

# **Signs and Classrooms**

**Historical Perspectives on the Role of Signs in Human  
Development, with Particular Reference to an Urban  
Classroom**

**John Hardcastle**

**Institute of Education University London**

**Submitted to the University of London in fulfilment of the  
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**November 2003**



## **Abstract**

The role of language in development has been a central theme in post-war English. However, the European history of ideas about the role of signs has been insufficiently appreciated. I aim to enrich readings of contemporary urban classrooms by recovering something of this history. As the culmination of this work, I trace the story of a poem, written by a Black student in a London classroom, back into the history of discussions and debates that a class conducted with itself over five years. From perspectives provided by the history of ideas and recent work in social memory, I show how the student's representation of a childhood recollection (a visit to the site of a former plantation) was mediated and shaped by 'pedagogical artefacts'. I give a history of one such artefact as an instance of the role of signs in a contemporary classroom.

A picture of language as human invention was drawn in the first instance during the European Enlightenment. From this picture a seminal theory about the role of signs in the mastery of mental operations emerged. On this view, memory and imagination depend upon signs. In the aftermath to the French Revolution, language was linked to conceptions of citizenship and human advancement. In Germany, the picture of language was redrawn in the light of Kant's epistemology, and connected to an educational ideal of self-cultivation. In the nineteenth century, 'cultural' psychology attempted unsuccessfully to combine a notion of signs in the development of higher mental functions with findings in experimental psychology. Subsequently, the introduction of a distinction between mental 'contents' and mental 'acts' fostered new research into the role of signs in consciousness. Concurrently, an ethical vision of symbolisation as the 'common ground' of humanity issued from a philosophy of symbolic forms. As a whole the thesis seeks to show the continuing relevance of this history.

# Contents

<b>Title Page</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. The Locke-Condillac Tradition: The role of signs in the development of mind</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2. The Idealist legacy: German discussions of the origins and the nature of language</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3. Signs of Enlightenment: The formation of a European education ideal</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>4. The Nineteenth-Century Legacy The role of signs in the development of the higher mental functions</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>5. On Common Ground: Cassirer's work on symbolization</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>6. Grinding the Wind: Excavating memory and imagination in a London classroom</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>309</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

I should like to thank Tony Burgess for his generous advice and patient support and Jane Miller for all her help and encouragement.

## Introduction

*I never knew at the time  
I had an idea with no real meaning*

Kevin (age 15), *Piece of the Past*

When Hackney Downs School opened in 1876, *The London Illustrated News* reported admiringly that it was ‘constructed of red brick and Bath stone dressings, in what is called the domestic Gothic style’. The building was planned to accommodate five hundred boys, with fifteen classrooms ‘fitted on the Prussian system’, a library and a large semi-circular theatre capable of seating eight hundred persons. The school is gone, the brick and Bath stone dressings obliterated. One morning last December, I pressed against the galvanized fence that borders the site and recalled my time teaching there.

My aim is to tell the story of a particular classroom and to describe something of the learning that went on there. This will entail recounting events that occurred over a long cycle, five years in all. I shall attempt to reconstruct a retrospect of a class’s history and the only way that I can reconstruct it is through a ‘reading’ of the past, that is, through multiple acts of ‘remembrance’. Inevitably, what is recalled will be shot through with the reader’s preoccupations and prejudices. Such is the historian’s work - a compromise with objectivity. The material traces of lessons – tapes, students’ scripts, scraps of writing, textbooks and so on - have been gathered and sifted for what they might hold of the past. But it is only through continual acts of interpretation – readings and re-readings - that such traces become charged with meaning. As the German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, put it, ‘historical objects have true being only so long as they are remembered’. Yet material traces have a solidity of their own, and reliable historical reconstruction begins with empirical evidence. I have mainly fragments to work with. Though incomplete, they must be selected, sorted and organized in a coherent fashion to tell the story properly. The problem of

interpretation will be a familiar one to students of the arts and humanities. Every act of interpretation, every reading is also a 'rewriting' because 'interpretation never comes to a complete standstill.' The so-called 'hermeneutic problem' comes to the surface whenever and wherever people try to reach agreement. For Cassirer, we understand ourselves as well as others through the medium of signs which provide us with the common ground on which humanity depends. Interpreting children's meanings will be especially important in the final part of this study, where I look at the relationship between memory and imagination in the writing of a Black student. My strategy overall, however, is to enrich and deepen a reading of a London classroom through an engagement with the writings of thinkers who have enlarged my historical understanding of the role of signs in human development.

Elsewhere I have argued for a bridging theory of education that is capable of connecting language with history and the broader currents of social and cultural change.<sup>1</sup> I was reflecting on concerns that had occupied me as an English teacher in Hackney school, and I was calling for a unified approach to language, literature and culture at a moment when English appeared to be fragmenting. Similar arguments and reflections are at the core of this dissertation.

Much of the empirical material for the present study (written materials, tapes and videotapes) was gathered with colleagues between 1979 and 1984.<sup>2</sup> I need to acknowledge my indebtedness to them and say a word about what we were trying to do. We began with a shared interest in children's writing development. And we were especially concerned with the progress of boys from what we called 'West Indian' backgrounds. These concerns resonated with national debates about the provision for urban school populations in the light of what was perceived to be the 'failure of Black children in our schools'. (The setting up of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups in 1979, under the chairmanship of Anthony Rampton reflected the mood at the time). We were trying to look beyond what can be characterized broadly as 'deficit' views of Black (and working class) language and culture. In particular, we wanted to challenge the then

widely held view that non-standard dialects somehow interfere with children's progress in learning to write standard forms. So we looked closely at the relations amongst written and spoken, standard and vernacular language with a view to establishing the positive strengths of linguistic diversity in the eyes of teachers and policy makers. We aimed to influence practice among English teachers by describing the present and potential strengths of collaborative ways of working, especially in the processes of writing composition.<sup>3</sup> Looking back, I can see how some of our ideas about children's writing development fed into the work of the National Writing Project. However, the linguistic features of vernacular languages and creoles are not my chief concern here, although I touch upon them at some points in the story.

Subsequent research into children's writing has benefited from two powerful research traditions that have contributed substantially to work in English. The first tradition has been in applied linguistics and it has focused on the forms and structures of spoken and written language in relation to use in classrooms. The second tradition has its base in anthropology and it has fostered rich ethnographic studies of literacy in community settings. Both these traditions reflect a strong sense of the social and cultural embeddings of literacy, which is something that I am keen to retain.

I recall that we were encouraged by exciting work that was being done on the languages spoken in London schools by Tony Burgess and Harold Rosen.<sup>4</sup> Jane Miller's study of bilingual children, *Many Voices*, insisted on the importance of taking a cultural approach to difference in schools.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, such work helped to establish diversity as a fundamental principle for contemporary English teaching. Additionally, at the back of our early, shared concerns and interests lay the Writing Research Project that was based at the London Institute of Education (1966-71), and traditions of thinking about language and development that were established by James Britton and his associates there.<sup>6</sup> Britton's work drew upon linguistics, (particularly Roman Jakobson's hierarchy of functions), but it also had a substantial footing in

psychology and a characteristic concentration on the role of symbolization in children's development. When I first read Britton's work in the early seventies I was intrigued by the way that he drew insights from the German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer. These insights concerned the intrinsically human ability to create representations of 'actuality' with the aid of symbols of our own making - and to work on them. 'The world we respond to,' writes Britton, 'in fact the world towards which our behaviour is directed, is the world as we symbolise it, or represent it to ourselves.'<sup>7</sup> The notion that we work on our representations of actuality in order both to make sense of the world and to act in it has been a powerful one for me. And it provides a starting point for what is to follow, although the chapter, which specifically concerns Cassirer's work, comes in the second part of the present study. Essentially, Cassirer's pictured the role of signs in creating the conditions of possibility for what we might call 'experience'. Britton puts it like this:

Events take place and are gone: It is the representation that lasts and accumulates and undergoes successive modification. It is from representation we make that we gain a sense of our continuing existence in the world that has a past and a future, a world that remains in existence whether we are there to prove it or not. Cassirer calls the world of space and time a human world. 'Only symbolic expression', he says, 'can yield the possibility of a prospect and retrospect, because it is only by symbols that distinctions are not merely made, but fixed in consciousness.'<sup>8</sup>

In passages such as this one, generations of English teachers discovered a foundational principle for the kind of unified approach to language, literature and culture of the kind I that was seeking. But it was much later, and in circumstances I shall be describing, that I came back the problem of symbolizing and I began asking where such a picture came from in the first place. Much of this dissertation concerns the history of these and related ideas. As far as I know the intellectual history of the problem of signs in development has not been told in relation to English in education before.

I have mentioned the interest in children's writing development that I shared with colleagues. In due course, however, I began to develop separate theoretical interests. These grew specifically out of my efforts to get to grips with the life of urban

classrooms. Raymond Williams' work was especially important to me, as well as the works of the Soviet thinkers, Volosinov/Bakhtin and Vygotsky. Three themes in particular focused my attention: first, Williams' notion of residual and emergent cultural practices; secondly, Volosinov/Bakhtin's critique of the Saussurean sign and thirdly, Vygotsky's conception of the mediating role of signs in human development. Further to this, two questions began to emerge. 'How can we picture the curriculum subject English in ways that keep in touch with the present realities of social formation and cultural change?' And, 'How can we grasp the historical and cultural dimensions of children's learning and development in contemporary classrooms?' I wanted to investigate social and cultural interaction in classrooms in ways that attended adequately to issues of history and power. Yet at the same time, I was intrigued by the way that themes and arguments from Williams, Volosinov/Bakhtin and Vygotsky appeared to interlock and to confirm one another. This second current of interest carried me towards the project of recovering historical perspectives on the role of signs in human development. And thus, in a curious way, I found myself pulled in two directions. In one direction there was the intractable reality of a Hackney classroom, and in another, there was a dauntingly complicated history of European ideas. Slowly, the notion of carrying forward problematics – questions, themes and ideas - with a view to deepening and enriching a reading of a contemporary classroom began to take shape.

I have learned much from two traditions in classroom discourse analysis. In the mid-eighties, research by socio-linguists into the underlying regularities of classroom interaction contrasted strikingly with discourse analyses from research perspectives inspired by continental thinkers, especially Foucault and Lacan (Walkerdine and Urwin, Venn).<sup>9</sup> Socio-linguistic analyses of classroom discourse uncovered the underlying patterns of interaction that typify classrooms such as IRF (Initiation, Response and Feedback). From a different set of theoretical assumptions, competing analyses of classrooms emerged ('incommensurable discourses' Pennycook calls them). The 'unified, rational subject' of western psychology was under attack from post structuralists and deconstructionists, and 'radical' ways of thinking about

subjectivity and power in relation to classroom discourse beckoned. Work that I did with Tony Burgess in the eighties reflected our shared interest in the potentials of such modes of analysis at the time. But for me, there was always a peculiar tension between insights gained from fine-grained analyses of classrooms and the empty philosophical outlook of post structuralism generally. I couldn't square the anti-humanism with the rich picture of human agency that I had met in the work of the three thinkers I mentioned above. What is more, I became increasingly suspicious of the way that continental ideas gained currency here and in the USA in a manner that removed them from the historical contexts that had given rise to them in the first instance.<sup>10</sup>

Historical perspectives on the way that pictures of language have altered over three centuries are central to the present study. I needed to explain how and why figures like Locke and Condillac, Herder and von Humboldt, Wundt and Brentano, Cassirer and Vygotsky fit into the present scheme of things. And I also wanted to say how and why these particular thinkers might enrich readings of contemporary classrooms.

I begin with Raymond Williams because his work leads me directly to the problem of language studies before the advent of modern, structural linguistics. Williams' work has resonated continually for me since I first read him in the sixties. 'I feel myself committed to the study of actual language', he writes: 'that is to say, to the words and the sequences of words which particular men and women have used in trying to give meaning to their experience.' This remark comes in the Introduction to *Culture and Society*, a work that first appeared in 1958, and it contains the germ of a problem that Williams returned to again and again, which is to do with the relations among language, human activity and history. Indeed the long theoretical chapter, 'Language', in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) represents a sustained discussion of just this problem, as Williams explains in conversation with members of the editorial committee of *New Left Review*. They have been speaking about the notion of the arbitrariness of the sign:

The notion [the 'arbitrariness' of the sign] was introduced in opposition to the idea that the sign was an icon, and it is certainly true that there is in general no necessary relation of an abstract kind between word and thing in language. But to describe the sign as arbitrary or unmotivated prejudices the whole theoretical issue. I say it is not arbitrary but conventional, and that the convention is the result of a social process. If it has a history, then it is not arbitrary – it is the specific product of the people who have developed the language in question.<sup>11</sup>

Behind Williams account of the sign stands his reading of Volosinov's critique of Saussurean linguistics.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet thinker accepted the notion of arbitrariness only in so far as it describes the conventional nature of the internal relation between the two components, the signifier and the signified that go to make up the sign.

Volosinov objected to the notion of arbitrariness because it fails to capture the way in which signs are continually made and remade as part of the social process.

Williams puts it like this:

...the systematic character of language itself is the result, the always changing result, of the activities of real people in social relationships, including individuals not simply as products of the society but in precise dialectical relation both producing and being produced by it. The failure to see this led to the idea of language as a certain socially available quantum of signification which is never fully realized, of which all individual speech-acts are instances; this especially in the harsher theorization of sixties' structuralism which was very different from Saussurian linguistics.<sup>13</sup>

Williams insists upon language as constitutive, human activity: the business of making and remaking signs on which all social activity depends. 'Human beings made language,' he says, 'and they will remake it, not just setting out to do so – though they do sometimes – but as a normal ongoing process in the course of their full social experience.'<sup>14</sup> In the light of such insights I began to envisage English classrooms as places where the ordinary miracle of language making goes on routinely, and where real children in history – not abstractions like 'the child' or 'the learner' - use words in trying to give meaning to their experiences.

Williams remarks that the notion 'arbitrariness' was taken up by structuralist theorists of the sixties in a manner that differs strikingly from the way the concept originally appeared in Saussurean linguistics. This is a crucial point, and one that

J.G. Merquior underscores in his critique of French structuralism and post structuralism, *From Prague to Paris* (1986):

Today the single notion most generally credited to Saussure is the idea of the arbitrariness of the sign: the independence of the linguistic sign from non-verbal reality. The concept of the arbitrary sign is something of which structuralism has made heavy, and indeed heavily ideological, use. Yet Saussure did not at all assert the arbitrariness thesis as a novelty.<sup>15</sup>

Intriguingly, Merquior goes on to list some of the thinkers for whom the notion of 'arbitrariness' was a 'commonplace' of linguistic theory:

They include Hobbes (1655), Locke (1690), Leibnitz (1703), Wolff (1709), Berkley (1733), Breitinger (1740), Condillac (1746), Turgot (1751), Lessing (1766), D. Stewart (1792), Fichte (1795) and Hegel (1817).<sup>16</sup>

The significance of this list can only be truly appreciated in the light of discussions and debates that have gone on in the relatively new domain of history of language studies: linguistic historiography. Theories about language – the nature of language, where language comes from and what it is for – need to be connected to a wider history of ideas to gauge their real significance for many different domains. We need historical perspectives to make sense of what we are being told. For this reason Merquior cites the work of the historian of ideas, Hans Aarsleff in the context of his claim that 'arbitrariness' - the notion that signs relate to ideas rather than to things as such – was already familiar to eighteenth century thinkers. We have to enlarge our picture of language studies to remove several serious misconceptions about the development of ideas and institutions. For without a shift in historical perspectives, Aarsleff argues, it is impossible to grasp 'the role that the study of language has played in literature, criticism, religious and social thought, science pedagogy, political ideologies and philosophy; and to see those interrelations as something more than the scattering of local encounters to be met in an ad-hoc fashion where they seem to occur'.<sup>17</sup> The important issue here is not especially about Saussure's indebtedness to earlier thinkers. Rather it is this: Aarsleff 's lucid history of European language studies implies a need for a complicated shift in historical perspectives that we have to make if we are to appreciate adequately the richness and the depths of 'pre-scientific' linguistic thinking. Such thinking, by definition,

predates nineteenth century philology as well as modern structural linguistics. Crucially, the thinkers that interested me at the outset, Williams, Volosinov/Bakhtin and Vygotsky were in touch with these earlier traditions of language studies.

I am hugely indebted to Aarsleff's work for the way that it has opened up the field of the European history of language studies in the modern period in a manner that might be related usefully to the history of English studies. Curiously, such perspectives are almost entirely missing from contemporary histories of English.<sup>18</sup> Tony Crowley's book, *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates* is exceptional in the way he has reconstructed discussions around standard language in the nineteenth century and for the way that he uncovers the cultural politics involved. Olivia Smith has also produced a superb, focused study of the social and political consequences of linguistic theories around the turn of the eighteenth century, *The Politics of Language*.<sup>19</sup> From the standpoint of the social historian, Penelope Cornfield has investigated how people have understood and described themselves in a variety of cultures in her edited collection, *Language, History and Class*.<sup>20</sup> Rosemary Aston has studied the reception of German thought in her book, *The German Idea: Four English writers and the reception of German Thought, 1800- 1860*.<sup>21</sup> She looks specifically at the work of Coleridge, Carlyle, Lewes and George Eliot from the perspectives of literary history. And Peter Burke and Roy Porter give a fascinating social history of the role that written and spoken language has played in shaping our sense of reality from the perspectives of historical anthropology in their book, *Language, Self and Society*.<sup>22</sup> However, further research is needed into the reception of Continental ideas about language that can be linked to the formation of English studies in particular and to education generally. Pictures of language were centrally important in the discussions that went on among the architects of the first modern education systems in France and in Prussia. Essentially, Aarsleff provided me with a standpoint from which to start to map the history of the problem of signs and development from the perspectives of an intellectual history of linguistic thought. Roy Harris and Talbot Taylor added further breadth and substance, especially in their book *Landmarks in*

*Linguistic Thought: The Western tradition from Socrates to Saussure.*<sup>23</sup> My discussion of the ideas of Locke, Condillac, Herder and von Humboldt draws extensively on their scholarship.

For Aarsleff 'the study of language' means something altogether broader than modern structural linguistics usually allows. He rejects the history of language studies as the record of progress towards modern linguistic science, and he insists instead upon the intrinsic interest that the subject might hold for contemporary readers. Thus he takes an unusually generous view of the field. 'By language study', he says, 'I refer not only to philology in the conventional sense but to any reasonably coherent and clearly formulated discussion that is specifically directed toward problems that arise in relation to language'.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Aarsleff has recovered the significance of work on language in the eighteenth century that specializing linguistics has largely ignored because, in order to establish itself as an independent 'science', linguistics has wanted to get away from 'speculative questions that 'scientific' linguistics as such could not hope to answer. Above all, Aarsleff provides the proper depths of perspectives on why language studies mattered to those who were engaged in them during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

We may think of the study of language as an activity that has few practical and intellectual consequences outside its own domain, whose territory may of course shift, expand and contract from one period to another. But during the years under consideration, [1780 –1860] language study – even when called philology – was not merely a matter of knowing the forms, syntax, phonology, historical relationships, and other aspects of particular languages. It involves questions of wider significance. What, for instance, was the origin of thought? Did the mind have a material basis? Did mankind have a single origin? Was the first language given by revelation or had man invented it in the process of time? Could etymology be made instructive without lending support to skepticism? It is possible to separate philology as a scholarly discipline, characterized by certain methods and subject matter, from these questions. But it is not possible to deal with its history without including them, providing that the aim is not merely to seek to understand connections between events.<sup>25</sup>

However, it has not been my intention here to attempt to replicate work done in the field of the history of linguistic thought. This dissertation does not aim to offer a

history of language studies as such. Rather, I have attempted to engage with ideas and debates that spring from Aarsleff's research for the way that they relate to English in education.

A striking feature of Aarsleff's account of the development of language studies in the eighteenth century concerns his reappraisal of the significance of the work of the French thinker, Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac. Two aspect of this reappraisal will concern us here. The first is the importance of Condillac's picture of language for the thinkers of the French Enlightenment. To give just one important instance that I shall be returning to, *The Encyclopédie*, which represents the supreme achievement of the French Enlightenment, was constructed upon the foundations of Condillac's epistemology. Secondly, Condillac evolved a theory of the role of signs in the developing mastery of mental operations, a notion which figures powerfully in the work of Lev Vygotsky and which has a central importance for the story I shall be telling. Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746), especially in the new translation by Aarsleff, opened a window onto the eighteenth century origins of the notion that mental life starts with the invention and use of signs.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in articles, chapters and books, Aarsleff argues convincingly that histories of language studies that begin with the achievements of Schlegel, von Humboldt, Bopp and the brothers Grimm – the founding figures of German philology – miss the seminal character of French eighteenth century linguistic thought. And much turns on the indebtedness of the Germans, Herder and von Humboldt to French thinkers, especially von Humboldt's indebtedness to Condillac dating from his contact with the *idéologues* in Paris in the eighteen nineties.<sup>27</sup>

To suggest something of the scale of what is at issue here I shall give just one illustrative example. This concerns Michel Foucault's attempt to give an historical account of the birth of the human sciences and to lay bare the 'fundamental codes' of our culture. But if Aarsleff is right – and I believe he is – then German philology is essentially continuous with the eighteenth century French linguistic thought, allowing for the fact that the motives and methods of Schlegel, Bopp and the Grimm

brothers were new. Aarsleff's history then is seriously at odds with the account of language studies that Foucault gives in his book *The Order of Things, An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1974) where he speaks of radical discontinuities – the famous epistemic breaks - between 'classical' and 'modern' modes of thought.<sup>28</sup>

I should make it clear, too, that I have elected not to focus on the history of language studies in England. My decision to concentrate on the European history of linguistic thought goes back to my interest in the way that themes and arguments from Williams, Volosinov/Bakhtin and Vygotsky appeared as part of a piece. Earlier, I touched on my reservations about structuralist and post-structuralist approaches. Reading Habermas proved a turning point. I learned much from Habermas' measured critique of Derrida and Foucault, and what he calls the 'unfinished project of the Enlightenment'.<sup>29</sup> However, it was largely through contact with European researchers I was prompted to reflect on my poor grasp <sup>of</sup> European ideas and especially my inadequate appreciation of the European Enlightenment.

The journey from Hamburg airport to the main railway station is a short one. The streets are wide and the traffic quick. Once, close by the railway station, I found myself among a group of 'West Indians'. It could have been Dalston or Railton Road. 'Wie geht's? W'appen'?' It makes little difference the manner is the same. Hamburg University is in Von-Melle-Park, a short walk from the U-Bahn. Founded in 1919 - Cassirer was Rector there until 1933 - opposite a railway embankment is the the main University building. It is less than imposing. In stone above the portico are carved the words: *Der Forschung, Der Lehre, Der Bildung*. <sup>To</sup> Research, <sup>To</sup> Teaching, <sup>To</sup> Cultivation. *Bildung*. It reminded me of Bakhtin's essay, *The Bildungsroman*, and the true significance of German, his second language began to dawn on me. Also I began to appreciate for the first time the complexity of the cultural ties that connected Vygotsky to German thinkers.

Then, one afternoon, during a seminar conducted entirely in English about standard language teaching in European multi-lingual schools, a German Professor remarked, half teasing, half mocking, '*Of course, we are all the children of Von Humboldt...*' It struck me as faintly comical. At the time, to be truthful, I had no idea what she meant.

Von Humboldt's linguistic thought provides the hub around which this dissertation turns, although in some ways his legacy is a problematic one.<sup>30</sup> Peter Heath's 1988 translation of von Humboldt's classic work on language, published posthumously by the Berlin Academy, *The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* (1836), with an introduction by Hans Aarsleff, enlarged my sense of the trajectory of Vygotsky's thought.<sup>31</sup> The chapters on 'The Nature and the Constitution of Languages as Such' and 'Inner Linguistic Form' implied powerful connections with familiar Vygotskian concepts, especially 'inner speech'. I soon became convinced that the Soviet psychologist was the inheritor of a powerful – I am tempted to say 'mainstream' – current of European linguistic thought that extends back at least as far as Locke. But, perhaps Aarsleff underestimates the distinctiveness of German ideas about language. He has rightly wanted to restore a proper picture of Condillac's seminal influence, and there can be no doubt that French debates about the origin of language were the forerunners of German discussions of the topic. Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis' appointment to the Berlin Academy of Science (1746) – he knew Condillac personally and corresponded with him – triggered protracted German discussions and debates about where language comes from and what it is for. Certainly, Herder and his contemporaries were deeply indebted to Condillac. But a combination of external and internal factors inflected the German discussions of language differently. Resistance to French cultural and political hegemony and the emergence of German philosophical idealism created the particular circumstances that shaped language studies in Germany for a century to come. Mindful of these circumstances, I have touched on French and German nationalism in the aftermath to the French Revolution. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer gives a clear, persuasive account of the powerful

Kantian element in von Humboldt's early linguistic thought.<sup>32</sup> I give a brief discussion of Kant's epistemology because without such an account it would be hard to appreciate the force of Herder's conception of 'expression' and the depth of von Humboldt's theoretical and ethical preoccupation with signification.

By and large, French thinkers were indifferent to German philosophy in the aftermath to the French Revolution. Ironically, as well as reading in Condillac intensively during his stay in Paris, von Humboldt also tried unsuccessfully to explain Kant to the *idéologues*. From Kant, German thinkers gained an extraordinarily powerful ethical vision of human development that issued in the educational ideal of *Bildung*, or self-cultivation. But, it was from the *idéologues* that von Humboldt gained practical knowledge of the setting up the first coherent state education system, which he later applied to the business of reforming the Prussian education system. Risking some repetition, I have tried to separate matters relating specifically to language from those pertaining directly to education as such, though inevitably there is some overlap. My overall aim here is to show the relevance of the history of such events and ideas for contemporary discussions in English in education. In particular I want to restore a 'sense of scope' that English is in danger of losing. However, I have not attempted to trace the reception of continental ideas about language in England. Such an undertaking is for the future.

\* \* \*

This dissertation is divided into three parts. Part One concerns the legacy of the European Enlightenment. I look at a change to the prevailing picture of language that occurred at the start of the eighteenth century. I begin with the legacy of John Locke. I show how his 'sensationalist' epistemology issued in a picture of language as human invention and how Locke's pictured language as a vehicle for communication. For Locke, words provided the means by which people reach common understandings, because with words thoughts can be conveyed between individual minds. Behind Locke's picture of language lay a crucial argument for the development of science about the public discussion of knowledge that is

independent of religious authority. Embedded in this argument is a view of a new kind of 'citizen'. I go on to show how the Abbé Condillac took up Locke's picture of language, how he constructed a theory of the origins of language and how he developed a psychological theory about the role of signs in the mastery of mental operations. On Condillac's theory, voluntary control of the faculties, specifically memory and imagination depends upon signs of human invention.

I move on from the discussion of Condillac's ideas to describe how debates about the origins of language, which began in France, entered a new phase with the German Enlightenment. I elected to concentrate on the works of Herder and von Humboldt for the way that these two thinkers especially developed powerful notions of the role of signs in the development of Mankind. I connect these notions to Kant's critical philosophy and I describe how Kant's epistemology underpinned both a radical conception of freedom and a new sense of individual human worth and dignity. I touch on the criticism that was levelled at Kant's system at the time, and how Herder's theory of the 'expressive' subject was made to stand in contrast to the Kantian 'rational subject of cognition'. I tell the story of Herder's *Treatise on the Origins of Language*, and I introduce the work of von Humboldt, saying why he thought that the study of language held the key to understanding the guiding principle of the history of Mankind. Then, I attempt to show how and why language was important for the setting up of the first state education systems in Europe by saying how language was linked to conceptions of citizenship and of human development. The German ideal of *Bildung*- self-cultivation - provides the focus for my discussion. Kant's epistemology is revisited, and the significance of his notion of individual moral development as the guiding principle of World history is underscored. Herder's 'genetic' theory of development is also described and related to his vision of education and I describe von Humboldt's role in the reform of the Prussian education system and the place of language studies in it. My line of argument is that the German thinker gained hugely from the time he spent in Paris in contact with the *Idéologues* at the moment when the French education system was being put in place.

In Part Two I concentrate on the legacy of the nineteenth century, and in particular the work of three thinkers: the ‘cultural’ psychology of Wilhelm Wundt, the philosophy of Franz Brentano and Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms. I have read substantially in the major works of Locke, Condillac, Herder and von Humboldt. With Wundt, however, I have relied on secondary works where primary sources in translation have been difficult to trace. My choosing to look at Wundt’s theories may seem puzzling. Woodruff Smith’s superb study, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920* convinced me that the founding figure of professional psychology merited a fresh look.<sup>33</sup> Nowadays, Wundt’s ethnic psychology receives little serious attention beyond standard histories of the field. Yet, at the close of the nineteenth-century Wundt’s international standing as the world’s foremost experimental psychologist seemed secure. I describe how Wundt developed a theory of the role of signs in the development of the higher mental functions, and I outline the way he tried unsuccessfully to combine experimental and anthropological methods into a form of ‘cultural’ psychology to tell the story of Mankind. The research programme which Wundt established in Leipzig in the eighteen-eighties, stands at a fork, where two specialising fields, linguistics and psychology, parted company. The picture of language that Wundt started out with in the eighteen-sixties was compromised by Saussure’s structural account of language as a system of differences. Additionally, his notion of mental ‘contents’ was superseded by a conception of mental ‘acts’ stemming from the philosophy of Franz Brentano. Yet Wundt’s expansive cultural psychology held out a notion of mind that extends beyond individual consciousness to include human cultural productions (call it ‘material culture’, though Wundt was not a materialist as such) including artifacts. By contrast with Wundt’s mental contents, Brentano’s conception of mental ‘acts’ points towards the rigorous analysis of mental behaviour for what it tells us of consciousness. The notion of mental acts has been seminal for developments in many fields including psychology, philosophy as well as literary theory. Following on from this, Brentano’s ‘phenomenology’ was hugely significant for many of Vygotsky’s contemporaries, especially for researchers working in the field of

perception. The Berlin Gestalt School was powerfully influenced by such ideas. Interestingly, the peculiar methodological difficulties that beset Wundt's research programme foreshadow the general crisis in psychology to which Vygotsky among others responded.

Finally in Part Two, I show how Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, especially his distinctive phenomenology, figured in contemporary discussions among psychologists about the role of signs in mental development and how these discussions related to contemporary developments in clinical psychology. I go on to suggest why his profoundly ethical vision of language as 'the common ground' of humanity continues to have resonance for education today. From the secondary literature, two studies of Cassirer have been especially useful to me. D. R. Lipton's book, *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany, 1914-1933* alerted me to the huge importance of a major study of German culture around the turn of the nineteenth century by Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890- 1933*. Lipton also provided me with a fascinating political backdrop against which to place a reading of Cassirer's major work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. In his book, *Cassirer, Symbolic Forms and History*, John Michael Krois' lucid discussion of Cassirer's philosophical journey beyond neo-Kantianism makes plain the philosopher's unique place in contemporary intellectual developments.

My decision not to include Vygotsky among the thinkers I discuss in Part Two may seem a strange one in the light of the way that I make use of his work in Part Three. However, rereading the Soviet psychologist from the historical perspectives that I have attempted to recover here is too great an undertaking and it will have to be postponed.

In Part Three, I turn to a Hackney classroom and specifically to the theme of learning and development in an urban setting. I tell the story of how a poem, *Piece of the Past*, came to written by a boy from a Caribbean family background who was

growing up in the local community. This entails tracing the origins of the poem back into personal history and the history of discussions and debates that the class conducted with itself over five years. In the course of the narrative, I connect the changing social relations among the children to history and to wider social realities. And I carry forward problematics from parts One and Two into a reading of classrooms. Additionally, I draw on recent work in social memory as well as perspectives from Vygotsky's writings on memory and imagination. Thus I aim to enrich my analysis of how a student's representation of a childhood memory was mediated by the semiotic materials to which he had access. Essentially, I have selected just one from many possible narratives to build up depth in the story I shall be telling.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hardcastle, J. (1985) 'Piece of the Past: Classrooms as Sites for Cultural Making' in *English in Education*, 19 (3), Autumn, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Hardcastle, J. *et al.* (1983) 'Growth community and control in secondary school writers', in B. Kroll and G. Wells (eds.) *Exploration in the Study of Writing*, London: Wiley.

<sup>3</sup> Graves, D. H. (1986) *Writing: children and teachers at work*, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

<sup>4</sup> Rosen, H. and Burgess, T. (1980) *The Languages and Dialects of London School Children*, London: Ward Lock.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, J. (1983) *Many Voices*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

<sup>6</sup> Britton, James *et al.* (1975) *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18*, London: Macmillan

<sup>7</sup> Britton, James, (1970) *Language and Learning*, London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, p.14

<sup>8</sup> Britton, James, (1970) p. 18 The quotation is from Cassirer, Ernst. (1944) *An Essay on Man*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Sinclair, J. McH. and Coulthard, M. (1975) *Towards an Analysis of Discourse*, London: Oxford University Press and Stubbs, Michael (1983) *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*, Oxford: Basil Blackwood and Cazden, C. (1988) *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning*, Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann. Julian Henriques, Wendy Holloway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine have looked at discourse from post-structuralist perspectives. Their book, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, London: Methuen, was something of a landmark in educational research when it was published in 1984. The aim of the book was to demonstrate that the individual is not a fixed or a given entity, but rather a product of historically specific practices and social regulation – the product of discursive regimes. On this view, subjects are produced or constructed within historically evolved ways of speaking. Tony Burgess and I tried to work with such ideas, See Hardcastle, J. (1985).

<sup>10</sup> See especially, Dews, P. (1987) *The Logics of Disentigration: Post Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London: Verso; Judt, T (1992) *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, Berkeley: University of California Press, Habermas, Jürgen (1989) *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT; Habermas, J. (1992a) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with assistance by Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: Polity Press;

- Habermas, Jürgen (1992b), *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated from the German by Fredrick Lawrence, Oxford: Polity Press; Habermas, Jürgen (1994) *The Past as Future*, interviews with Michael Haller, translated and edited by Max Pensky, with Foreword by Peter Hohendahl, Cambridge: Polity Press; Honneth, Axel (1993) *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; Honneth et. al. eds. (1992) *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; Merquior, J. G. (1986) *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post Structuralist Thought*, London: Verso; Merquior, J. G. (1985) *Foucault*, London, Fontana Press-Collins; Taylor, C. (1995) *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- <sup>11</sup> Williams, Raymond, (1981) *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, London, Verso, p.330
- <sup>12</sup> See Volosinov, V. N. (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, edited by L. Matejna and I. R. Titunik, New York: Seminar Press.
- <sup>13</sup> Williams, (1981) pp. 330 – 331. See also Williams, Raymond (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, where he discusses Volsinov's picture of language at length in the second chapter, which focuses on language.
- <sup>14</sup> Williams, (1981) p.331
- <sup>15</sup> Merquior, J. G. (1986) p. 12. For Merquior, Saussure's outstanding achievement was that he gave modern linguists its main analytic tools. He managed to achieve this by weaving together various strands of linguistic thought: 'the unmotivated nature of the verbal sign; the difference between signified and signifier; the principle of the primacy of synchronic analysis; the need for distinguishing the structure or code of a given language (*langue*) from the boundless wealth of its infinite messages, uttered and as yet unuttered; and last but not least, the concept of 'value', pointing as it did to the fact that language as a working system rests on a complex network of differences – differences between units as well as between lower and higher levels of units...' (Merquior, J. G. (1986) p.13).
- <sup>16</sup> Merquior, J. G. (1986) p.12.
- <sup>17</sup> Aarsleff, Hans, (1984) *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, London, Athlone, p. 3.
- <sup>18</sup> See, Baldick, C (1983) *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Dixon, J. (1991) *A Schooling in English: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press; Doyle, B. (1989) *English and Englishness*, London: Routledge 1989, Eagleton, T. (1983) *Literary Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Mathieson, M. (1975) *The Preachers of Culture: A Study of English and Its Teachers*, London: Allen and Unwin; Palmer, D. J. (1965) *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature from its Origins to the Making of the Oxford English School*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Shayer, D. (1972) *The Teaching of English in Schools, 1900-1970*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul; Hunter, I. (1988) *Culture and Governmen: The Emergence of Literary Education*, London: Macmillan Widdowson, P. ed. (1982) *Re-Reading English: Essays on Literature and Criticism in Higher Education*, London: Methuen.
- <sup>19</sup> Smith, O. (1984) *The Politics of Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- <sup>20</sup> Cornfield, P. J. ed. (1991) *Language, History and Class*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- <sup>21</sup> Ashton, R. A. (1994) *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860*, London: Libris.
- <sup>22</sup> Burke, P. and Porter, R. eds. (1991) *Language, Self and Societ*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- <sup>23</sup> Harris, R. and Taylor, T. (19) *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought: The Western tradition from Socrates to Saussure*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul..
- <sup>24</sup> Aarsleff, Hans, (1983) *The Study of Language in England, 1780 – 1860*, London, Athlone Press, p.6
- <sup>25</sup> Aarsleff, Hans, (1983) p.4
- <sup>26</sup> Condillac, Etienne Bonnot de (2001) *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, originally published in 1756, translated and edited by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- <sup>27</sup> For a clear account of von Humboldt's indebtedness to the ideologues see, Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt (1990b) 'From Sign to Signification: The Herder-Humboldt Controversy', in Wulf Koepke (Ed.) *Johann Gottfried Herder: Language, History and the Enlightenment*, Columbia, South Carolina,

---

Camden House; Streuver, Nancy (1995) *Language and the History of Thought*, edited by, Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

<sup>28</sup> See Aarsleff, Hans, (1983) pp. 23-24

<sup>29</sup> Habermas, Jürgen (1989) *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; Habermas, J. (1992) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with assistance by Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: Polity Press; Habermas, Jürgen (1992a), *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated from the German by Fredrick Lawrence, Oxford: Polity Press; Habermas, Jürgen (1995) *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, translated from the German by William Hihengarten, Cambridge: Polity Press; Habermas, Jürgen (1994) *The Past as Future*, interviews with Michael Haller, translated and edited by Max Pensky, with Foreword by Peter Hohendahl, Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>30</sup> See, especially Raymond Williams' discussion of von Humboldt's linguistic legacy in *Marxism and Literature* (Williams, 1977, p. 31).

<sup>31</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von, (1989) *The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, known as *The Kawi Introduction*, first published in 1836, translated from the German by Peter Heath, with an introduction by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1990).

<sup>33</sup> Smith, Woodruff C. (1991) *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*, Oxford University Press, New York.

## Chapter 1

### The Locke-Condillac Tradition: The Role of Signs in the Development of Mind

*Neither the naked hand nor the understanding left to itself can effect much. It is by instruments and helps that the work is done, which are as much wanted for the understanding as for the hand. And as the instruments of the hand either give motion or guide it, so the instruments of the mind supply either suggestions for the understanding or cautions.*

Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Book I, 1620<sup>1</sup>

*In order to develop the real cause of the progress of the imagination, contemplation and memory, we must inquire what assistance these operations derive from the use of signs.*

Abbé de Condillac, *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge: Being a Supplement to Mr Locke's Essay on Human Understanding*, 1756<sup>2</sup>

Language begins with the need to co-ordinate human activity and ends as the means by which we gain mastery over our mental operations - such a picture of the role of signs in the development of mind was drawn in the first instance by thinkers of the European Enlightenment. It arose chiefly from discussions about the nature of knowledge and it has been a focus for debate among philosophers, linguists and psychologists ever since. Indeed, it has shaped educational theories about the role of signs in the development of human capacities.

Discussions about scientific method in the seventeenth century turned on fundamental epistemological questions: questions over the place of scriptural interpretation in understandings of Nature and questions about what might be known

about the world with reasonable certainty. In the context of such discussions, the English thinker, Francis Bacon drew attention to the mediated nature of mental operations and the role of what he called, 'instruments of the mind'. Subsequently, a picture of the mediating role of signs in mental development arose when rationalist and empiricist thinkers counter-posed 'innatist' accounts of the already given nature of ideas and 'sensationalists' explanations of the way that knowledge derives from the senses, that is, experience.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the English philosopher, John Locke, argued against the idea that ideas are given to mind *a priori*. He claimed that ideas have their source in both the senses and in reflection. He also argued that words make combination of simple ideas into complex ones possible. Such arguments were framed by Descartes' separation of mind and body.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Cartesian thinkers divided consciousness from material (temporal and spatial) reality. Essentially, they split the world into two mutually independent realms. After Descartes, epistemological debates concentrated on the question whether knowledge comes from innate ideas given to mind (by God); or whether it derives from the impressions that sensations make on consciousness, what we might call experience, which is the view that Locke adopted. Centrally at issue was the nature – the existence, even – of the soul. What was at stake was a secular, political conception of the freedom of individual citizens to act responsibly in the light of what they could claim to know.

In this chapter I aim to show how the problem of signs in development figured in the ferment of ideas I have just sketched. Further to this, I want to suggest that a major shift occurred during the Enlightenment in the way that the link between signs and mind was pictured. With Locke, who set the intellectual scene, and then, later, with the French thinker, Etienne Bonnot, the Abbé de Condillac, a theory of the role of signs in gaining mastery over mental operations – a theory that linked signification to psychological development – was given its first, powerful formulation.

Together, Locke and Condillac brought about a new appreciation of the role of signs in the development of mind. What was new in their appreciation was an understanding of the link between word and thought and the connection between signs and the mastery of consciousness. As a consequence to this, the very substance of language took on a new psychological aspect, especially once it was suggested that language secures the necessary preconditions for discursive thinking. From these beginnings a theory about the mediating role of signs in the voluntary control and development of the higher mental functions (attention, comparison, imagination, contemplation, memory and judgement and so on) was evolved. We shall be particularly concerned with the role of signs in the development of memory and imagination in adolescents in the final part of this dissertation.

