacan's work, and situates this in an overview of psychoanalytic views of gender. Psychoanalysis has operated in a contradictory way as a set of texts and practices with regard to women. At times it is deeply reactionary, at other points (and with a selective use of Lacan's writings) it has empowered feminists, a fact which has many repercussions for the deconstruction of other disciplines which claim to be concerned with social relations.

The feminist uses of deconstruction bring us back to politics. It is not possible to engage in any critical project in the human sciences (reconstructive or deconstructive) without addressing the political implications of the theories we use. Erica Burman assesses the claims made for post-structuralist accounts of gender, and brings feminist concerns to bear on the debates. Deconstruction does open up contradictions in the discipline. The question, which is addressed in Chapter 15, is whether we should be satisfied with the perpetual conceptual housecleaning that the approach provokes or whether we should be making things more uncomfortable for social psychology by basing our deconstruction in a political critique. [End of page 154]