The Locke-Condillac tradition remains an intrinsically interesting one that foreshadows modern theories about signification as mind-constituting activity. Indeed, in a way that is not widely appreciated, this tradition has contributed substantially to contemporary theories about the role of signs in mastering psychological behaviour. One such theory of the role of signification in the development of mind issued powerfully in Vygotskian psychology of the 1920's and 30's. Intriguingly, the Soviet thinker was fond of quoting Bacon on the 'instrumental' character of words, yet, as far as I know, he never mentions Condillac. Vygotsky's psychology linked semiotic mediation to cognition in a socio-cultural account of mind. Yet the fundamentally social nature of language in human development – language's origins in social intercourse - was first truly appreciated by Condillac.<sup>4</sup> The intellectual history of Vygotskian psychology's antecedents in the Enlightenment has rarely been explored and I want to recover something of this intellectual history here, especially for what it might contribute to discussions in contemporary education.<sup>5</sup> I shall start with the picture of language that emerged from Locke's epistemology.

Locke developed a psychological theory to explain how complex ideas are built up out of the simple data of sensory experience. He did so without assuming the

existence of innate ideas. His starting point was the nature of human rather than revealed knowledge. Locke's interest in language arose chiefly from his epistemological concern with the origins and the nature of ideas rather than from an interest in language as such.<sup>6</sup> For the English philosopher and political theorist, the question of language was always of secondary importance to the problem of human understanding. Essentially, he wanted to establish the boundaries of what we can claim to know with reasonable certainty from the perspectives of the new spirit of science.

Locke tried to get clear about <sup>the</sup> way that the imperfections of language and what he called the 'cheat and abuse' of words causes serious misunderstandings among people. For Locke, words stood for ideas that have their separate existence in individuals' minds. Moreover, he grasped how commonly defined terms were essential for professionals such as scientists and lawyers who needed to establish and maintain shared public discourses across various contexts. Further to this, language-based misunderstandings also carry serious political implications, where the definitions of words like 'liberty', 'equality' and 'justice' have to be commonly understood if they are to be of any practical value.<sup>7</sup> The business of defining words therefore is hugely important.

Earlier, the Port Royal grammarian, Antoine Arnauld had offered a reasonable solution to the problem of defining words. With Pierre Nicole he wrote an influential treatise, *The Art of Thinking* (1662), in which he proposed the creation of a new, philosophical language:

Our best method of avoiding the confusion born of the ambiguity of words in ordinary language is to construct a new language with new words to which we join only those ideas we want words to express. For our new language we need not invent new sounds: those already in existence may be used provided that we regard them as mere sounds expressing no meaning. Then, using simple unambiguous words we specify the meaning to be joined to each such sound.<sup>8</sup>

For Arnauld, the relation between the sounds of words and the meanings that we ascribe to them – ‘nominal definitions’ - is an ‘arbitrary’ one (as it was for Locke) in which more or less ‘any sound is capable of expressing any idea we choose the so-called ‘arbitrariness of the sign’). But with what Arnauld called ‘real definitions’ we do not arbitrarily join ideas and words. Rather we operate with a word’s common definition and try to discover by analysis what other ideas are contained in the way it is used. *The Art of Thinking* was based on the principle known as ‘linguistic rationalism’, which remained extremely influential throughout the eighteenth century. Essentially it states that the structures of thought determine the structure of verbal expression.

Locke concentrated on the conventional nature of words. According to Locke, word definitions were a matter of public and therefore social agreement. Thus they were wholly conventional in character. He was not, like Arnauld, concerned with grammar as such. Although Arnauld held that the relation between the word (sound) and the idea it stands for is conventional one, the Port-Royal grammarians usually assumed that the classes of words were given.<sup>9</sup> The notion that word meanings were made by humans would have seemed strange to them. However, such a notion had serious implications because it suggested that God did not provide Adam with names and their meanings. Rather, Adam created them himself out of his own resources. There was no need then for the Church to hand down authoritative definitions, when meanings could be settled by people independently of the Church’s authority. On this view, signs were in no sense ‘natural’, which is to say somehow ‘derived’ or ‘copied’ from nature. Rather people invented signs because they needed to understand one another. ‘Men learn names, and use them in talk with others,’ as Locke put it, ‘only that they may be understood’. Language is predicated on the notion of people freely reaching mutual understandings (to co-ordinate their activities) about things in the world. This is a key principle, and I shall be returning to it.

According to Haris and Taylor, the story of the origins of names that is given in *Genesis* both supports and undermines Locke's argument:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air: and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof

*Genesis* II, 19.

The names of things originate with Adam. He was not charged with finding out the names that God had already given to the creatures. Rather, his task was to invent the names unaided. In the *Genesis* story he invents the names in complete isolation:

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

*Genesis* II, 20.

Plainly, the *Bible* does not support a notion of the social origins of words ('there was not found an help meet for him'). But it leaves open the possibility that the language that Adam invented was a 'perfect' language, and that the problems with words and their meanings came after the Fall. Thus it also leaves open the question of how people reach agreement over what the words stand for, what they mean and how they get defined.

Conceptions of the social nature of language and the 'arbitrariness' of signs have been foundational for modern linguistics and they remain important to linguists today. Locke was not a linguist however, he was chiefly an epistemologist and a political theorist, and the linguistic aspects of the sign were not his chief concern. Rather, his concern was with the nature of knowledge.

Locke's theory of knowledge was partly a form of philosophical 'sensationalism' in that he held that knowledge is derived from sensory experience. Sensationalists' arguments were directed against the doctrine of innate ideas, and Locke's epistemology was of the same sort. The notion that we are equipped with ideas at birth by God seemed to Locke to put questions about the nature and status of what we might claim to know beyond the realms of public discussion. By contrast, if what

we know comes to us through experience (rather than by revelation) then what we may claim to know is open to public discussion. It follows from this that the status of what we claim to know is a matter for people to decide for themselves and not a matter to be settled by the Church's authority. This principle has been an extremely important one for the way that it helped to establish modern scientific culture: scientific knowledge is established by publicly shared methods of inquiry and debate, not by religious dogma.

However, Locke's epistemology was only partly, not entirely 'sensationalist' in character. The main thing that he had to explain was the manner in which the material that comes from sense impressions is turned into ideas, thoughts and concepts. He introduced a notion of reflection to explain how the process works. In the following famous passage Locke proposes that all ideas can be traced either to human sense perceptions, or to reflection:

All ideas come to us from Sensation or Reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all character, without any ideas: how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To answer this I answer, in one word experience; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. These are the two fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have do spring.<sup>10</sup>

Locke was particularly interested in the ways that ideas that have been built up from the data of sensory experience are combined with experience<sup>gained</sup> from reflection.

Further to this, he made a crucial distinction between simple and complex ideas, and he held that complex ideas can be broken down into simple ones. (Analogously, the meanings of words can be broken down into their constituent parts). But he also argued that although ideas come to us from our sense perceptions, our capacity to transform what we receive into ideas, which is our capacity for thinking, is a given one. On this view, the faculty of reflection is given to mind *a priori*.

Paradoxically, by assuming that the 'faculty' of reflection was given *a priori*, Locke struck a compromise with the doctrine of innate ideas. It will be important to remember this compromise when we come to Condillac, who went further than Locke by reducing reflection to sensations. Thus he began to picture the active role of signs in thinking itself. Later, with the advent of 'scientific' psychology the focus shifted from the question of where language comes from to the source of the faculties. In the nineteenth century, psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt took up the problem of where the so-called 'higher mental functions' (reasoning, memory and imagination) come from. But whereas some psychologists concentrated on the workings of individual minds as 'natural' phenomena, others (a minority) argued that the higher mental functions, in contrast to the 'lower' ones, are somehow derived from history and culture, and that they depend on signs for their development.<sup>11</sup>

The chief point here concerns the way that Locke addressed the problem of how material that is derived from the senses gets transformed into ideas. To explain the process, he described the learning path of a newly born infant. Notice how important the business of retaining impressions and distinguishing among them over time is to the whole process.

Follow a child from its birth and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the mind by the senses comes more and more to be furnished with ideas, it comes to be more and more awake; thinks more the more it has matter to think upon. After some time it begins to know objects, which being most familiar with it have made lasting impressions. Thus it comes by degrees to know the persons it daily converses with, and distinguishes them from strangers; which are instances and effects of its coming to retain and distinguish the ideas the senses convey to it.<sup>12</sup>

According to Locke, experience presents us with ideas in two significant ways: first, through our sense perceptions; and secondly, through reflection. Further to this, he claimed that simple ideas are combined into complex ideas that take two forms. The first form consists in ideas of 'substance', that is ideas of things that have real existence in the natural world. The second form comprises ideas of 'mixed modes'.

By 'mixed modes' Locke means abstract ideas that have mental existence only, like 'justice' or 'liberty'.

To shed light on the relations among different kinds of 'mixed-mode' ideas and the words that stand for them, Locke invented a sequel to the account of Adam's task of naming things given in *Genesis*. This sequel was never meant to stand as an 'historical' account of language's origins as such. Rather Locke's story afforded him a way of speculating about what makes language possible in the first instance. Here is his account of how language arose in full:

One of Adam's children, roving in the mountains, lights on a glittering substance which pleases his eye. Home he carries it to Adam, who, upon consideration of it, finds it to be hard, to have a bright yellow colour, and an exceeding great weight. These perhaps, at first, are all the qualities he takes notice of in it: and abstracting this complex idea, consisting of a substance having that peculiar bright yellowness, and a weight very great in proportion to its bulk, he gives the name *zahab*, to denominate and mark all substances that have these sensible qualities in them. It is evident now, that, in this case, Adam acts quite differently from what he did before, in forming those ideas of mixed modes to which he gave the names *kinneah* and *niouph* [*jealousy* and *adultery*]. For there he put ideas together only by his own imagination, not taken from the existence of anything: and to them he gave names to denominate all things that should happen to agree to those his abstract ideas, without considering whether any such thing did exist or not; the standard there was of his own making. But in the forming his idea of this new substance, he takes the quite contrary course; here he has a standard made by nature; and therefore, being able to represent that to himself, by the idea he has of it, even when it is absent, he puts in no simple idea into his complex one, but what he has the perception of from the thing itself. He takes care that his idea be comformable to this archetype, and intends the name should stand for an idea so comformable.<sup>13</sup>

According to Locke's story, Adam invented a name for the heavy, bright substance: *zahab* (gold). The name that he invents refers to a category of things in the natural world that share the same two striking properties, heaviness and brightness.

Elsewhere, Locke makes it plain that 'it is impossible for every particular thing to have a distinct, peculiar name'<sup>14</sup> (Rather, names refer to ideas of objects). Simply attaching sounds to particular things wouldn't work because particular names would

not serve the chief purpose of language, which is to communicate thoughts. Locke puts it like this:

Men learn names, and use them in talk with others, only that they may be understood: which is then only done when, by use or consent, the sound I make by the organs of speech excites in another man's mind who hears it the idea I apply to it in mine when I speak it.<sup>15</sup>

According to *Genesis*, Adam created names for creatures without God's help and in Locke's story, too, he creates the name for gold, without help. First, he perceives two distinguishing properties that strike him. (Herder calls such distinguishing features '*Merkmale*'). In other words, first of all Adam gets sense impressions of heaviness and brightness and then he combines them by a process of abstraction into a complex idea to which he subsequently attaches a single sound, *zaha*, which becomes the sign for the idea of gold.<sup>16</sup>

However, on Locke's view, individuals' ideas are formed through separate, sense-derived experience. Thus they constitute the private domains (the mental 'furniture', or the mental 'property') of individual minds. Crucially, this view shadows a fundamental argument for the political principle of liberty of conscience:

...and every Man has so inviolable a Liberty, to make Words stand for what Ideas he pleases, that no one hath the Power to make others have the same Ideas in their Minds, that he has, when they use the same Words, that he does.<sup>17</sup>

But as a consequence of the individual ways that we form ideas we can never be absolutely sure that what one person means by his or her words is the same as another. We form our ideas separately. And crucially, we have the freedom to choose words to convey our ideas to others because the same meaning can be expressed, the same idea conveyed, in different ways.

Later, especially with German thinkers like Herder the emphasis shifted towards a notion of choosing words to *express* – not merely *convey* – the inner meanings, interests and intentions of speakers, and thus the dimension of creativity in the production of signs was expanded. But for Locke, the chief concern was with the

problem of human misunderstandings. 'One man's complex idea' he says, 'seldom agrees with another.' And as soon as we reflect on the significance of complex ideas like 'liberty', and 'justice', we can see exactly why his theory of language has mattered so much. One person's notions of 'liberty' and 'justice' – and, crucially, their whole conception of Man, and hence the politics that flow from it - seldom agree with another.

Locke's account of Adam's task, then, is linked to his political conception of individual freedom of thought, as Hans Aarsleff explains:

As in his political philosophy Locke insisted on Adam's ordinary humanity also in regard to language: 'the same necessity of conforming his ideas of substances to things without him, as to *archetypes* made by nature, that Adam was under, if he would not wilfully impose upon himself, the same are all men ever since under too. The same liberty also that Adam had of affixing any new name to any idea, the same anyone has still...' <sup>18</sup>

Today, like Adam we have the freedom to attach new names to ideas. But there is an important difference. Historically formed languages precede us, as Locke recognised:

[In] places where Men in Society have already established a Language amongst them, the signification of Words are very warily and sparingly to be altered...But in Communication with others, it is necessary, that we conform the *Ideas* we make the Vulgar Words of any language stand for, to their known proper Significations, (which I have explain'd at large already,) or else to make known the that new signification, we apply them to. <sup>19</sup>

We use words that are commonly available to us.<sup>20</sup> As the need arises, we define and, when necessary, redefine our terms to establish and to maintain mutual understanding. Ironically, it is in the freedom to attach new names to ideas that Locke located the chief cause of human misunderstandings. We choose words to convey our thoughts. And like Adam, we make *creative* choices, even when we attach old words to new meanings. In this sense, others' words are always of our own choosing, because we fill them with our own intentions and interests. But the high price we pay for individual sovereignty (in forming our own ideas) is that our intended meanings sometimes miscarry. Words don't signify the same ideas to the

people who ‘share’ them. So how do we ever manage to understand one another at all?

Ordinary conversations rely on common usage. But common usage is unreliable in professional domains such as science and the law. For technical discourses, definitions have to be consistent and relatively context-free. For instance, ‘gravity’ has a special meaning within the ‘scientific community’. Thus gravity constitutes a particular instance of the way that the codification of words, their usage and their definition has been important for scientific practices. Indeed, the same is true for all professional domains, including the church, the academy, the law, medicine, and so on. Indeed, such reasoning lies behind the seventeenth century ideal of perfecting a philosophical language.

The practical need to ensure that words mean the same thing in public discourses has shaped language studies in obvious ways. Paradoxically, perhaps, it sharpened linguists’ awareness of the way that word meanings change over time, where different definitions are compared. Typically, where more than one definition is possible, scholars have sought to settle the matter by tracing the *origins* of words, their etymologies, their semantic derivations and so on.

In an effort to track down the original and therefore ‘true’ meanings of words scriptural interpreters have attempted to reconstruct the ‘perfect nomenclature’ that was, according to orthodoxy, perfectly invented by Adam, but subsequently corrupted after the Fall. Additionally, antiquarians, etymologists and lexicographers gained impetus from Locke’s unorthodox picture of how language changes. (It was not until the nineteenth century, especially after William Jones’ discovery of an Indo-European language, and with the advent of German philology that language change was explained in a systematic way.

Why was Locke’s picture of language important at the time? One reason it was important was for the way that it challenged the prevailing religious orthodoxy about

where language comes from and what it was for. This orthodoxy was the so-called 'Adamic' orthodoxy in which language appears as revelation. On this view, Adam's naming of the creatures was inspired by divine knowledge of things. God to Adam revealed their very essences. Thus revealed (Divine) knowledge about the nature of the world might be recovered by rediscovering the original language.

Against such an orthodox account of knowledge of the natural world as Divine Revelation, Locke set a radical view of knowledge as derived from human experience. Crucially, this view accorded with the spirit of the new scientific culture. With Locke's story of the naming of things, Adam invents the names for the creatures. He doesn't guess their 'true' or 'right' (God-given) ones. Instead - this is the vital point - he *creates* them out of his own resources. And thus Adam's linguistic *creativity* is connected to a fundamental principle of human freedom.<sup>21</sup> As Locke notes: 'What liberty *Adam* had at first to make any complex ideas of mixed modes, by no other pattern but by his own thoughts, the same have all men ever since had'.

In essence, discussions over the status of scientific knowledge framed Locke's investigations into language. He wanted to set scientific knowledge of the natural world apart from and above dogma that was derived from scriptural interpretation. In the seventeenth century, the authorised picture of the origins of language proposed that since, according *Genesis*, the naming of the creatures happened before the Fall the original names that Adam gave them must have been their 'true' names.<sup>22</sup> Thus theologians and Bible scholars searched for the original Adamic language because, allegedly, it contained the 'true' essences of things - *revealed* knowledge about the natural world. Hans Aarsleff comments:

Still retaining the divine nature of their common origin, languages were in fundamental accord with nature, indeed they were themselves part of creation and nature. They were divine and natural, not human and conventional. Even after the fall, Adam was the greatest philosopher, etymologist, and naturalist who ever lived on earth. The authority of scriptural revelation ensured that languages held a nomenclature, that words did name species and essences. This is an essentialist and innatist doctrine,

and it agreed with the double conformity expectation of ordinary speakers [that words conform to both things and ideas, which seem the same, but which Locke insists are not]. Languages were a better avenue to the true knowledge of nature than the mere self-help of man's deceiving senses and imperfect reason.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, with the orthodox, 'Adamic' picture of language Adam attaches words to things according to their revealed natures. Thus, Adam's inventory constitutes a 'perfect nomenclature' that stands above man's ordinary understandings. And thus scriptural interpretation is set above scientific method. But Locke assumed that Adam had no special knowledge to guide him. Rather, he relied on the experience that was given to him through his sense perceptions and reflection.

Finally, there's another aspect of Locke's theory of language that I have not yet touched on. This is to do with the role of signs in the development of thinking, and it points us in the direction that Condillac's investigations would take. Locke assumed that the main purpose of language was communication. He presupposed that the chief function of words was the efficient transference of ideas from the mind of one individual to another. Thus, he speaks about language as '*the great conduit*', or '*the vehicle*' of thought, which was a common metaphor in Locke's day. On this view, language is the chief means by which we make our thoughts known to others. Without words our ideas would remain private.

Because language is alleged to enter the picture *after* the formation of ideas has already occurred it might be inferred that signs do not play a constituent role in the actual formation of ideas. Recall that in Locke's picture of language, speech is the production of articulated sounds that are signs of a speaker's ideas. For Locke, words are vocal signs standing for ideas. Ideas come first and words come second. But, according to Locke, language has another function besides standing for ideas. This is a psychological function. Words, he says, provide the means by which we register our thoughts. We can represent ideas of things to our selves with the aid of words – 'even when they [things] are absent'. Words make it possible to store ideas, and what is more they make ideas available for future reference. Signs make

recollection possible. They function as mental ‘tools’ (what Bacon calls ‘instruments and helps’) and without such ‘tools’ experience itself would be literally ‘unthinkable’. And thus memory itself depends on signification. But Locke stopped short of claiming that the mastery of mental operations - and hence all knowledge – is dependent upon the use of signs.

Condillac took an additional step. And once this step was taken, thinkers began to grasp the constitutive role of signs in the psychological processes of thinking in a radically new way. This change, which began in France, later spread to Germany, where language and thought were discussed in the light of the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, though not by Kant himself. Thinkers began to picture the role of signification, in the development of the faculties and, at a later stage, what were referred to as the ‘higher mental functions’. In sum, after Locke, signs took on new *psychological* significance as well as an epistemological one.

\* \* \*

Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, took up the picture of language where Locke left off. He systematised it and he extended it in a strikingly original way. Condillac put signification at the very centre of his epistemology and thus language was not, as it had been for Locke, a secondary consideration subordinate to epistemological questions. Condillac’s treatise, *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* (*Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746)), what I shall refer to as the *Essai*<sup>24</sup>, was written some forty years after Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*. In it Condillac argued with breathtaking insight that it is by means of signs that we gain conscious control over our mental operations. Crucially, he ceased to think about language as merely the vehicle for thought once he conceptualised the mediating role of signs in the development of mental activity.

Condillac, held that knowledge comes to us through sense-perception. Like Locke he was a ‘sensationalist’ thinker, and he was, if anything, more robustly anti-

Cartesian in his philosophical outlook. Whereas Locke had contended that ideas are formed by a combination of sensations and reflection, Condillac reduced reflection to sensations. Thus he rejected the doctrine of innate ideas outright, claiming that the chief faculties – attention, comparison, imagination, contemplation, memory and judgement and so on – were derived from the senses.

The key difference between Locke and Condillac turns on their different understandings of what language is for. This difference stemmed from Condillac's innovative conception of the active role of signs in thinking. Locke never developed such a conception, for which Condillac took him to task:

Thus, as the soul does not from the first instant control the exercise of all its operations, it was necessary, in order to give a better explanation of our knowledge, to show how it acquires that exercise, and what progress it makes in it. It does not appear that Locke addressed that question, or that anyone has ever blamed him for the omission.

The picture of language that Condillac gives in the *Essai* suggests that signs function to achieve mastery over mental operations - especially reminiscence, imagination and memory. Crucially, without the use of signs, he argues, man could never achieve *voluntary* control over these faculties. Thus language is no longer just the chief means of communicating ideas as it remained for Locke. Rather, language is fundamentally necessary for the development of thinking itself.

The process of gaining mastery, Condillac says, begins with the impressions that things in the world make on our senses. Essentially, consciousness is our awareness of sense impressions and attention refers to the way that we select certain sense perceptions from others. Further to this, we become aware of changes in our perceptions. We notice things both disappearing and recurring. Reminiscence ('I have seen this before') marks the beginnings of experience, 'for without it, every moment would appear to be the first in our existence'.<sup>25</sup> Imagination is the means by which perceptions are linked and with it the entire object fills the mind. With memory, however, the representation is only partial. In the early stages imagination and memory are beyond voluntary control. However, at a later stage, mind gains

mastery of imagination and memory with the help of signs. Thus, Condillac reduces Locke's combination of sensations and reflection to a single source in sensations.

Condillac condenses this extraordinary insight into the process of gaining control over mental operations into a single sentence: 'In order to develop the real cause of the progress of the imagination, contemplation and memory, we must inquire what assistance these operations derive from the use of signs.'<sup>26</sup>

In chapter four of the *Essai*, Condillac distinguishes among three kinds of sign: 'accidental' signs, 'natural' signs and 'instituted' signs. The nature of these different kinds of signs was unproblematic for the French thinker. (Later, with German thinkers, Herder and von Humboldt, the problematic nature of the sign would become extremely important from a psychological standpoint). In a closely argued passage Condillac claims that 'instituted' signs are necessary for achieving control over the operations of memory:

Memory, as we have seen consists only in the power of reviving the signs of our ideas, or the circumstances that attended them; a power which never takes place, except when by analogy of the signs we have chosen, and by the order we have settled between our ideas, the objects which we want to revive are connected with some of our present wants. In short we cannot recall a thing to mind, unless it be in some connected with something else that is in our power. Now a man who has only accidental and natural signs, has none at all at his command. His wants can therefore occasion nothing more than the repeated act of his imagination; consequently he must have no memory.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, voluntary control over 'signs of our own choosing' enables us to recall ideas *at will*. It is voluntary control, says Condillac, which distinguishes humans from all other species: 'Hence we may conclude that brutes have no memory; and that they have only imagination which they cannot command as they please.' Later, in the same chapter, he returns to the question of the essential difference between men and brutes. Whereas brutes have inferior 'souls', the operations of their souls (minds) are 'not subject to their command'. Thus he continues,

So long as we have acquired no habit of the imagination, contemplation, and memory; or the habit of the two first, is not subordinate to our command; we

cannot dispose of our attention as we please. For how indeed should we dispose of it, when the soul has no operations in her power? She passes therefore from one object to another, only as she is dragged by the impression of the different objects.

But as soon as a man comes to connect ideas with signs of his own chusing, we find his memory formed. When this is done, he begins himself to dispose of his imagination, and to give it new habit. For by means of signs which he is able to recall at pleasure, he revives, or at least is often capable of reviving the ideas which are connected with them. Afterwards he obtains greater command over his imagination, in proportion as he invents more signs, because he thereby procures more means of employing it.<sup>28</sup>

Condillac makes three inter-linked claims. First, he claims that sign use creates the necessary preconditions for the emergence of human intelligence. Second, he indicates the key role of signs in the development of the faculties –attention, memory, imagination and, crucially reflection. Third, he suggests the direction that the developmental path of the intellectual capacities must follow from the lower to the higher mental functions. Thus, in at least three striking ways, Condillac's ideas prefigure nineteenth and twentieth century theories about the role of signs in the development of the higher mental functions

Where did signs come from in the first place? We might expect that Condillac would rework the *Genesis* story in the manner of Locke. Instead, however, he merely conjectures that signs arose naturally - from human reflection. Thus, the question of 'reflection' moved centre stage. But herein lies a fundamental problem for Condillac's system. If reflection depends on language, how can he account for the degree of reflection that the invention of language itself required?

What a deal of reflexion, for example, was necessary for the forming of languages! And how great is the assistance which these languages afford to reflexion! But this is a subject for which I design several chapters... It seems to me that we could never make use of instituted signs unless we were capable of sufficient reflexion to chuse those signs, and to affix ideas to them: what is the reason then, some perhaps will object, that the habit of reflexion is to be only acquired only by the use of these signs? ...My answer is that I shall solve this difficulty, when I come to treat the history of language. In the mean time it will be sufficient here to observe that it has not escaped me.<sup>29</sup>

Condillac's account of the origin of language comes in the second part of the *Essai*. By contrast with Locke, he does not begin with the story of Adam's task. Rather, he imagines two children living in a state of nature. In the first instance, they have no language. With only two modes of 'natural' signs (cries and gestures) at their disposal, they lack the means of gaining voluntary control over their faculties - attention, comparison, judgement, memory and imagination. In this story, the children's mental activity arises initially from the stimulation they receive from their immediate environment. In other words, they respond with their senses. However the children have to change over from producing 'natural' signs restricted to two modes over which they have no voluntary control to producing artificial (what Condillac calls 'instituted' signs) as the need arises. Crucially, it is only by means of artificial signs - signs of their own making - that they are able to gain voluntary control over their mental operations. The key question is this one: 'How are they able to make such signs in the first place?'

Condillac promises that he will deal with this question when he comes to the history of language. Unfortunately, in the event, he failed to come up with an adequate explanation. Instead, he merely imagines that the children's growing familiarity with 'natural' signs over time will eventually, by force of habit, lead on to some kind of voluntary articulation that will constitute the production of 'artificial' signs. The failure to explain the production of 'artificial' signs constituted a major blind spot in Condillac's system. And this was precisely where the German thinker, Herder, directed his attack in his *Treatise: On the Origin of Language*.<sup>30</sup> According to Herder, Condillac presupposed exactly what he set out to explain.

Today, questions about the nature of language and meaning have a central place in philosophy. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this was not so. Language was not generally thought about then as holding the key to epistemological and metaphysical problems in the way that it is now.<sup>31</sup> That came later. It was the nature of mind itself - mind's relation to sensations, the constitution of ideas, their combination, the operations of reason and memory, 'the so-called

faculties' and the limits of what we can claim to know that chiefly mattered.

Locke was not an atheist, (he was a Christian), but his ideas reinforced Deism, and they contributed substantially to the intellectual climate of humanism in France.<sup>32</sup> Condillac's 'sensationalism', which emerged partly in response to Locke's ideas about language and mind became commonly associated with Republican, materialist, anti-Royalist and anti-clerical (anti-Catholic) politics. This came about partly from the way the *philosophes*, (especially) formulated a radical versions of 'sensationalism' that combined Condillac's epistemology with a doctrine of universal equality. Helvétius turned Condillac's doctrine like this: 'If all knowledge comes through the senses, then what a man knows depends completely on his experiences. Thus all men are equal in knowledge at birth and the only differences between men in later life are differences created by different experiences.'<sup>33</sup> Ideas like these cleared a path for the French Revolution. And later, in its aftermath they were at the core of debates around the fledgling French State education system. In sum, Condillac's sensationalist epistemology was commonly associated with godlessness during and immediately after the Revolution.

The Condillac tradition has been an extremely productive one. Condillac's theory of knowledge stands behind Diderot and the theory that underpins the whole project of the *Encyclopédie*. Later, Condillac's ideas were taken up in the aftermath to the Great Terror<sup>34</sup> by the French *idéologues*, who were the chief designers of the French State education system. They applied Condillac's sensationalist picture of language to the analysis of ideas, and it is a measure of the thinker's importance at the time that the first collected edition of Condillac's works was published in 1798. It appeared in connection with an unprecedented concentration on language, curriculum design and pedagogy, when the *idéologues* struggled to put the study of signs at the very centre of a secular, national, curriculum that aimed to produce a new kind of French citizen for the new order. However, it was a German thinker, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who transformed the problem of the sign as 'product' into the problem of signification as constitutive, human activity – the notion that we

make ourselves through language. And it was von Humboldt who recast the whole problem of signification in terms of psychological processes from the perspectives of Kant's critical philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> Bacon, Francis *Novum Organum, Book I*, first published in 1620, in Victor Harris and Itrat Husain (eds.) (1965) *English Prose, 1600-1660*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto and London, p.44.

<sup>2</sup> Condillac, Etienne Bonnot, the Abbé de (1771) *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge: Being a Supplement to Mr Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding*, edited and introduced by Robert E Weyant, Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, Gainesville, Florida., p 51.

<sup>3</sup> Descartes, René (1986) *Meditations on a First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, translated by John Cottingham, with an introduction by Bernard Williams, first published in 1641, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

<sup>4</sup> See the Introduction to Condillac, Etienne Bonnot de (2001) *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, originally published in 1756, translated and edited by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.xii-xiii.

<sup>5</sup> A notable exception is to be found in an excellent article by Chris Sinha: Sinha, C (1989) 'Evolution, Development and the Social Production of Mind' in *Cultural Dynamics*, Volume II, 2. I am deeply indebted to Sinha for alerting me to Condillac as a major figure.

<sup>6</sup> Locke, John, (1993) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (abridged) edited by John Youton, London, Everyman J. M. Dent. My discussion of Locke's picture of language is hugely indebted to the work of both Hans Aarsleff and Roy Harris. See especially Aarsleff Hans, (1984) *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, Athlone, London, 1984; Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*, Athlone, London; and Harris, Roy and Taylor, Talbot, (1997) *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought 1: the Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure*, Routledge, London,.

<sup>7</sup> See Locke, John, (1993), Book III, Chapter X, pp. 274-279.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Hollis, M (1973) *The Light of Reason: Rationalist Philosophers of the C17*, edited by Martin Hollis, p.269.

<sup>9</sup> See Harris, R. and Taylor, T. (1997).

<sup>10</sup> Locke, (1993), Book II, Ch. I, p.45.

<sup>11</sup> Against Locke's notion that knowledge is built up from sense perceptions of the external world, the German philosopher, Gottfried Leibnitz argued that the human mind grasps the nature of the external world after a certain amount of mental work has already been done. The notion that sense perceptions that are presented to consciousness have already been organised to some extent has been extremely important in the history of German philosophical psychology. (It runs through Christian Wolff and Kant. Perhaps this should remind us that an adequate account of the role of mediating signs in thinking cannot be constructed from a theory of signs or text independently of psychology.

<sup>12</sup> Locke, (1993) *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II Chapter I. 22. P. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Locke, (1706): Book III, Chapter VI, Section 46, cited in Roy Harris and Talbot Taylor, (1997), Chapter 3, p.38. My account of Lockes' reworking of the Genesis story is indebted to the detailed account that Harris and Taylor give.

<sup>14</sup> Locke, (1993) Ch. III, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Locke, (1993) Ch. III, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Later, philosophers and psychologists, who have been interested in the role of language in the formation of concepts, have suggested that we match the name to a given object's criterial properties. This entails sorting out which out of all the perceived qualities the defining ones, having first met the name. The given name or word acts as a kind of pivot around which concept formation turns. In this context, it is especially interesting to recall Vygotsky's experiment with coloured blocks of various

shapes and sizes which aimed to investigate the formation of scientific concepts. In the experiment each of the blocks is given a nonsense name, which the subject learns to distinguish by correctly identifying two criterial properties, height and surface area. Of course, the nonsense words are as it were 'given by the culture'. With scientific terms, the significance of the properties and their proper combination is given by science.

<sup>17</sup> Locke, (1993), Book III, Chapter II, section 8 p.230 (cited in Harris and Taylor, (1997), p 132).

<sup>18</sup> Aarsleff (1984 ) p 26.

<sup>19</sup> Aarsleff (1984) p 62.

<sup>20</sup> I am especially indebted to Harris and Taylor, (1997) here for their discussion of creativity in language in relation to Locke's ideas and for their discussion of the distinction between ordinary and 'specialist' or 'professional' language.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault has claimed that a significant linkage between man made language and a new conception of human freedom (the so-called 'birth of the subject') begins with Grimm, Bopp, German philology and the epochal change that he describes as the 'epistémé' of the nineteenth century. (Foucault, Michele, (1973) *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage Books New York, 1973). Locke's *Essay*, of course, was published around the turn of the seventeenth century, which suggests that Foucault gives a somewhat distorted picture of the history of language studies.

<sup>22</sup> Harris and Taylor (1997), p 38.

<sup>23</sup> Aarsleff, Hans (1984), pp. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Condillac, (1971).

<sup>25</sup> Aarsleff, Hans (1983) *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*, London, Athlone Press, p.20.

<sup>26</sup> Condillac, (1971), p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Condillac, (1971), p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Condillac, (1971), pp.57-58.

<sup>29</sup> Condillac, (1971), p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Herder, Johann, Gottfried, (1986), *Essay on the Origin of Language*, first published in 1772, translated from the German by Alexander Gode, in *On the Origin of Language: Jean Jaques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Languages*, and Johann Gottfried Herder, *Essay on the Origin of language*, translated with afterwords by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, Introduction by Alexander Gode, University of Chicago Press, London, 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Vries, Willem A de (1992), *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

<sup>32</sup> One of the founding figures of English philology in the nineteenth century referred to Locke's 'loathesome infidelity', which was representative of the Victorian's loathing for his philosophy. See Aarsleff Hans, (1984) 'Locke's Reputation in Nineteenth Century England' in *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, London, Athlone, pp.120-146 ;also Aarsleff Hans (1983) *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*, Athlone, London p.191.

<sup>33</sup> Helvetius, (1810) *Treatise on Man*, London.

<sup>34</sup> During the eighteenth century, sensationalist conceptions of mind took on an explicitly political accent in a radical theory that linked questions of social equality to education, though this development should not be attributed to Locke, who was as we have noted already, a religious man did not share such views. On this radical theory, education counts for more than birth. This then shocking assertion paved the way for the anti-aristocratic conception of the 'career open to talent'. Such revolutionary thinking issued from a synthesis of political theory, history, theories about the nature language and a conception human development. To give an important instance of the kind of the kind of radical theorising I have in mind, here is a commentator summarising a key argument from Helvetius' *Treatise on Man*,

If all knowledge comes through the senses, then what a man knows depends completely on his experiences. Thus all men are equal in knowledge at birth and the only differences between men in later life are the differences created by different experiences

Crucially, talents and virtues are not bestowed at birth, according to Helvetius, rather they are the outcome of life experiences – chiefly education - that a person receives over time. The question that Helvetius posed is as follows: '...are the talents and virtues of each individual, the effect of his [biological] organisation, or of the education he receives?' He continues,

---

‘I am of the latter opinion...If I can demonstrate that man is in fact nothing more than the product of his education, I shall doubtless reveal an important truth to mankind. They will learn that they have in their hands the instrument of their greatness and their felicity, and that to be happy and powerful nothing is more requisite than to perfect the science of education’

Thus, he denies the existence of a ‘providential’ hierarchy of innate abilities bestowed by birth that served to legitimate the highly stratified social orders of the *Ancien Régime*. Instead, Helvetius holds out hopes for education as a means of transforming the whole of society, which was a step beyond Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, who thought it unwise to provide an education that went beyond what social position required. Thus Helvetius contributed powerfully to what is essentially a French revolutionary doctrine which was formulated in the following manner: ‘Public instruction is first need of man in society and the first debt of man to society’

Arguments from sensationalist epistemology were used by the *philosophes* and later by their inheritors, the *idéologues*, after the fall of Robespierre, against the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Such ideas explicitly challenged the Catholic Church’s authority. Moreover, they were important for a secular conception of State education, especially one that sought to reduce or abolish the church’s role in schooling. And they were important too for establishing the fundamental principles of universal, secular education

## Chapter 2

### **The Idealist Legacy: German Discussions of the Origins and the Nature of Language**

*The activity of the senses must combine synthetically with the inner action of the mind, and from this combination the presentation is ejected, becomes an object vis-avis the subjective power and perceived anew as such, returns back to the latter.*

Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Kawi Introduction*, 1836.<sup>1</sup>

The picture of language and mind that Condillac developed in the first half of the eighteenth century was linked to French anti-metaphysical thought. By contrast, the picture that emerged in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century had a powerful metaphysical side to it. This chapter concerns German discussions about the where language comes from, what it is for and how it relates to mind. Essentially, the ground plan for German theories about language and its relation to mind was provided by Immanuel Kant, though Kant never developed a picture of language as such. Instead, it was Herder and von Humboldt who, above all, connected signification to an extraordinary conception of human development in history and culture.

Kant aimed to free humanity from the burden of oppressive authority and to end the tyranny of princes, despots and the confinements of the past by overthrowing religious dogma and mindless prejudice. What was striking about Kant's critical philosophy was his unwavering conception of ethical autonomy and responsibility. This conception rested on his theory of knowledge. Kant's epistemology turned on the idea that mind can only grasp what it has itself created. Before Kant, rationalists and empiricists had disputed the rival claims of mind and sensations in the production of knowledge. Kant retained both mind and sensations in his system, arguing that our knowledge of the world is gained through the synthesising interaction of perceiving subjects (thinking individuals) and perceived objects (material reality). For Kant, our intuitions about things in the world are rationalised by synthetic *a priori* categories. With the aid of the categories that are given to mind we make human sense of the world. Indeed, without the synthetic *a priori* categories human 'experience' as such would be impossible. Instead, there would be merely an undifferentiated flux - a meaningless tumult of sensations.

According to Kant, our relation to things in the world is never direct. We can never know 'the thing in itself', the *noumenon*. Rather, we (thinking subjects) can know objects (material reality) only as they appear in subjective consciousness, that is, as *phenomena*, which are produced by mind operating on nature. In sum, for Kant, the world we know is not grasped directly, but rather it is 'apperceived'.

Since Kant, the problem of subject-object relations has preoccupied many philosophers, especially German ones. They have posed such questions as, 'How does the thinking subject distinguish itself from the object of its own thoughts?' and, 'How can reason turn back on itself?' The chief advance after Kant came with Hegel, who argued the case that the subject and object belong to the same totality, and that reality can only be grasped in a dialectical fashion over time. Such metaphysical problems are important as a background to what follows, and particularly so for the light they shed on eighteenth century debates around the source, the nature and the function language. And the business of capturing the



nature of human reflection has been a key problem too. We shall be especially concerned with the relations between signs and the human capacity for reflection when we look at the pictures of language that were developed by Herder and von Humboldt.

Whereas Descartes had taught that all knowledge could be broken down systematically and analysed into common, simple elements. Kant, by contrast, emphasised the synthesising activity of mind in the apperception of reality as a whole. He stressed 'the unity in the manifold' of representations that are given in our intuitions. Mind, he said grasps wholes that cannot be decomposed Cartesian fashion into separate, constituent elements. Crucially, he emphasised the contribution of the 'knower' to what is known. Today, such a notion has become the constitutive feature of what has come to be known as 'constructive idealism'.

In Kant's critical philosophy the thinking individual – what is sometimes referred to as 'the transcendental subject of cognition' - occupies centre stage. Abstracted from place and time, Kant's 'disembodied' subject stands above objective reality and the world of 'things in them selves'. Indeed, one of the problems that thinkers have struggled with since Kant has been the bringing together of the 'transcendental subject of cognition' with flesh and blood, concrete individuals in history and culture.

Nowadays, it is widely held that the chief difference between rationalist conceptions of the subject and those conceptions of subjectivity that derive from critiques of rationality lies in their contrasting pictures of language. Indeed, contrasting evaluations of the Enlightenment have hinged upon critiques of the Kantian subject. Discussions in education – the status of its emancipatory claims, for instance - have frequently turned on the question of the constitutive role of signs in the 'construction' or the 'production' of subjects in discourse. Today, analysis of the role of signification and representation in identity formation is commonplace. However, in many such analyses the principles of individual psychology are

routinely subordinated to accounts of discourse as structure and system. I want to get behind the problem in this chapter by returning to the writings of some of the German idealist thinkers with a view to recovering historical perspectives that might usefully inform contemporary discussions in education.

Kant's epistemology underpinned both his radical conception of freedom and the educational vision it inspired. Crucially, he tied his conception of freedom to three things: individual moral development, accountability and responsibility. For Kant, an action is moral 'if, and only if' it is performed in accordance with universal moral law. He argued that the 'categorical imperative' - human ethical sense - provides the universal grounds for all moral judgements everywhere. Indeed, the universality of such judgements is crucially important in Kant's system. On this view, all mature, rational individuals can be freed from external authority to act according to their mature moral convictions because freedom in the Kantian sense is primarily an inward condition. But at the same time as individuals win freedom to act they must submit to external judgement because they are held accountable for their actions. For Kant, learning to take responsibility was the chief aim of education.

Such ideas have contributed powerfully to our modern sense of the value of individual lives. They provide the foundation for concepts such as education as a universal entitlement. Kant's radical conception of moral autonomy, tempered by duty, carried with it a compelling sense of individual worth and dignity. Thus, since the Enlightenment, such a secular sense of individual worth has been the cornerstone of liberal democracies.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, generations of thinkers have drawn upon or attacked Kant's notion of the rational individual - the 'transcendental subject of cognition'. And what is more, they have done so in ways that have held profound implications for many intellectual fields including some that were not established as independent disciplines in Kant's time - linguistics, literary theory, psychology, the social sciences, political economy - as well as for philosophy itself. Contemporary

‘deconstruction’, for instance, insists that coherent subjectivity is a fiction. Yet such has been the influence of Kant’s philosophy in the field of education that many of its fundamental tenets are commonly taken-for-granted in wholly de-historicised fashion. Here I want to underscore the foundational character of Kant’s epistemology and recall something of the criticism it met at the time.

\* \* \*

Since the late eighteenth century, Kant’s critics have drawn attention to difficulties with his system as a rational construct. Johann Georg Hamann, one of Kant’s contemporaries, flatly denied that there was a necessary connection between *a priori* propositions and true statements about the world. And here, crucially, language – signification – enters the picture. Reason, Hamann claimed, is language:

If I were as eloquent as Demosthenes, I would do no more than repeat one sentence three times: Reason is language, Logos. On this marrow bone I gnaw, and I shall gnaw myself to death on it. There still remains darkness on the face of this deep for me: I still wait for an apocalyptic angel with a key to this abyss.<sup>3</sup>

Hamann’s great insight was that thinking and speaking were not two processes but one. For Hamann, language was not a vehicle for transporting pre-existing ideas from one mind to another (as it was for Locke). Rather he believed it was the case that language constitutes mind itself.

Hamann’s insight held far reaching philosophical implications. It inspired thinkers, who were dissatisfied with Kant’s emphasis on abstract, transcendental reason, to attack his system. Herder, for example, took up and developed Hamann’s original idea. Hamann had argued vehemently that philosophers had failed to see that when they were studying ideas and concepts they were actually studying human ‘expression’. Thus, he writes, ‘With me the question is not so much: what is reason?’ but rather, ‘What is language?’<sup>4</sup> Following Hamann, Herder attacked Kant’s epistemology two polemical pieces: *Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason* (1799), and *Kalligone*, (1800). The chief line of these attacks was directed

against the *a priori* character of Kant's theory of subjectivity – in particular, the way that Kant's abstract 'thinker' (mind) brings knowledge into being with the aid of intuitions and the categories that are already given to mind.<sup>5</sup> Herder, by contrast, wanted to put the nature of the thinker first. Essentially, this was an assault on the abstract nature of Kant's theory of the rational subject. 'No one can make himself independent of himself,' said Herder, 'that is, place himself outside all original inner and outer experience, and...think himself beyond himself. That would be a *prius anterior* to every *a priori*; thereby human reason would cease before it had begun.'<sup>6</sup> By rejecting the Kantian transcendental subject of cognition, and by insisting on a flesh-and-blood thinking person who has been formed by historical events, Herder took a hugely significant step that pointed the direction for German philosophy of history as well as philosophical *anthropology*.

If Kant's synthetic *a priori* categories are indeed somehow dependent upon language, as several of Kant's contemporaries, (chiefly Hamann) argued; and if the origins of language lie in human invention, then claims about the transcendental, trans-historical status of the categories run into trouble. If humans invented language, then language made its appearance in history and the same goes for the categories. It follows from this that ways of seeing the world – outlooks, mentalities, norms and values are somehow deposited in the languages of 'historical peoples'. According to Hamann '...every court, every school every profession every corporation, every sect has its own language.'<sup>7</sup> Languages have their own historical particularities, which relate to the experiences of the people who speak them. (This idea re-emerges powerfully in Volosinov/ Bakhtin's marxist critique of the Saussurean sign as a form of 'abstract idealism'). If languages are cultural artefacts, then, the same applies to the categories that depend on them. They are not, as Kant had claimed, transcendental, changeless, and somehow outside history. They do not rise above place and time. The values and the standards by which we live are, on the contrary, peculiar to the societies, cultures and 'spheres of life' - the courts, the professions, the academy and corporations - that gave rise to them. And languages have been manufactured variously, both in space and time, to reflect or 'refract' the

experiences of the peoples who speak them. Interestingly, Kant was aware of this problem - it appears in his anthropological writings - but he does not seem to have been troubled by it.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas Kant erected the ideal of the autonomous, rational individual – the ‘transcendental subject’ - as a bulwark against prejudice, religious dogma and the arbitrary authority of princes and despots, Herder put the ‘expressive subject’ at the centre of things. Herder, who was a student of Kant, had always harboured a deep suspicion of the philosophers’ ‘brooding over transcendent, abstract words and word-sounds whose direct observation is denied to the human spirit.’<sup>9</sup> Thus, Herder followed Hamann, who thought that, ‘ideas and things can and must be studied only in their concrete, naturally occurring contexts, that is, as they occur in the thought that is actually used by human beings, otherwise they will be misunderstood’.<sup>10</sup> Not surprising, then, Herder chose to begin in a different place from Kant.

He rejected Kant's emphasis on the logical, formal conditions for knowing as a starting point. Instead, he stressed the role of subjective ‘needs’ and ‘interests’ of the ‘knower’ in what is known. He also insisted that it is through language that we grasp realities. How was this accomplished? According to Herder, humans possess a special power that he regarded as a creative capacity of the soul (*Kraft der Seele*), that enables us to seize upon reality as we find it. Crucially, he linked this creative ‘power’ of the soul to the production of speech.

*Kraft* is a metaphysical expression. Herder first used it to explain the impact of a poem on a receptive mind. As one historian of ideas has shown recently, the term *Kraft* was borrowed from contemporary philosophy, where it had already acquired a complicated meaning. ‘*Kraft*, is a difficult concept to define,’ he writes, ‘and though it was an essential component of most ontological and psychological theories of the German Enlightenment, nearly all of the philosophers who used it also struggled to find an adequate determination of its meaning.’<sup>11</sup> Essentially, *Kraft* suggests Herder’s notion of the creativity of the Human Spirit

Additionally, Herder's picture of speech was linked to a conception of the development of peoples and nations. Human difference emerged as a major theme in the late Enlightenment and the German reception of Voltaire's *Philosophy of History* (1766) marks an important moment in our context.<sup>12</sup> Voltaire had challenged orthodox religious assumptions about the efficacy of divine providence. Hitherto, the notion of divine providence had provided the organising principle for what was essentially a theistic conception of historical and cultural progress. Voltaire argued in the first chapter of his book, '*The Different Races of Men*', that the people of the earth are divided into entirely separate races. This claim ran counter to *Old Testament* accounts, as Voltaire's German reviewers were quick to show. These German reviewers also criticised what they saw as too narrow a definition of peoples and cultures. A quarrel ensued and, amidst the controversy, August Schlozer was commissioned to write an authoritative '*Universal History Curriculum*'. This curriculum was duly published in 1772, and Herder wrote a short damning review of it.

He devoted three paragraphs only to the key words in Schlozer's piece, accusing him of following Voltaire in his 'sweet mistakes of history'.<sup>13</sup> (Interestingly, Schlozer's work contained a strong ethnographic element - he it was that introduced the term). But Herder saw plainly that the real weaknesses of the *Universal History* lay elsewhere: it was too schematic, too abstract and, crucially, it lacked an adequate principle of historical development. One historian has summed up Herder's objections like this:

Thus Herder asked the question of the decade, namely where is the unifying factor in in Schlozer's conception of the history of world cultures, where are the organizing principles of direction, or to use Herder's term, where is the goal post?<sup>14</sup>

The 'question of the decade' was this: 'What is the organising principle of world history?' It was an especially powerful one. For Kant the answer was progress towards moral maturity. It was in the context of debate about the nature of historical

change that Wilhelm von Humboldt began to speculate that the key to discovering an organising principle lay in the diversity of human language structure and its influence on the mental development of Mankind.<sup>15</sup>

Herder introduced a form of cultural relativism into an emerging picture of human development. He sketched an 'internalist' view of human development in *Yet Another Philosophy of History for the Furthering of Humanity*, (1774). By 'internalist' I mean that he argued the case that it is both ethically and historically mistaken, to measure cultures in the way he claimed that French thinkers like Voltaire had done. They used categories, values and beliefs from outside the particular ways of life, customs and traditions of the communities in question. Thus, 'Herder freed the anthropology of the peoples of the globe from progress ideology, just as Voltaire had from divine providence a decade earlier'.<sup>16</sup> Where did Herder's cultural relativism come from? The answer is that he imported it from the picture of language that he had already developed in connection with his work on the origins of speech.

\* \* \*

I shall turn now specifically to Herder's picture of language and to the particular circumstances in which he wrote his famous treatise on the origins of language, *An Essay on Language*. In the late spring of 1769, the Berlin Academy set the prize-essay question: 'supposing that human beings were left to their natural faculties, are they in a position to invent language? And by what means will they achieve this invention on their own?' Behind the question lies a complicated history of intellectual exchange.<sup>17</sup> The essay topic had travelled to Berlin from Paris, and it became a long-standing stimulus for debate there.

By the first quarter of the eighteenth century Berlin Academy had grown provincial. It had lost much of the prestige it had once enjoyed in the days of Leibniz. But the reputation of the Academy was revived by Frederick the Great in the 1740s by the appointment of a Frenchman, Pierre Louis Maupertuis, to the Presidency, on the

recommendation of Voltaire, whom Frederick greatly admired. Maupertuis, who was a member of the *Academie des Sciences* in Paris, and the Royal Society in London, aimed to improve the international reputation of the Prussian institution.

In Berlin the influence of the French tastes and manners was everywhere. The official language of the Academy was French. Academic papers were occasionally accepted in Latin but rarely in German. From Berlin Maupertuis, kept in close touch with intellectual and scientific developments in Paris, especially debates around the origin of language. The publication of Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (*Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746)) had produced a flood of works written on the same and related topics, including Maupertuis' own *Reflexions philosophiques sur L'origine des langues et la signification des mots*, (1748). Maupertuis knew Condillac personally and, naturally, he discussed the origin of language question with him when he visited Paris in 1754 and in his correspondence with the French thinker.

It is hardly surprising then that, Maupertuis, should have introduced the question of the origin of language as a topic for an essay competition. What is surprising, though, and what needs explaining, is why Germans discussed the origin of language in Berlin for further twenty years. What sparked fresh controversy among them was the perception that Condillac had failed somehow to show convincingly how language first made its appearance.<sup>18</sup> His tale of two children, at a loss for language, who by force of habit, gradually acquire voluntary control over signs, failed to convince his German critics, especially Herder, who submitted the prize winning essay, *An Essay on Language* in 1772.

In the seventeen-sixties, it was commonly held that language was providential. However, the Berlin Academy framed a prize-essay question in such a way that it invited responses putting the case for language as human invention. Herder wrote the prize-winning *Essay on the Origin of Language* –or, *The Treatise* (*Abhandlung*).<sup>19</sup> In doing so, he drew on the work of Condillac, although

paradoxically he was highly critical of Condillac's account of language's first appearance. Herder's originality lay in the way that he changed the manner that the question was posed.

He divided his *Treatise* into three sections. The first section dealt with the roots of speech in the outward expression of inner feelings. He argued that humans share with animals the ability to make natural cries, but this on its own, is not sufficient to explain the origins of speech. And he makes a distinction between natural cries and human speech. (This distinction corresponded broadly to Condillac's division between 'natural' and 'instituted' or 'conventional' signs). Human speech, Herder says, depends on the uniquely human capacity for reflection, (*Besonnenheit*). It is just this 'faculty' that separates humans from animals because it provides the means by which humans both order the world and mediate their inward operations, which is what Condillac had argued earlier. However, reflection is singled out as the chief faculty. It is not as it appears in Condillac's account, one faculty among others.

Crucially, language is not represented primarily as a system of 'instituted' signs, but as an *act* of reflection. On Herder's view, it is reflective consciousness that enables us to grasp a distinguishing mark (*Merkmal*) from a flood of sensations. This provides the conditions of possibility for reminiscence. By such acts of primary signification we are able to recognise an object when we see it again. Moreover it is just this ability - to recognise and signify within a single mental operation - Herder claims, that makes us intrinsically human. Here is the 'epoch-making' passage in which Herder describes the whole process. I shall quote it in full:

Man placed in a state of reflection which is peculiar to him, with this reflection for the first time given full freedom of action, did invent language. For what is reflection? What is language? This reflection is characteristically peculiar to man and essential to his species; and so is language and the invention of language.

Invention of language is therefore as natural to man as it is to him that he is man. Let us simply develop these two concepts further: reflection and language –

Man manifests reflection when the force of his soul acts in such freedom that, in the vast ocean of sensations which permeate it through all channels of

the senses, it can, if I might say so, single out one wave, arrest it, concentrate its attention on it, and be conscious of being attentive. He manifests attention when, confronted with the vast hovering dream of images which pass by his senses he can collect himself into a moment of wakefulness and dwell at will on one image, can observe it clearly and more calmly, and can select in it distinguishing marks for himself so that he will know that this object is this and not another. He thus manifests reflection if he is able not only to recognize and acknowledge to himself one or several of them as distinguishing characteristics. The first act of this acknowledgement results in a clear concept; it is the first judgement of the soul – and through what did this judgement occur? Through a distinguishing mark, which he had to single out and which as a distinguishing mark for reflection struck him clearly. Well, then! Let us acclaim him with shouts of *eureka!* This first distinguishing mark, as it appeared in his reflection was the work of the soul! With it human language was invented!<sup>20</sup>

As Herder claimed later in the *Treatise*, ‘The focal point has been found where Prometheus’ divine spark ignites in the human soul - with the first characteristic mark [*Merkmal*] there was language’.<sup>21</sup>

Condillac had acknowledged the importance of reflection. But he did not give it the pivotal role that Herder gave it. As the historian, Kurt Mueller-Vollmer puts it,

[Reflection] denotes nothing short of the process through which the subject *qua* conscious and thinking subject constitutes itself, and is no longer one mental operation among others as Condillac and his followers still believe. Reflexion occurs when thinking turns back upon itself by distinguishing itself from its thoughts, and that Herder maintained is only possible in and through speech. The birth of the subject is also the birth of language.<sup>22</sup>

For Herder, the question is no longer, ‘Which came first, language or reflection?’ (The problem that Condillac promised to resolve, but never did). Rather, with Herder, ‘every act of semiotic recognition is thus founded upon an instance of cognition in which something becomes a sign, in short on upon acts of signification... The question now reads: How is semiotic recognition possible?’<sup>23</sup>

Herder never answered this question satisfactorily. But he did succeed in transforming the terms of the prize-essay question. If reflective consciousness constitutes what is intrinsically human, then it must follow that ‘the growth of

language is as natural to man as his nature itself'.<sup>24</sup> The question is no longer about whether humans, left to their own resources – like Condillac's children in their pre-linguistic state – could invent language. Rather, humans are intrinsically human because they possess the common capacity for both reflection and speech at one and the same time.

After Herder, language is no longer thought about as something added. Rather, language is there from the start. Indeed, on his view, linguisticity constitutes the defining characteristic of the species. It provides the common ground for what is generally human. Moreover, language is not thought about as it is in modern structural linguistics as a system of differentiated signs. Rather it is seen as human activity.

In the second part of the *Treatise*, Herder attempted to formulate various linguistic 'laws'.<sup>25</sup> The first 'law' promulgates a notion of development. It claims that people's linguistic capacities increase with language use - a claim that still has currency. Thus, linguistic growth at the individual level is explained by linking it to the development of thought. In sum, the growth in our capacity for reflection is linked directly to our linguistic development – hence the role of language in learning. This is arguably already there in Condillac. What Herder introduced was a 'genetic' account of the history of such development.

Herder's second 'law' moves beyond the level of the individual to consider language development in the family. In this section, he suggests that grammars have grown out of the needs arising within the necessary practice of language instruction. His third 'law' applies to the formation of national languages. In it he proposes that varieties of language derive from a single, common, language stock. Herder speculates that varieties of language have arisen from the common stock, as peoples have inhabited different environments over the globe. What was once homogeneous speech has split variously, first into dialects and then, subsequently, into different languages: 'Just as, according to all probability, the human race forms a progressive

whole from one origin in one great system: so also all languages and with them the whole chain of culture'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in Herder's eyes, variation, whether it is at the level of individuals or at the level of entire peoples offers proof of common humanity.

Herder's picture of language holds far-reaching implications for both the philosophy of language and for a conception human 'emergence' in the way that it focuses on the relation between the birth of the speaking subject – the emergence of the individual person – and the problematic nature of the sign.<sup>27</sup> Along with the English language theorist, Monboddo (it was Herder who suggested that his work be translated and who wrote the preface to the German edition of 1784/5)<sup>28</sup>, Herder suggests that the defining human characteristics – rationality, sociality, erect stature, language – result from a developmental process. On this view, language is neither given to man (by God) nor added to humankind as a 'invention', in the way that it appears in Condillac's account. Herder held out a picture of the role of language in the progressive humanisation that constitutes the story of man's self-production.<sup>29</sup>

In the aftermath to Herder's original insights, the substance of language – especially grammar- remained largely unexplored in connection with the question of the language's origins. Indeed, language as such remained a more or less transparent, unproblematic medium. It was left to Wilhelm von Humboldt to reformulate Herder's basic arguments systematically from the perspectives of a linguist - Von Humboldt was especially interested in language's forms and structures - from the perspective of a major theorist whose philosophical outlook was shaped by Kant.

\* \* \*

Von Humboldt's major work, *The Diversity of Human Language Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* reveals how questions about the nature of language and mind were linked to the German philosophy of history.<sup>30</sup> Essentially, Von Humboldt connected language to a picture of human development. The Berlin Academy published the *Kawi Introduction*, (as the work became known)

posthumously in 1836, though it was conceived as a theoretical and philosophical introduction to a longer, more ambitious project: *A Treatise on the Kawi Language*. Von Humboldt's study of the literary and sacred language of Java aimed to show how Indian languages and cultures had penetrated indigenous Malayan linguistic and cultural patterns. It was a huge undertaking, and fraught with difficulty, too, as von Humboldt himself quickly realised. He writes, 'Such a situation and inter-relationship of peoples and languages confronts ethnographic and linguistic research with problems of the utmost importance, but also of the greatest difficulty'.<sup>31</sup> *The Kawi Introduction*, then, was intended to prepare readers for the main work, which was to be a detailed, empirical investigation, in three volumes, describing the relations between people and languages across the Malayan Archipelago. Thus, the *Kawi Introduction* aimed to clear the philosophical ground for the main work. Von Humboldt writes as a philosopher of universal history,

The division of mankind into peoples and races, and the diversity of their languages and dialects, are indeed directly linked with each other, but are connected with and dependent upon, a third and higher phenomenon, the growth of man's mental powers into ever new and often more elevated forms. They find here their valuation, but also their explanation, so far as research is able to penetrate into them and grasp their connection. This revelation of man's mental powers, diverse in its degree and nature, over the course of millennia and throughout the world, is the highest aim of spiritual endeavour, the ultimate idea which world history must strive to bring forth clearly from itself.<sup>32</sup>

Kant wrote, 'We want to see if we can succeed in finding a guiding thread for such a history [a universal history of Mankind], and we will leave it to nature to produce a man who is in a position to write it'.<sup>33</sup> Von Humboldt's linguistic research was driven by a quest for just such a universal organising principle of world history – a principle of human development. In his study of the Kawi language he intended to link the forms and structures of language to the mental development of the peoples of Java. Thus, he aimed to uncover (in a way that resembles Goethe's morphology) a 'higher phenomenon, the growth of man's mental powers into ever new and often more elevated forms'.

Von Humboldt's intellectual roots were planted deep in the European Enlightenment. From the perspective of a concern with the progress of humanity, he sought to make language central to a philosophical survey of mankind's capacity for self-cultivation. Thus, in a letter to a friend he outlined his plans for the Kawi work:

My aim is much simpler and also more esoteric, namely a study that treats the faculty of speech in its inward aspect, as a human faculty and which uses its effects, languages, only as sources of knowledge and examples in developing the argument. I wish to show that what makes a particular language what it is, is its grammatical structure in all its diversities can only follow certain methods that will be listed one by one, so that by the study of each language it can be shown which methods are dominant or mixed in it. Now, in these methods themselves I consider, of course, the influences of each on the mind and feeling, and their explanation in terms of the causes of the origins of the languages, in so far as this is possible. Thus, I connect the study of language with the philosophical survey of humanities capacity for formation [*Bildung*] and with history. I have for some years been engaged in a work of this subject and made good progress. But the stay in Gastein this year has brought my ideas on these matters to a certain maturity.<sup>34</sup>

What Herder's concept of *reflection* had failed to explain, eventually became the focus for von Humboldt's own seminal theory of language.

Von Humboldt claimed that the 'inward aspect' of speech is inherently structured. He also claimed that grammar is its formative principle. I shall say more about what he intended by this presently, but for now I simply need to note two things: first, that his theories prefigured psycho-linguistics; secondly, he afforded language a central role in the formation of subjectivity.

For von Humboldt, language amounts to more than communication. It is not, as it was for Locke, a conduit or a duct to transport ideas from one mind to another.

Language stems from an inner, creative drive:

The *bringing forth of language* is an *inner need* of man, not merely an external necessity for maintaining communal intercourse, but a thing lying in his own nature, indispensable for the development of his mental powers and the attainment of a world view, to which man can only bring his thinking to clarity and precision through communal thinking with others.<sup>35</sup>

Von Humboldt's conception of 'inner need' corresponds broadly to Herder's notion of ~~exp~~pression. With Herder, he argues that human development depends on the growth of mankind's linguistic capacities. But by contrast with Herder he insisted on the *intersubjective* character of the production of linguistic meaning.<sup>36</sup> For von Humboldt, intellectual development was not so much individual as fundamentally *dialogical*.<sup>37</sup>

However, von Humboldt did not subscribe to a principle of linguistic relativity - the notion that all languages are adequate for the life-worlds - the 'spheres' - of the peoples who speak them as Herder had done. Rather, he subscribed to a notion of the perfection of linguistic forms. On this view, Sanscrit is a superior language because it is 'one of the languages in which the mental cultivation of mankind has evolved most happily in the longest sequence of advances'.<sup>38</sup> For von Humboldt, each language's potential for development was limited by its original 'design', 'blueprint or *Bauplan*. Thus, he claims, 'the whole progress of language of improved language making can only go on within the limits prescribed to it by the original design...' And nations, he continues, 'cannot remove the inner restrictions which have once been deeply embedded therein'.<sup>39</sup>

By this principle, Von Humboldt ranked languages hierarchically according to their original design. Intriguingly, the racist implications of his linguistic views were challenged almost immediately. In 1822, two North Americans, Pickering and Duponceau, objected to the inference that all non-Indo-European languages were inherently inferior. Indeed, they objected specifically to the way that Von Humboldt used Sanscrit, Greek and Latin as the standards by which other languages were measured. For his part, Von Humboldt tried to reassure them by claiming that he judged impartially. But he stuck to his original view that the potential for development in languages was limited by the structures they were given when they were first formed. Unfortunately, he also linked the potential for the development to the mental outlooks of nations:

What I have tried to say and still believe to be true is that the grammatical

form of Sanscrit, from which all the European languages derive, is preferable for giving the mind the habit of methodical reasoning and for the development of all the intellectual forms of man. Civilization adds very little to that.<sup>40</sup>

On this account, the capacity for language- human linguisticity - is universal, while the forms of language, especially their original forms, vary. However, the significant point for von Humboldt was not about the global distribution of various languages. Rather, it was to do with the shaping influence of languages on the development of the mentalities of various peoples. This influence, von Humboldt believed, held the key to understanding the nature of human progress – what he calls, ‘the secret evolution of mankind’. From this starting point he constructed a grand narrative, ‘A Story of Mankind’, about the emergence of civilizations and cultures:

The mental power that intrudes, from its inner depth and fullness, into the course of world events, is the truly creative principle in the hidden and, as it were, secret evolution of mankind... Thus arose the plastic art of Egypt, which was able to build up the human form from out of the organic centre of its circumstances, and which thereby first impressed upon its works the stamp of true art. In this way, though otherwise closely related, Indian poetry and philosophy and classical antiquity possess a character inherently distinct, and in the latter case also a Greek and Roman manner and cast of thought. So, later, from Romance poetry and the mental life which suddenly developed, with the downfall of Latin, in the now independent European West, there came the major part of modern culture.<sup>41</sup>

Civilizations and cultures enter the picture at a later date than do languages. The sequence is critical. As with Herder, human linguisticity was there from the start. However, on this view, languages can never transcend their in-built limitations. As von Humboldt insisted, ‘this whole progress of language-making can only go on within the limits prescribed to it by the original design of the language.’<sup>42</sup> In other words, the underlying forms and structures of a given language set limits for its future development –and, crucially, for the mental development of the people who speak it. As a consequence to this, civilizations and cultures can never transcend or improve upon the original design. Von Humboldt writes, ‘A nation can make a more imperfect language into a tool for the production of ideas, but it cannot remove the inner restrictions which have once been embedded therein.’<sup>43</sup> Implicitly then, from

von Humboldt's standpoint, some languages will be superior to others. And, sadly, such notions paved the way for the ranking of languages and indeed entire cultures in ways that have been fatally damaging and destructive.<sup>44</sup>

Von Humboldt's picture of language as the 'formative organ of thought' may have been indebted to Herder, but his picture amounts to more than just a reworking of Herder's notion of innately human creative powers (*Kraft der Seele*) combined with reflection (*Besonnenheit*). And whereas we can trace the antecedents of Herder's theory of language back to Condillac, (Herder and von Humboldt shared a common influence in the French thinker's writings) the German concentration on the creativity of language as an essentially self-formative human activity broke new ground.

In the manner of Herder, Von Humboldt insisted on the importance of creative - 'Promethean' - self-formation through linguistic activity. But in a way that was quite unlike Herder, von Humboldt looked closely at language's forms and structures. Thus he reconfigured Herder's basic insight - that signification and cognition are two sides of the same coin - by investigating the stuff of signification itself. Indeed, he set himself the task of comparing the forms and structures of world languages from the perspective of diversity. What is more, he set about comparing their grammars from a historical standpoint, although his studies were restricted to written texts.

For Locke and Condillac, as for Herder, grammar was an artificial system invented by theorists to describe and to regulate language. On this view, prescriptive grammar is applied to natural language as it already exists. In its essentials, Herder's picture of grammar is no different to that of the Port Royal Grammarians. As he puts it, grammar is 'a philosophy about language and a method for its use.' On Herder's view, some languages - especially so-called 'primitive languages' - appeared to be without grammar altogether. By contrast, von Humboldt realised that grammar constitutes the inherent order of any given language. Moreover, he grasped the way

that a language's primary forms and structures had to be there from the start. They could not have been added over time. Thus, in von Humboldt's picture of language, all languages are inherently grammatical (though not 'equal') for the very reason that they depend for their existence upon underlying structural principles. Such principles or regularities, he claimed, were built into each language's original design. And every language, he said, has its own 'blueprint' or *Bauplan*. Variations among languages occur mainly because they were designed differently in the first place and consequently they have developed differently. Moreover, linguistic variation is not just a matter of different vocabularies - or different words for the same ideas. Rather, variation is a matter of historically evolved forms and structures as well as historically evolved meanings. Differing world outlooks (*Weltanschauung*) have been shaped by correspondingly different grammatical outlooks.

Since the eighteenth century (at least), many linguists and philosophers tried to show the close correlation between world-view and linguistic form. However, for many such researchers grammar was not thought about as an artificial system of instituted rules imposed on existing 'natural' language as it was with the Port Royal Grammarians' picture of language. After von Humboldt, grammar is increasingly seen as 'language's formative principle.' The question, 'Where does language come from?' was refined so that it became: 'Where do language's forms and structures come from?'

\* \* \*

In the closing section of this chapter I shall be focusing on von Humboldt's account of the origin of language, and I shall be underscoring the Kantian character of his ideas. *Thinking and Speaking: Sixteen Theses on Language* is a tightly compressed, aphoristic essay that Von Humboldt probably wrote during the winter of 1795-96 in response to Fichte's essay, 'On the Speech Faculty and the Origin of Language' (1795).<sup>45</sup> It is an early piece that is particularly important for the way that it reveals the unmistakable influence of Kantian epistemology<sup>46</sup>. Von Humboldt was tackling

what has been called ‘the Sisyphean problem’ of eighteenth century semiotic thinking, (the origin of language) but he does so from an entirely new standpoint. This standpoint was Kant’s critical philosophy and the transcendental perspectives of the generation of German idealists to which von Humboldt belonged.<sup>47</sup>

The essential difference between von Humboldt’s and Herder’s pictures of semiotic activity, as I have already suggested, lies in the different weighting that they give to language’s underlying forms and structures. For von Humboldt, the forms and structures that are given to mind are very much like the Kantian synthetic *a priori* categories. But they are somehow *produced* through the sensory medium of language. They derive from the natural qualities of sound – specifically, the temporal properties of differentiated sounds - in conjunction with the synthesising powers of mind. Von Humboldt writes,

*Thesis Six.* The sensory designation [*Bezeichnung*] of those units, into which certain portions of thinking are united, in order to be opposed as parts to other parts of a greater whole, as objects to the subject, is called in the broadest sense of the word: language.<sup>48</sup>

We impose an order on what otherwise would be an undifferentiated flux of sensory material – meaningless noise – by distinguishing among sounds. However, such ordering is only made possible by the differentiated sounds produced by man himself:

*Thesis Twelve.* Linguistic signs [*Sprachzeichen*] are thus necessarily sounds, and according to the hidden analogy which exists between all the faculties of man, he must as soon as he clearly recognises one object as distinct from himself, directly utter the sound which is to distinguish the object.<sup>49</sup>

The search for linguistic signs requires that we differentiate among sounds of our own making. (I am intrigued by von Humboldt’s notion of a ‘hidden analogy which exists between all the faculties’, which is never fully explained). Subsequently, options arise for combining small sound units (phonemes) into larger stretches of language, or wholes (texts). Moreover, because linguistic signs refer to ideas rather than things in the world, opportunities will arise for handling signs and ideas together, even when the referent (the thing itself) is absent.

Von Humboldt argues that we reanimate signs creatively in the production of meaning. until they are brought to life in use, signs remain 'dry husks'. Further to this, large combinations can be broken down into small units and then recombined to produce a multiplicity of new combinations and hence new meanings. Thus, too, a picture of the organization of language on different *levels* comes into view. Von Humboldt is the precursor of de Saussure in the way that he understood the production of meaning from a system of differences, and the fixing of precise meanings by the regulation of the relations of difference. He writes,

*Thesis Thirteen.* ...As man searched for linguistic signs (*Sprachzeichen*), his understanding had the task of differentiating. Moreover, he formed whole units, which were not real objects but rather concepts, therefore allowing for free manipulation, for repeated separations and new combinations. Accordingly, the tongue, too, selected articulated sounds, consisting of elements allowing for multiple new compositions.<sup>50</sup>

So far I have been emphasising the Kantian dimension of von Humboldt's picture of language. Now I want to say something about von Humboldt's indebtedness to the tradition of Condillac as he met in France in the nineties.

In November 1797 (after writing *Thinking and Speaking*) von Humboldt visited Paris. There he made contact with the French *ideologues* – Sieyès, Destutt de Tracy, Degerando, Garat, Daunou, Cabanis, Roederer, Volney and others who had survived the Great Terror and who were presently struggling to write a new constitution in the midst of popular insurrections and international crises. Crucially, Condillac was the key thinker for many of these *ideologues*, some of whom had known him personally. In Paris, von Humboldt read Condillac's works on language extensively and immersed himself thoroughly in the Abbé's ideas. Indeed, this proved a turning point for the Prussian aristocrat. In 1799 he wrote to his friend, the great classical scholar, F. A. Wolf, 'In future I feel I shall devote myself more exclusively to language study, and that thorough and philosophically oriented comparison of several languages is the task I can shoulder after some years of serious study.'<sup>51</sup>

Condillac's seminal insight concerned the role of signs in gaining mastery over mental operations. He made a crucial link between words and psychological development. But what he understood signs to be was never fully theorised. It was largely German thinkers who carried the theory of the sign to new <sup>a</sup> level and who paved the way for the Saussurean breakthrough at the turn of the nineteenth century.

For Condillac, as for Locke, signs refer to ideas rather than to things in the world. However, on this view, signs themselves remain transparent, rather in the manner of Port Royal grammar. They existed for Condillac as a set of entities that already exist to which meanings are subsequently attached. However, German thinkers challenged this view in a way that forced linguists to reconsider the nature of the sign.

Von Humboldt agreed with Condillac that signs play a indispensable role in achieving voluntary control over mental operations. But crucially he rejected Condillac's claim that growing familiarity with 'natural' signs over time - merely by force of habit - leads on 'naturally' to the production of 'instituted' signs. (This was also a bone of contention for Herder, who complained that Condillac had failed to give an adequate account of the production of signs in the first instance). Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, summarises this point succinctly:

[von] Humboldt maintained against this (Condillac's) position that ~~that~~ signs do in fact order our thinking, but not because certain objects have *naturally* come to represent certain ideas of things, but because signs, together with their corresponding thoughts are shaped and fashioned by the human mind at one *and the same time and in the very same act*.<sup>52</sup>

Von Humboldt took up the fundamental question about language's origins where Herder left off. He grasped the notion that the act of signification requires a combination of two inherently structured realms: the 'acoustic image' (speech/sound) and the thought referred to. To recast this powerful insight in Saussurean terms, the signifier and the signified combine to make up the sign. Indeed, von Humboldt's insight is the forerunner of de Saussure's theory of the double sidedness of the sign. (Saussure speaks of the two sides of a sheet of paper). However, the way that the German thinker gives priority to the shaping activity of

mind - the contribution of the knower to what is known - is characteristically Kantian.

However, there is another aspect of von Humboldt's theory of signification that the link to de Saussure fails to reveal. Mueller-Vollmer writes: 'For [von] Humboldt the act of *Artikulation* in his terminology, is at one and the same time the constitutive act for the consciousness of self of the speaking individual.'<sup>53</sup> As they speak, subjects differentiate themselves from the object, which is their own voiced thought. To be conscious of the 'object' is also to become conscious of one's self. Thus, the primary acts of signification mark the birth of the subject.

For von Humboldt, the development of selves depends on an interactive dynamic between man and his world. The German thinker moved beyond the separation of mind and body that philosophers had inherited from Descartes. On von Humboldt's view, individuation depends upon 'acts of conjoining (*Verbindung*) with others'.<sup>54</sup> The concept of self-objectification of speaking subjects is connected directly to von Humboldt's theory of self-formation, *Bildung*, a theory that has been extremely important for education theory throughout Europe, and which I shall be discussing in the next chapter.

Chapter nine of the *Kawi Introduction*, 'Nature and Constitution of Language' contains many of the concepts I have just touched on. In it he attempts to conceptualise 'the whole route whereby, proceeding from mind, language reacts back upon mind'. Thus 'consciousness comes to recognise itself in its own activity.'<sup>55</sup> He explains the process in the following Kantian fashion:

The activity of the senses must combine synthetically with the inner action of the mind, and from this combination the presentation is ejected, becomes an object vis-à-vis the subjective power and perceived anew as such, returns back to the latter.<sup>56</sup>

Von Humboldt took up and expanded a crucial idea (one that Herder merely touched on) namely, the so-called 'linearity' of the auditory sign. Speakers not only

apprehend their inner thoughts but they also make them available for further reflection as ideas expressed outside the self. And in the same way that speakers perceive their own articulations –they can hear what they are saying as they speak - they can shape the objectifications of their subjective ideas transformatively at the very point of utterance. The absolute importance of this insight for Von Humboldt's whole conception of individual development is made particularly clear in passages like this one, where he speaks of *subject-object* relations:

But language is indispensable for this [reflection]. For in that mental striving breaks out through the lips in language, the product of that striving returns back to the speaker's ear. Thus the presentation becomes transformed into real objectivity, without being deprived of subjectivity on that account.<sup>57</sup>

Without language, claims von Humboldt, the mental process of concept formation (indeed, we might add the development of the higher mental functions) would be impossible. This leads him to a crucial insight into the nature of the relation between language and the development of mind. He continues,

Only language can do this [transform the representation into 'real objectivity']; and without this transformation, occurring constantly with the help of language even in silence, into an objectivity that returns to the subject, the act of concept-formation, and with it true thinking, is impossible. So quite regardless of communication between man and man, speech is a necessary condition for the thinking of the individual in solitary seclusion.<sup>58</sup>

Insights such as these provided the foundation stones for subsequent work on inner speech and dialogics that was developed in the first half of the twentieth century, especially by Russian thinkers like Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>59</sup>

\* \* \*

From this point on the story I have been telling opens up along several new avenues. I want to mention just three of them. The first avenue takes us towards modern linguistics and semiology. I have traced a line of development in the theory of the sign that runs from Locke, through Condillac, Herder and von Humboldt to de Saussure and on to modern, structural linguistics. The second avenue leads towards psychology and to Vygotsky's theories about semiotic mediation linked to cognition

in a socio-cultural account of mind. Thus Von Humboldt's emphasis on the shaping power of language and its transforming role in development prefigures current theories about language, learning and development in children.

The third avenue opens in connection with the writings of a contemporary German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, and it takes us towards an attempt to discover rational, normative foundations for critical theory in the universal pragmatic conditions that make everyday conversations possible. For Habermas, von Humboldt is crucially important because he combined two conceptions of meaning. The first conception is to do with speakers' intentions, and the second is to do with the regulative principles involved in language as practices. Of course, real speakers in the world operate strategically to gain power. They manipulate others by the way they use words. But as Habermas says, the category of lying would become meaningless and language itself would become meaningless if everyone lied all the time. Not everyone could behave in this way at any one time otherwise socialisation or learning from the past would be impossible. Besides, the world disclosing nature of language meant that we describe the world for others. And different understandings about things among speakers are overcome only when they submit to the regulative idea of mutual commitment to getting a better understanding through rational argument. We always know claims Habermas, when we honestly want to convince each other because we bow to the better argument. The kind of idealisations that Habermas has in mind are not produced by solitary thinkers (Kant's transcendental subject of cognition) in opposition to reality, rather they are the 'normative contents' that are encountered in everyday practice, which we cannot do without, since language is constitutive for social forms of life. With Habermas, the scale of von Humboldt's ethical project begins to be restored.

\* \* \*

I have given an account of how and why the question of the origin of language became a focus for discussions, first in France and then, subsequently, in Germany. I have also touched on the importance of such questions for developments in

philosophy, psychology, anthropology, history, the social sciences, religious studies linguistic and literary studies and education. Such discussions issued in a new developmental conception of humanity - one that has had profound (though often contradictory) political ramifications. Above all, in the work of Herder and von Humboldt, there emerged a picture of language as the constitutive human activity by which we forge, both individually and collectively, selves in culture and history.

---

<sup>1</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) *The Diversity of Human Language- Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, known as *The Kawi Introduction*, first published in 1836, translated from the German by Peter Heath, with an introduction by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.56

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Herder, 1784, in Menze E. A. and Menges, K. (Eds.) (1992) *Johan Gottfried Herder, Selected Early Works, 1764-1767, Addresses Essays and Drafts; Fragments on Recent German Literature* Pennsylvania State University Press, VII, pp. 151-52.

<sup>4</sup> Berlin, Isaiah (1956) *The Age of Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, selected with an introduction and interpretative commentary, London: New English Library, p. 273.

<sup>5</sup> Menze E. A. and Menges, K. (1992) p.14.

<sup>6</sup> Menze E. A. and Menges, K. (1992) p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Isaiah Berlin (1998) *The Proper Study of Mankind, An Anthology of Essays*, London: Pimlico, pp. 252-53.

<sup>8</sup> See, Immanuel Kant, (1794) *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, first published in 1798, translated by Mary J Gregor, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Leventhal R..S. (1990) Critique of Subjectivity: Herder's Foundation of the Human Sciences, in Mueller-Vollmer, K. (Ed.), (1990) *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference, 5-8 November, 1987, Stanford California*, New York: Walter de Gruyter, p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, I. (1956) p 274.

<sup>11</sup> Koepke, Wulf (1990) *Johann Gotfried Herder: Language History and the Enlightenment*, Camden House, Columbia, South Carolina., p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Fink, Karl, J. (1993), 'Storm and Stress Anthropology', in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp.51-7, p.52.

<sup>13</sup> Fink, K. J. (1993) p..53.

<sup>14</sup> Fink, K. J. (1993) p.54.

<sup>15</sup> See endnote 46 below.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, Charles (1979) *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.2

<sup>17</sup> For a comprehensive historical account of the origins of language debate see, Aarsleff, Hans (1982) *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, London: Athlone, and particularly his essay 'The tradition of Condillac: The Problem of the Origin of Language in the Eighteenth Century and the Debate in the Berlin Academy before Herder', pp 146-209. It is still the fullest treatment of the topic available.

<sup>18</sup> Norton, Robert, E. (1991) *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> Herder, Johann, Gottfried (1986) 'On the Origin of Language', first published in 1772, translated from the German by Alexander Gode, in *On the Origin of Language: Rousseau, Jean Jaques 'On the Origin of Languages', and Herder, Johann Gottfried, 'Essay on the Origin of Language', translated with afterwords, by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, Introduction by Alexander Gode*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press,.

---

<sup>20</sup> Herder, J. G. (1987) pp. 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> Herder, J. G. (1987) p.128.

<sup>22</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1990) 'From Sign to Signification: the Herder-Humboldt Controversy', in Koepke, W. (1990) p.13.

<sup>23</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1990) p.13.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Sapir, Edward, (1907) 'Herder's 'Ursprung der Sprache', *Modern Philology*, July, 1907, pp.109-142

<sup>25</sup> The notion of 'linguistic 'laws' is an important one. Herder's quasi- scientific attempt to formulate laws was criticised by later generations of linguists for its lack of scientific rigour. In the nineteenth century linguists concentrated on substance (the forms and structures of language) and deprecated what they saw as merely speculative approaches.

<sup>26</sup> Herder, J. G. (1987) p.128.

<sup>27</sup> After the appearance of Herder's prize-essay, interest in the question of the origin of languages faded for a while. It was revived, however, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it received a new urgency. Fichte revived the topic with his essay, *On the Speech Faculty and the Origin of Language* (1795) Fichte's essay is important for the way that it takes up the problematic nature of the sign from a truly theoretical standpoint. Essentially, Fichte inherited two contradictory theories. *Naturalistic* theories traced the origins of words to natural cries and stressed words' imitative character. By contrast, *conventionalist* theories argued that signs are arbitrary in the sense that their meanings arise from some sort of deliberate agreement between speakers. Locke, Condillac, and Rousseau, for example, were inclined towards the conventionalist view. But Fichte explored a third possibility. Conventionalists, who wanted to argue that signs are wholly arbitrary, faced two difficulties. First, they had to explain why someone should adopt somebody else's meaning. And second, they had to give an adequate account of the way that such an agreement could be reached without recourse to language. Naturalistic theories, on the other hand, had to account for the qualitative leap from natural cries to fully human speech – in Condillac's terminology, from 'natural' to 'instituted' signs. Fichte resisted both positions and sought a synthesis. He retained the notion of the arbitrariness of the sign that he had inherited from the conventionalists, arguing that it implied the free decision of an individual human being to express her "rational purposiveness" to another. It also implied the equally free response by another (the addressee) to acknowledge this expression of rational purposiveness. (see Surber, J. P. (1994) *The Historical and Systematic Place of Fichte's Reflections on Language* in Breazdale, D and Rockmore, T. (Eds.) *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, New Jersey: Humanities Press.). Thus Fichte made *intersubjectivity* the centrally important feature of his innovative theory of the sign. And thus, crucially, Fichte shifted attention from the Kantian isolated subject of cognition towards a conception of *intersubjectivity* in a way that broke new ground.

Obviously, there was more at stake for Fichte than simply refining an abstract theory of signification. The *ideal* of reaching 'uncoerced' agreement in everyday speech is an extremely important one. It embodies a foundational (universal) principle for a theory of subjectivity that takes us beyond Kant. To make the significance of this plainer, we should recall that Fichte incorporated the notion of 'the free *intersubjective reciprocity* of rationally purposive human beings' elsewhere in his writings on law. Specifically, he incorporated it into his work on natural rights. For Fichte, the theory of the arbitrariness of the sign guaranteed a particular kind of freedom. This is the freedom to make meanings of one's own volition. Additionally, it implied that signification is the means by which human reciprocity is both learned and articulated.

Fichte, partly in critique of Herder, and partly in an attempt to restore the Kantian subject after the attacks by both Hamann and Herder, managed to break fresh ground by identifying *intersubjectivity* as a new problem for the philosophy of knowledge. But it was von Humboldt after Fichte, who built upon these insights to develop the principles of a new linguistic outlook.

To suggest how Fichte's and von Humboldt's linguistic *idealism* has been taken up recently, I offer this thumb nail sketch of the theory of communicative interests from Habermas. He is talking about the ideal element in ordinary conversation. He begins with the premise that, 'in everyday communicative practice, sociated individuals cannot avoid also employing everyday speech that is oriented toward reaching understanding'. He continues,

...It's really quite simple: whenever we mean what we say, we raise the claim that what we said is true or right, or truthful. With this claim a small bit of ideality breaks into our everyday lives, because such validity claims can in the end only be resolved with arguments. At the same time, we know that the arguments that appear valid to us today, in the light of new experiences and new information can prove false tomorrow in the light of new experience and new information. (Jurgen (Habermas, J. (1992) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated from the German by Fredrick Lawrence, Oxford: Polity Press, p.102)

On this view, the ordinary business of reaching inter-subjective understandings about things in the world - in other words, what makes ordinary conversation possible - is seen to afford the normative basis for human co-operation.

<sup>28</sup> Aarsleff, Hans, (1983) *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*, London: Athlone, , pp.41-42.

<sup>29</sup> See Lia Formigiari 'Language and Society in the Late Eighteenth Century' in *Language and the History of Thought*, edited by Nancy Struever (1995) Rochester : University of Rochester Press, , pp.153- 170.

<sup>30</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a).

<sup>31</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p.20.

<sup>32</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p.20-22.

<sup>33</sup> Kant, Immanuel, (1983), 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History and Morals*, translated by Ted Humphrey, , first published in 1784, Hackett Publishing Company

<sup>34</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. xiv.

<sup>35</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p 27.

<sup>36</sup> What Jürgen Habermas has called 'the free intersubjective reciprocity of rationally purposive human beings'.

<sup>37</sup> Sentences like the following one bring to mind the Russian thinker, Mikhail Bakhtin, in the way that he insists that inner speech, even in solitude, is always oriented towards others: 'The individual man is always connected with the whole...from whatever aspect one may look at it, his life is necessarily tied to sociality... mental cultivation, even in the loneliest seclusion of temperament is equally possible only through language and the latter requires to be directed to another being that understands it.'

<sup>38</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. x

<sup>39</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. 34

<sup>40</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. xii

<sup>41</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p.31

<sup>42</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p.34

<sup>43</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p.34

<sup>44</sup> See for instance, Said, Edward (1985) *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. Also Martin Bernal covers the development of 'Romantic' linguistics extensively in his monumental study of the Afroasiatic roots of Classical civilization. Bernal, Martin (1987) *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 2 volumes, London: Free Association Books.

<sup>45</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von , 'Thinking and Speaking', in Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989a), 'Thinking and Speaking: Herder, Humboldt and Saussurean Semiotics: A Translation and Commentary on Wilhelm von Humboldt's Sixteen Theses on Language', in *Comparative Criticism*, edited by E.S. Schaffer, Cambridge, England, 1989, 193-214

<sup>46</sup> The title, 'Thinking and Speaking' instantly recalls the masterwork of the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky published in 1936, *Thought and Language*, (*Myslenie i rech* ). It suggests a link connecting von Humboldt and the Soviet thinker. Such a link exists, but actually, von Humboldt's original piece bore no such title. The German, '*Denken und Sprechen*', was supplied by the editor of the collected works, Leitzman, in 1907. The link between von Humboldt and Vygotsky was through the teaching of the Ukranian philologist and von Humboldt scholar, Alexander Potebnja, who also wrote a book with a similar title, *Thought and Language (Mysl' i jazyk)* published in 1922. Significantly, Vygotsky's early reading of Potebnja seems to have quickened his interest in psychology. (see Van Der Veer, R and Valsiner, J.(1993) p5) Intriguingly, Vygotsky remained in touch with the view of

---

language that von Humboldt developed around the turn of the nineteenth century.

<sup>47</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1990) 'From Sign to Signification: The Herder-Humboldt Controversy', in Koepke, W. (1990), p.18

<sup>48</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1989a) p 211

<sup>49</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1989a) p 211

<sup>50</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1989a) p 210

<sup>51</sup> Aarsleff, H. (1982) p.336.

<sup>52</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1990) p.16.

<sup>53</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1990) p.18.

<sup>54</sup> For a lucid summary of von Humboldt's conception of self-formation through 'conjoining' see Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989b) 'The Abstractness of Reason and the Real Life of Individuals and Institutions: Von Humboldt's Educational Politics and the French Revolution' in *The French Revolution and the Age of Goethe*, edited by Gerhart Hoffmeister, Geog Olm Verlag, Santa Barbara, p. 163.

<sup>55</sup> Lofts, S. G. (Lofts, S. G. (2000) *Ernst Cassirer: A Repetition of Modernity*, Albany, State University of New York) discusses this passage in relation to Ernst Cassirer's theory of language and the 'Subject of History'.

<sup>56</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1989a) p. 56.

<sup>59</sup> The Russian thinkers were closely in touch with the German intellectual tradition of which Von Humboldt was the seminal figure. Modern structural linguistics has largely forgotten (or pushed aside) this tradition for reasons that are both complicated and intrinsically interesting. These reasons have been to do with establishing linguistics as an independent academic discipline, however further discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this chapter.

## Chapter 3

### **Signs of Enlightenment: The Formation of a European Education Ideal**

*To offer all individuals of the human race the means of providing for their needs, of assuring their well-being, of knowing and exercising their rights, of understanding and performing their duties; To assure each of them the facility of perfecting his skill, of rendering himself capable of the social functions to which he has a right to be summoned, of developing to the fullest extent the talents with which nature has endowed him; and thereby to establish among citizens an actual equality, and to effect the realization of the political equality recognized by law ...Such must be the primary aim of national education; and from this point of view it is a task of probity for the government.*

Condorcet, 'Report on the General Organization of Education' presented to the Convention, 20-21 April, 1792.<sup>1</sup>

*Even when they [the idéologues] use the same words as we do they always give them another meaning...their imagination is not our 'Einbildungskraft'.*

Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Letter to Schiller*, 1798<sup>2</sup>

The plans for Europe's first coherent state education systems were drafted in the aftermath to the French Revolution. A striking feature of these plans was the way that the principal draftsmen linked language to notions of citizenship and human development. Indeed, a link forged between language and development led to the formation of a powerful education ideal, which is what this chapter is chiefly about. The developments I shall be discussing issued principally from a change to the way that language was pictured in the eighteenth century, when the orthodox picture of language as the timeless gift of providence gave way to a contrasting one of language as human invention. In essence, this new picture reshaped

conceptions of what it is to be a human being.<sup>3</sup>

Eighteenth-century discussions about language – where language comes from and what it is for – constituted a sustained critique of humanity. And the follow-on from such discussions was at the heart of moves to set up state systems of education: first, in post-revolutionary France and then, a decade later, in Prussia. A strong presupposition emerged among those who were chiefly instrumental in designing these systems, that public education was essential for the political and social development of nations and, further to this, that language somehow held the key to the understanding and advancement of Mankind.

However, such presuppositions were inflected differently in different national circumstances. In France, where Condillac's anti-metaphysical, 'sensationalist' epistemology prevailed, advocates for language studies insisted upon the material origins and the social nature of ideas.<sup>4</sup> In Germany, where the influence of Kant was strong, and where a conception of the synthesising capacities of mind had furnished the foundation of German idealism, a conception of the role of language in self-cultivation emerged. In what follows, I shall be concentrating chiefly on the second of these inflections, the German educational ideal of self-cultivation, or *Bildung*

*Bildung* is hard to define.<sup>5</sup> It is a larger in scope than the notion of education as the 'training' of character, which is its closest English equivalent.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the English understanding of 'mental cultivation' means something like 'the refinement of the faculties', in Germany *Bildung* suggests something larger and more comprehensive: the autonomous production of individual and collective selves.<sup>7</sup> The differences between English and German conceptions of education as a form of 'self-cultivation' stem from *Bildung*'s philosophical roots in German idealism. Moreover, they also reflect the way the original German ideal was associated with Liberal politics. Later, with the failure of the Liberal revolutions of 1848, *Bildung*, much reduced in scope, was appropriated by a social elite. Here, I am taking *Bildung* to refer to the original, generous humanistic

conception of individual and collective cultivation, which emerged in Germany during the late Enlightenment.

The *Bildung* ideal embodied a powerful view of human development. Specifically, it was concerned with the ‘humanising’ process of enculturation. We become fully ‘human’ by interacting with a world that is replete with meaning and, as Von Humboldt put it in a fragment on the theme of *Bildung*: ‘... by combining our individual selves with the world in a process of most general, animated and free interaction’ we achieve a state of humanity<sup>8</sup>

In part, *Bildung* consciously imitated the Greek educational ideal of linguistic and literary education as ‘the gymnastic of the soul’. By developing the virtues of memory, diligence and discipline the student eventually attained a superior form of life. However, it was also linked to a heroic conception of human agency in the improvement of Mankind. Indeed, such a conception fed powerfully into Marx’s thought, especially where he insists that men make themselves in history - never in isolation, but rather in definite social relations among constituent members of communities engaged in the material processes of production. Crucially, the original *Bildung* ideal combined Kant’s picture of the autonomous, rational subject with his precept that the guiding thread of world history is the story of Mankind’s progress towards moral maturity. For Kant, this was the very meaning of Enlightenment. On this view individual moral development was framed by a notion of the purpose of world history. Indeed, values implicit in present-day notions like ‘fulfilling one’s potential’ and ‘world citizenship’ owe much to Kantian ethics, with the overarching ‘grand narrative’ of the moral purpose of world history stripped away.<sup>9</sup>

And *Bildung* was connected to a picture of language. In the *Bildung* fragment, Von Humboldt also notes:

What man really needs is simply an object which makes interaction possible between receptivity and self-activity. If it is to succeed in occupying his whole being in its entire strength and unity, then this object must be of the world itself...or at least considered as such.<sup>10</sup>

In the previous chapter, I discussed the way that Von Humboldt attempted to conceptualise 'the whole route whereby, proceeding from mind, language reacts back upon mind' so that 'consciousness comes to recognise itself in its own activity.' Thus, the objectification of consciousness makes reflection possible - we can examine our own thoughts. He explains this complicated process in a highly compressed, but unmistakably Kantian fashion: 'the activity of the senses must combine synthetically with the inner action of the mind, and from this combination the presentation is ejected, becomes an object vis-avis the subjective power and perceived anew as such, returns back to the latter. On this view, signification makes an objective representation of the world possible. Without it conceptual thinking would be impossible. Moreover, the way that signification works, mind acts in partnership with the senses to produce a world outlook.

During the Enlightenment, discussions around the nature and origins of language had had their roots in divisions over fundamental questions. These questions arose out of the competing claims of religious authorities and the proponents of the new science over what people might claim to know. Such divisions coincided with the emergence of what has been called 'the public sphere'.<sup>11</sup> With advent of an emergent public sphere, matters of general importance, policy, ideas and values were publicly discussed. In this context, the change to the way that language was pictured had at least two serious consequences. First, the field of language study (more than oratory, or rhetoric) became a matter for serious political concern. Secondly, language was seen both as something produced by and something producing the world outlooks of people who speak them. Languages were linked to the particular historical experiences - and hence the 'outlooks' or 'mentalities' - the *Weltanschauung* - of the various peoples who had evolved them. Such links have shaped modern conceptions of national consciousness, as well as forms of nationalism.

In Germany, under the influence of Kantian idealism, language came to be thought about as having a powerful role in the production of collective and

individual selves. And where the diversity of language structure was taken as evidence of universal human creativity (what Herder called '*Kraft*'), the history of languages was linked to the mental development of particular nations as well as the whole of Mankind. Subsequently, historical-comparative language studies (particularly German philology) fostered ideas about the origins of national mentalities at the very moment when the foundations of modern nation states were being established. In sum, language issues became central to German ideas about education and the production of national citizens.

In Germany especially thinkers concentrated on the notion that cultures embody the historical experiences of peoples and nations. Languages, they claimed, reflect historically evolved ways of life.<sup>12</sup> Herder was a major source of such ideas. He pictured cultures not so much as the accumulated 'contents' of past civilizations but rather, in an active sense, as forms of life that have been established over time, that reflect particular, concrete circumstances and interests and that will continue to evolve. Thus, languages were linked to individual and collective development in history and culture. Further to this, thinkers like Herder began to suggest that the languages we inherit not only make us what we are they also prefigure what we become. Thus they wedded a picture of language to a dynamic, agentive conception of individual and collective self-realisation. In doing so they also contributed to the German conception of the 'culture state', in which the essence of nationhood – the so-called 'national spirit' or the 'spirit of the people' – was seen as grounded in and emerging from a collective sense of a shared past that constitutes national consciousness. Such conceptions have figured powerfully in educational discussions ever since, especially discussions around the teaching of national heritages in the liberal arts and humanities. Crucially, they have supplied a powerful rationale for studying language and literature in state curricula.

In this chapter I shall be concentrating mainly on German thinkers: Kant, Herder and von Humboldt. But I shall need to recover some of the themes and ideas that they inherited from the French Enlightenment. The German thinkers I shall be

discussing were the inheritors of the French Enlightenment, but their inheritance was a problematic one. During the second half of the eighteenth-century, German intellectuals began resisting the hegemonic power of France. They contrasted 'French civilization' with German 'culture' at a time when French ideas and tastes dominated the whole of Europe. These thinkers welcomed the Revolution of 1789. But resistance to French culture intensified after the humiliating Prussian defeat at Jena (1806) and the French military occupation of Berlin. Notwithstanding resistance to French ideas, the reform of Prussian education was heavily indebted to the designers of the French system. I shall be describing how von Humboldt, the chief architect of the Prussian system, gained hugely from the time he spent in Paris, when he was in daily contact with thinkers like Abbé Sieyès and Destutt de Tracy. As one cultural historian has put it, 'Standing on the shoulders of French and English Enlightenment predecessors, German thinkers developed the ideas of the Enlightenment to a higher level.'<sup>13</sup>

During the eighteenth-century, the ideas that circulated among the *philosophes*, paved the way for the French Revolution. Typically, French discussions about progress concentrated on rational frameworks - institutional arrangements, the codification of rights and so on. French thinkers saw the prospects of Enlightenment chiefly in terms of *external* states of affairs. And they assumed that human nature was given *a priori*. Their conception of Man was more or less fixed as a static abstraction as the locus of universal rights. Human nature was not thought about especially as a dynamic entity and it was not talked about generally as growing, constantly changing, or as something to be radically transformed by education.<sup>14</sup>

A contrasting picture of human nature grew out of quasi-biological accounts of change over time. Such a picture of development came, *a fortiori*, from Germany where it was fostered by rapid advances in the natural sciences, especially biology. I will show how genetic-historical explanations of human development emerged in the writings of German thinkers like Herder and Goethe. And what is more, they contributed powerfully to the German education ideal of self-

cultivation as an inwardly transformative process: in a word, *Bildung*.

For the most part, the French *philosophes* didn't think about progress (or indeed about Enlightenment itself) as primarily a psychological or an inward condition. Nor did they bother overmuch about transforming human nature as such for the better. Rather, they discussed human nature as something that was essentially given, that had been corrupted and disfigured by corrupt, oppressive social arrangements, and that needed to be restored to 'health' by changing the social order. Such discussions issued in the philosophers' critiques of the oppressive burden of 'existing society on humanity, and a call for a return to an integral and pure form of human nature. This is major theme in Rousseau's writings on education, which he saw chiefly as a 'healing' process that would restore mankind to itself.<sup>15</sup>

The *philosophes*, then, were not especially interested in Enlightenment as an inward, developmental process advancing towards 'moral maturity', though they were concerned with the business of human advancement. For the thinkers of the French Enlightenment, the emancipatory promise of education was that it would free mankind from the irrational, benighted burden of oppressive social arrangements, mindless dogma and ignorance. Their aim was to release the human spirit, not to create the conditions for its further development. Indeed, the French Enlightenment's picture of Man, as the locus of universal human rights was carried forward into the twentieth century, where it has continued to shape modern liberal conceptions of citizenship.

The recruitment of the past was essential for radical political ideologies. In Revolutionary France, Roman Republican principles were freely appropriated.<sup>16</sup> What is more, a fashionable taste for Roman civilization was self-consciously cultivated and displayed everywhere in post-Revolutionary society. For a while in France (as in Germany), the study of classical texts was linked powerfully to Republicanism. To give just one important instance, French revolutionaries tried to justify the redistribution of land by invoking the Roman *loi agraire*.<sup>17</sup> Thus

ancient history was put to political use. Crucially, such overtly 'ideological' appropriations of history foreshadowed a moment when secular states would 'sanction' history - especially national history - as 'official knowledge'.<sup>18</sup>

Language, too, became 'official'. In the aftermath to the Revolution, when standard French became the language of the middle classes, speaking French was bound up with a notion of citizenship. Post-Revolutionary France assimilated different language groups, different ethnic groups and different races within boundaries that were not based on geography, history or an existing language community, but rather on a system of civic rights and obligations. Since the Revolution, as one historian has put it, in France 'political inclusion has entailed cultural assimilation, for regional cultural minorities and immigrants alike'.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, it is sometimes claimed that the Revolution abolished ethnicity and race in its definition of French citizenship. But, notwithstanding the broad assimilation of differences, there were periodic outbreaks of xenophobic nationalism such as in the crises of the seventeen-nineties, when neighbouring nations posed a real external threat to the Revolution.

In 1789, of the twenty-five million French nationals, five million did not speak French. Instead, they spoke regional languages such as Breton or Basque. Thereafter, French became the official 'language of liberty' and strenuous efforts were made by central government, chiefly through education, to establish standard French as the first language within all French territories. Indeed, the business of learning standard French was linked at a very basic level to the widespread political need for the new citizenry to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities. The majority (though, significantly, not all) non-French speakers supported such moves. They did so to keep up with the unprecedented political and social changes that were transforming their lives and the lives of those around them. Speaking French was part and parcel of the post-Revolutionary conception of what it was to be a 'citizen'. What is more, the standardisation of languages as 'official' national languages elsewhere in Europe followed the French pattern.<sup>20</sup>

However, the speaking of regional languages was bound up with the political and cultural autonomy of the people who spoke them. There were those who wished to retain their ways of speaking and to maintain their heritage cultures and customs. In the nineties, scholarly attention became focused on regional languages and dialects in relation to standard French, when, partly as a consequence of the moves towards standardisation, 'minority' languages became interesting to linguists. To give an salient example, the nature of Euskara (Basque language) was discussed among linguists in Paris in the seventeen-nineties and, indeed, these discussions prompted von Humboldt, who was resident there at the time, to visit *pays Basque* and to make a systematic study of the language. In point of fact, the principle of defending languages as the carriers of heritage cultures – that is as the bearers of historically evolved traditions, values, customs and practices - was worked out chiefly by German thinkers. Arguably, the notion of Basque 'culture' today is partly the product of nineteenth century German philology, and it is to such developments in Germany that I want to turn now.

\* \* \*

The 'universalistic' values of the French First Republic - *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* - were shadowed in Germany by particularistic national ones. After the Prussian defeat at Jena and the military occupation of Berlin (1806-1809), universal revolutionary ideals looked oppressively French to those German intellectuals who committed themselves to the project of national renewal.

In Germany, education and scholarship were wedded to national renewal when a link was forged between jurisprudence, classical scholarship and comparative and historical approaches to language studies. The great German legal scholar, Savigny who later founded the Historical School of Jurisprudence in Berlin (1815) took his student, Jacob Grimm, a founding figure of German philology, to Paris in 1805. Earlier, I mentioned that Roman law (the *loi agraire*) was important for Revolutionary theorists who wished to redistribute land. Such

developments encouraged scholarly work on ancient texts. But the study of ancient German manuscripts by German philologists in Paris took on an altogether different importance. German scholars like Savigny as well as the great historian Niebhuhr set exacting new standards of scholarly rigour. They deplored the way that classical texts, particularly those concerning Roman Law, were poorly interpreted by French scholars, who wanted to make political use of them. By contrast with French scholars who discovered universal principles in ancient laws, Savigny's methodologically sophisticated approach to interpreting ancient German texts uncovered legal traditions that were deeply rooted in historical experience and custom. Paradoxically, such work provided von Humboldt, who supported the idea of a new social order, with critical, perspectives on French attempts to create a new political order from 'a utopian blueprint of pure reason'.<sup>21</sup> From von Humboldt's perspective, a new order, if it were to flourish, must somehow be grown from the seeds of the past.

German intellectuals, following Savigny, pictured national identity not so much as formalised rights and duties, but rather as being to do with 'belonging' to the historical, 'organic' (cultural, linguistic and 'racial') community. (This concept of community, which is in some ways deeply problematic, is usually referred to as the *Volksgemeinschaft*). Moreover, questions about the origins of this community were heavily politicised precisely because they were articulated with the keenly sensed need to establish the basis for a unified nation. Thus, the political quest for national origins supplied the engine that drove academic philology in the German universities.<sup>22</sup>

Since the French Revolution, national identity in continental Europe has been defined chiefly in secular terms. With the advent of the Enlightenment's sense of modernity, citizens have related to 'tradition' and to the idea of a 'national past' differently than before. Previously, institutions, (mainly the Church and the Judiciary) had mediated history. Now individuals were more reflexive and more self-directing in their approach to the past. At the same time, with the rise of modern nation-state, and with the concentration of political power in its central

institutions, the state itself began to claim an increasingly powerful role in 'mediating' the past, as well as in selecting and codifying 'official' cultural knowledge. One of the effects of this process was to subordinate regional, class and ethnic traditions in relation to official, dominant ones.

The state also began to picture itself as having the chief responsibility (and the capability through its education system) for forging a unifying national spirit. From the outset, compulsory education was charged with the responsibility for binding individual citizens' allegiance to the nation by selecting, codifying and interpreting an 'official' tradition that was meant to stand for the shared national consciousness. And thus the systematic study of indigenous languages, laws, customs, folklore and so on was organised within a fundamentally conservative project of national restoration. In Germany this took place exclusively in the universities, whereas the pattern in France and England was strikingly different. Whereas in France the notion of being French was tied to a notion of citizenship within jurisdictional boundaries, in Germany cultural and community boundaries were difficult to establish for historical and geographical reasons. Consequently, German policy makers, in partnership with academics and scholars - chiefly historians and philologists, but later, biologists - were keen to discover 'scientific principles' that would enable them to distinguish among 'true nationals' and 'aliens'. And thus nationalism permeated the institutions of the German nation state - especially educational ones - from the early nineteenth-century on.

However, in the early nineteenth-century, there were two powerful countervailing humanist ideals in Germany that acted as a bulwark against unfettered nationalism. They both reflected seminal principles of the original *Bildung* ideal. The first principle was embodied in the educational emphasis on inward, moral development as a preparation for *world* citizenship guided by the thread of the history of Mankind. The second principle was a striking, cosmopolitan emphasis on the role of diversity in the processes of human development. Unfortunately these countervailing ideals were weakened and debased, after their initial formulation.

The conception of Enlightenment that emerged in Germany, then, was different in certain key respects from the one that evolved in France. Like the French *philosophes*, German thinkers asked about progress. But they placed greater emphasis than their French counterparts on developmental processes, and especially on processes of inner development (*Innerlichkeit*). They became especially interested in Enlightenment as a psychological condition.

Consequently, they concentrated on the history of the cultivation of the inner-self from 'genetic' developmental perspectives. 'Genetic' histories of developmental growth were essentially narratives of self-cultivation (hence the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* genre). I shall be explaining how the notion of 'genesis' was borrowed from contemporary work in eighteenth-century biology, and how it was used as a principle of historical change later when I discuss Herder's notion of development. I want to establish that German thinkers were interested in the cultivation of the inner-self from the perspective of the development of moral sense- in a word, conscience – over time. They discussed the inward processes of individual cultivation, subjectivity and identity at greater length than the French and they were preoccupied with shaping persons and fostering their moral 'growth'. Not surprising, then, they were especially interested in the psychological mechanisms by which inner states of consciousness are qualitatively transformed, and this transformation was linked to human rationality.<sup>23</sup>

Kant put human reason, not faith or religious dogma, at the centre of his philosophy. His notion of the rational, autonomous individual emerged from a fundamentally Protestant outlook. Kant emphasised the world constituting powers of mind and, further to this, his conception of the rational autonomous subject as the seat of all knowledge implied a radical conception of freedom. According to Kant, the history of Mankind is the story of Man's emergence from domination by nature and self-imposed tutelage. Self-mastery and an awareness of freedom and rationality have brought about a transition, as Kant puts it, from 'the raw state of merely animal creature to humanity, from the harness of

instincts to the guidance of reason - in a word, from the guardianship of nature to the state of freedom.<sup>24</sup> On this view, self-mastery – taking responsibility for one's own actions - provides the key to human development. We have no option, says Kant, but to regard ourselves as beings bound by constraints of morality and purpose. Moral growth, he claims, is Man's essential purpose and it is the *telos* of history. And such has been the appeal of Kant's vision of Enlightenment that generations of thinkers have been attracted by its promise of human autonomy, worth and dignity.

Although Kant's conception of freedom was indebted to thinkers of the French Enlightenment, (especially to Rousseau), it was significantly different in its scope and emphasis. Whereas key French thinkers were resolutely anti-metaphysical in their philosophical outlook, German thinkers were typically concerned with metaphysical problems: the fate of the soul; the transformation of the inner-life; and, above all, the attainment of spiritual autonomy. They were especially concerned with the growth of the individual's ethical sense.<sup>25</sup> The *Bildung* pedagogical ideal of individual, self-activated, self-directed cultivation was erected on the foundations of Kant's epistemology. Its cornerstone was the Kantian precept that Man's essential purpose is moral development. The *Bildung* ideal deserves our attention here, not just because it has helped to shape our modern sense of the status and worth of the individual, but also because it has contributed powerfully to the normative foundations of a vision of education as human development.

The sources of Kant's notion of self-development were not intrinsically German, of course. Rousseau's writings on education, for instance, especially *Emile*, (1762) helped to shape his thinking. In the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1754), Rousseau had claimed that history had failed to bring about Enlightenment. Thus he declares: 'The development of his faculties and the progress of his mind has made man civilized, but unhappy and immoral.'<sup>26</sup> Later, in *Emile*, he attempted to 'reconcile nature with history, man's selfish nature with the demands of civil society, inclination with duty. Man requires a healing

education [he says] which returns him self to himself.'<sup>27</sup> With Rousseau, Kant claimed that Enlightenment is fundamentally an emancipatory project. But, crucially, he also claimed, characteristically, that Enlightenment's chief goal was to release man from, '*self-incurred tutelage* ' [immaturity] and to restore him to his rightful self. If freedom were to be granted, and if individuals were to take full responsibility for their thoughts and actions, he argued, then an 'enlightened' society would surely follow.<sup>28</sup>

Kant's ascetic notion of self-mastery, responsibility and the strict adherence to duty, which is grounded in the laws of *reason*, was the cornerstone of his conception of the ideal state. Thus he writes, "The Idea of a constitution in harmony with the natural rights of man, one namely in which citizens obedient to the law, besides being united, ought also to be the legislative, lies at the basis of all political reforms."<sup>29</sup> And, having posed the question, 'In what order alone can progress toward the better be expected?' Kant answers unswervingly, 'not by the movement of things *from the bottom to top*, but *from top to bottom*.'<sup>30</sup> In sum, Kant taught that the education of the inner-self, the formation of individual moral character and the development of a sense of duty would lead to Enlightenment. And transcendental consciousness, (or mind, which is what he means by the '*top*') would direct the whole operation.

The counterweight to Kant's radical notion of freedom is his exacting sense of responsibility. Kant's 'categorical imperative' tells us how to act. Our given sense of right and wrong directs our actions when they are correct. Kant puts authority firmly into an internal condition. But at the same time, he abstracts the 'categorical imperative from history and the specificities of social determinations. Thus he closes down the possibility of asking where the 'duties' and 'responsibilities' – the normative foundations of human social interactions – come from. Rather, he says, they are given *a priori*.<sup>31</sup>

The responsibilities of the state in furthering the project of Enlightenment seemed clear to Kant. He believed that progress towards 'enlightened' society

will occur when, and only when, the state puts an appropriate education system in place. But as Kant himself recognised, the likelihood of such a project ever succeeding depends ultimately on a wider programme of political reforms.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the instant we reflect on the realities of the modern nation state (the amassing of centralized power; the weight of administrative bureaucracy; the regulation of highly stratified populations and the reproduction of patterns of material and social inequalities), the Kantian ideal of *emancipation* from 'self-incurred tutelage' seems an impossible abstraction. But Kant himself can hardly be expected to have foreseen how nation states would develop. Besides, this misses the point. The priority for Kant's generation was to break free of slavish adherence to custom, superstition and the dogma of established religion on the one hand; and to defend individuals from the arbitrary powers of princes and despots on the other.

For Kant the intuitions and the universal categories and structures that are given to mind stand above particular circumstances. They lie outside the historical experiences of peoples, nations and the material processes of change and in this sense they are truly 'transhistorical'. Thus, from its soaring critical vantage-point reason challenges mindless custom and blind prejudice. Kant appealed to reason above religious dogma and the arbitrary power, and he put reason at the center of his system because he wanted to get beyond things that are a matter of chance and contingency. In essence, he wanted to establish the limits of what we can claim to know with the same degree of certainty that Newton gave the law of gravity.

From an ethical standpoint, the notion of the Kantian subject of cognition is tied to a powerful conception of the sovereign individual reason operating within a teleological framework. We live purposefully. And the essential purpose of human existence, Kant claimed, is to free oneself from 'self-incurred immaturity' in order to attain moral autonomy. Thus, the tacit goal of each individual is to take responsibility for his or her actions and decisions.

On Kant's view, the individual thinking subject is ultimately the source of all knowledge. But as we noted earlier, he or she always bears the burden of ethical accountability – the judgements of others. What is at stake is the sovereign autonomy of the individual citizen. Moreover, the picture of Humanity that emerges from such a powerful conception of individual responsibility has been the foundation stone of modern European liberal humanism, and this is why liberal humanism and social democracy have put the highest premium on the development of individual conscience. For liberals, conscience provides *the* crucial site where individual interests can be reconciled with the common good. Thus, a concern with the internal workings of the individual consciences – psychology, cognition, affect and the formation and the development of moral sense – assumes paramount importance. That is why liberals have made education, especially moral education, centrally important, not just for individuals, but for the whole of society.

This is also why the ideal of the sovereign autonomy of the individual conscience has been enshrined in the key institutions of modern liberal democracies, especially education. What is more, the humanist ideal of education as the formation of ethical sensibility has provided a powerful rationale for literary education, where exposure to the 'humanising' qualities of 'great works' has been thought about as necessary for the moral growth of the 'good citizen'. On this view, the training of conscience is not some kind of epiphenomenon of the 'real' historical processes.<sup>33</sup> Rather, it constitutes a precondition of genuine political reform. And it is precisely such a developmental concern with the training of ethical – and critical – consciousness that has been the mainspring of claims about the humanising potentials of literary studies.

Yet critics of liberal humanism, from the nineteenth-century on have argued strenuously that the structural problems in society, like poverty and widespread social injustice that determine the material conditions of existence – cannot be solved at the level of the individual conscience. (Indeed, this has been one of the

chief criticisms of the *Bildung* educational ideal). Such critics have cast suspicion on liberalism's a-social emphasis on self-cultivation, arguing that this has been pursued at the expense of more fundamental social values like solidarity. Instead, they have wanted to prioritize 'the social' above the individual. As a consequence, philosophical idealism's critics have wanted to reformulate the problem of subjectivity (as it has appeared within the idealist tradition) in terms of the social constitution of consciousness.

Some of Kant's contemporaries, as well as many philosophers and thinkers that came after Kant, were profoundly unhappy with the 'disembodied', abstract character of the transcendental thinking subject. And as soon as we try to think about the Kantian trans-historical subject at the same time as a flesh and blood, 'embodied' thinking human being we can see why. By contrast with the abstract thinking subject, 'actual' people, living in historically developed societies with their particular cultural norms will have their own distinctive views of the world, their own standards of judgement, their own criteria of truth and value. Such is human diversity. In a theoretically important sense, this is how they recognise themselves, both as individuals and as peoples. It is what makes them who they are. Indeed, it is frequently argued that people's outlooks are *so* tied to their ways of life, to their concrete circumstances, to their particular 'spheres', as Herder puts it, that *what* they claim to know can never be properly separated from who they are and where they come from.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of the rational individual thinking subject – the transcendental subject of cognition - is the foundation for Kant's epistemology. Yet individuation - what it is that distinguishes one flesh-and-blood person from another, in a word, difference - is hard to come at in purely Kantian terms. Concrete individualizing attributes, such as gender, ethnicity or social class are, strictly speaking, not relevant, where the chief goal is to uncover the formal conditions that make knowledge possible. Particular, concrete attributes belong to the domain of *empirical*, not purely logical, enquiry.<sup>35</sup>

However, a profound change occurred around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth-century, when the focus shifted dramatically from the problem of how knowledge is possible to the problem of 'being in the world'. Essentially, this marked a shift from epistemology to ontology. Intriguingly, this ontological shift was reflected in further changes to pictures of language. A powerful notion of the role of language (signification) in the processes of existential self-understanding emerged when German thinkers especially began to suggest that both individual and collective subjectivities were somehow constituted both 'in' and 'through' linguistic (semiotic) activity. I shall return to the notion of self-constitution in language later. But first, I want to look at linguistic theories of self-cultivation, and particularly at Herder's theory of the subject.

\* \* \*

Much of Herder's thinking developed out of his opposition to Kant's approach. Therefore, I should make at least one broad difference between the two thinkers clear. The way in which Herder sought to take into account human 'drives', feelings and emotions of flesh-and-blood people contrasts strikingly with the Kantian emphasis on disembodied reason.

By contrast with Kant, Herder pictured the development of the 'whole person' in history and culture. He conceptualised human emergence in historical time and, further to this, he claimed that human development occurs on two distinct planes: first, on the individual plane; and second, on the plane of the community. With his conception of the cultural development of the whole community he called attention to the seminal significance of human 'collectivity'. Further to this, what I am calling Herder's 'two-plane' theory takes us back to a paradox at the core of the *Bildungs* ideal. For many German thinkers, self-cultivation was never envisaged as something separate from the development of the larger community. The *Bildung* pedagogical ideal tied the processes of self-directed, individual cultivation to the supra-individual processes of collective development. Two

lines of development, two trajectories, one individual and the other collective, are thought about as being shaped and guided by the same animating principle - for Herder, it was a notion of a creative life-force, or *Kraft*. Later, for Hegel, it was a guiding world-spirit, or *Geist*. The difficulty is this: when the emphasis falls on collective development, what gets diminished is the Kantian sense of individual responsibility and accountability, especially where there is a tendency to project individual, subjective development onto collective development, as if there were no differences between the two processes.

The original *Bildung* notion of self-cultivation as 'development' differs significantly from contemporary 'individualism' and it is especially important to get the difference clear. *Bildung* is not like present notions such as 'the pursuit of personal goals' or 'self-fulfilment' or 'realising one's own potential', where individual development is thought about as somehow independent of - in some ways in spite of - the larger community. Since the end of the eighteenth century, as one contemporary German philosopher has recently suggested, terms like 'enlightenment' and 'emancipation' have referred to experiences in which an individual undergoes changes at a personal level that are linked with learning to act rationally and achieving new levels of self-understanding. In this sense, 'emancipation' is a special experience for the way that self-understanding is associated with an increase in personal autonomy.

The link between personal development and political autonomy demands particularly careful scrutiny. Experientially, where ethical questions are connected with getting clear about who we are and who we want to be, and where such questions also involve wanting to know what is equally good for all, we learn to see ourselves differently not in isolation but rather both in and through our relations with others. With such processes moral and ethical insights depend upon new forms of self-understanding. Such personal transformations are often traced back to adolescence, when they are felt especially keenly. Here the notion of emancipation is located in the domain of the subject's relation with itself.<sup>36</sup> Therefore there is a crucial distinction to be made between modest, ordinary,

biographical experiences of emancipation in the sense that I have just described it, and large socio-political events, such as the French Revolution or the ending of slavery. This distinction is particularly important in connection with competing claims over what education can and cannot achieve.

Herder's notion of self-expression is much larger in its scope than contemporary individualistic notions of 'self-expression' and 'personal growth'. More often than not, such contemporary notions are embedded in what we might call 'progressive education discourse' (for instance discourses about children's 'creativity') with the consequence that somehow the larger implications get forgotten. Behind the word '*expression*' as Herder uses it is a 'grand theory' about the purpose and direction of world history. Moreover, Herder framed his theory in such a way that it was linked to large presuppositions about the ways that nations develop, especially where he suggests that national civilizations move through various stages towards some sort of end-state, some sort of completeness. Nationalists have appropriated such ideas, of course. But with this picture of human development Herder also holds out a strikingly *cosmopolitan* picture of human diversity as well as one of common humanity forming a unity - a 'progressive whole'. In sum, for Herder, the 'purpose' of world history is the advancement of the whole of humanity.

Kant had assumed that there was an underlying causal unity in nature of which the appearances of things were only one aspect. For Kant, Newton had demonstrated that the whole of nature could be understood in terms of mathematical laws. With his phenomenology, Kant aimed to derive the *essence* of things from their appearances by relying on the instrument of reason. He was especially critical of existing methods of classifying the natural world because they had failed to capture the underlying unifying processes at work - the sense of the *whole* out of which the *manifold* character of things derives. Indeed, the notion of unifying processes in nature appealed strongly to Goethe. And it was Goethe, through his contact with Herder, who developed his conception of the 'formation and transformation of organic natures, and who coined the term

*morphology*.<sup>37</sup> The idea of genetic development - a series of transformations (*Metamorphosen*) - that shaped the picture of how individual human growth occurs emerged somewhat earlier.<sup>38</sup>

Up until around the middle of the eighteenth-century, it was widely held that human development *unfolds* from some kind of 'core entity'. This 'core entity' was thought about as something like a miniature version of what was to come. The important point is that the core is already in existence in its essential form from the start. This notion of human development, which is part of a general biological theory, is usually referred to as *preformation*.<sup>39</sup> However, the theory of *preformation* fell apart when German embryologists set current wisdom aside and began using microscopes to observe and record changes to animal organs on a day-to-day basis. They began to document with meticulous precision, stage by stage, minute transformations over time. What is more, the manner in which they recorded their findings had at least four major ramifications that extended far beyond biology. First, the genre of the scientific report was transformed when biologists began to write histories of physiological transformations. In short, they wrote 'genetic' descriptions of transformations over time to represent growth as a *historical* process. Further to this, biologists were led to seek the 'laws' governing changes whereby biological potentialities become actualities. Second, the principles of *genetic* analysis were imported into what was emerging as psychological science. Third, biologists began to relate the patterns of individual development, (*ontogenesis*) to a larger picture of the development of the species (*phylogenesis*).<sup>40</sup> In a short space, detailed, systematic recording began to alter fundamentally the way that human development was pictured. It led directly to the construction of a *genetic* picture of human development— not only *physical* development, but also *psychological* development too.

The fourth major ramification concerns the philosophy of history. For Herder, humanity came from a single origin that constituted part of a unified great system. This corresponded in some ways to Kant's picture of things, but for Herder, who believed that humanity was animated by primal 'life-forces' there is

both a striking picture of human diversity as well as a powerful conception of the 'life-cycle' of different peoples, which he discusses in quasi-biological terms. Crucially, Herder's terms mirror the terms used by biologists to describe the process of *epigenesis*. What happened was that Herder took over a biological picture of development directly from contemporary German biology and blended it into a 'purposive' vision of world history. On Herder's view, story of the earth is the emergence of higher forms of life from lower ones. The creation of higher forms, whether he speaks of biological or cultural forms, is pictured as the work of *genetic* forces.<sup>41</sup> Characteristically, he applied a notion of animating life forces - much as he did with the notion of human 'creativity' (*Genesis/Kraft*) - across the board, irrespective of whether he was talking about organisms, languages, natural species or nations because he thought of them as part of the unified, great system.<sup>42</sup>

The advances in embryology had a profound impact on pictures of world history, when the methods and insights borrowed from 'historicising biology' were imported into 'truly' historical thinking. Herder was quick to take up the theory of *epigenesis*, (as was his pupil, Goethe) and to apply it to the history of Mankind. In his essay of 1774, *Yet Another Philosophy of History for the Furthering of Humanity*, Herder made both implicit and explicit links between historical and biological processes. Moreover, he drew striking parallels between the development of biological species, the growth of national civilizations and the universal progress of humanity.<sup>43</sup> For Herder, the idea of a fundamental life force, an essential creative energy, which, significantly, he called *genesis* (which is the semantic equivalent of the German *Bildung*), provided the footings for his theory of the individual self-formation in a way that was strikingly new. What is more, it enabled him to encompass the particular developments of individuals and nations within an organic picture of the emergence of the whole of humanity.<sup>44</sup>

Later, for Hegel human emergence was pictured as a dialectical process that depends on contact with difference. His starting point was his insight that our

whole understanding of the world is bounded by the horizons of our historical situation. Thus he maintained that it is only by conducting an interpretative dialogue with the past, as well as with cultures that are radically different from our own, that we are led to reflect on our own historical situatedness. It is only when we come into contact with ancient or foreign languages and the civilizations that gave rise to them, that we begin to push beyond the boundaries of our own parochial understandings to reach new stages of self-understanding. Thus cultures develop over time.

The idea of an interpretative dialogue with the past to reach self-understanding has attracted generations of humanists and educators. Crucially, for key thinkers of the Enlightenment, the past was no longer mediated exclusively by religious institutions, rather it was something that individuals might confront and interrogate for themselves. As a consequence of this, the notion of finding human significance and meaning in the present through a dialogue with the past, where individual and collective experience has been sedimented in historically evolved cultures, became centrally important for secular philology as well as for linguistic and literary studies that grew out of it. Such ideas remained centrally important in Europe and in the United States for two centuries, right up to the nineteen twenties, when a new generation of thinkers appeared to break the spell of German philosophy of history. Today, language, not history, is sovereign.

\* \* \*

When Herder was appointed General Superintendent, Head of the Protestant Clergy in Weimar, he proved himself to be an energetic and capable administrator. Yet despite his efforts he had little lasting impact on the education system. Herder brought to the business of school reform his practical experiences as a teacher. He grasped the way that the possibilities for reform depend upon resources. His proposals for the reform of the *Gymnasium* were accepted in principle by the authorities, but hampered in the event by a lack of funds. Moreover, where only a small minority of students went on from secondary

education to university, Herder struggled to provide an appropriate education for all. In Weimar, where the majority of children received their education in the same school, (the children of the aristocracy received tuition from private tutors), the syllabus had to provide for varying needs and it also had to meet different expectations in a highly stratified society. Moreover, Herder never saw education as a means for transforming society in the name of equality (in the way that Robespierre did). He presupposed, rather than challenged, the existing social hierarchy. We might suppose, therefore that Herder would see education as training for a specific station in life. But actually, he advocated a common foundational curriculum in the lower school that aimed to offer a general preparation for adulthood. Herder's curriculum included history, geography and mathematics for all students.

The curricular principle of a common foundation for all – a common educational offer - is a fundamental one. It was linked to the educational goal of producing independent, 'useful citizens'. Thus Herder writes, 'It is not for his precious studies that a man should educate himself, but for life, for the use and the application of his knowledge in all human situations and callings'. Chiefly, Herder saw education as a practical preparation for life beyond school. Indeed, he always maintained a strong sense of useful knowledge and advocated 'the application of knowledge in all human situations', as the following passage makes plain,

We are men before we become members of a particular profession, and woe-betide us if we do not remain men when exercising this calling. The best of our culture and usefulness in our person comes from what we know as men and have learned as boys, without too anxious thought of what the state wants to make of us. If the knife is once sharpened, all kinds of things can be cut with it, and not every household has a different piece of cutlery to deal with bread and with meat. So it is too with the sharpness and polish of the intelligence. Sharpen and polish it on what and for what you will, so long as it is sharpened and polished, and use it afterwards to your heart's content and according to the needs of your station...it is not for precious studies alone that a man should educate himself, but for life, for the use and application of his knowledge in all human situations and callings. What I learn as a theologian I try more and more to forget, and my office compels me to do so. Just because of that I

am becoming a better tested man and a more useful citizen.<sup>45</sup>

Behind Herder's generous, liberal conception of a humane education for all lay his powerful sense of the 'creativity' of the people. And this sense of popular creativity was linked to his concept of 'expression' as mark of common humanity.

Herder's detractors have criticised his lack of realism. As one of them put it, 'Herder's ideal of all-round humanity is in practice reduced to one of universal receptivity...It is an ideal of culture for scholars, not for men of action, who need clearly defined motives and models.'<sup>46</sup> Crucially, Herder never doubted the possibility of development for all pupils, regardless of their 'natural' abilities and their different starting points. The fact was that existing social arrangements imposed heavy restrictions on the syllabus. The upper school, which was geared to university entrance, concentrated heavily on the classics, especially Latin. (The emphasis shifted to Greek later, with von Humboldt's reforms), so Latin was taught regardless of students' aptitudes and interests, and so there was little that Herder could do.

\* \* \*

Herder was professionally concerned with education throughout his life, both as a teacher and as an administrator. But his reforms, as I just mentioned, had little lasting impact. By contrast, Von Humboldt, the chief architect of Prussian education reform after 1809, was concerned with education for only a short time. Yet he transformed the Prussian education system in a way that influenced the whole of Europe.

Von Humboldt was a Prussian aristocrat. His wealth came from his extensive estates in Poland (he was an absentee landlord), as well as the family estate at Tegel near Berlin. (Tegel was looted during the French military occupation). His patrician education enlivened and enriched by travel and through contact with

various languages and cultures, contrasted strikingly with the harsh realities of ordinary people who lived and worked on his estates. Their unvarying lives were tied to the land and to the seasonal cycle of labour.

And yet, von Humboldt's educational policies were shaped powerfully by an 'enlightened' conception of human development. His outlook was fundamentally Kantian. He aimed to 'improve' people's lives, and to make common, general education available to all, regardless of the individual's station in life. Much as Herder had done, he saw education as a general preparation for life rather than for a particular occupation or a position in society. Thus he advocated the universal development of individual capabilities (*allgemeine menschenbildung*), and the awakening of students' minds to equip them for the various situations that life presented.<sup>47</sup> In the aftermath to the French Revolution, such ideas appeared dangerously radical to members of his class, who feared the consequences of educating people beyond the needs of their station.<sup>48</sup>

Von Humboldt was appointed as the head of the newly created Section for Educational and Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Prussian Interior Ministry in February 1809. Unusually, his was a secular appointment. Up to 1808, educational institutions, such as primary and secondary schools, had remained under Church control. Indeed, Von Humboldt's appointment was a controversial one precisely because his ant-religious views were well known. But there had been a marked change in the Prussian cultural climate, following the humiliating defeat by the French. German education reformers (especially Fichte) sought a basis for a new relationship between the state and schools and the task of establishing the new relationship fell to von Humboldt.

Von Humboldt was chiefly responsible for broad section of state sponsored cultural activity: the supervision of schools, universities, the art and science academies, cultural associations and the Royal Theatre.<sup>49</sup> Paradoxically, in an early treatise, *On the Limits of State Action*, he had advocated the imposition of strict limits on state powers. Notwithstanding his views on limiting the state's

reach, he did not hesitate to consolidate his powers and to direct reform energetically from the centre. His first move was to centralise authority by swiftly transferring financial control of education from local communities to central government. Subsequently, he made it a requirement that university applicants pass the *Abitur* examination. (This now involved translation from Greek, as well as oral and written tests in Latin). The *Abitur* could only be taken by pupils at the classical schools designated officially as *Gymnasien*. He also introduced mandatory tests for candidates for secondary teaching posts, restricting the local council's choice of candidates to those with a *Gymnasium* education. Additionally, he grasped the need for clear and logical progression through various stages for education to work as a system.

On the face of it, nothing had prepared von Humboldt for the practical task of educational reform. Where did von Humboldt's practical knowledge of education policy making come from? To account for his grasp of institutional realities we have to look back to the time he spent in Paris in the 1790s, and to his contact with the French *idéologues* there.

\* \* \*

The *idéologues* were a small circle of thinkers who had survived the Great Terror (1793-1794), and who were chiefly responsible for drawing up the ground plan for the first coherent, modern national state education system in Europe. In the aftermath to the Terror, and in the wake of the reactionary 'White Terror' that followed it, the *idéologues* pictured a central role for free, secular, public education in the name of the social and political advancement of Mankind. In doing so they built upon the proposals of earlier thinkers, especially Condorcet, whose ideas on education one historian has claimed 'lie at the very heart of the political and intellectual processes from which the modern French school originates.'<sup>50</sup>

When von Humboldt went to Paris in 1797, the Republic was sunk deep in crisis.

He followed political events closely and studied the problems of the Thermidorean government at first hand. Also he kept in close contact with the *idéologues*, especially, Abbé Sieyès and Destutt de Tracy, on a daily basis. But before I describe von Humboldt's contact with this group, I shall need to backtrack and give a rapid sketch of developments in post-revolutionary France.

\* \* \*

During the fragile Thermidorean Republic (1794-99), when the *idéologues* were chiefly active, there was a powerful rekindling of humane values – *l'esprit humaine* - in public life. Institutions for deaf and dumb persons were established; measures against vandalism were instituted; measures to preserve works of art were brought in; and plans for a new National Library were proposed. Such initiatives reflected a renewal of Enlightenment values and the Enlightenment's belief in the improvement of the human condition. Moreover, liberal proposals for a national system of education which had been conceived and proposed in the period immediately after the Revolution, but never implemented, were revived after Robespierre's execution.

In the immediate aftermath to the Revolution of 1789, the Constituent Assembly (1791) had aimed to replace the old education system with one that would represent the secular spirit of the new order. First Talleyrand (1791), then Condorcet (1792), the so-called 'last of the *philosophes*', proposed new systems of education comprising elementary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Thus they drew up the ground-plans for the first national, state education system in Europe. Condorcet's proposal (20-21 April, 1791) was especially far-sighted. He advocated co-education, physical training, and a balanced curriculum that included science. His vision of secular, non-compulsory education was conceived as a basic, universal right for all citizens and it was linked closely to his theory of democratic reform. However, in the best spirit of the Enlightenment's love of rational enquiry and its hatred of prejudice and dogma, Condorcet promulgated freedom of teaching. Thus he wrote: 'Neither the French Constitution nor even

the *Declaration of Rights* will be presented to any class of citizens as tables which are handed down from Heaven and must be worshipped and believed. Enthusiasm will not be founded on prejudice or the habits of childhood'.<sup>51</sup> But Condorcet perished in the Terror before his proposals could be implemented.

The universities were closed in 1792. Further to this, Robespierre attacked the very spirit of the Enlightenment when he denounced the *encyclopédie* and inaugurated the Cult of the Supreme Being. To the future *idéologues* – especially Madme de Helvétius, Volney, Chenier, Danou, and de Tracy – Robespierre's actions amounted to a counter-Enlightenment. Whereas Condorcet had encouraged freedom of teaching and a critical spirit in education, Robespierre aimed to use education reform to secure a radical transformation of the whole of French society. In sum, for Robespierre, the chief purpose of public instruction was to produce a new kind of citizen.<sup>52</sup>

Robespierre advocated a compulsory system of public institutions, each housing four hundred to six hundred pupils. Boys between the ages of five and twelve, and girls between the ages of five and eleven would be educated away from their families. Schooling was to be equality in practice. Each child would receive the same food and clothing and the same teaching and care as every other one:

There, all treated equally, fed equally, clothed equally, taught equally, equality will be for the young pupils not a specious theory but a continually effective practice, In this way a new race will be formed, strong, hard-working, disciplined, and separated by an inseparable barrier from all impure contact with prejudices of our antiquated species.<sup>53</sup>

Robespierre's proposal states clearly his intention to transform society by producing a new kind of citizenry through the establishment of a 'complete and austere' pedagogic regime. This regime was pledged to abolish all existing inequalities; to inscribe 'official' values (hard work and discipline); and to effect a complete and irrevocable break with the old order. However, Robespierre was arrested and executed in 1794, and his plans were never implemented.

Abbé Sieyès survived the Terror to join the *ideologues*. Crucially, he linked the prospects for social and political advancement to the establishment of a universal, free, secular state education system. Sieyès had been the chief designer of the 1791 Constitution. In it he made the following proposal:

A system of Public Instruction will be created and organised, which will be common to all citizens, free as regards the education that is indispensable for everyone, and ordered in a hierarchy of establishments that will be related to the division of the kingdom. National fetes will be established to preserve the memory of the French Revolution, sustain fraternity between the citizens. And attach them to the constitution, the fatherland and the laws.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Sieyès was the major political theorist of the 1789 Revolution.<sup>55</sup> His advocacy for a representational system of government, his conception of rights, his drafting of constitutions, his plans for the division of French territories; his scheme for the organisation of central government and his conception of a national education system were comprehensive and hugely influential. But Sieyès was not a democrat. Essentially, he believed that men of property and education both would and should be elected to power in a representative system.<sup>56</sup> Immediately after the Revolution, Sieyès was preoccupied with drafting the Constitution (1791). Later, however, he turned his attention to education because, like Condorcet before him, he linked universal education to the rights and the responsibilities of citizenship for the new social order.

In June 1793, Sieyès' plan for the establishment of a coherent system of national instruction comprising primary, secondary and tertiary institutions was presented to the National Convention. (It built upon earlier proposals by Tallyrand and Condorcet). The backbone of his plan was a scheme to provide free schooling for all children – boys and girls - between the ages of six and thirteen. Tellingly, Sieyès was more concerned with establishing a framework for public instruction than he was with specifying the actual content of the curriculum, which he was content to leave to the National Institute that had replaced the French Academy.

Sieyès conception of education was an unusually broad one. He believed in

educating 'the whole person' for the responsibilities of citizenship. Whereas the traditional curriculum had been predominantly literary, Sieyès wanted to expand the syllabus to include physical, moral and 'industrial' teaching. Additionally, he developed an unusually far-sighted conception of 'life-long learning' whereby men and women of all ages might receive public instruction over the course of a lifetime. Thus, incrementally, people would understand their civic rights and responsibilities.

The return to humane 'enlightened' values of the 1789 Revolution after Robespierre's execution is understandable as a reaction to the extreme violence of the preceding years. What needs explaining further is the significance of intense discussions about language in education that were conducted among the *idéologues* and their associates over the next four years. Intriguingly, it was during his stay in Paris, which began in 1797, that von Humboldt began to evolve a realistic picture of how a state education system might be made to work in Germany. It was in Paris, through daily contact with the discussants, that he resolved to undertake a comprehensive study of the various languages of Mankind. And crucially, his proposals for Prussian educational reforms sought to avoid the mistakes of the French system that he had seen at first hand.

Chiefly among those with whom von Humboldt discussed the nature of language was Destutt de Tracy. Tracy was a leading figure among the *idéologues*, who was directly concerned with plans for education after 1796. Tracy promulgated a new 'super-science' of ideas. This involved the study of Man from the perspective of the rigorous study of the formation of ideas - '*idéologie*' as it was called. The theoretical underpinnings of the new science drew heavily on Condillac's ideas about the origins of language and on his sensationist epistemology, which he wrote about in two key works: *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, (1746, and *Traité des sensations*, (1754).

'Ideology' stemmed from a perception shared among those who had survived the Terror that human nature had to be fully explored and explained to prepare and to

equip future citizens for the responsibilities of self-government. In various programmatic papers and memoranda de Tracy called for a theory of moral and political knowledge resting on the secure foundation of a science of the formation of ideas. Tallyrand duly called it 'ideology'. Further to this, he claimed that the reform of science must entail the complete overhaul of scientific terminology. The aim was to purge science of its metaphysical residue. Ideology then was to be a rigorous first science, and de Tracy demanded a 'Newton of the science of thought'. The methods of the new science would be to progress from the 'decomposition' (the rigorous analysis into constituent parts) of first the elements of ideas and then on, systematically, to the whole.

Central to de Tracy's project was his non-metaphysical account of mind. In June 1796 he presented his paper, *Analysis of the Faculty of Thinking*, in which he formulated sensationalism pithily in the precept 'to think is to sense'. He was especially careful to show that the science of ideas was not a branch of metaphysics. Eighteenth-century psychology had presupposed the existence of the 'soul', whereas the new 'sensationalists', after Condillac, aimed to explain Man's means of knowing by analysing the faculties and sensations. De Tracy drew heavily on the tradition of Condillac, but not withstanding his admiration for the thinker, he wrote to the materialist thinker, Cabanis, about problems that Condillac had left unresolved. The notion of mind that they inherited from Condillac and from the Enlightenment generally seemed to Tracy to reintroduce metaphysical considerations. His goal was to reform the scientific study of ideas by replacing the old terminology, which contained metaphysical residues, with non metaphysical terms. Tracy rejected 'psychology' because of its metaphysical associations as in 'the study of the 'soul' or the 'psyche'. The name of the new discipline is especially telling. 'Ideology', was a term derived from the Greek *eidos* (visual image). Intriguingly, the object of study was broadened beyond language to include all forms of signification., and thus Tracy attempted to make *semiotics* centrally important for the French national curriculum.

Tracy claimed that the study of signs - 'sensations and ideas' - held the key to the

understanding and advancement of human culture. Thus, he made the study of signs a foundational discipline of a national curriculum that was designed specifically to produce the new 'French citizen' for the post-revolutionary order. Further to this, the systematic analysis of signs and sensations, Tracy argued, would clarify the 'confusing legacy' of 'enlightened' thought. Crucially, the rigorous analysis of 'sensations and ideas' aimed to establish the boundaries of what could be said and known by purging education of religious dogma. And so from a secular, vigorously anti-clerical standpoint de Tracy aimed to settle fundamental questions that had divided thinkers before the Revolution.

Grammar, or the 'science of communicating ideas' was to provide the foundational element for ideological studies. Tracy believed that by building on rational foundations, by combining ideas along scientific lines and thus attaining to new truths 'ideology' would create a new morality for the new social order. And thus Tracy attempted to establish the centrality of semiotics for modern state education. Moreover, he linked ideological studies to the critical study of political economy, as well as to the formation of a new kind of citizenry. But later, as a direct consequence of the politics that linked Condillac to Republicanism and anti-clericalism, Condillac's doctrine was officially banned during the Restoration that followed the fall of Napoleon.

Condillac's ideas on the nature and purpose of language (as von Humboldt met them when he visited Paris in 1797) kindled the German's interest in the role of signs in human development. From this point on, signs and particularly language seemed to him to hold the key to understanding the various outlooks and mentalities that make up mankind. Moreover, the study of the outlooks and mentalities of nations from a standpoint of language structure constituted a first step towards pinpointing their origins and tracing their developmental histories.

In the aftermath to the Restoration, the Condillac tradition was officially repressed for overtly political (ideological) reasons. (Condillac's ideas were associated with materialism and anti-clericalism). In Germany, too, Condillac's

work was shunned, but for different reasons. German thinkers underestimated the importance of the French philosopher largely because of the way that *idéologues* had elevated Condillac above contemporary German philosophers, at a moment when thinkers like von Humboldt were keenly aware of Kant's immense stature.

Von Humboldt had much difficulty in explaining Kant to Tracy. He complained to Schiller in a letter that 'even when they [the *idéologues*] use the same words as we do they always give them another meaning... their imagination is not our *Einbildungskraft*'.<sup>57</sup> He met Sieyès in May 1798. They took long walks together in the Champs Elysée and discussed the political situation. He also met de Tracy, who had recently written series of influential *memoires* in which he set out his account of the relation between ideas and sensations. Sieyès and de Tracy organised a seminar in Paris where von Humboldt was invited to lead a discussion on contemporary German philosophy. The major theorists of '*idéologie*' were present. But the seminar, which lasted for five hours, ended 'in something of a shambles' and Von Humboldt came away regretting the way that Sieyès put Condillac among the first rank of 'metaphysicians'.<sup>58</sup> He also regretted that Sieyès had not constructed a philosophical system in the German manner.

Von Humboldt arrived in Paris from the intellectual circles of Jena and Weimar that included Goethe, Fichte and Schiller and he refused to rank the French thinkers as highly as contemporary German ones.<sup>59</sup> This had important consequences later on when historians of German philology generally, and Von Humboldt's biographers in particular, confidently ignored the tradition of Condillac. In reality, of course, Condillac's ideas had stimulated German discussions about the origins and the nature of language throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. It is especially ironic therefore that the Condillac tradition was neglected in both France and Germany during for over a century.

Von Humboldt gained invaluable insights into the practical workings of the

Republican constitution directly from his contact with the *idéologues*. He expressed his misgivings about the French attempt 'to create a new society and political order from the utopian blueprint of pure reason alone'.<sup>60</sup> But his misgivings did not arise like Burke's from a conservative reaction to the Revolution. Rather they sprang from his powerful insight that abstract reason alone was an insubstantial basis for radical government, where abrupt discontinuity with the progressive tendencies already present in the previous order forced government to legislate from abstractions that were not embedded in a pre-existing lifeworld. Intriguingly, the historical school of jurisprudence that I mentioned in connection with Savigny stemmed largely from the insight that effective legislation is rooted in culture rather than abstract principles. Typically, Sieyès once remarked, 'If the revolution that is taking place bears no resemblance to any other, it is because it has as its first and true cause the progress of reason.'<sup>61</sup> But the *idéologues* were unable to resolve a crucial paradox. On the one hand, they saw that ideas and values were tied to history; on the other hand they wanted to advance universal principles that were 'true' for all time.<sup>62</sup>

Von Humboldt regularly attended the sessions of the various classes of the National Institute of France and he learned much that would be of practical value to him as an education reformer. The structure of the Institute reflected the restructuring of academic knowledge in France after the revolution of 1789. Yet in many ways it retained much of the old Academy's élitist character. Members were elected to the various 'classes' and knowledge was divided into three domains or 'classes'. The first class included France's most prestigious scientists, (La Grange, Laplace, Fourcroy, Cuvier and Jussieu, among others); the second class concerned the moral and political sciences; and the third class concentrated on Literature and the fine arts. The group of thinkers who gathered in the second class, which was the most significant as far as education reforms were concerned, comprised key political figures, regicides, Jacobins, theists and atheists. It was here, and not in the class of literature and fine arts that de Tracy concentrated his energies when he was elected to the second class in 1796 as an associate member.

However, the practical difficulties facing Tracy in establishing the new education system proved insurmountable. The scale of the problems facing him is reflected in the way that compromises with the old system had to be reached. All too frequently these compromises created both confusion and overlap. One of the chief difficulties arose from the shortage of teachers and the need to reemploy clergy as teachers. Flawed arrangements for the supply of teachers exposed the gap that existed among the Institute, the designers of the new system and the institutional structures that were established. The system relied upon Normal schools for teacher training, which were directed by the Institute from the centre. Additionally, problems arose over the central control of teaching methods as well as the content of the syllabus.

De Tracy's role was to accelerate the programme of The Council of Public Instruction by supervising and approving textbooks and instructional materials as well as inspecting teachers' *cahiers* – the planning and record books – to ensure that they conformed to the state's policies. But crucially, he lacked the necessary powers to drive his initiatives through, a point that von Humboldt duly noted. Indeed, the speed with which the German minister secured central powers directly reflected his appreciation of de Tracy's difficulties during his time in Paris.

The foundational character of language studies became a key issue in the battle for control over the new curriculum. De Tracy issued several circulars outlining objectives for courses stressing the central importance of 'ideology'. General grammar was to be preceded by an extensive course in 'ideology' and history was to be taught from Enlightenment texts.

In reality, Tracy's efforts were in some ways continuous with ongoing attempts to centralise and standardise French education that began in 1764. Interestingly, the teaching of philosophy was a particular priority and the works of Locke and Condillac were singled out for special attention. Interestingly, however, in the Rhenish departments professors insisted on teaching Kant, Fichte and Herder

instead of Condillac.

De Tracy was an energetic and efficient administrator who took measures to ensure that teaching in the *écoles centrales* (secondary schools) was adequately supervised by instituting a system of surveillance by correspondence and by reviewing the *cahiers*. He strove to establish the *idéologues*' educational values in secondary schools throughout France. But his work was severely impeded when the Council of Public Instruction was dissolved 1800 under Napoleon's influence.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, Von Humboldt had attended closely to the details of the French system and his first-hand observations provided him with the practical knowledge that he would need for reforming the Prussian education system a decade later. Crucially, he took account of pupils' development and progression. He based the division between primary, secondary and tertiary education in Prussia on the French model but, by contrast with theirs, his framework was simple and clear and there were no overlaps. Whereas elementary education provided instruction in literacy, calculation and moral principles, secondary education aimed to develop mental functions through a tightly constructed yet broadly based curriculum around three domains: language, history and mathematics. In sum, Von Humboldt gave serious thought to the way that students learn. He worked with a conception of pupil development, moving from dependency on instruction at the early stages towards autonomous learning later on. The chief goal of elementary education was to produce autonomous learners.

Additionally, Von Humboldt established 'progressive' pedagogy in the Prussian system. His thinking about teaching and learning was influenced by the progressive educational ideas, which Pestalozzi had developed in Switzerland. In the context of Prussian reforms, progressive pedagogy aimed to develop children's individual potentials. In the eighteen seventies, von Humboldt had criticised Pestalozzi's methods in a letter to Goethe, but after 1806 several education reformers in Germany, including Fichte (who actually visited the Swiss

reformer), began to advocate Pestalozzian methods. Humboldt was receptive to the focus on the individual child as well as the goal of developing the whole personality. Characteristically, he gave priority to general education over vocational training, and, crucially, he grasped the cardinal importance of providing appropriate professional training for teachers.

The contrast between the French and Prussian arrangements for teacher training are especially revealing. In France, normal schools provided training under the direction of the French Institute. But whereas the French intelligentsia dominated the Institute in Paris, the new University in Berlin was open to all suitably qualified applicants from the *Gymnasien*. No matter what their backgrounds, the new University of Berlin would provide suitably qualified teachers for the Prussian system.

Von Humboldt was chiefly instrumental in founding the University of Berlin. This was his greatest achievement as an administrator.<sup>64</sup> He succeeded in attracting many eminent academics, among them the great classical scholar, Friedrich August Wolf. The young legal scholar, Savigny was also appointed. Language studies, broadly conceived, were central to von Humboldt's project. As I have mentioned, he served in the Ministry for a short space (between February 1809 and July 1810), during which time he made it possible for philology to lay claim to being the central humanising discipline of the state education system. Crucially, it was von Humboldt who established the principle that there was a need for such a thing as a central humanising discipline for the nation in the first place. Over time, he ensured that historical and comparative language scholarship had a secure base in at least a dozen German universities, which was an astonishing achievement in such a short space.<sup>65</sup> Thus he made the 'science' of philology, central to the German ideal of the university as the state-designated spiritual centre of national life.

On the one hand, von Humboldt wanted to affirm the 'autonomy' of academic studies. On the other, he wanted to orient the university towards the spiritual and

moral training of the nation'. The *Bildung* ideal allowed von Humboldt to subsume two potentially conflicting principles - one oriented towards the individual, the other towards the state - beneath a higher principle: human emergence and the cultural development of the Mankind.<sup>66</sup>

Or such was the grand design. But von Humboldt was also faced with the practical problem of how to secure the independence of the University of Berlin from political pressures and State power. Once more his contact with the *idéologues* proved useful. In 1798 Sieyès had complained to von Humboldt that his attempt to persuade the National Assembly to convert church property into a permanent endowment for public education had failed to find support. Von Humboldt duly proposed to endow the university with landed property from which to derive its revenue, but this attempt proved unsuccessful.

After the fashion of Sieyès, Von Humboldt was reluctant to prescribe the *content* of the Prussian State curriculum. Instead, he argued that the critique of Man should form the core of studies. Thus he made language central to a comprehensive, historico-philosophical critical project.<sup>67</sup> As a direct result of von Humboldt's reforms the Classics, especially Greek, came to dominate the secondary school curriculum. Such developments reflect the rise of German philhellenism. In the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a major rediscovery of the importance of Classical Greece in Germany. This rediscovery was significantly different in character from the 'Augustan' taste for neo-classical imitation, and different again from the enthusiasm for Republican Rome in post-revolutionary France. German philhellenism related to widespread fears of political, social and cultural fragmentation. And such fears were not groundless. They constituted a genuine response to the social and political realities of the times. As a consequence of the new emphasis on the classics, however, most of the school day was taken up one way or another with the teaching and learning of Greek, especially Greek grammar.

The German enthusiasm for Classical Greece also reflected another mood. It was

symptomatic of a nationalist aversion to the attributed superficiality of *French* tastes and courtly manners. This was an instance of the famous opposition between French 'civilization' and German 'culture'. Typically, around the turn of the eighteenth century, German enthusiasm for antiquity was Republican and anti-aristocratic; but it was also a counter-hegemonic patriotic expression of disgust for just about everything French.<sup>68</sup>

During the Revolutionary wars, and the Wars of Liberation that followed, German philhellenes discovered a special affinity for the Athenian State. They imagined the *polis* as a community united by a common language and a shared spirit. But then, as Marchand notes, after 1806, 'German philhellenism underwent a profound change; its anti-aristocratic aspects were translated into pro-national sentiments, and a new form of pedagogy, built on the notion of *Bildung*, made its peace with the state and the status quo.'<sup>69</sup> What is particularly striking, however, is the way that German philhellenism was both institutionalised and 'professionalised' so rapidly and so completely in Germany, where, by contrast with France and England, the study of ancient civilizations took place almost entirely within the universities.

Attacks on teaching the Classics had begun in the eighteenth century, but they intensified from around the middle of the nineteenth. In Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, school reformers and modernisers sought to make the curriculum more responsive to the populations they served, as well as to meet perceived national needs. The perception shared among a new generation of reformers was that too much effort has been 'wasted' on useless knowledge. They attacked the emphasis on Greek grammar and they gained ammunition from the fact that, all too frequently, what classical studies meant in reality was an austere, classroom-bound regime of mind-numbing routines. Lessons entailed the laborious translation of 'pedagogic' texts' - that is, texts chosen to facilitate the teaching of items of the language, grammatical features, models of style, and so on, rather than whole works.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the social reality was that classical education actually functioned to further stratify an already divided society. It marked off an elite social group from the rest. Knowledge of Greek was one of the ways that members of a social élite commonly identified themselves to one another and thus the syllabus served to exclude outsiders. Not surprisingly, this caused resentment among those who associated an education in Greek with class privilege and illegitimate social power. Over time, such perceptions fuelled further attacks on the place of classics in the curriculum.

The *Bildung* ideal has been criticised on both social and political grounds for the way that in practice it diverted a highly educated section of German society from participating fully in 'ordinary' politics. As far as many of them were concerned, the only politics worth considering was accessible only by means of the superior education afforded by the classics. And as one historian puts it was Von Humboldt who 'infused the school system with his generation's commitment to nonpurposiveness, inwardness and scholarliness.'<sup>70</sup>

Von Humboldt was an aristocrat of the Mark Brandenburg as well as a state official. Temperamentally, he was predisposed to a life of unworldly inwardness that he combined with a 'nonpurposive' (anti-utilitarian) intellectual inquiry. He also possessed an unswerving sense of selflessness and disinterested service. He was an outstanding administrator as well as a skilful diplomat. In office, one of his aims was to create an autonomous class of classically educated, disinterested state functionaries who would be independent of aristocratic patronage. This he achieved, and more.

Von Humboldt never lost touch with the European Enlightenment. He was, according to one biographer, 'a child of the eighteenth century, a gentleman of the Mark Brandenburg, who characteristically wore a pigtail down to 1809, when such a sight was rare'.<sup>71</sup> Largely due to his intellectual force and administrative capability the German universities became the wonder of Europe and the envy of English thinkers like Matthew Arnold.<sup>72</sup> To von Humboldt goes the credit for

evolving the German conception of the University as a cultural site, where new knowledge is produced, not just passed on. The core of his project was his profound cosmopolitan vision of the role of language studies and the humanities in the formation of world citizens. Such a profound ethical vision gave coherence to the study of language, literature and culture as a critique of Man. The European educational ideal of *Der Forschung, Der Lehre, Der Bildung* - to research, teaching and self-cultivation - is his.

<sup>1</sup> Condorcet's 'Report on the General Organization of Education' presented to the Convention, 20-21 April, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989) 'The Abstractness of Reason and the Real Life of Individuals and Institutions: Humboldt's Educational Politics and the French Revolution', in *The French Revolution and the Age of Goethe*, edited by Gerhart Hoffmeister, Gerg Olm Verlag, Santa Barbara CA, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> As Raymond Williams has put it, 'A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world.' (Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 21). Behind William's assertion lies Marx's dictum: 'Language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men and thus as it really exists for me myself as well. Language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men... Consciousness is from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.' Marx, K. (1961) *German Ideology*, first published in 1846, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social philosophy*, edited by T B Bottomore and M Reubel, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, , pp. 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> To grasp the connection between the 'sensationalist' tradition and materialism, compare Marx's assertion that 'sense experience must be the basis of all science' and 'The whole of history is a preparation for man to become an object of sense perception, and for the development of human needs'. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844, in Marx, K. (1961) p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> The *Bildungs* ideal is usually associated with a constellation of writers in Classical Weimar, including Goethe Schiller and von Humboldt. I shall be concentrating on the last of the three thinkers because I want to show how the *Bildungs* ideal figured in the design of the Prussian education system. Additionally, I want to link *Bildung* to developments in language studies, especially the rise to dominance of German philology, and to suggest the continuing relevance of von Humboldt's ideas for education in language and literature.

The nineteenth-century English public school ideal of education as the formation of character, borrowed from the German notion of *Bildung*, but it was not its equivalent. (I am speaking here particularly about the ideal associated with the reforms that Dr Thomas Arnold introduced at Rugby, which were partly inspired by contact with German educators and thinkers.) Dr Arnold was a key figure in shaping the ideal of education as the formation character. Although he was a religious man, Dr Arnold disliked religious dogma. As Headmaster of Rugby (1828-1842) he held non-liturgical services in the school chapel based on weekly sermons. The lofty moral tone of these sermons aimed to mould the character of the pupils with a view to producing 'Christian gentlemen'. Dr Arnold was especially keen on contemporary German thinkers. He knew the great German historian, Barthold Niebuhr, who was a leading proponent of the new historicism. Indeed, Niebuhr visited Rugby school. Dr Arnold was educated at Winchester and Corpus Christi, Oxford. He became a Fellow of Oriel college, (1815-1816). Oriel had the reputation then of being the most intellectually distinguished of the Oxford colleges. Although he was ordained as a clergyman, Dr Arnold's chief interest was in the ethical content of Christianity and particularly in the teaching of Christian values. His ideas on education, (especially those which stressed

---

individual moral responsibility, contrasted significantly with those of John Henry Newman and the followers of the Oxford movement.

Newman became a fellow of Oriel, six years after Arnold. As the leading figure of the Oxford Movement, Newman sought to restore the intellectual and spiritual authority of the Church. Eventually he would convert to Catholicism. Even a superficial glance at the two thinkers suggests the opposing forces and tendencies that have shaped much of English educational thinking. For instance, the whole story English Education politics in the eighteen-thirties and forties might be told as the story of the struggle of the Anglicans for control over state education. This development is quite different in character from the stories of French and German education provision. German ideas appeared powerfully in Cambridge before they did at Oxford. While Oxford was in the middle of the Anglo-Catholic revival, the Cambridge Apostles, particularly at Trinity College, were reading Niebuhr, Savigny and Vico. Oxford turned towards German thinkers later, some time after the Oxford Movement had been defeated. Newman left Oxford in 1845. As one of his contemporaries remarked, 'How different the fortunes of the Church of England might have been if Newman had been able to read German'. (Momigliano, A. D. (1994) *Studies on Modern Scholarship*, Edited by G W Bowersock and T J Connell, with new translations by T J Connell, Los Angeles: University of California Press, p.112). After the defeat of the Oxford movement, the leading disseminator of German ideas in Oxford was Mark Pattison, a contemporary of Dr Arnold's son, Matthew Arnold. Pattison tried valiantly to introduce the German idea of the university to Oxford. He made frequent visits to German universities and, as the head of a college, he frequently urged Oxford dons to study in Germany. Crucially, Pattison's conception of the University was much closer to Von Humboldt's vision than the one that Newman outlined in his famous lecture series of 1852, *The Idea of the University*. But Pattison's attempts to introduce the German idea of the university at Oxford met with stubborn resistance. (See Sparrow, J. (1967) *Mark Pattison and the Idea of the University*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

A key issue in debates about the curriculum was the so-called 'non-purposive' (anti-utilitarian) character of liberal education. Essentially, this refers to the notion that education should be more than a preparation for a particular station in life. Herder and von Humboldt had made similar arguments. Contributors to the national education debate such as Whewell, Faraday, Farrar and Jowett supported liberalisation of the curriculum. The debate over liberal education took place against the backdrop of the perceived crisis in Christian faith which dominated the nineteenth-century intellectual landscape. At stake was the structure of higher education. There was a general feeling that the existing curriculum was too narrow, and that it needed to be broadened in a liberal fashion. What happened in the universities determined what happened lower down in the system. The grammar school syllabus was shaped by the university entrance examinations, and the grammar school syllabus in turn affected the elementary schools. However, there was no coherent system of progression as there was in Germany, largely due to von Humboldt's vision. Yet the State was showing its interest in continental educational ideas by setting up a series of commissions. Pattison and Arnold were sent to look at European schools by the Newcastle Commission (1859). In 1859 Pattison was appointed as an Inspector by the Education Committee of the Privy Council to report on elementary education in Prussia. In the same year, Matthew Arnold was sent to France (and later to Germany, Switzerland and Italy) to report on schooling there. Early on, resistance to change in the universities came from the professors. Pattison sought to increase the influence of the tutors, believing that they were the potential scholars along the lines of German researchers. Later, however, when he realised that the Commission had encouraged tutors and students to put too much emphasis on examinations, he aimed to reverse the trend by championing the professors against the tutors in the name of liberal culture – German *Kultur*, that is. Thus, implicitly, he invoked the *Bildungs* ideal. Matthew Arnold also invoked it. His conception of 'culture' was heavily indebted to Herder, especially his conception of *Zeitenfortgang* – 'time progress' in which the human cultural tradition is constantly growing to fullness and being made available to the individual. Arnold resisted – indeed, deprecated, the utilitarianism that was associated with the dissenting tradition.

And thus German ideas had a shaping influence on the development of English studies. It would be quite wrong, however, to suggest that German ideas were assimilated into English intellectual circles in an unproblematic way. To see what was problematic, we have to appreciate the

significance of Pattison's break with the Oxford movement. Earlier, he had turned away from researching in the lives of the Saints along the lines that Newman had advocated. Instead he concentrated on English literary texts (Milton and Pope) as well as intellectual history. Pattison's vision of the university, like von Humboldt's, was primarily a secular one. Indeed, Pattison was in close touch with German scholarship. He befriended two German thinkers, who were in England at the time, Chevalier Bunsen, and the Jewish scholar, Jacob Bernays. Bernays had developed highly sophisticated methods for studying Classical history, and it might easily be assumed that Bernays' scholarship represented the advanced German philological research. However, Bunsen and Bernays' methods were not typical of German philological scholarship generally, though Pattison seems to have thought that they were. It is a commonplace that, for most of the nineteenth-century, German philology was far superior to English linguistic scholarship. German philology more or less defined the field. The Philological Society of London (1842), unlike its German counterparts, lacked an institutional base in the universities. At Cambridge, the Apostles - Trinity College was especially strongly represented - supplied powerful contributors to the liberal education debate. Many of them were passionately interested in the English language. At Trinity, students read Niebuhr and Savigny and they immersed themselves in German *Kultur*. As Momigliano (1994) has put it, 'They traveled in Germany, they read its literature and - unusually - they mastered its language.'

During the time when state education systems were being established in France and Germany, there were strong currents of opposition to continental ideas in England. This opposition reflected the climate of reaction to the French Revolution. The climate changed, of course, and by the middle of the nineteenth-century, German ideas began to influence education reform. However, largely as a consequence of the climate of resistance to radical social ideas, the English public school notion of 'building' or 'training' character remained chiefly concerned with 'cultivating' individual sensibility and fostering Christian moral values as a preparation for leadership. This was not primarily an aesthetic education. The English public schools concentrated above all on producing 'English Christian gentlemen'. For a full discussion of the English notion of 'gentlemanly education', see George C. Brauer Jr. (1959) *The Education of a Gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England, 1660-1775*, New York, Bookman Associates. One of the issues that Brauer touches on is the English upper class's 'deep-rooted' anti-intellectualism. Evidently there was no shortage of writers on the theme of an appropriate curriculum for gentlemen in the eighteenth century, and Brauer gives an outline of the curriculum followed through private tuition as well as in the public schools. The emphasis was upon the classics. 'An ability to write English correctly and elegantly and an appreciation for English literature were apparently sometimes neglected' (Brauer, (1959) p.75). Interestingly, history was chiefly valued for its 'moral examples'. The concentration in English public schools was on shaping the individual conscience - an amalgam of Christian values and good manners rather than upon intellectual attainments. And thus, the English notion of education as the 'shaping' of character - educating the 'whole' person - was also part and parcel of the business of reproducing an elite social elite. The *Bildungs* ideal by contrast had the weight of Kant's philosophy of moral development behind it, and the notion that the purpose of human existence - the guiding thread of world history - was to achieve moral maturity.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Peter Menck in 'Didactics as the Construction of Content' in *Learners and Pedagogy*, edited by Jenny Leach and Bob Moon, London: Open University Press in association with Paul Chapman Publishing, 1999, p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief sophisticated discussion of the *Bildungs* ideal see Lichtheim, George, (1970) *Lukács*, Collins, London pp.74-75. Lichtheim has described *Bildung* as 'untranslatable'. He claims that '*Bildung* does not signify 'education', but rather something like intellectual and moral maturation'. For the thinkers that I am discussing, chiefly, Kant, Herder and von Humboldt, the nature of history was a central problem. German idealists held out a picture of history as something that unfolded teleologically according to a guiding principle. For Kant that guiding principle was the rational progress towards moral maturity. For Herder history was driven by quasi-biological creative 'life-forces' striving for perfection. And von Humboldt thought that it was possible to discover the fundamental principle of world history - the guiding thread - by studying Language. In the background of my discussion is the view of history that Marx developed. Marx wrote in critique of the idealist tradition, of course, especially Kant's

'moralism'. Dialectical materialism opposes the (Hegelian) notion that history is guided by an abstract or absolute spirit that cannot be grasped in its totality from within the currents of historical change. For Marx, 'the first historical act is...the production of material life itself.' (Karl Marx, *German Ideology*, 1845-6) On this view, history is not itself a force or a principle. Rather, says Marx, 'It is men, real, living men who do all this, who pose things and fight battles. It is not history, which uses men as a means of achieving – as if it were an individual person – its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.' (Karl Marx, *Die Heilige Familie*: quotations from T B Bottomore and Maxemilien Reubel, (1963) *Karl Marx: Selected writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Menck, 1999, p. 116.

<sup>8</sup> See Habermas, J. (1992) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with assistance by Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, Polity Press.

<sup>12</sup> The idea that languages reflect national mentalities was prefigured in the writings of Locke and Condillac. However, it was developed substantially by German thinkers, especially Herder and von Humboldt in the context of the German quest for origins. Interestingly, this is a point that Raymond Williams discusses in *Marxism and Literature* (Williams, 1977, p.31).

<sup>13</sup> As Lukács puts it, 'For everything that was produced in the small German courts in the way of culture and particularly the in the way of pseudo culture was nothing more than the slavish imitation of the French and a hindrance to the development of a culture stemming from the needs of a German middle-class life. The German form of the Enlightenment engages in sharp polemic with this French culture; and it preserves this note of revolutionary patriotism even where the real content of the ideological battle is simply the conflict between different stages in the development of the Enlightenment...' (Lukács, Georg (1968) *Goethe and his Age*, London: Merlin Press, p. 14).

<sup>14</sup> French inheritors of the Cartesian tradition, analysed society atomistically. That is to say, they aimed to break society down into its constituent parts with a view to reconstructing it along rational lines. More often than not, along with such aims went an 'atomistic' picture of Man. But such a picture was not welcomed everywhere. To many German thinkers of the *Storm and Stress* decade (1770s) they appeared too fragmented, too lifeless, too incomplete and, above all, too narrowly rationalistic. By contrast, German thinkers sought to construct a contrasting picture of Man as a 'unified totality' in which the sum was greater than the parts. They were the inheritors of Leibniz. Yet, paradoxically, Germans like Herder were also hugely indebted to the very constellations of French ideas they were criticising. Indeed, this tendency is nowhere more evident than in Herder's critique of Condillac's account of the origin of language.

<sup>15</sup> Such projects rely on recovering what has been lost. As Vygotsky once remarked about the great Russian novelist, 'According to Tolstoy our ideal is not ahead of us but behind us'. The inference is that the real challenge is not to 'restore' humanity but to master and develop it for the future. See, Vygotsky, L. S. (1994) 'The Socialist Alteration of Man' first published in 1930, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by René van der Veer and Jan Valsiner, Blackwell, Oxford, p.179.

<sup>16</sup> When the *philosophes* looked at the foundations of the *Ancien Régime*, of course, they were implicitly questioning contemporary political arrangements. Additionally, they were seeking alternative principles for government. Ancient history was crucially important to their project. The evocation of Republican Rome furnished them with a legitimising backdrop for their political activities. And this was a matter of both style and substance, where ancient history was somehow 'there' for those seeking to make political use of it. Yet the notion of deriving principles and values from ancient civilizations presented thinkers with a bewildering array of philosophical problems. French attempts to derive values from the past, (from classical Greece and Rome) set in motion protracted debates around the historicity of ethical and political standards. Such debates engendered various forms of relativism. Intriguingly, in the hazardous climate of punitive censorship, the terms of these debates and discussions were set, not by political circles, but by 'quarrels' in the (safer) domain of aesthetics. *La querelle des anciens et des modernes* raised fundamental issues about the historicity of aesthetic values and standards.

<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the great classical historian, Niebhuhr, supported the emancipation of the peasants

in Prussia. However, he insisted that the Romans had never used agrarian law to undermine the principle of private property.

<sup>18</sup> The establishment of the Louvre as a *national* collection of art treasures immediately after the French Revolution foreshadowed the setting up of the 'patron' state. It was symbolically and strategically important that what had been formerly a Royal collection became a common national patrimony. The establishment of a national collection made concrete the notion of a sovereign people, who shared not only the collection, but also a common identity. Moreover, the idea of a collective past, concretised by the national patrimony, implied a collective future. Additionally, after 1789, the French nation defined itself chiefly in terms of Revolutionary and Republican ideology, rather than in terms of language, religion or ethnic origins. Interestingly, such a political definition of national membership was in some ways a continuation of the notion of a political unity that already existed for the *Ancien Régime*, which was generally cosmopolitan in its outlook.

<sup>19</sup> Brubaker, Rogers (1992) *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Although the conception of a national standard language that emerged in post-revolutionary France was essentially a progressive one in so far as it helped to broaden participation in political processes, paradoxically, its origins lay in the old order. The establishment of French as the language of the 'people' actually continued policies of the *Ancien Régime* through the agency of some of its most powerful institutions, especially the *Académie Française*. Such institutional arrangements belonged to the French tradition of centralised political decision-making – the *dirigisme* that was a defining feature of absolutist monarchy.

The French Revolution established a coherent, free education system. Popular education existed under the *Ancien Régime*, but it was only with the Third Republic that conditions were established that made public education viable – facilities, roads and a sense of meaningfulness. See especially Weber, Eugene (1979) *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870 – 1914*, London, Chatto and Windus.

<sup>21</sup> This phrase comes from an excellent discussion of von Humboldt's reservations about the likelihood of the French Revolution succeeding, when he visited Paris in 1789. The point the writer makes is that von Humboldt's reservations were not the same as Edmund Burke's conservative reaction to events in Paris. (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1791). Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989) 'The Abstractness of Reason and the Real Life of Individuals and Institutions: Humboldt's Educational Politics and the French revolution', in *The French revolution and the Age of Goethe*, edited by Gerhart Hoffmeister, Santa Barbara CA Gerg Olm Verlag, 1989, p.160.

<sup>22</sup> Germans pictured themselves representing a fragmented people struggling to resist French cultural hegemony on the one hand, while attempting to forge a collective German identity – a national 'spirit' – on the other. In these difficult circumstances they attributed intense significance to the historical nature of the national culture – its language, literature, myths, folklore judiciary, local habits, customs, religious traditions and (fatally) so-called 'racial characteristics'. For such thinkers, German nationhood meant, above all, belonging to a community that shared a historically developed culture.

The German notion of the self-cultivation of national citizens through contact with historically evolved languages, customs and settled ways of doing and valuing things issued in a distinctive picture of national identity that contrasts strikingly with the one that emerged in France. As a consequence of this, there is a telling distinction to be made between the French post-revolutionary conception of the 'political' state, with its rational legal frameworks and its constitutions, and the German picture of the 'cultural' state, where nationality was given a markedly cultural, linguistic and ethnic basis. A sense of belonging to the national collective has been fundamental for the development of the modern, secular sense of nationhood during periods of rapid economic and social change. Such a sense was not confined to Germany, but emerged elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, nineteenth-century European nationalism has actually been defined as 'a modern form of collective identity' (Habermas, J. (1992) pp.252-256). Plainly, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries a sense of belonging to a collective – a people or a nation – satisfied a felt need for new forms of identification when old forms were being dismantled or destroyed by emergent economic and societal forces. A new conception of nationhood evolved as

a mode of self-understanding, especially in Prussia. Military defeat and national humiliation made Prussia the main focus for National renewal after the Wars of Liberation. In Berlin, the sense of nationhood (defined as 'a shared way of life' that has been forged out of common past) permeated and energised the scholarly quest for national origins. Out of just this quest historical comparative language studies emerged.

<sup>23</sup> There are complicated reasons why this was so, that go back to German religious traditions: to Lutheran doctrine, to the Protestant Reformation and to the dynamics of German Pietism. At the heart of such religious traditions lies the drama of the soul's progress towards salvation. With German Protestantism it was never enough to act well: actions have to come from the right motives. (Thus, for Kant a moral action is one that goes against one's natural inclinations – even when the inclination is to act for the good). In the Protestant tradition conscience must always be open to inspection and rigorous self-examination, as a kind of spiritual book keeping. Essentially, Lutheran Protestants believe that individuals are responsible for the care of their own souls. No individual or institution, no mass or confessional, can intercede on another's behalf.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, Immanuel (1983) *Speculative Beginning of Human History*, first published in 1786, in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History and Morals*, translated from the German by Ted Humphrey, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, p53.

<sup>25</sup> The notion of 'personal growth', which has provided a rationale for post-war English studies, derives from broadly similar intellectual sources, especially with certain conceptions of development that emerged largely in the eighteenth-century. The entry of German theory into British literary theory has been described at length by M. H. Abrams in his classic study in the history of Romantic ideas, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, New York Norton, 1958. Abrams describes the shift from France to Germany as the chief 'exporter' of continental theory around the turn of the eighteenth century. However, an adequate account of the shaping influence of such ideas on British education theory is beyond the scope of this study. For a seminal account of English as 'personal growth', see Dixon, John (1972) *Growth Through English: Report based on the Dartmouth Seminar, 1966*, London, Reading and Fakenham, Cox and Wyman for N.A.T. E.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Rousseau, J.J. (1991), *Emile or On Education*, introduction, translation and notes by Allan Bloom, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, p.3.

<sup>27</sup> Rousseau, J. (1991) p3.

<sup>28</sup> Kant, I. (1963) p.4.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, I. (1963) p.50.

<sup>30</sup> Kant, I. (1963) p.52. By 'top' Kant means the mind, or reason.

<sup>31</sup> Kant looked to uncover the conditions under which things can be said to be necessarily, not merely contingently true. Thus he bracketed out actual contexts and 'real' settings because he wanted to isolate and abstract the logical conditions, under which something can be said to be true, free from all local, empirical circumstances. He was interested in logical 'conditions of possibility' of knowledge, rather than the empirical contents of knowledge as such. Kant's synthetic *a priori* demarcates what must be taken as 'given' – that is, what cannot be investigated further by strictly rational methods of enquiry. Of course, this does not rule out further lines of empirical investigation. Rather, the synthetic *a priori* indicates the limits and boundaries of purely logical inquiry. It speaks of the conditions of possibility for what we can rationally claim to know, a form of inquiry best represented by Kant's famous question: 'How is mathematics possible?' We should not infer from his rational approach to knowledge that Kant was unaware of, or indifferent to, concrete realities. Rather, he was concerned with systematically clarifying the limits of secure knowledge. For Kant, the 'person-who-knows' - the 'transcendental knowing subject' - is a rational construct, and as such it constitutes a 'disembodied' abstraction because of the nature of Kant's philosophical task. He was seeking the transcendental foundations of knowledge. As one contemporary philosopher puts it, as with Descartes, often, the 'I' that appears in the *text* does not specifically represent the writer, it marks the position of the thinker – 'the I who is having the thoughts may be yourself.' (Williams, B. (1986) 'Introduction' to René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, edited by John Cottingham, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. vii.).

<sup>32</sup> How can an education that aims to free men from 'self-incurred tutelage' be put in place by the

state? Simply, how can *state* institutions (like schooling, for instance), hope to foster *autonomous* self-development? Doesn't the so-called 'patron state' perpetuate immaturity? Are the interests of the individual and the state the same? Obviously they are not, least ways, not for much of the time. Besides, compulsory state schooling necessarily entails some degree of coercion (in the sense that if something is compulsory then, by definition, freedom to choose has been removed), so when is coercion 'legitimate'? Does the state have a legitimate right to 'improve' and 'enlighten' its citizenry, in the way that Robespierre assumed it did? It might be judged to have such a right if it could be shown that it was acting in accordance with a higher principle, for instance reason, progress or the *telos* of human history.

<sup>33</sup> See Lichtheim, G (1970) *Lukács*, London: Fontana Collins, , p.43.

<sup>34</sup> People's outlooks cannot be easily separated from the ways that they represent and imagine the world, to themselves and for others. (Such a view issues powerfully from the picture of language held by Hamann, but it goes back at least as far as Locke.) If we accept this picture of the 'always-embodied' subject – that is, a flesh and blood person in time and place rather than an abstraction – we have to concede at some point that peoples' world-views change over time and that they alter from context to context. It follows, then, that what an individual or, indeed an entire people may claim to know, what they identify as a standard of behaviour, or what they believe to be true at a given moment is contingently, not necessarily true. It cannot be known with absolute certainty because the circumstances change. And this, of course, appears to defeat Kant's aim, which was to provide a secure, rational foundation for knowledge. Fichte tried to find a solution to just this problem by developing a distinction (which was already there in Kant's work) between the empirical subject and the transcendental subject, in other words, between the embodied individual of flesh and blood thinking person and the rational abstraction of 'the person who thinks'. But he was unable to find a satisfactory solution. He treated thought and concrete reality as integral elements of a whole structure. That is, he did not treat them, as Kant had done, as logically separate – subject and object. From Hegel's perspective, Kant tells only half the story. He offers a theory of consciousness that dwells on the problem of how objects appear to subjects: their *phenomenal* existence. But he never gets beyond the 'thing in mind' to the *noumenon*, the 'thing in itself'. Hegel formulated his theory of the subject in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806).

Interestingly, *the Phenomenology of Spirit*, became a focus for idiosyncratic (and influential) interpretations of Hegel's thought in Paris in the thirties. (See, Kojève, Alexandre, (1969) *Introduction to the reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom, translated from the French by James H Nichols, Jr. first published in French under the title *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel*, Paris, 1947, Basic Books, Inc. New York. These interpretations were seminal for many French post-structuralist accounts of subjectivity, as well as for critiques of Reason and the Enlightenment. What is particularly striking about the interpretations of Hegel in Paris in the thirties was the extraordinary concentration on the master-slave dialectic in which identities are forged out of a life-or-death struggle for domination that is the human condition. Between 1933 and 1939 Alexander Kojève, a Russian exile in Paris, gave a series of lectures at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes on Hegel's *Phenomenologie des Geistes*. Kojève's reading (some might say 'reinvention') of Hegel's text concentrates on the master slave relationship in which each comes to know himself through the activity and recognition of the other. Only the violent overthrow of the master's oppression brings self-understanding to the slave. On Kojève's reading, the master-slave relation becomes a paradigm for human existence. Essentially, he combined his version of Hegel with insights from Heidegger and Marx in which violence emerges as a 'concomitant of reason'. See, Judt, Tony, (1994) *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, University of California Press, Berkley; Kelly, Michael (1992) *Hegel in France*, Birmingham Modern Languages Publications, Birmingham; Niethammer, Lutz, (1992) *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* translated from the German original by Patrick Camiller, London: Verso, Those attending the lecture included Raymond Aron, Merleau-Ponty, Jaques Lacan, Georges Bataille, Raymond Queneau, André Breton, Alexandre Koyré and Hannah Arendt. The influence of Kojève's lectures on the post-war generation of French thinkers (especially post-structuralists) has been very considerable. However, the picture of German philosophy – particularly Hegel – that has emerged

is actually a somewhat distorted one.

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel argues there that the structures that are constitutive of consciousness enter all forms of human life. Elsewhere, too, he proposes that spirit (*Geist*) is the guiding principle by which all individuals and peoples (especially nations) actively constitute themselves. He puts it like this:

The very essence of spirit is *activity*; it realises its own potentiality - makes itself its own deed; its own work - and thus it becomes an object to itself; contemplates itself as an objective existence. Thus it is with the Spirit of a people; it is a Spirit having strictly defined characteristics, which erects itself into an objective world, that exists and persists in a particular religious form of worship, customs, constitution and political laws - in the whole complex of its institutions - in the events and transactions that make up its history. That is its work - that is what this particular nation is. Nations are what their deeds are.

(*Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 1832)

For Hegel, spirit (*Geist*), is (dialectically) both what is prefigured and what is self-determined. Crucially, spirit is a form of self-productive *activity* shared among individuals and nations alike. Moreover, it is essentially an *expressive* process whereby what was previously internalised by subjects is subsequently externalised through human action.

Habermas, has posed the problem like this: 'In Kantian philosophy the individuated ego falls through the cracks, as it were, between the transcendental ego, which stands over and against the world as a whole, and the empirical ego, which finds itself already in the world as one among many. (Habermas, J. (1995) *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, translated from the German by William Hihengarten, Cambridge Polity Press, p.158).

<sup>36</sup> See Habermas, Jürgen (1994) *The Past as Future*, interviews with Michael Haller, translated and edited by Max Pensky, with Foreword by Peter Hohendahl, Cambridge: Polity Press, , pp.103-104.

<sup>37</sup> Cassirer, has claimed that, 'Goethe completed the transformation from the previous *generic* view to the modern *genetic* view of organic nature'. .See Cassirer, Ernst (*Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* , translated from the German by James Guttman, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup> See especially, Glass, B., Temkin, Owsei and Straus, William, L (1968) *The Forerunners of Darwin, 1745-1859*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore. This collection of essays concentrates on views of the evolutionary nature of the species that were held by eighteenth century authors such as Maupertuis, Buffon, Diderot, Kant, Herder, and Lamarck.

<sup>39</sup> The theory of *preformation* went unchallenged until a path-breaking account of developmental patterns in chicken embryos appeared in 1759, when Caspar Friedrich Wolff published his seminal treatise, *Theoria generationis*. He followed it quickly with the publication of a study of the formation of the animal intestines. These two studies established the biological fact that the growth of separate organs in animals follows their own growth patterns. Crucially, Wolff demonstrated that animal organs are not there in miniature form at conception waiting to get bigger. Additionally, he insisted that changes to organs need to be described independently of one another, since their developmental paths differed significantly over time. Thus, a new picture emerged of organic transformations along separate paths that were related to the overall development of the larger organism. The development of the larger organism is never reducible to its separate parts. Thus, the theory of *preformation* was superseded by the theory of 'growth along separate paths' a process that was called *epigenesis*.

<sup>40</sup> This move issued in a theory of 'biogenetic parallelism' the central premise of which is that *ontogeny* recapitulates *phylogeny*.

<sup>41</sup> Such a picture contained damaging implications, however. Unfortunately, the notion of the passage from lower to higher life-forms implied *ranking* them according to their various stages of development. Thus, the notion of stages of human development fostered potentially racist notions of 'primitive' peoples, and what is more it appeared to give such notions a 'scientific' basis.

<sup>42</sup> Temkin, O. (1950)

<sup>43</sup> Temkin, O. (1950) p. 224.

<sup>44</sup> Notions about the special role of language and literature in the development of national citizens of the kind that circulated in Germany around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century

were not especially new. Nor were they especially German. To give one important instance of an earlier formulation, the Neapolitan thinker, Gianbattista Vico, believed that language and literature were centrally part of education. He also believed that that training in rational analysis on its own would never produce the 'good' citizen. Simply, 'intellect' could not provide guidance in those areas of human experience that are most important to us, especially those that require keen ethical sense. Moral judgements, he believed, depend on the formation of *character*, a combination of common sense, imagination and (surprisingly, perhaps), memory. And, crucially, for Vico a moral education meant learning the languages, traditions and exemplary ideals of past civilizations.

Herder's views about the importance of an education in languages and literatures were broadly similar to Vico's. But significantly, they were articulated in different historical circumstances. Herder stood at the threshold of German national cultural reconstruction. Germany was really no more than a patchwork of principalities with small courts, each struggling to 'imagine' its own coherence in relation to the others. (Anderson, Benedict, (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso,).

The German nation was barely more than an idea, a folk memory, as it were, of the Carolingian Empire. In the aftermath to the French military occupation of Berlin and the Wars of Liberation, as we noted earlier, German intellectuals strove to reconstruct a 'shared *national* past', to revive their folk customs and traditions and to establish a common standard language as the language of education and government. Indeed, the German nation state made its emergence at a point somewhere between past and future glories and present crisis. (see Gumbrecht, H. U. (1986) 'Un Souffle d'Allemagne ayant passé: Friedrich Diez, Gaston Paris, and the Genesis of National Philologies, *Romance Philology*, 15: 1.

<sup>45</sup> Bruford, W. H. (1962) *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar*, Cambridge University Press

<sup>46</sup> Bruford, W. H. (1962) p. 315.

<sup>47</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, ' (1989) The Abstractness of Reason and the Real Life of of Individuals and Institutions: Humboldt's Educational Politics and the French revolution', in *The French revolution and the Age of Goethe*, edited by Gerhart Hoffmeister, Santa Barbara CA Gerg Olm Verlag, 1989 p. 159-179.

<sup>48</sup> Later, the notion that diversity is necessary for human development was taken up and incorporated into liberal educational ideology generally in the rest of Europe.

<sup>49</sup> Marchand, Suzanne L. (1996) *Down from Olympus: Archeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.27.

<sup>50</sup> Albertone, M. (1984) 'Enlightenment and Revolution: The Evolution of Condorcet's Ideas on Education' in *Condorcet Studies*, edited by Leonora Cohen Rosenfield, Atlantic Heights, New Jersey: Humanities Press, p. 131.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart, J. H. (1951) *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, New York, p.350.

<sup>52</sup> It is interesting both to compare and contrast Soviet attempts to create a new 'Man' - *homo Sovieticus*

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Forsyth, M. (1987) *Reason and Revolution: The Political thought of the Abbé Sieyès*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, .

<sup>54</sup> Forsyth, M. (1987) p.204.

<sup>55</sup> Sieyès influenced Karl Marx, who was especially interested in the Abé's treatise on the Third Estate. For a balanced, comprehensive account of Sieyès' position in the history of political thought, see the concluding chapter of Forsyth, M (1987).

<sup>56</sup> Forsyth, M (1987), p.218.

<sup>57</sup> For an account of von Humboldt's time in Paris during the 1790s and for a description of the Kant seminar see Sweet, P. (1978) *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, p.220.

<sup>58</sup> Sweet, P. (1978) p.221.

<sup>59</sup> There has been a fierce, protracted debate among historiographers of language studies about von Humboldt's indebtedness to Condillac. Hans Aarsleff has claimed that von Humboldt's debt to the French thinkers was substantial. In making this claim Aarsleff has consciously challenged orthodox (nationalistic and conservative) nineteenth-century German claims about von Humboldt's originality. Chiefly, Aarsleff wants to restore Condillac's reputation as a major

thinker among contemporary linguists and historians of ideas. Thus he has contested what he sees as the overestimation of the originality of nineteenth-century German philologists and linguists at the expense of their French antecedents. Moreover, the links between Condillac's ideas and Republican politics as well as philosophical materialism have damaged his reputation in France. Cassirer, in rediscovering Herder and von Humboldt in the dangerous climate of German cultural nationalism in the twenties and thirties, overlooked the Germans' debt to Condillac. Aarsleff is quite correct when he suggests that Cassirer carried forward uncritically the conservative picture of von Humboldt's achievements – what he calls a 'moth-balled' picture of Von Humboldt's ideas - that he inherited from his nineteenth century German biographers.

Recently, however, Ulrich Ricken.(1994) has broadened the discussion profitably by setting the Condillac legacy against the backdrop of the French Enlightenment. The chief inheritors of the Enlightenment, the *ideologues*' debt to Condillac is foregrounded. For Ricken, 'Like Condillac, Destutt de Tracy (the chief thinker of the group) saw in 'sensations' the single source of human knowledge. (Ricken, 1994 p.208) Ricken also discusses Von Humboldt's indebtedness to the French thinkers, and particularly his indebtedness to Condillac's 'sensualistic' philosophy (Ricken, 1994, pp.218-219). Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, however, argues persuasively that von Humboldt's primary indebtedness was to Kant. It is plain too that von Humboldt read Condillac extensively, and as a consequence of his discussions with the *ideologues* about the nature and purposes of language, he was influenced to devote his energies to the study of language, Mueller-Vollmer (Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1989)) also stresses the importance of von Humboldt's interest in radical proposals for education and his critical evaluation of the French plans. (He thought such plans unworkable). Elsewhere, Mueller-Vollmer (Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989a) 'Thinking and Speaking: Herder, Humboldt and Saussurean Semiotics: A Translation and Commentary on Wilhelm von Humboldt's Sixteen Theses on Language', in *Comparative Criticism*, edited by E.S. Schaffer, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 193-214) gives a painstaking, subtle account of von Humboldt's indebtedness to Kantian philosophy which shaped his linguistic theories. Von Humboldt's practical interest in establishing an education system coupled with his *idealist* radicalism invite a fresh reappraisal of orthodox accounts of the von Humboldt legacy.

On a different point, there are some intriguing parallels to be drawn between the debates that went on around the turn of the nineteenth century and contemporary debates surrounding Habermas' critique of post structuralist thinkers – the so-called 'neo-conservatives' - and the theorists of Post-modernity. It is therefore especially interesting to note in particular Habermas' tracing the roots of contemporary so-called 'critical theory' back to German idealism.

<sup>60</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1989) p. 164.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1989) p.166.

<sup>62</sup> See Hall, Stuart ( ) 'The Hinterland of Science: ideology and the 'Sociology of Knowledge' in *Ideology*, OU Press.

<sup>63</sup> For a full account of the Tracy's educational work see Kennedy, E (1978) *Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology*, The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

<sup>64</sup> See for example, Hofstetter, M. J. (2001) *The Romantic Idea of the University: England and Germany, 1770-1850*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.

<sup>65</sup> Aarsleff, H. (1982) p. 293.

<sup>66</sup> For a full length discussion of this issue see Lyotard, F. (1986) *The Post Modern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, translated from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, with a Foreword by Fredrick Jameson, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp31-34.

<sup>67</sup> Marchand, Suzanne L. (1996) *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp.28-29.

<sup>68</sup> See Marchand, S. L. (1996).

<sup>69</sup> Marchand, S. L. (1996) p.25.

<sup>70</sup> Marchand, S. L. (1996) p.30.

<sup>71</sup> Bruford, W. H. (1975) p.11.

<sup>72</sup> Aarsleff, H. (1982) p. 180.

## Chapter 4

### The Nineteenth-Century Legacy: The Role of Signs in the Development of the Higher Mental Functions

*The psychophysics of Fechner and Wundt sets out on its journey with proud sails, trustful in the newly discovered methodology of experimentation with impressions and expressions. But today the sea has become calm around them. The results of the investigations on pulse and breathing by experimenters in Wundt's laboratory are commonly rejected...and it is precisely with this ... that Wundt's theory of expression begins. Why should we concern ourselves seriously with something that causes the reader to shake his head after the first few pages and which offers no new insights?*

Karl Bühler, 1933<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the origins of the higher mental functions dominated psychology in the late nineteenth century in much the same way that the problem of the origins of language had dominated language studies in the eighteenth. For many socio-cultural psychologists nowadays the two problems are closely linked. However, the nature of such a link first began to be explored systematically in the eighteen eighties from the perspectives of 'cultural' psychology in the research programme that Wilhelm Wundt established at Leipzig. Today, Wundt's project is largely forgotten, yet it has continuing relevance for the way that it holds out a

picture of the role of culturally evolved signs in the development of the 'higher mental functions'.

Contemporary socio-cultural psychology stems chiefly from the theoretical perspectives that Lev Vygotsky established with colleagues in the Soviet Union in twenties and thirties. The breathtaking scale of Vygotsky's project has become clear from the large and expanding literature that has appeared in recent years. Indeed, this literature has been hugely added to since the mid-eighties by translated work previously unavailable in the West.<sup>2</sup> But discussions of Vygotsky's ideas often take for granted knowledge of the history of European psychology on the part of the reader. Consequently, the rich, though in some ways problematic nature of the nineteenth-century legacy has been insufficiently appreciated.

Wundt dominated German psychology in the closing decades of the nineteenth century in a way that no other psychologist had done before. His lectures at Leipzig attracted huge international audiences. Indeed, the research laboratory that he established there for experimental psychology became the model for the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> But Wundt's reputation as the world's foremost psychologist declined steeply at the start of the twentieth century. When Vygotsky mentions Wundt, it is often in a critical vein. Thus the Soviet psychologist characterises Wundt's work as an example of the 'naïve empiricism' typical of the 'old idealism'. However, to grasp why Wundt's reputation declined so steeply we have to appreciate not so much the force of the Soviet critique of Western psychology as a combination of several factors that changed the face of psychological research. Chiefly among these factors was the impact of the work of another seminal thinker, Wundt's contemporary and the founding figure of modern phenomenology, Franz Brentano.

Brentano clarified the philosophical foundations of modern psychology in a way that Wundt was unable to do. As a philosopher, he sought to break with German idealism, which he considered irredeemably decadent. What is more he aimed to

make psychology the foundation of philosophy in the future. From the standpoint of a revitalised interest in Aristotelian philosophy, he introduced a seminal distinction between what he called 'genetic' and 'descriptive' approaches to mind. Whereas 'genetic' psychology follows the methods of the natural sciences by tracing the 'causes' of mental events, he argued, 'descriptive' psychology aims to provide 'phenomenological' accounts of mental acts from the perspective of the perceiving subject. On this view, 'descriptive' psychology affords a fine-grained, rigorous, analysis of individual 'mental acts'. The importance of the distinction between 'mental contents' and 'mental acts' will become clear when we come to examine some of the chief differences between Wundt and Brentano.

Nowadays, Wundt's work is rarely discussed beyond respectful references in undergraduate introductions to the field.<sup>4</sup> Yet Wundt was the founding figure of experimental psychology; he pioneered research into so-called 'cultural psychology', and he broke new ground in the way in which he explored the problem of the higher mental functions' dependency on culturally evolved signs. Thus, in significant ways Wundt's project foreshadowed Soviet historical and socio-cultural psychology. But there is more. Historians of linguistic science have linked Wundt's name to those of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Heyman Steinthal when they have wanted to characterise key phases in the history of nineteenth century language studies. The complicated relations between two emergent domains, specialising psychology and linguistics, will be important in what follows.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter I shall be revisiting the history of early moves in cultural psychology. Partly, I want to get clear about the intellectual legacy that Vygotsky inherited.<sup>6</sup> But also I want to recover fundamental perspectives with a view to enriching contemporary discussions in education. My focus is the nineteenth-century picture of role of signs in the development of the higher mental functions.

\* \* \*

Wundt's cultural psychology straddled two disciplines, psychology and linguistics, at a moment when they were both seeking their institutional independence from the parent discipline, philosophy. The story of their gaining their independence cannot be told properly without appreciating the impact of the natural sciences on philosophy during the nineteenth-century. Essentially, the standing that philosophy had attained in the German Universities around the turn of the eighteenth-century was reduced as a consequence to the rise of the physical sciences in the nineteenth. And though German idealism remained the dominant philosophical tradition in the academy, the critical philosophy that Kant established in the late eighteenth-century was subsequently transformed into neo-Kantianism chiefly in response to the rise of the natural sciences. Neo-Kantians read Kant primarily as an epistemologist. For the most part, they concentrated narrowly on theories of scientific and mathematical knowledge. Their aims were to re-establish the foundational status of philosophy in the universities and to put science in its place.

Crucially, Wundt employed the 'normal' methods of the natural sciences because he wanted to distinguish 'scientific' psychology from speculative and metaphysical conceptions of mind. Similarly, contemporary linguists wanted to break with the 'old idealism' that underpinned historical and comparative approaches to language studies (philology) because they wanted to establish linguistics as a science in its own right. Thus, for instance, they aimed free language studies from the principles of individual psychology and expression.

Western psychology has tended to concentrate on the individual. By contrast, Wundt claimed that the structures of the individual mind belong somehow to the larger culture. What is more, his stress on mind in relation to mediating signs, symbols and complex cultural environments ran counter to the assumptions of mainstream Western psychology just at the moment when the field was being defined. Wundt reached for cultural materials, such as folktales, customs and language – the stuff of 'ethnology', or anthropology – in order to tell the story of

human development, because he was convinced that the true nature of the higher mental functions could not be investigated adequately using experimental methods. This was a view that Vygotsky and his generation of psychologists explicitly challenged. To grasp why Wundt adopted this stance we shall have to look back to the project of psychophysics that preceded his own investigations.

Wundt was clear that the higher mental functions could not be investigated adequately in the laboratory. By contrast, as I suggested a moment ago, a new generation of psychologists began to design experimental methods for researching into complex mental processes - the formation of concepts, memory and so on - in research centres such as those in Berlin, Würzburg and Moscow. Wundt was concerned with the basic elements or the contents of consciousness from the standpoint of their organisation into the higher mental functions. On his view, the structures of culturally evolved contents of consciousness held the key to understanding the organising principles of the higher mental functions.

Subsequently, Vygotsky and his associates took a different approach when they began to investigate experimentally the way that concepts are developed with the aid of historically evolved psychological tools and artefacts from a 'genetic' perspective. Thus the Soviet psychologist wrote genetic-developmental accounts of the role of signs in higher mental functions. For Vygotsky, the appearance of new historical-psychological formations, along with the primitive strata of behaviour in the process of child's growing mastery of mental 'tools' and 'symbols' (material culture), held the key to investigating the genesis of higher mental functions such as memory and imagination from the standpoint of 'acts' of consciousness. In this, Vygotsky benefited from work in psychology that was shaped by Brentano's philosophy.

And yet, despite important differences between them, Wundt and Brentano were engaged in a common enterprise in so far as they aimed to study consciousness by employing the objective methods of normal science - observation, experiment and so on. To appreciate this, I shall have to backtrack to characterise the kind of

psychology that preceded their work.

Discussions around the physical basis of mental life dominated psychology around the turn of the eighteenth century. The impetus for such approaches came largely from France. Subsequently, however, psycho-physiology emerged in Germany in the eighteen-fifties, when German physiologists set out to investigate the 'soul' or the 'psyche' using natural scientific methods.<sup>7</sup> At the University of Leipzig, which already had a growing international reputation for medical research, Gustav Fechner set about the task of quantifying mental responses. He aimed to refute the view, handed down from Kant, that psychology could never become a science like physics because you can't measure mental phenomena in the way that you measure things in the natural world. Consequently, he tried to quantify the strength of mental responses linked to physical sensations.<sup>8</sup> As a physiologist, he set out to prove mathematically the laws of relations between stimuli and sensations - what he called 'outer psycho-physics'. Thus he aimed to separate out the spiritual endowment of humanity –Fechner was a religious man – from the material determinations of consciousness.

Crucially, Fechner assumed that it was possible to study the higher mental functions in the same manner as the lower ones. This was an assumption that Wundt implicitly rejected. Wundt argued against the notion that consciousness was reducible to physiological chains of causation. (In a similar way, he argued against the 'associationism' that was characteristic of British empiricism). Essentially, he refused to separate the processes of bodily life from the conscious processes. With hindsight, we can see that Fechner's experimental research was significant not so much for what it established but for what it set in motion.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence of Fechner's pioneering work there, Leipzig, which will be hugely important in the next part of our story, emerged as a major centre of psycho-physiological research. And it is to Wundt's work at Leipzig, that we now turn.

Wundt was a 'giant' of nineteenth century German 'cultural science'.<sup>10</sup> His experimental work on perception and cognition helped lay the foundations of

‘specialising’, professional psychology, and today, when he is remembered, it is usually as the first professional experimental psychologist. After starting out as a physiologist, he had turned towards psycho-physiology. Indeed, the publication of his book, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, (1872) is universally regarded as a landmark in the history of psychology as an independent discipline. Thus, in a remarkably short space, Wundt became Germany’s foremost experimental psychologist, the father of *Sprachpsychologie*, (an early form of psycho-linguistics) and the founding figure of the short-lived ‘science’ of so-called ‘*Volkerpsychologie*’, ‘ethno-psychology’, or what I have been calling ‘cultural psychology’.

*Volkerpsychologie*, aimed to study comparatively the mental development of Mankind. Thus a ‘grand narrative’ of human history framed Wundt’s *Volkerpsychologie*. The sheer scale of Wundt’s project is astonishing. His monumental (but deeply flawed) project illuminates the very beginnings of socio-cultural psychology. What follows, however, mostly concerns Wundt’s failure to create a unified science.

Such was Wundt’s standing in the eighteen-nineties that his lectures on the psychology of language were the most heavily attended in the world.<sup>11</sup> But, as I have mentioned already, his reputation declined around the turn of the century.<sup>12</sup> Wundt retired at the age of eighty-five (1917), since when he has been widely recognised for his administrative capabilities in setting up the laboratory and the research programme at Leipzig. But his theoretical writings (such as his multi-volume work, *Volkerpsychologie*, 1900) are seldom read.<sup>13</sup> Wundt never established a school, and his ‘ethno-psychology’ was abandoned soon after his death.<sup>14</sup>

The reasons for this turnabout in Wundt’s fortunes are complex. Three complicated factors led to the decline in his standing. First, the model of psychophysics on which much of Wundt’s early experimental research was based, lost currency. Secondly, the pre-Saussurean view of language that Wundt started out with appeared outmoded by the time the first of his two volumes of

*Volkpsychologie* (the volumes dealing specifically with language) were published.<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, competing philosophical approaches to the problem of mind emerged. The most important among these competing approaches, were those influenced by the Brentano's philosophy, and I shall be discussing them in the closing section of this chapter.

The historical circumstances in which Wundt worked cannot be ignored. In the late nineteenth-century, much hinged politically on pictures of mind.<sup>16</sup> Wundt was a neo-Liberal and a nationalist. His interest in psychology grew out of his involvement in workers' education, and his belief in education as the remedy for all social ills was typical of neo-Liberal thinking at the time. The prevailing neo-Liberal picture of mind presupposed that the elementary mental structures are pretty much the same everywhere. Neo-Liberals typically saw human variation as caused by particular circumstances, local geography, climate, history and so on. Indeed the capacity to develop variously in different settings, they claimed, is a defining human characteristic. Surface differences among peoples and cultures, they asserted, were essentially the products of different external contexts or environments. Crucially, they presupposed that it was possible, in principle, to separate out the super-structural or 'cultural' aspects of mind from what was innately or 'naturally' given. Thus, they hoped to distinguish what constitutes the universal rational endowment of Mankind from its particular cultural 'overlays'.

Where did the so-called 'higher mental functions' – imagination, and memory and so on – figure in the neo-Liberal scheme of things? The question came down to whether they belonged to the biologically evolved, universal 'endowment', or whether they were part of the 'cultural superstructure'. Indeed, some 'advanced' neo-Liberal thinkers suggested that by combining evolutionary biology together with historical anthropology scientists might demonstrate that what was taken to be biologically 'given' has not only evolved (and would continue evolving), but that 'human nature' itself was open to change.

Thus discussions hinged on what is 'fixed' and what is changeable in the 'human

psyche'. Crucially, different answers to this highly politicised question shaped contrasting estimations of the power and efficacy of human agency and citizenship.<sup>17</sup> Characteristically, German neo-Liberals claimed that the critical aspect of the human psyche - the part that is open to change - could be shaped by education. Typically, however, they thought about change as something occurring within the individual, a view that reflected Kantian principles of rational, moral autonomy, but which also reflected the bourgeois dichotomy between the 'individual' and 'society'. Neo-Liberals did not usually think about the development of mind as a socio-historical process that has evolved outside individuals on the plane of collective development.

Wundt, however, became increasingly sceptical about the adequacy of the abstract neo-Liberal model of the rational autonomous individual, in the aftermath to the failure of the Liberal revolutions of 1848. He grasped the notion that thought occurs and, indeed, human minds are formed in particular cultural circumstances. In other words, he came to believe that the cultural environments they inhabit shape individual's minds. Thus, at a stage beyond what is biologically evolved (and thus, in a sense, 'fixed'), mind is open to modification. Consequently, the experimental psychologist became especially eager to extend his investigations into the relations between the formation of the individual consciousness and its cultural environments.<sup>18</sup>

Wundt painted a striking picture of the way that culture gets inside the individual. Intriguingly, he pictured cultural environments as more than merely the external contexts in which mental development occurs. His was not a picture of an individual mind unfolding in a nurturing culture. Rather, he argued, we appropriate, take in ('internalize' would be Vygotskian way of putting it) the 'cultural environments' – cultural *milieux* -that we inhabit. Further to this, we do so in such a way <sup>that</sup> cultural environments become part of our psychological make up. Such processes, he claimed, are fundamental to the development of higher mental functions. And thus elements of Wundt's *Volkerpsychologie* prefigure strands in contemporary *sociocultural* theory, especially strands in neo-

Vygotskian work. But at the same time – and this is both suggestive and problematic - they also hark back to the philosophical anthropology of the German Enlightenment, and I shall be coming back to this point later.

Wundt's *Volkerpsychologie* aimed to construct a comprehensive historical account of the psychological development of 'cultural peoples'.<sup>19</sup> Thus it combined a picture of how individual minds are formed with a view of the collective development of peoples and their cultures. Hugely ambitious, it claimed to offer a comprehensive psychological history of Mankind. The account of mind it gave is one of a series of qualitative transformations which occur on different planes. On this view, new mental capacities are not simply layered over existing ones, building block fashion: rather, the addition of new capabilities entails the restructuring of the old ones. Indeed, it offered more of a dialectical account of development than might appear at first glance. (Wundt, of course, was not a Marxist thinker). The mental transformations Wundt sought to conceptualise were pictured as occurring on two levels: at the level of the individual and at the level of the psychological 'collective', the nation or *Volk* in a way that is reminiscent of Herder's thought.<sup>20</sup>

Where did *Volkerpsychologie* come from? Wundt did not 'invent it. Rather, ethno-psychology emerged in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth-century, around the same time as psycho-physics. By Wundt's account, *Volkerpsychologie* was established by two thinkers, a philosopher and a philologist, Heyman Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus. They established ethno-psychology through the journal they edited together in the eighteen-sixties. Interestingly, Wundt complained that the editors of the journal had failed to give precise definition to the new field. Therefore, he took pains to distinguish his own project from earlier versions of it. What distinguished his approach, he claimed, was that it was constructed upon rigorous principles of 'scientific' psychology. It was not speculative and it contained no metaphysical residues. What Wundt meant by 'scientific' was fairly straightforward with his experimental work in the laboratory, indeed the great French sociologist, Emile Durkheim was impressed

by this aspect of his research. But it was unclear as to how the principles of scientific psychology were to be applied rigorously to the philological and anthropological data – folktales, customs and symbols - that his cohorts of field workers painstakingly gathered and classified, where a large amount of interpretative work had to be done.

Essentially, Wundt failed to construct a synthesising theoretical overview into a unified science that was capable of bridging the ‘natural’ and ‘human’ science divide. Instead, he built a massive edifice comprising a vast corpus of cultural ‘data’ that he assembled from disparate sources (psycho-physics; philology; anthropology; mythology; archaeology and more) in an attempt to picture the history of human development. Looking back, he wrote, ‘The idea gradually arose of combining the mental development of man as severally viewed by language, religion and custom.’<sup>21</sup> It was an unwieldy, grandiose project, (historico-psycho-anthropology) and in the end it proved beyond him. Wundt’s legacy is a rich but problematic one. The cultural dimensions of his work were not well understood at the time, and they have not been widely appreciated since. Therefore, I want to say more about what lay behind it.

Moreover, science cannot be sealed off from ideology. The distinction between individual and collective psychology became an increasingly politicised one in the climate of national rivalry around the turn of the nineteenth-century. Notions of ethnic and national mentalities - the ‘German mind’, ‘the European mind’, as well as the world outlooks of ‘primitive’ and ‘cultural peoples’ (*Naturvolker*, and *Kulturvolker*) and so on - were freely appropriated by nationalists and imperialists who made political capital out of ranking peoples’ attributed mental traits.<sup>22</sup> Further to this, notions borrowed from ethno-psychology gave pseudo-scientific credence to the business of drawing up ethnic and racial hierarchies. Later, disastrously, they figured in National Socialist ethnic politics. Such notions have been unspeakably damaging and we cannot ignore them, but their negative aspects should not distract us either. Wundt’s prioritisation of collective over individual psychology remains an intrinsically interesting one.

In reality, Wundt drew on a stock of anthropological ideas about peoples and their world outlooks that belonged to the legacy of German idealism. Herder and von Humboldt were major contributors to this stock. Yet, curiously, the experimental psychologist does not seem to have appreciated the dynamic conception of the role of signs that lay at the heart of earlier pictures of language and mind. In the mid-nineteen-hundreds, it was a commonplace among German philologists that signs were collective, historical productions. Thus Wundt writes, 'all phenomena with which mental sciences deal (language, art, mythology, religion) are, indeed, creations of the social community'.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, *Volkerpsychologie* involved studying 'those mental products which are created by a community of human life.' Mental products, Wundt argued, 'are, therefore, inexplicable in terms merely of individual consciousness, since they presuppose the reciprocal action of many.'<sup>24</sup> (On this view, the higher mental functions represent a cultural achievement, where the 'mentalities' or psychological structures peculiar to particular peoples are pictured as the 'objectifications' of the 'spirit' of this or that group). In sum, so-called 'ethnic mentalities' were reified as historical productions that might be studied comparatively.

Today, readers will be rightly suspicious of 'scientific' projects proposing to investigate the mental characteristics of peoples and races comparatively.<sup>25</sup> The damaging legacy of the work of racial 'classifiers' should ring deafening alarm bells. It is somewhat paradoxical, then, that Wundt was taken to task by his contemporaries for devoting the same painstaking analysis to the languages of 'primitive' peoples (*Naturvolker*), in an age when the distinction between 'cultured peoples' (*Kulturvolker*) and 'primitive peoples' caused no stir among scientists. Ironically, the painstaking attention that Wundt afforded 'primitive' peoples' language was usually only given to the Indo-European and Semitic languages. Interestingly, Wundt's contemporary, Franz Boas was the first linguist to show that there is no scientific basis for the correlation of race and culture.<sup>26</sup> He demonstrated convincingly that language 'families' cannot be mapped onto racial groups without distorting reality. What is frequently overlooked, however,

is that Boas' path-breaking work on Native American languages grew directly out of German cultural science. Early on, Boas's research was linked closely to developments in Berlin. Similarly, another contemporary figure, Rudolf Virchow produced a crucial study of the racial characteristics of Prussian school children, which concluded Prussians, as a racial type, did not exist.

Wundt took particular care to draw a clear line separating his project from earlier, cruder versions of 'ethno-psychology'. And he also took pains to distinguish his own definition of 'primitive man' from definitions that he inherited from the French Enlightenment. French Enlightenment conceptions of 'primitive man', Wundt claimed, were the product of an abstract opposition between 'culture' and 'nature' that was common among philosophers and anthropologists of the eighteenth century. In this respect Wundt, who in some ways followed in the spirit of the *Sturm und Drang* anthropologists, was highly critical of the French Enlightenment and he deprecated what he described as 'its conceited estimate of [its own] cultural achievements'. For Enlightenment thinkers, he said, 'The endeavour was not to find or observe, but to *invent* him [primitive man].'<sup>27</sup>

In essence, Wundt's *Volkerpsychologie* was constructed around a powerful conception of the cultural nature of mind. He claimed that all cultural productions, especially languages and symbol systems, depend fundamentally on social interaction - 'the reciprocal interaction of many', as he phrases it - in historical time. On Wundt's view, mind is a collective phenomenon, hence his assertion: 'All phenomena with which mental phenomena deal are, indeed, creations of the *social* community'.<sup>28</sup> Language, he emphasised, also arises out of the history of collectivity. For Wundt, language existed on the supra-individual, sociocultural plane. From this perspective, language (unlike utterance) does not spring 'expressively' from the needs and interests of individual speakers and cannot be studied as such. Indeed, Wundt underscores this very point. 'A language can never be created by an individual'.<sup>29</sup> Intriguingly, his picture of language as a collective phenomenon became the very cornerstone of his theory of human psychological development.

Wundt reached two fundamental conclusions. First, that the structures of mind shape every stage of human social and cultural development. Secondly, that the higher mental functions are governed by their own developmental laws.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Wundt refused to reduce the higher mental functions to the determinations of the lower ones. On this view the lower ones do not prefigure the higher mental functions. Rather, they follow independent developmental trajectories. What is more, because they follow their own course, they cannot be reduced to chains of physical causation because culturally evolved materials continually mediate them. Both of these conclusions turn on notions about the role of culture – and especially the role of signs and symbols – in the formation of mind. In essence, Wundt put human signification at the centre of his picture of the psychological history of Mankind. Yet, in the last instance, his notion of the mediating role of signs lacked an adequate conceptualisation of human activity, and thus it remained curiously lifeless.

\* \* \*

I want to come back now to the relations between Wundt's psychology and late nineteenth-century developments in language studies. Wundt was called to a "half-chair" in philosophy at Leipzig in 1874. The division of a professorial chair, though not unusual at the time, is telling. It suggests two things. The first I have already touched on. It suggests the way that two emergent academic disciplines, linguistics and psychology splintered away from philosophy at the close of the nineteenth-century. Unsurprisingly, this was an uneven business. With psychology the case is especially complicated. Usually, it remained in the shadow of philosophy right up to the 1920's. Professional specialisation led to fragmentation among several disciplines (philology, 'scientific' psychology, 'philosophical' psychology, anthropology, and linguistics and so on) before the Great War, not after it, as accounts usually suggest.

Secondly, although it is as a psychologist rather than as a linguist that Wundt is chiefly remembered, his picture of signification (language, signs and symbols) was central for much of his work. Indeed, the first two volumes of his monumental work, *Volkerpsychologie* took language (*die Sprache*) as their chief focus. (Subsequent volumes dealt with a broader range of anthropological topics and themes: mythology, religion, art forms, social structures, legal systems, culture and the philosophy of history.<sup>31</sup> But whereas, recently, historians of psychology have begun to recognise the extent to which Wundt's work on the role of signs in the development of higher mental functions foreshadows the "cognitive revolution" of the 1950's, serious recognition of Wundt's theoretical work has been confined to cognitive psychology. Contemporary linguists have paid little serious attention to Wundt's work.

The fact that Wundt's picture of language has failed to interest contemporary linguists is telling. For Wundt, psychology was a propaedeutic science.<sup>32</sup> On this view, linguistics was to be derived from psychological principles rather than from principles of its own making. Yet, for much of his career, Wundt was at the storm centre of debates that were transforming language studies into a modern, specialist science.

At Leipzig during the 1870's and 80's, when Wundt's reputation as the world's leading professional psychologist was being made, and when experimental psychology was advancing full-sail ahead, the *Junggrammatiker* (neo-grammarians) were laying the foundations of modern structural linguistics. It is hardly coincidental that the young de Saussure began his doctoral studies there in the mid-seventies. I need to say more about these developments, and especially about the way that the picture of language changed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The key change as far as our story is concerned was that the new picture of how language works - language as system of differences - no longer needed principles of individual psychology.

The *Junggrammatiker* were a group of 'militant' linguists who gathered at

Leipzig in the eighteen-seventies. They spearheaded the drive that was to transform language studies into a full-blown science. Indeed, their chief objective was to establish linguistics as an exact science on a par with the other natural sciences. To achieve their objective they developed a more rigorous methodology than any other school of linguistics had done before.

The first generation of comparative and historical philologists had discovered law-like patterns of regularity among sound shifts that held true in a large number of cases. For instance, where English words begin with 'f', the Latin is likely to begin with 'p', and so on. They did not, however, claim to discover laws that apply in every single case. Herein lies a crucial difference. The *Jungrammatiker*, by contrast to the philologists, claimed that sound changes are governed by laws that hold without exception. Further to this, they held that such laws could be formulated in exact ways, just as they were in the natural sciences. Thus, they sought to break with the unscientific tradition of historical and comparative philology.

The significant shift in the way that language was pictured came about when the explanation for regularity in sound change was located in the differentiated system of sounds that go to make language up. Henceforth, explanations of change were no longer sought in the historical determinations of separate items of language (etymologies). From a systemic point of view, sound changes have little to do with the expressive needs or intentions of individual speakers. Rather, changes occur systematically over long periods of time spanning many generations. Moreover, once it is accepted that language change occurs at the level of the self-regulating system, then change can no longer be explained adequately in terms of individual psychology or, indeed, of historically unique - and therefore unrepeatable - instances of speech. Crucially, such a picture of language is incompatible with Wundt's view of psychology as the propaedeutic science according to which linguistics is to be derived from psychological principles.<sup>33</sup>

The advent of structural linguistics marks the point where the picture of language as individual 'expression' met its limit. By concentrating on language as a system of differences, de Saussure showed that it was possible to describe linguistic change as a phenomenon that is 'independent of the expressive needs, desires or interests of the speakers. Crucially, the way that language works can be explained separately from the laws of mind – or, indeed, any other principles of individual psychology. Thus the rug was pulled smartly from under the feet of 'expressivist' theorists of the origins of language, going back at least as far as Herder. And thus, modern structural linguistics appeared to free itself from the idealist abstraction of the *originating* individual speaker that it inherited from the idealist philosophy of consciousness.

De Saussure arrived at Leipzig to start his doctoral studies around the same time that Wundt was 'called' to the half-chair in philosophy (1874/5) and it is therefore important to get clear about the relations between linguists and psychologists at the time. De Saussure was among those who attended Wundt's packed lectures on the psychology of language, and it is interesting to conjecture about what he made of them.<sup>34</sup> But where did Wundt stand in relation to the other linguists at Leipzig? How did he perceive the developments in language studies that were going on around him? What impact did they have on his *Sprachpsychologie*? Intriguingly, Wundt once remarked that if he had received better training earlier he would have become a linguist.<sup>35</sup> What he meant by this exactly it is hard to tell, but his remark raises intriguing questions. Could experimental psychology and linguistics be drawn together in a unified theory of the role of signs in the development of the higher mental functions?

Battles raged at Leipzig on several fronts. There were clashes among experimental psychologists and metaphysical philosophers. And there were skirmishes among positivistic philologists and scientific linguists. The history of this intellectual warfare is especially revealing. In 1860, some fourteen years before Wundt was called to Leipzig, Steinthal and Lazarus had launched a journal devoted to the psychology of language: *Zeitschrift für Volkerpsychologie*

*und Sprachwissenschaft (Social Psychology and Linguistics)*. Wundt was an early contributor.

Trained in Humboldtian philology, Steinthal had published an influential study on the origins of language, *Der Ursprung der Sprache*, which appeared in 1856.<sup>36</sup> He started out from the assumption that innate laws of language govern mind, and subsequently he became convinced that a science of psychology was impossible without a complementary science of signs. Unfortunately, his ideas emerged around same time as psycho-physiology was getting under way and inevitably his views led him directly into conflict with the psycho-physiologists. They argued that physiology - muscle, reflexes, the nervous system, 'localisations' in the brain, and so on - held the key to the laws of consciousness. By contrast, Steinthal insisted on the importance of signs, especially linguistic signs, in the constitution of mind. However, it was a double misfortune for Steinthal, when he also came under fire from 'scientific' linguists, particularly the *Junggrammatiker*, who quarrelled with his picture of language. Push came to shove when Steinthal produced a psychology textbook that began with a chapter on linguistics. Several of the *Junggrammatiker* objected that the new, empirically based mathematical psychology – the tradition that psychologists like Fechner had started - offered a more scientifically secure foundation. A fierce battle ensued, and Wundt's psychology issued in the aftermath to it.

Wundt inherited from German idealism the notion of *apperception*. Recall that in idealist philosophical traditions *apperception* usually refers to idea that things can never be known in themselves. Rather, says Kant, they can only be grasped as they are perceived, that is, as they are presented to consciousness by the synthesising powers of mind. Wundt's conception of the formation of the higher mental functions turned on his picture of the apperceptive mental processes organising – synthesising – the elementary contents of consciousness. Additionally, he made a distinction between the 'inward' system of apperception and judgements, and the 'outward' system of events and associations. Such distinctions preserved von Humboldt's division between inner and outer forms of

speech. (Von Humboldt's thinking, of course, was shaped powerfully by Kant).

In Wundtian theory, *apperception* involved the selection and 'structuring' of mental contents. By contrast, *perception* is always externally oriented, for instance, with sensing and detecting. On this view, *apperception* involves making sense of raw sensory data. Crucially, Wundt claimed that the structures produced by the internal cognitive system are quite different from those produced externally.<sup>37</sup> As far as the internal structures of mind are concerned, the relations between the various elements of the system appear to be the most important ones.

The full significance of the difference between inner and outer structures emerges when we look at one of the key higher mental functions, memory. Memory, Wundt argued, is not so dependent on patterns of association (which is how the British empiricists saw things) as it is on internal structural principles. Crucially, we do not recover past experience as the isolated traces of events that are 'stored' separately in memory. Rather, we learn to regenerate experiences within whole structures. For Wundt, mind grasps meaningful wholes. What is more, experimental evidence appeared to support just such a view. Subjects working on memorisation tasks were able to recall lists of words grouped into meaningful phrases, whereas discrete nonsense items were largely forgotten.

Wundt applied these and similar insights successfully in his experimental investigations of language performance in the laboratory. To give just one important example, when he tried to capture mental processes at work in the production of speech, he became intrigued by the phenomenon of rapid conversation. He observed that speakers in rapid conversation constantly adjust what they say in the light of the listener's anticipated responses. He observed, too, that the same speakers sometimes find themselves suddenly at a loss for words. They are conscious of what they want to say, but unaccountably unable to say it. With instances like these, the pre-structuring mechanism for the whole utterance seems to break down. At the very moment we speak, at the point of utterance, the next word is, moment by moment, at the forefront of our attention.

But, at the same time, somewhere in the background, the whole of the utterance is being formulated and reformulated –mentally drafted and redrafted, as it were – on the wing. Words only take shape within a broader span of attention.<sup>38</sup> Wundt puts it like this:

From a psychological point of view, the sentence is both a simultaneous and a sequential structure. It is simultaneous because at each moment it is present in consciousness as a totality even though individual elements may occasionally disappear from it. It is sequential because the configuration changes from moment to moment in its cognitive condition as individual constituents move into the focus of attention and out again one after the other. The claim that the sentence is a chain of word concepts is as untenable as it is merely a chain of words. On the contrary it is the dissection of a totality present as a whole in consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

Against the associationists (who presuppose that chains of words and concepts are linked in a linear sequence), Wundt claimed that a multiplicity of processes come into in play whenever we speak. The ordering of words in the sentences we utter couldn't be organised by a single chain of associations. In sum, he argued the case that there is no linear sequence. Rather, the internal processes require that several functions be performed at one and the same time. Words, he concedes, are indeed spoken one after another. But crucially, they require that the whole utterance be worked upon simultaneously, in its totality, according to some kind of plan or schema. In other words, we formulate, revise – and, crucially, reformulate – our entire speech plan as we speak, shaping our words at the point of utterance.<sup>40</sup>

Wundt established an astonishing programme of experimental research at Leipzig in the 80s. His goal, as we have said, was essentially a neo-Liberal one of which was to discover universal properties common to all minds. And to this end he attempted to survey the mental characteristics of different peoples. Thus, he set about gathering anthropological evidence of their 'mentalities' as they were 'objectified' in their 'spiritual' productions, especially language, symbols, artefacts, myths, customs, art, religion and so on. The various lines of investigation were supposed to culminate the serial publication of his multi-volume work, *Volkerpsychologie*. But in reality he was following two radically

different modes of enquiry - experimental psychology, and historico-ethnopsychology. He did so plainly because no single approach afforded him a complete enough picture of human mental and cultural life, but his quest for the total picture threw up unforeseen, seemingly intractable methodological problems and he was unable to resolve them. How could experimental psychology and cultural anthropology be blended into a unitary research programme?

Wundt's methodological difficulties arose, as I have already mentioned, just at the moment when experimental psychology was trying to establish its footings in the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaft*). At the same time, ethno-psychology was trying to break with philology and to set itself up as an autonomous 'cultural science' (*Geisteswissenschaft*).<sup>41</sup> Each domain developed distinct philosophical foundations and methodologies of the kind that Wundt's contemporaries, Rickert and Dilthey, were concurrently struggling to clarify.

Wundt stuck to the distinction, which he made early on, between the lower and higher mental functions. Whereas he thought that the lower mental functions have their basis in human physiology, and can be traced to the nervous system, respiration, heart rate, reflexes, muscle tissue and so on. With the higher mental functions, culture has to be taken into account. Crucially, Wundt presupposed that complex mental processes (the higher mental functions) depend on the use of signs. And, because signs - especially languages - have arisen historically in different cultural circumstances, peoples' mentalities vary in time and space. Thus, as far as research into the higher mental functions are concerned, the individual 'organism' cannot be taken as the sole unit of analysis. Instead, the products of the cultural collective have to be taken into account for the way they provide additional, objective data:

We may add that, fortunately for science, there are other sources of objective psychological knowledge, which become accessible at the very point where the experimental method fails us. These are certain products of the common mental life, in which we may trace the operations of determinate psychical motives: chief among these are language, myth and custom. In part determined by historical conditions, they are also in part, dependent on psychological laws; and the phenomena that are referable to these laws form the subject-matter of a special psychological discipline,

ethnic psychology. The results of ethnic psychology constitute at the same time, our chief source of information regarding the general psychology of the complex mental processes. In this way, experimental psychology and ethnic psychology form the two principle departments of scientific psychology at large.<sup>42</sup>

Wundt claimed that, unlike physiological functions, social and cultural functions cannot be investigated in a way that abstracts them from their social and cultural embeddings. Thus the higher mental functions cannot be investigated on an individual basis or in isolation. Rather they have to be seen in relation to the culture that gave rise to them. In a manner that foreshadows contemporary sociocultural theory, Wundt implied that, 'Thinking on the higher plane means that individuals are participating in the culture.'<sup>43</sup>

Wundt sought a model of mind that was reliable, objective and positively grounded in empirical reality. In the manner of a natural scientist, he sought to discover the laws governing all mental processes everywhere without exception. But whereas the lower mental processes were amenable to investigation in the laboratory, he could see plainly that higher ones could not be captured by the same methods. He needed 'hard' historical-cultural psychological as well as experimental data. But what kind of 'hard' historical data would fit the bill?<sup>44</sup>

Wundt assumed that mental phenomena are never directly available to the researchers. He assiduously avoided methods that relied on introspective data because they lacked 'scientific objectivity'. He also grasped the way that there are serious problems over the 'status' of psychological 'facts'. And yet he remained adamant that he could build a scientifically objective picture of mental operations by 'natural scientific' methods. That is, he believed that by making inferences, by constructing hypotheses, and by testing such hypotheses empirically, the laws governing higher mental functions were, in principle, discoverable. In sum, he believed that psychological research had to rely on the general principles of inductive empirical science. The major challenge came with his ethnological investigations, where a high degree of interpretative work was required to

discover meaning and significance. In essence, he was unable to evolve a unitary, synthesising theory that combined the different methodologies.

\* \* \*

Before I draw my discussion of Wundt to a close, I want to say a word more about Wundt's changing picture of culture in relation to neo-Liberal ideology. He started out with a neo-Liberal picture of culture as an aggregate of the values, customs and beliefs. Later, however, he arrived at a radically different picture from the one he set out with. Early on, Wundt worked with a notion of culture that accorded well with prevailing neo-Liberal assumptions. Neo-Liberals assumed that people are fundamentally rational and more or less the same everywhere, and that peoples are the products of different environments, histories and so on. Over time, Wundt shifted away from such a view. According to one historian, 'For the later Wundt, culture was no longer a consensus among individuals, an aggregation of ideas, words, artifacts and so on, that were passed on by persons of one generation to those of another. Instead, the mental structures of individuals were literally part of the larger culture'.<sup>45</sup> Culture appears in Wundt's later work as a supra-individual entity, 'an active force' with 'coherence in itself.' Paradoxically, for the experimental psychologist 'culture' came to resemble what it had been for Herder and the German anthropologists of the *Sturm und Drang* - a 'shaping principle' - that is, something that prefigures the development of individuals.

This shift in the notion of culture marks a change in Wundt's thinking. As a consequence to it, the central focus of his research ceased to be the individual consciousness and became instead the cultural totality. The key difference between the orthodox neo-Liberal model of culture and Wundt's radical reformulation of it is that, with the new model, culture ceases to be thought about as the setting for individual development - it is no longer the external context, or the set of historical circumstances within which the individual's psychology unfolds - rather, culture plays an internally constitutive, shaping role in collective

as well as individual development. For this reason Wundt made the supra-individual, cultural 'laws' of psychological development became the chief object of his investigations.

To many of Wundt's critics (especially German ones) the picture of development that he painted must have recalled the epoch of German Romanticism. Moreover, to many psychologists from overseas, (especially Americans), who had been attracted initially by Wundt's experimental psychology, such a radical shifting of perspectives made little sense. Indeed, this reformulation of the neo-Liberal model of culture by which the development of the individual is subordinated to the development of the collective, goes some way towards explaining why Wundt's ethno-psychology, (*Volkpsychologie*), made little impact in America, where individualistic psychology was strong. Consequently, only Wundt's experimental psychology was taken up there, and the cultural dimensions of his work were ignored.<sup>46</sup>

Wundt claimed that the relations between lower and higher mental functions could only be studied by investigating the role of cultural materials, chiefly signs in the formation of mind. Further to this he thought that such investigations must be undertaken from *genetic* perspectives. In other words, he claimed that the study of the higher mental functions entailed giving a *prehistory* of their development. He was of the opinion that child psychology and animal psychology merely afforded the potential for complementary lines of investigation, whereas he was convinced that experimental psychology and ethno-psychology, in combination, would yield the key to the history of the development of Mankind. Thus, he attempted to trace the evolutionary stages in the development of mind, ascending from lower to higher mental functions.<sup>47</sup>

\* \* \*

Essentially, Wundt's picture of 'mind' depended on whether mental 'contents' can be broken down for analysis into their 'component elements' such as

sensations and feelings. He assumed they could. But for a new generation of psychologists – especially Bühler, Külpe, Katz, Wertheimer, Köhler, Koffka and Vygotsky among others- mental acts, not mental contents provided the key to the development of the higher mental functions. In one blunt sentence Karl Bühler summed up what he took to be Wundt's outmodedness. He wrote, 'The key word in Wundt's theory is *'experience'*, the key word in the modern model, by contrast, is *'action'*. Wundt's view of mind, Bühler implies, is fatally limited because it is wedded to a *static* notion of mental contents. Wundt, he writes, has no real conception of mental *'acts'*. How did Bühler reach such a conclusion? The answer is that he was immersed in the 'act psychology' that stemmed from the philosophy of Franz Brentano.

1874 saw the publication of Franz Brentano's best-known book, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.<sup>48</sup> *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* grew out of Brentano's deep dissatisfaction with the state of philosophy. He believed that he had been 'born into a period of the worst sort of intellectual decadence'.<sup>49</sup> He rejected outright the philosophical idealism that still dominated the German universities, and turned instead to the philosophy of Aristotle, and this marked a sharp break with Kantian thought.

In his *habilitation* thesis (1866) Brentano had defended the claim that 'the true method of philosophy is none other than natural science'. In the light of the general trend away from Hegelian metaphysics and the spectacular rise of the natural sciences, this claim may appear merely to reflect the times. In fact it was anything but a reflection of the times, as Linda McAlister explains:

Here [*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*] he [Brentano] argues that philosophy appears to differ from the natural sciences in the following four ways: it lacks universally accepted doctrines; it undergoes, in turn, one complete revolutions after another; the ends it seeks to achieve seem totally unattainable by empirical means; and it is impossible that it should have any practical uses. But, he argues, these differences are only apparent and are due to the fact that philosophy is still at a very immature state of development: he contends that when it develops further these apparent differences will disappear.<sup>50</sup>

McAlister describes Brentano's conclusions as 'extraordinary'. Moreover the position that he affords psychology in the history of philosophy seemed to her extraordinary too, especially where he argues that psychology is one of several branches of philosophy, but it is the branch on which all the others depend. According to Brentano, psychology depends on physiology. Thus he concludes that 'psychology is a natural science at a very early stage of development and so, therefore, is philosophy'.<sup>51</sup> On the face of it this may seem a very strange conclusion to have reached. He appears to be claiming both that philosophy is in its infancy, and that it is parasitic on the 'young' science of psychology. But the strangeness is quickly dispelled when we grasp the distinctions that Brentano is making between an empirical science, experimental psychology, and a philosophical psychology, the philosophy of mind.

Against the background of these fundamental distinctions, a further seminal distinction between 'genetic' and 'descriptive' psychology makes striking sense. 'Genetic' psychology, Brentano claims, follows the methods of natural science and it is analogous to physiology, physics or chemistry. From 'genetic' perspectives, mental events can be traced back to physical causes. Indeed, psychological investigations depend typically for their success on a prior knowledge of physiology, especially neuro-physiology. (Wundt's experimental psychology falls into this category.)<sup>52</sup> By contrast, 'descriptive' psychology sets out to delineate and to classify mental phenomena. Thus it concerns itself chiefly with the analysis of mental experiences that it seeks to break down into their constituent parts. 'Descriptive' psychology, then, is chiefly concerned with the analysis of concepts. It aims to show how concepts are derived from experience.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in contrast to 'genetic' psychology, descriptive psychology does not attempt to explain the causes of mental phenomena. Rather, it gathers its data from inner-perception, which Brentano carefully distinguishes from introspection upon which psychological idealism typically relies. We cannot observe our own mental acts, he says, but we can perceive them – for instance, by reconstructing them in memory.

‘Descriptive’ psychology does not attempt to make inductive generalizations in the manner of the natural sciences. Instead, it takes as its standard phenomenological description - things as they appear to the perceiver. However, ‘phenomenology’ is not a term that Brentano used. It comes from Brentano’s student, Husserl.<sup>54</sup> For Husserl, phenomenology was primarily a way of studying consciousness. Like Brentano, he was at pains to distinguish psychic from physical phenomena and thus to delimit the object of psychology. Husserl’s debt to Brentano was substantial. He attended a series of seminal lectures in Vienna, where he came under the spell of Brentano’s thought. Indeed, he once remarked that without Brentano, ‘I should have written not a single word of philosophy.’ Subsequent to this, he transformed Brentano’s descriptive psychology into a ‘phenomenology’.

So far I have been discussing Brentano’s distinction between ‘genetic’ and ‘descriptive’ psychology without stopping to say what he meant by ‘mental phenomena’. McAlister offers the following helpful further distinction: ‘It appears’ she writes, ‘that [for Brentano] mental phenomena are all mental *acts*, in a broad sense, while physical phenomena are, strictly speaking, all instances of sensible qualities’.<sup>55</sup> Much turns on this distinction. As I have mentioned already, the contrast between psychology based on mental ‘contents’ and psychology based on mental ‘acts’ is according to Bühler, precisely what distinguishes Wundt’s project from the work of a new generation of researchers.

Brentano’s notion of ‘intentionality’ has been discussed extensively. I can only offer a short summary of some of the key points here. ‘Intentionality’ (*intentionale*) is the term Brentano used to suggest that all mental phenomena are ‘relational’. ‘Intentionality’ here does not mean ‘having a purpose’: rather Brentano borrowed it from the Scholastics’ reworking of Aristotelian philosophy. He gives the following definition of mental phenomena:

Every mental phenomenon is characterised by what the Scholastics of the middle-ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a

content, direction towards an object (by which you should not take me to mean a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something in itself as an object, though they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.<sup>56</sup>

On this view, a mental act is the way that mind relates to the object before it. Thus the simplest mental act consists in having an object in consciousness - what Brentano calls '*representation*'. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that that Brentano is saying that we can only know representations of things as opposed to 'things in themselves', in the manner of the Kantian apperception. The point that he is making is that the object of consciousness need not actually exist to be the object of an 'intentional act'. A literary work of art, to give just one important illustration, 'exists' as an object of 'pure intentionality'. Plainly, objects that only have existence in consciousness can be distinguished from objects that mind contemplates, which also have actual existence. Essentially, the question turns on the relation of the subject to the object. For example, the difference between a judgement and a representation does not lie in the object itself, but rather in our manner of conceiving it, that is in the nature of the mental act.

Brentano's notion of intentionality has had huge implications for literary theory. The roots of 'reader response' theory lie in the interpretations of intentionality that were elaborated by his students and their associates. The founding figure of 'reader response' theory, Roman Ingarden, was a student of Husserl. He took up the problem of the literary work of art from the standpoint of 'pure intentionality'. (Wolfgang Iser developed this tradition in the direction of literary theory with his notion of the 'implied reader'). For Ingarden, who was interested in the work of art primarily as a philosophical problem, the literary work was the perfect instance of an 'object whose pure intentionality was beyond any doubt'.<sup>57</sup> Art, he wrote in 1930, presents an opportunity to investigate 'the essential structures of the mode of existence of the purely intentional object without being subject to suggestions stemming from real objectivities'. By 'real objectivities'

he means things in the world that have actual existence rather than objects that have existence in consciousness.<sup>58</sup>

The implications of Brentano's philosophy for psychology were huge. From its very inception, 'modern' psychology had struggled with Cartesian 'mind-body dualism'. Out of this struggle there emerged the two major contrasting orientations. Whereas some psychologists looked toward the natural sciences for their methods, others preferred the 'interpretative methods of the so-called 'human sciences' (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The second of these two orientations drew heavily on philosophical hermeneutics – the 'science' of the interpretation of texts. Crucially, the history of modern hermeneutics can be traced back through the works of Gadamer, Heidegger and Husserl to the seminal ideas of Brentano. Intriguingly, Freud was also a student of Brentano.

Hermeneutic approaches to the interpretation of the psyche seemed especially promising to those psychologists who were seeking to grasp the complexities of the higher mental processes from the perspective of meaning. But it was not until the 1920's that the full significance of this dual legacy began to emerge. Experimental research, which took its orientation from the natural sciences, was more positivistic than psychological hermeneutics. The former assumed that there were psychological facts that were open to 'objective' observation and verification. Its overriding aim was to make psychology into an exact science. By contrast, hermeneutic approaches wrestled with the problems that arise from the way that the observer or the 'informant' enters the picture. Indeed, a central issue for hermeneutic approaches has been the way that the researcher 'selects' and 'constructs' the object of inquiry and the way that a person's prejudices and undisclosed assumptions shape the analysis. Every act of interpretation is also a 'rewriting' because interpreters make sense of things from within the horizon of their 'prejudices' in the positive sense that Gadamer gives the word. From the perspective of positivist science, hermeneutic approaches appear lacking in scientific objectivity, but from the perspectives of hermeneutics, science cannot escape the very problems that hermeneutics sought to clarify.

More than any other psychologist (or linguist) at the time, Karl Bühler appreciated the significance of the differences among competing traditions in the fields of language studies and psychology.<sup>59</sup> Bühler belonged to the new generation of psychologists. And he held before him a clear picture of the merits and shortfalls of at least three major traditions of research. These traditions were first, the comparative-historical philology of Herman Paul; second, the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl; and third, the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Bühler's appreciation is all the more impressive because it came at a moment when the future of relations among these traditions (indeed, the future of relations among the academic disciplines: philosophy, psychology and linguistics), was impossible to foresee. Along with many of his generation of psychologists, Bühler was highly critical of Wundt's research programme. Chiefly, he was critical of Wundt's inability to give modern psychology adequate methodological foundations of the kind that Brentano had sought to clarify. The story of the quest for an adequate methodology leads us forwards to the research programme that Vygotsky and his associates established in the Soviet Union. They took up once more the problem of the role of signs in the human development from a philosophically engaged socio-cultural standpoint.

Wundt has rarely been recognised as a theoretician. Rather, he has been dismissed as a 'positivist compiler' and a 'classifier' of mental phenomena. He has been criticised – sometimes even derided – for ponderously amassing (and taxonomising) a mass of quasi-anthropological data.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps such criticisms miss the mark. Wundt's research is vulnerable to criticism. But this vulnerability stems from his inability to design a unified research programme. At the finish, he failed to bring the findings from his laboratory together with the bulk of 'cultural' evidence that he and his cohorts of researchers painstakingly assembled.<sup>61</sup> Although a unified theory psychology eluded him, the socio-culturalist perspectives that he developed at Leipzig contributed substantially to socio-cultural theory as it was developed in the twentieth century.

Brentano's ideas influenced generations of philosophers, psychologists and literary theorists. For psychologists, especially, there was a need to establish a theoretically coherent picture of the field. In 1928, Vygotsky, speaking about the crisis in psychology, remarked that psychologists had aspired to a [single] science and created several of them. They had failed, he said, to overcome the crisis that Franz Brentano had called attention to in 1874.<sup>62</sup> (Vygotsky was referring to the Preface to *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, where Brentano declares, 'In place of psychologies we must seek to create a psychology.'<sup>63</sup> Brentano was the precursor of modern phenomenology. The model of mind that he proposed was an active, 'intentional' one in which consciousness is pictured as a process involving mental acts. For Vygotsky, a notion of mental acts, mediated by culturally evolved signs, held the key to the problem of the higher mental functions. Phenomenology will be important in the next chapter, which concentrates on the work of Ernst Cassirer and the relationship of his philosophy of symbolic forms to a picture of psychological development.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bühler, Karl (1973) 'The Psychophysics of Expression of Wilhelm Wundt', first published in 1933, translated by Mara Abolins, in Wundt, Wilhelm (1973) *The Language of Gestures*, with an introduction by Arthur Blumenthal and additional essays by George Herbert Mead and Karl Bühler, the Hague, Mouton p. 34

<sup>2</sup> Vygotsky, L. S. (1987) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, volumes 1-5, edited by R.W. Rieber and A.S. Carton, New York, Plenum Press.

<sup>3</sup> Wundt's laboratory was totally destroyed during an allied bombing raid in December, 1943

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Schulz, Duane, P. and Schulz, S. E. (1996) *A History of Modern Psychology*, Fort Worth, Harcourt Brace. Interestingly, this introduction to the field, which is organised around 'schools of thought that mark psychology's evolution', makes no mention of Soviet psychology beyond the behaviourism of Pavlov and Bekhterev.

<sup>5</sup> Bloomfield, L (1935) *Language*, London: Allen and Unwin.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Vygotsky, L. S. (1997) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, vol.4, *The History of the Development of the Higher Mental Functions*, edited by R.W. Rieber, translated by M. J. Hall, New York Plenum Press.

<sup>7</sup> Psycho-physiology was a new science that aimed to trace mental phenomena to physiological origins. Thus, it also gave psychology an independent base in the physical sciences.

<sup>8</sup> See Scheerer, Eckart (1987) 'The Unknown Fechner', *Psychological Research*, 49:197-202.

<sup>9</sup> See Hearnshaw, L. S. (1987) *The Shaping of Modern Psychology*, London, Routledge and Keegan Paul, p129

<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the nineteenth-century German notion of 'cultural science' see Smith, W. D. (1991) *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*, New York, Oxford University Press. I am especially indebted to Smith for my discussion of Wundt's cultural theories in relation to German neo—Liberalism.

<sup>11</sup> Wundt, Wilhelm (1973) *The Language of Gestures*, with an introduction by Arthur Blumenthal and additional essays by George Herbert Mead and Karl Bühler, the Hague, Paris, Mouton, p13.

---

<sup>12</sup> One of the extra-scientific, contributory factors to the decline in Wundt's international reputation after the German defeat, was the way that he blamed England for starting the Great War and justified the German invasion of Belgium as self-defence. See Schultz, D. P. and Schultz, S. E. (1996) p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Wundt's output was phenomenal. According to the historian of experimental psychology, Edwin Boring, he wrote fifty-five thousand seven hundred and thirty-five pages in sixty eight years. Cited in Scheerer, (1987) p.97.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, W. D. (1991) p.115.

<sup>15</sup> Wundt's contemporaries at Leipzig, the *Junggrammatiker*, played a huge part in transforming linguistic science, as did a young doctoral student there, Ferdinand de Saussure.

<sup>16</sup> Wundt's career cannot be understood in isolation from the broader currents of European history and politics. Indeed, the history of psychology generally cannot be told adequately solely in terms of 'internal' scientific developments alone. Rather it has to be seen in relation to the ideologies and social projects of the day. There is a long-established connection between psychology and neo-Liberals' interest in education in continental Europe and the character of this connection needs to be appreciated to grasp what Wundt set out to achieve.

Regional industrialisation brought about unprecedented social changes in Germany. In the context of such changes, German neo-Liberals looked to education for remedies for the social ills that attended rapid urbanisation. Although state education had been introduced early on in Prussia, universal compulsory schooling among new urban populations forced fundamental questions about the educability of the masses onto the political agenda. Such questions have a familiar ring to them. Are all sections of the community equally capable of benefiting from schooling? If not, then shouldn't those who are likely to benefit most get priority? What kind of a curriculum should state schools provide? The caste-based *Bildung* ideal of self-cultivation that had been the cornerstone of von Humboldt's reforms in the early decades of the nineteenth century did not meet the requirements of 'mass' education. Yet the need to educate (and regulate) the children of industrial workers was felt keenly by neo-Liberals. Wundt, who was himself a neo-Liberal, like many of his contemporaries, became involved (briefly) in the working class education movements of the 1860s. His interest in psychology dates from this time. Typically, German neo-Liberals shared an optimistic vision of world history. They held that the whole of mankind possesses a common progressive spirit and, further to this, they claimed that, universally, people share a given capacity for rational behaviour whatever their present condition. For these nineteenth-century neo-Liberals, history was essentially the story of human progress. However, the failure of the revolutions of 1848 threw Liberalism into crisis and, in the aftermath, neo-Liberals asked themselves how their political performance could be improved. Thus they began to be interested in popular political behaviour. How, they asked, does culture shape ordinary people's political decision making? In the 1850s, the emergence of cultural science in Germany went hand in hand with the neo-Liberal's efforts to modernise their political programme. They took up the research findings from the new German social sciences and, bolstered by modern 'scientific-cultural' knowledge, they strove to create a new political order in which. Liberalism's traditional emphasis on rationality – the common human faculty - figured significantly. In sum, the neo-Liberal ideal order presupposed a universal potential for rational behaviour that could provide the basis for a liberal conception of citizenship. The Neo-Liberals were the inheritors of the European Enlightenment. Universal rationality, they claimed, lies just beneath the surface of human differences. It was not that neo-Liberals imagined that everyone always thinks and behaves in a rational manner - a point that is frequently overlooked by their critics. Rather, they thought that rationality constitutes a common endowment for the whole of humanity. On this view, rationality is what makes us human. The neo-Liberal notion of a common rational capacity was essentially a Kantian one. It provided the foundation for political and ethical values like individual autonomy, worth and dignity. And thus, the rational, reflective individual became the cornerstone of the neo-Liberal vision of universal rights. With the political failures of 1848 and the rapid rise of positivist science, however, neo-Liberals were forced to step back from their reliance upon abstract idealism and metaphysical system building. Subsequently, many neo-Liberals began to explain Man and society in much the same way that natural scientists explained the physical universe. That is they sought to discover 'laws' governing the social domain. Such laws, they believed, would provide an enduring foundation for a new, more rational, more just, and more

efficient social order. For neo-Liberals seeking political reforms, and especially for those of them who wanted to extend the base of political decision-making, a realistic estimate of ordinary people's capacities for rational behaviour was critical. They needed to know how ordinary people think. Essentially, German neo-Liberals were seeking some kind of a socio-cultural psychology, although, they would not have used such terms. They suspected (quite rightly) that what they were after was not to be found in German metaphysics or in the 'old' idealist philosophy. (Kantian critical philosophy was a vital source of liberal values, but it said little about how people actually make decisions). The ideals of the autonomous, rational, subject that they had inherited from Kant - indeed, the ideals on which Kant's vision of citizenship depended - were too abstract to serve as a foundation for the irreducibly practical tasks of policy making and social planning. Because post-Kantian idealism was the foundation of the Liberals' ethical and political vision, neo-Liberals were reluctant to abandon Kant altogether.

However, there was another wing of the German idealist tradition that fed into neo-Liberals ideology. This tradition stemmed from Herder and Hegel and it emphasised the role of history in the development of the cultural collective, especially the nation. Hegel, whose writings were associated with radical politics, fell into neglect after 1848. In an age of anti-metaphysical, positivist science, with technology at the forefront of modernisation, neo-Liberal thinkers preferred an empirically grounded psychology (rather than a metaphysical one), to complement the Kantian ideal of the rational, individual citizen. As one historian puts it, nineteenth-century neo-Liberal cultural scientists, 'wanted to gather empirical data about the human mind in order to augment the abstract Kantian model.'

<sup>17</sup> Some radical political thinkers, among them Marx, thought that *self-transformation* (through labour) was the driving force, the *telos*, of world history.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, W. D. (1991) p.123.

<sup>19</sup> Wundt drew on the resources of German nineteenth century social scientific terminology (especially compound nouns signifying fine distinctions) to underscore the importance of history. The German word '*Volk*' denotes 'community' in the sense of an historically developed collectivity. He might have chosen the term '*Gemeinschaft*'. But the composite title '*Gemeinschaftspsychologie*' ('the psychology of 'collectives' or 'communities'), he suggests, can be misleading. It risks losing the notion of *history*. Like '*Sozialpsychologie*', he says, '*Gemeinschaftspsychologie*' could suggest that it focuses on the present. Wundt, rather, was concerned with the formation of mental phenomena over time.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Blumenthal suggests that Wundt was heavily influenced by Fichte's philosophy. See Blumenthal, Arthur, (1970) *Language and Psychology: Historical Aspects of Psycholinguistics*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, pp.13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Wundt, W. (1920) p.2.

<sup>22</sup> Thus, for example, German 'integrity' and 'directness' was counter posed to French 'insincerity' and 'artificiality'. Behind lay the pseudo-scientific question as to whether or 'mentalities' have a 'racial' (and therefore a pseudo-biological) basis.

<sup>23</sup> Wundt, W. (1920) p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Wundt, W. (1920) pp.2-3.

<sup>25</sup> The moment we ask, 'To what extent is mind culturally produced, and to what extent is it biologically given?' a serious 'difficulty' for neo-Liberals comes into sharp focus. From the perspective of progressive view of world history, cultures may be represented as being at different stages of development. At any given point, some cultures appear to be - or represented as - 'advanced', while others are made to seem to be 'undeveloped'. This contrast was especially striking (and attractive) to many cultural scientists who were trying to get to grips with industrial modernisation and its social consequences. The stark contrast between the dynamic growth of the German industrial economy and the rural poverty of ancient civilizations (for example, Egypt, Greece and Turkey) led a generation of writers, especially writers who refracted the world through nationalist prisms, to represent Northern European cultures as 'progressive' and 'dynamic', whereas other cultures were made to appear 'regressive', 'static' or even 'degenerate' by comparison. As many commentators have pointed out, it is hard to square such contrasting (and demeaning) representations of cultures with the Liberal picture of history as the story of human progress. The notion that all cultures - and nations - pass through the same stages, though not at the same time, fascinated many nineteenth century historiographers. As a consequence of

this, a brutally pessimistic estimate of the human situation arose. It was one that proclaimed the reversibility of national progress and cultural decline. The liberal picture of progress was turned on its head. On this pessimistic view history threatens to become the story of human regress.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner, (1974) *Culture and Thought*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, p.20.

<sup>27</sup> Wundt, W. (1921) pp.1. Vygotsky has this to say about scientific definitions of 'primitive' peoples: '...one of the richest sources for this type of psychology (*historical psychology*) is the study of so called 'primitive peoples'. This term is commonly used as a convenient label, to designate certain peoples of the 'uncivilized' world, situated at the lower levels of cultural development. It is not entirely right to call these peoples primitive, as a greater or lesser degree of civilization can unquestionably be observed in them. All of them have already emerged from the prehistoric phase of human existence. Some of them have very ancient traditions. Some of them have been influenced by remote and powerful cultures, while the cultural development of others has been degraded.' (Vygotsky, L.S. (1992) p.41.) Yet, as Valsiner and Van der Veer indicate (Valsiner and Van der Veer (1991) pp 207-216), Vygotsky was influenced by French anthropologists like Levy Bruhl and Thurnwald, both of whom operated with notions of 'primitive peoples'. Notwithstanding their influence, Vygotsky concludes that 'Primitive man, in the true sense of the term does not exist anywhere at the present' and that 'the psychology of primitive man has not yet been created'.

<sup>28</sup> Wundt, W. (1921) p.3. Besides contributing powerfully to German 'cultural science', Wundt's work had an influence on French sociology. A striking instance of Wundt's influence lies in the work of the great French sociologist, Emile Durkheim. Durkheim visited Germany in 1885-86 to study contemporary social thought there. Interestingly, he went with a party of young French scholars to see at first hand the 'great' German universities. After the humiliating French defeat by the Prussians at Sedan, many influential French thinkers believed that Prussian schoolmasters were the 'true victors' of the Franco-Prussian War. Consequently, they looked to reform French higher education and to get on a par with their rivals. Official visits to Germany were arranged, but many of the young French scholars who visited Germany were unimpressed by what they saw there. Durkheim, however, was struck by what he called 'the new organic' conception of society there. What impressed him most was a conception of national cohesion. According to Durkheim, the German conception of the State issued from an organic view of culture and society. His research programme took shape in the aftermath of the war, just at the time when the fabric of French national culture and society seemed to be disintegrating. Durkheim's work was moulded by an intense desire to delineate precisely – to pin down exactly – what binds societies and nations together. His particular interest in education stemmed directly from his Republican nationalism and above all he wanted to secure a secular foundation for French national solidarity. Durkheim was especially impressed by the Wundt's experimental psychology at the laboratory in Leipzig, and indeed, Wundt's psychology became highly fashionable in France in the 1880's. The French thinker liked the way that Wundt concentrated on 'precise and restricted problems' and avoided 'vague generalisations and metaphysical possibilities'. Interestingly, however, from a methodological standpoint he was singularly unimpressed by Wundt's attempt to combine experimental psychophysics with anthropology.

<sup>29</sup> Wundt, W. (1921) p.3.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, W.D. (1991) pp.125-6.

<sup>31</sup> Blumenthal, A. (1973) pp.14-15.

<sup>32</sup> Wundt, Wilhelm (1973) *The Language of Gestures*, with an introduction by Arthur Blumenthal and additional essays by George Herbert Mead and Karl Bühler, The Hague: Mouton.

<sup>33</sup> De Saussure is generally credited as the founding figure of modern structural linguistics for the way that he redefined the object of linguistic studies by re-describing language as a self-regulating system of differences. Once language was conceptualised as a self-regulating system, the 'scientific' picture of language-as-structure was established. Moreover, de Saussure's prioritisation of the *synchronic* axis of language (a slice through language at a given moment in time) over the *diachronic* axis (language as it appears *in and over* time) has usually been presented as the decisive break with historical and comparative philology. With De Saussure, it seems the spell of the philosophy of history that had enchanted historical and comparative language studies throughout the nineteenth century was finally broken. But what often gets

forgotten, and what is especially relevant here, is that de Saussure's path-breaking study of the Indo-European vowel system, *Memoire sur le systeme primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-europeennes*, (1879) was both historical and comparative in its approach. De Saussure's early *diachronic* studies contrast fascinatingly with the synchronic perspectives that characterise his later, better-known, work. In his study, *Memoire sur le systeme primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-europeennes*, de Saussure conceived of language as a unified structure of relational items that have been instituted over time. De Saussure's methods were striking. For instance, where he failed to find concrete evidence of linguistic change among the historical sources that were available to him, he took the startlingly bold step of inferring their historical existence from the abstract picture of the system as a whole. Thus, he claimed that the missing pieces of the linguistic puzzle must have been there once because of the way that language as a system of relational items works. On this view, no single linguistic item, taken in isolation, holds the key to change. Thus change cannot be explained by reference to traceable, historically specific occasions, isolated facts, or individual intentions. On this view, individual psychology counts for very little. Instead, all the differentiated units of language have to be drawn in relation to one another. Moreover, to grasp the pattern of linguistic change, the relations among the differentiated units had to be surveyed over longer stretches of time than had hitherto been envisaged. Yet, (and this is easily forgotten) the system de Saussure pictured as a totality remains, theoretically, within the determinations of history. I am indebted to Wlad Godzich for a lucid account of de Saussure's early work. See Godzich, Wlad (1994) *The Culture of Literacy*, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, pp.119-215.

<sup>34</sup> Among those also present were Herman Paul, Delbruck and the young American linguist, Leonard Bloomfield. Early on, Bloomfield relied heavily on Wundt, but ironically, the 'behaviourist' picture of language he developed later after reading Watson, was shaped by his resistance to Wundtian 'psychologism'.

<sup>35</sup> Blumenthal, A. (1970) p.9.

<sup>36</sup> Two important books on von Humboldt were published around the same time, Gustav Slessor's *Wilhelm von Humboldt*, 1845 and Rudolf Haym's *Wilhelm von Humboldt*, 1856. Haym's book, especially, was responsible for promoting the view of von Humboldt as an wholly original German thinker, thus neglecting the influence of the French *ideologues* and the tradition of Condillac.

<sup>37</sup> Blumenthal, A. (1970) *Language and Psychology: Historical Aspects of Psycholinguistics*, New York: John Wiley, pp. 1-16.

<sup>38</sup> Blumenthal, A. (1970) p.20.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Blumenthal, A. (1970) pp.21-22.

<sup>40</sup> This insight is strikingly similar to the ideas of the Russian thinker, Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his theory of *speech genres*. Bakhtin stresses the significance of the larger configuration, the complete structure of the utterance as a totality within which the individual items are organised. Bakhtin suggests that this structure arises on the *socio-psychological*, rather than on the *subjective-psychological* plane of the individual speaker. Crucially, on this view, the listener's response enters the structure of the utterance. And it can do this, says Bakhtin, because it draws on something that is prefabricated, so to speak, something that is already given in the culture: the speech genre.

<sup>41</sup> Recall that German philology comprised anthropology, historical and comparative language studies and archeology.

<sup>42</sup> Wundt, W. (1904) pp.5.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, W.D. (1991) p.125.

<sup>44</sup> Intriguingly, Vygotsky and Luria addressed essentially the same question in the twenties. In *Primitive Man and his Behaviour* they make striking distinctions among three 'planes' of psychological development. The first plane is biological evolution. The second plane is individual development starting with child behaviour. And there is a third plane, about which, we are told, much less is known: 'The behaviour of contemporary civilized man is the product not only of biological evolution or childhood development; it is also the product of historical development. In the process of man's historical development, external relations between people, and relations between mankind and nature are not all that has changed and developed. Man himself has changed and developed; human nature has changed.' (Vygotsky, L.S. (1992) p.41) The Soviet psychologists go on to make the fundamental point that the reason why less is known about

*historical psychology* than is known about psychology from the perspectives of biological evolution or child development is because there is less evidence available. Documents and archeological remains can help us to reconstruct the external history of the human race but, 'historical psychology can draw on a very much smaller body of material.' (Vygotsky, L. S. (1992) p41)

<sup>45</sup> Smith, W. D. (1991) p.125.

<sup>46</sup> Ironically, it was studies in animal psychology and child psychology that opened up new horizons for research in the higher mental functions. Wolfgang Kohler's experiments with primates' rudimentary rational behaviour marked an important breakthrough in the field. Moreover, the work of Bühler and Piaget (among others) on child development also proved decisive. According to Bühler, the problem with Wundt's picture of mind was that it was flawed from the start. Wundt's theory of the physiological origins of human expression (language, gesture, symbolisation and so on), Bühler argued, remained too deeply embedded in Cartesian presuppositions about mind-body relations. Wundt's expressive subject, he said, was 'too self-contained, too 'scientifically isolatable', in brief, too individualistic. For Wundt, - this is the really significant point - expression always issues from the individual's subjective interior conceived *statically* in relation to the supra-individual cultural collectivity. According to Bühler, Wundt's view of language, is fundamentally 'expressivist'. It derives from the theory of the origins of speech in expression that Wundt inherited from German idealism, especially from Herder and von Humboldt. Any utterance might, in principle, be traced back along a chain of physiological changes to its source, the feelings and intentions of speakers. The fact is, Bühler, who belonged to a post-Saussurean generation of psychologists, thought that that such an expressivist theory of speech was outmoded.

<sup>47</sup> It was work in animal psychology, chiefly Köhler's work on anthropoid primates in Tenerife, and child psychology, especially Piaget's experiments in Geneva - that lead to significant advances in the field, both in terms of findings and in developing appropriate methodologies.

<sup>48</sup> Brentano, Franz (1973) *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint*, translated by A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell and L. McAlister, (first published in 1874), New York: Humanities Press.

<sup>49</sup> McAlister, L. (1982) *The Development of Franz Brentano's Ethics*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, p.7.

<sup>50</sup> McAlister, L. (1982) p.7.

<sup>51</sup> McAlister, L. (1982) p.7.

<sup>52</sup> Brentano lent his full support to experimental psychology. Indeed, he advocated the setting up of a psychological laboratory in Austria. Thus, he prepared the way for Karl Bühler at the Vienna Institute

<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, Brentano always maintained that all concepts are derived from experience. In other words, he denied that there were such things as innate ideas, and to this extent he was an 'empiricist'. On the other hand, he continued to believe that our knowledge of ethical principles is knowledge *a priori*. Confusingly, perhaps, he also held that knowledge comes to us through both perception and apperception.

<sup>54</sup> Phenomenology reappears *a fortiori*, when Husserl's pupil, Martin Heidegger, rejecting his teacher's ideas, developed a way of philosophising about the linguistic embeddedness of individual existence (*ontogeny*).

<sup>55</sup> McAlister, L. (1982) p.20.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in McAlister, L. (1982), p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Holub, Robert (1984) *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, London: Methuen: p.23.

<sup>58</sup> Holub, R. (1984) p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Karl Bühler wrote about fundamental problems in psychology at the Psychological Institute in 'Red Vienna' (1922-38) around the same time as Vygotsky. He published his seminal work, *The Crisis in Psychology*, in 1927. Vygotsky knew Bühler's work well and he refers frequently to the research (especially work on child psychology) that the Böhlers, Karl and Charlotte, did in Vienna. Psychology promised much in the aftermath to the Great War, and Bühler's lectures attracted huge audiences. (Such audiences were comparable only to those that Wundt had attracted at Leipzig in the 1880s). Yet today, few English-speaking researchers discuss Bühler's

---

path-breaking theoretical work, *The Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language* (1934). Possibly, like Gestalt psychology, his work did not travel well.<sup>59</sup> It is not widely appreciated in the English speaking world that Bühler's so-called '*organon*' model of language provided the basis for both functional approaches to speech (Roman Jakobson adapted Bühler's original model) as well as for theories about the role of signs in the development of mind

<sup>60</sup> Curiously, such criticisms echo late nineteenth-century attacks on *positivistic* philology, especially on archaeology. The painstaking accumulation of commonplace facts about ancient civilizations seemed to critics like Nietzsche to lose the essential point. The purpose of studying the past was to somehow reanimate the spirit of antiquity and to make civilizations like classical Greece count for something in the formation of individuals and, ultimately, the whole nation. Thus anti-positivism reflected a sense that the ideals of the first generation of philhellenes had been betrayed.

<sup>61</sup> Wundt worked on a scale that matched the breadth, and scope of his precursor, Wilhelm von Humboldt. Indeed, it is sometimes claimed that Wundt's *Volkpsychologie* marks the culmination of the Humboldtian tradition. I see von Humboldt's work, however, not as the foundation, but as the continuation of a broad tradition of European inquiry into the role of signs and symbols in the development of human thinking. (see Hardcastle, J. 1997, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Ash, Mitchell, G. and Woodward, William, R. (1987) *Psychology in Twentieth Century Thought and Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.190.

<sup>63</sup> Ash, M.G. and Woodward, W. R. (1987) pp. 207-8.

## Chapter 5

### On Common Ground: Cassirer's Work on Symbolization

*I start from the objectivity of symbolic form because here the inconceivable has been done. Language is the clearest example. We assert here that we tread on common ground...*

Ernst Cassirer, 1929<sup>1</sup>

For the German-Jewish philosopher, Ernst Cassirer symbolising provided the common ground upon which human development depends.<sup>2</sup> On Cassirer's view, symbolising makes human development possible, because symbols constitute the very medium by which our 'humanity' comes into being. It is by means of symbols alone that human experience is transmitted from one generation to the next. My aim is to recover some of Cassirer's ideas, which were rooted in the European Enlightenment, to suggest how his work on symbolization might contribute fundamental perspectives for a unified educational theory of language, learning and development.<sup>3</sup>

To appreciate something of the resonance of Cassirer's ideas, consider the theory of the novel that the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin developed in the twenties and thirties. Bakhtin's writes about the ways that languages are always 'dialogically implicated' in one another. Intriguingly, his path-breaking insight into the nature of the multi-voiced text (what he calls 'heteroglossia') stemmed partly from his reading in Cassirer.<sup>4</sup>

For Bakhtin, novels are material artefacts. They have currency, they circulate,

have a certain distribution, a fundamentally social character and a particular history. Crucially, they continually refer back to their previous existences outside the immediate contexts of their production. Novels as 'composite symbols' transcend the 'finitude' of individual authorship in the way they have effects beyond the lives and intentions of their creators. Such a conception of the 'afterlife' of the work of art lies at the very core Cassirer's conception of a common humanity. I have been speaking about the highly specialised work of novelists, but in point of fact everybody is engaged in fundamentally similar processes all of the time. The processes of recreation and adaptation are common to all symbolising, whether we are speaking about 'great works' of art or ordinary conversation. According to Cassirer, it is precisely through countless acts of symbolization that the commonality on which development depends - the common ground of humanity - is achieved. On such a view, 'Humanity' is not some sort of spiritual essence: rather, it is the very medium in which human life attains symbolic form. For Cassirer, Man - 'humanity' - is essentially a historically evolved sign.

Cassirer was the inheritor of the values of classical German humanism - the tradition of Kant, Schiller, Goethe, Herder, and von Humboldt. What is more and to the point here, he defended these values in the paralysing climate of anti-humanism, despair and disillusionment that gripped Germany in the years following the Great War. Cassirer believed in human progress, but with 'no guarantee of irreversibility': on this view, past achievements do not prevent cultures from going into terminal decline. From the standpoint of the history of ideas, his philosophy of symbolic forms emerged from a sustained attempt to shift the focus of neo-Kantian philosophy from the epistemology of natural scientific knowledge toward a broad theory of culture. This at the moment when German society was descending into the politics of National Socialism.<sup>5</sup>

Cassirer was a bourgeois neo-Liberal. In the midst of the collapsing Weimar Republic and during the violent rise of National Socialism he kept faith with a notion of the unbroken continuity of ideas coming down from the European

Enlightenment. Thus, he spoke pointedly of the German humanist tradition to those academics and intellectuals who gave their support readily to National Socialism. He spoke too of 'a feeling for the individual, for their peculiar individual development and for the common basis of life which brings all these together...[these] were won through the efforts of the German mind during the eighteenth century'. What is more, he considered all of this to have been a cosmopolitan achievement, one that transcended national boundaries. 'All Europe helped', he said.

Cassirer started out as an orthodox neo-Kantian philosopher of science of the Marburg school. However, his revaluation of the works of Herder and Von Humboldt marked a crucial turning point in his intellectual development. According to Cassirer, it was these thinkers above all, writing about the origins and the nature of language that first grasped the 'world constituting power' and 'world disclosing nature' of symbols.

However, we need to look critically at Cassirer's claims about the originality of Herder and von Humboldt in the field of language studies. He sometimes fails to appreciate the indebtedness of classical German thinkers to the the French Enlightenment, especially to Condillac. (I have touched on German underestimation of Condillac's stature earlier). It was in the writings of German thinkers that Cassirer rediscovered the seminal notion that language enters and shapes our ways of seeing the world.<sup>6</sup> From Herder he took a conception of the 'constitutive function' of language.<sup>7</sup> And from Von Humboldt he gained a profound understanding of the way that, 'Man not only thinks the world and understands it through the medium of language; his whole intuition of it and the way in which he lives in this intuition are conditioned by the very medium'. Remarkably, Cassirer found confirmation for such ideas in contemporary research into speech pathology in the field of clinical psychology after the Great War.

Von Humboldt pictured language as constitutive, human activity. On his view,

language, which is constantly created and recreated in speech, makes us what we are. Further to this, he reflected on the way that language can only grow – that is transform itself into something new - in a given, historically evolved, community. But there is more. For Cassirer, following on from von Humboldt, the nature of language embodies an important ethical principle. As one contemporary philosopher puts it, ‘ the language I speak, the web I can never fully dominate and oversee, can never be just my language: it is always *our* language.’<sup>8</sup> On this view, language implies an ideal social order in which no single individual can settle meaning once and for all; rather, language is the chief medium whereby human activity is co-ordinated and through which understanding between people, however imperfect, becomes possible. Human co-operation depends on it.

Cassirer carried such notions forward into his philosophy of symbolization. Whereas he recognised the empirical fact of human variation, like many neo-Liberals, he sought a universal principle of individual worth and dignity in a common humanity. He found just such a principle in the notion of symbolization. Furthermore, he made symbolization not only the foundation of his conception of moral agency, but also the cornerstone of his defence of human rights. In sum, he tied symbolization to a powerful conception of universal freedom.

Moreover, throughout the recurring constitutional crises of the crumbling Weimar Republic, during its degradation and the National Socialists seizure of power, Cassirer held fast to neo-Liberal values of individual freedom individual rights. Thus he resisted the intimidating mood of anti-Republicanism, anti-humanism that swept in with the flood tide of political and cultural nationalism. Against Fascism he invoked the cosmopolitanism of the German Enlightenment and the European Humanist tradition.

Tellingly, Cassirer’s philosophical outlook contrasted strikingly with that of his contemporary, Martin Heidegger, whose radically anti-humanist ideas had the greater impact at the time. The difference between these two thinkers comes out

clearly in their contrasting pictures of language, as I hope to show later in this chapter. In the twenties and thirties, the field of the history of philosophy in Germany was a political battleground. Social disintegration gave rise to strong demands for the legitimation of political choices. In this climate, philosophers like Heidegger had a powerful appeal. By comparison, Cassirer's ideas seemed removed from immediate realities. Besides, Cassirer's writings on history, the epistemology of science, semiotics, experimental psychology and jurisprudence made huge demands on his readers. As one commentator puts it, 'Probably no other twentieth century philosopher has been so steeped in the history and theory of as many different fields of study'.<sup>9</sup>

Cassirer's conception of universal humanity (*Humanität*) was the foundation of his conception of human rights. Its source was the European Enlightenment and, in particular, the extraordinary achievements of classical Weimar. The educational ideal of self-cultivation, (*Bildung*), was especially important to him. For Cassirer, the achievements of thinkers like Kant, Herder, Goethe and von Humboldt established a universal human entitlement that was not there before. On this view every individual has the right to self-development, freedom from arbitrary violence, freedom from arbitrary arrest or torture, and to freedom of movement and expression.

Cassirer was preoccupied with the problem of setting the limits of political power. In this context, the notion of 'personality' – what makes an individual person uniquely important – became an extremely important one for him. Though he allowed that the 'person' is in a certain sense 'given' (biologically), he thought that the individual 'personality' is open to the influence of reflection and moral training. Cassirer held fast to the *Bildung* educational ideal. With *Bildung*, each individual has a creative contribution to make towards the development of the whole of humanity. And thus, for Cassirer, 'the capacity to affect humanity is a source of ethical responsibility'<sup>10</sup> In sum, he made self-cultivation a foundational principle of universal human rights.

In the writings of von Humboldt Cassirer discovered a picture of language (and, by extension, symbolization) in which human beings transcend their insularity. This accorded well with the cosmopolitan vision of Humankind that he (von Humboldt) got from Kant. For von Humboldt, language offers the chief indication of the unity of Humankind. Cassirer puts it like this,

For him, [von Humboldt] language is 'the clearest evidence and surest proof that the human being does not possess a self-enclosed individuality; that the words 'I' and 'You' not only mutually support each other; that, as concepts, they are identical; and that, in this sense, there is a sphere of individuality, including the weak, needy, and perishing and extending back to the remotest beginnings of mankind' According to von Humboldt, without such rudimentary universality all understandings of others, human life within the medium of speech would be impossible.<sup>11</sup>

Cassirer grasped the way that language – symbolising - enables man to 'conceive actions in ways that transcend expediency'. In this manner language makes possible highly self-regulated forms of behaviour. For Cassirer, 'giving oneself commands ... is the essence of ethical personality'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, on this view, the development of individuality – the self - is fundamentally dependent upon symbolic processes that issue from complex social interactions in ways that have been established historically. Such an expansive, synthesising notion of symbolization marked the point of intersection among several domains: ethics, jurisprudence (natural and human rights theory), and experimental psychology. I want to look now at the question of how such a synthesis was possible.

\* \* \*

Cassirer's major work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923/1929) has its origins in the philosophical investigations that he conducted in Marburg around the turn of the century under the direction of Herman Cohen. Cohen was widely regarded as the leading neo-Kantian philosopher of his day. The form of neo-Kantianism that dominated Marburg stressed the role of mind in the constitution of knowledge. Indeed, the Marburg rallying cry was, 'The world is not given, but <sup>given as a task</sup> ~~conceived~~ - *Die Welt ist nicht gegeben, aber aufgegeben*'.<sup>13</sup> Cassirer went to

Marburg in 1896. Earlier, while he was studying jurisprudence in Berlin (1894), he had attended a course of lectures on Kant given by Georg Simmel. On one occasion, Simmel dropped the remark, 'Undoubtedly the best books on Kant are written by Herman Cohen; but I must confess that I do not understand them!'<sup>14</sup> This, it seems, inspired Cassirer to go to Marburg at the first opportunity to study under Cohen's supervision. Following Cohen, he studied the underlying structures of mathematical and scientific thought. However, at a point where he attempted to apply the findings to problems in the cultural sciences, it quickly became apparent to him that the neo-Kantian theory of knowledge, developed by Cohen to study the basis of mathematics and science, could not provide an adequate methodology for the human sciences.<sup>15</sup>

Over time, Cassirer found the Marburg emphasis on pure reason and the mathematical and logical foundations of scientific knowledge altogether too narrow. He wanted to provide an adequate basis for a methodology of the human sciences. But he had no wish to break with Cohen.<sup>16</sup> Friendship, intellectual indebtedness and loyalty made Cassirer unwilling to criticise Cohen's system publicly. Such criticism would, perhaps, have made the points of difference between them clearer. But Cohen's critics often associated themselves with anti-semitic elements in German academic circles, and for obvious reasons, Cassirer refused to strengthen their position.

My concern here is with the development of Cassirer's thought, but institutional politics, particularly anti-semitism, cannot be left out of the story. When Cohen retired from the Chair of Philosophy in 1912, along with Paul Nathorp, another leading neo-Kantian, he attempted to secure Cassirer's appointment at Marburg as his successor. By this time Cassirer was widely regarded both as an outstanding epistemologist of science and as the philosopher best qualified to succeed Cohen.

In the event, however, against the wishes of both Cohen and Nathorp an experimental psychologist, Erich Jaensch, was appointed instead. Subsequently,

Jaensch's work on eidetic memory won international acclaim. Indeed, his research impressed Vygotsky, who took up some of Jaensch's ideas in his own work on memory. (We shall return to Vygotsky's indebtedness later in connection with imagination and creativity). Later, Jaensch became an ardent National Socialist. He wrote zealously about the role of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' elements in psychological research in Germany and worked enthusiastically to establish the foundations of a National Socialist psychological science.<sup>17</sup> Such was the political climate in Marburg in the thirties.

Cohen's failure to secure Cassirer's appointment can be explained partly by the fact that he, Cohen, had made enemies. His socialist politics and the fact that he always insisted upon the Jewish contribution to German culture had not endeared him to the academic establishment.<sup>18</sup>

Cassirer studied with Cohen in Marburg for only three formative years (1896-1899). During his time there he concentrated on the philosophy of Descartes and, naturally, his work centred mainly on the foundations of mathematical and scientific knowledge. After leaving Marburg, Cassirer went first to Munich, where he worked on Leibnitz. Then, in 1903, he moved to Berlin, probably to escape the anti-semitic climate in Bavaria. Once in Berlin, where there was a vibrant cosmopolitan intellectual culture, he made contact with the world of publishing through his cousins Bruno and Paul.<sup>19</sup> Bruno Cassirer published Cohen and, later, Ernst himself. Meanwhile, Ernst refereed philosophical manuscripts for the publishing house.

There were other important family contacts in Berlin besides Paul and Bruno. As a child Cassirer had often visited another of his cousins, Kurt Goldstein. Goldstein was a neurologist, a practising physician, and, crucially, he was a member of the emergent Berlin School of Gestalt Psychology. (Goldstein helped to edit a journal, *Psychologische Forschung*, which was established in 1922 and which was especially important for Vygotsky and his associates in the Soviet Union). The cousins renewed their friendship and there began a fruitful period of

collaboration. Empirical research from the Gestalt School was to provide Cassirer with fundamental perspectives for his major work, the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, The Phenomenology of Knowledge*.

To appreciate what is truly distinctive about Cassirer's phenomenology of knowledge we have to go back at the way he sought to transform neo-Kantianism. In part he was responding to the times. Before the First World War, thinkers like Franz Brentano had challenged neo-Kantianism's dominant position in German philosophy. (There is a clear line of connection that runs from Brentano, through Husserl to Martin Heidegger, though the differences among them are also important.) For reasons I explained in chapter four, Brentano sought to break with German idealism.

By contrast, Cassirer never proposed such break. Rather he sought to transform neo-Kantianism from the inside. His extraordinary achievement is best understood as a broadening of his early interests as he moved beyond a neo-Kantian epistemology of the natural sciences, towards a new theory of meaning. This led him away from Cohen's system, but unfortunately he died before he made their differences explicit. It has often been assumed that no real differences existed between them, and that Cassirer was an orthodox neo-Kantian. Consequently, criticisms levelled at Cohen and the Marburg School were thought to apply equally to Cassirer's own work.

With *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer carried his work far beyond the boundaries of an epistemology of the natural sciences. His own philosophy begins to emerge at the point where he moves away from Cohen's philosophy. Cohen's radical idealism reduced all reality to a single form of logic. In the Marburg tradition, scientific knowledge was made to stand for all forms of knowledge, whereas *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* seeks to include all forms of knowledge, some of which cannot be grasped as 'natural' scientific knowledge, such as myth.

Cassirer continued to write on Descartes, Leibniz and Kant. Indeed, mathematics,

science and logic continued to occupy him throughout his career. And thus he maintained continuity with his earlier work. But in the light of investigations by contemporary English philosophers like Russell and Whitehead, he began to see that the traditional logic that had been available to Kant (which was based on classes and the syllogism) was less 'reliable' than the new logic of 'relations'. This new logic of relations was developed in the context of mathematics, where mathematical laws were expressed as *functions*. Such a *functional* approach led Cassirer to re-examine the nature of scientific concepts, and to consider the role of representation as the constitutive condition of all experience.

Thus Cassirer's new project began to take shape. According to his own account the idea of symbolic form dates from 1910.<sup>20</sup> The first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923) dealt specifically with language. It surveyed the history of language studies, with special concentrations on Herder and von Humboldt. In the second volume, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume II, Mythic Thought*, (1927) Cassirer turned towards anthropological studies of myth. Then, finally, with the third volume, he returned to the problem of knowledge. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume III: The Phenomenology of Knowledge* (1929) constitutes the central achievement of Cassirer's mature work, and yet, paradoxically it is the least well known. Like much of his writing before the Second World War, it has been respected, but not explored. As one critic has observed, since it was published in 1944, *An Essay on Man* has received more attention from American readers than *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has ever received in Germany.<sup>21</sup>

When Martin Heidegger reviewed the second volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Mythical Thought* in 1928, he naturally assumed that Cassirer was an orthodox Marburg neo-Kantian. Heidegger himself had developed a radically unorthodox reading of Kant in which, crucially, he pictured Kant as an ontologist rather than an epistemologist. For Heidegger, Kant offered a theory of existence. He sought a more 'drastic' approach to the problem of 'being in the

world' than Cassirer offered, which was one of the major differences between them. In 1928, Heidegger decided to postpone writing a full critical discussion of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* until the foundational principles had been fully worked out. These foundational principles were subsequently presented in *The Phenomenology of Knowledge* (1929).

To grasp how Cassirer arrived at these principles we have to go back to his critique of the Kantian subject. Cassirer saw a fundamental ambiguity in Kant's theory of the subject that he thought, quite rightly, had arisen from the limitations of eighteenth century psychology. Kant had argued against sensationalist thinkers (who thought that the senses not only provide us with impressions of things in the world, they also compose them and produce images of objects) that there has to be something more to perception than mere receptivity. Something else is needed to *form* sensations. There has to be some kind of a psychological mechanism – a way of making judgements - to achieve a regular *synthesis*. For Kant, the 'something else' is supplied by mind operating with the synthetic *a priori* categories. Thus, Kant established the self-subsistent, transcendental subject of cognition as the 'author' who organises bare sensations and gives them intelligible form.

Cassirer's chief criticism of the Kantian subject was that Kant attacked the presuppositions of the old sensationalist psychology, while 'continuing to speak its language'. In sum, he relied on the eighteenth century '*faculty*' psychology in which given faculties give meaning to sensory data. Meaning was the key issue. On Cassirer's view, there *are* no bare sensations separate from meaning. Meaning, he argues, is already present in sense experience. Essentially, Cassirer raised the same objection to the influential notion of 'intentionality' that Husserl had adapted from Brentano. (He touches upon Brentano's seminal work, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in *The Phenomenology of Knowledge* where he notes an ambiguity in Brentano's notion of 'intentional inexistence'.)<sup>22</sup> According to Cassirer, Husserl introduced a distinction between consciousness and meaning where, from a *phenomenological* point of view, no such distinction

exists. Rather, there is a 'total experience' where perception, representation and meaning are facets of the same mental operation.

Before Kant, no one had taken self-conscious reflection as the starting point for the analysis of the formal properties of knowledge. Kant made self-conscious reflection the foremost principle in the constitution of knowledge. Ambitiously, Cassirer aimed to take the investigation to a more fundamental level by introducing the notion of '*symbolic pregnancy*'.<sup>23</sup> This is a difficult notion to hold on to, but what he means by the term, Michael Krois suggests, is this:

Symbolic pregnancy... is the condition of the possibility of a consciousness and of the symbolic forms of culture. Unlike an idealism of consciousness, Cassirer's notion of symbolic pregnancy required a conception of subjectivity that begins with the phenomenon of the body.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the central problem ceased to be the nature of reflective self-consciousness and its relation to the formal constitution of knowledge. Instead, the central problem became the possibility of self-consciousness itself.

On Cassirer's view, symbolic 'pregnance' occurs at the earliest stage of perception. Crucially, it is tied to bodily awareness. As Krois puts it, 'The feeling of the body, our basic self-awareness, is an understanding of meaning. This is the prototype of all symbolic relations.'<sup>25</sup> Meaning at this most elementary level, then, is located in bodily action, 'in the doing and feeling that accompanies one's physical confrontation with the world.'<sup>26</sup> For Cassirer, reflection 'enters as thinking about intelligent action in a bodily sense, not thinking about thought.'<sup>27</sup> Perception is grasped as a whole. It cannot be broken down analytically into separate components such as sensory impressions. Nor is meaning something that is superimposed on raw perceptual data. Rather meaning originates with perception itself.<sup>28</sup> Cassirer formulates the notion of symbolic 'pregnance' like this,

By symbolic pregnancy we mean the way in which a perception as sensory experience contains at the same time a certain non-intuitive meaning which is immediately and concretely represents.

Here we are not dealing with bare preceptive data, on which some sort of apperceptive acts are later grafted, through which they are interpreted, judged, transformed. Rather it is perception itself which by virtue of its own immanent organisation, takes on a kind of spiritual articulation - which, being ordered in itself, also belongs to a determinate order of meaning. In its full actuality its living totality, it is at the same time a life 'in' meaning. It is not only subsequently received into this sphere but is, one might say, born into it.<sup>29</sup>

Where does the 'immanent organisation' come from? What does Cassirer intend by 'a life in meaning'? His reading of Leibniz offers some clues.

Cassirer speaks of Leibniz's notion of the 'now', as something 'filled and saturated with the future: *praegnans futuri*', and 'the future presents itself as a wholly distinctive mode of vision: it is anticipated from the standpoint of the present.'<sup>30</sup> Consciousness never leads back to absolute elements. 'No consciousness', Cassirer says, 'is merely given, mere *datum*...[rather] every perception embraces a definite character of direction by which it points beyond the here and now.' On this view, perception is already saturated with human intentions and filled with symbolic form

There is a sense in which whole edifice of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* rests on the foundations of the picture of language that Cassirer discovered in the works of Herder and von Humboldt. Von Humboldt had reformulated the old problem of the relations between words and ideas from the perspective of the critical philosophy of Kant. Cassirer writes,

Perhaps nothing is so remarkable about William von Humboldt's contribution to the philosophy of language as the circumstance that from the start he directed his inquiry not solely towards the world of concepts but also towards the world of perception and intuition' The passage about...Man not only thinks the world and understands it through the medium of language, his whole intuition of it and the way in which he lives in this intuition are conditioned by this very medium. His grasp of an objective reality –the way in which he sets it before himself as a whole and forms, divides and articulates it in particular – non of this would be possible without the living energy of language.<sup>31</sup>

Cassirer was an outstanding historian of the thought of the European Enlightenment. In revisiting debates about language that had preoccupied some of its keenest minds, he reanimated the old questions: 'Where does language come from and what is it for?'

Recall that Herder had complained that Condillac had failed to come up with an adequate account of the production of signs in the first instance. In the account that Condillac gave, 'natural' signs are somehow transformed into 'instituted' ones. Essentially, for Condillac (as for Locke) signs existed as a given class of objects to which meanings become attached, but no proper explanation is given. But then Herder also failed to give an account of the appearance of signs beyond some notion of a cry that corresponds to the defining attribute of the thing in question by which it can be recognised and recalled to mind – the '*merkmal*' as Herder called it.

Von Humboldt took up the problem where Herder left off. He cut through the seemingly intractable question, (which came first, words or ideas?) by proposing that signs, together with perceptions were produced at one and the same time in a single flash of '*Artikulation*'.<sup>32</sup>

The problem of the relations between language and perception surfaced slowly in mainstream psychology.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, it appeared from the very outset in studies of the pathology of speech, particularly aphasia, as Cassirer notes:

The question of the relation between the formation of language and the structure of the world of perception was asked only late in the psychology of language; but from the very first it forced itself on the study of speech pathology...[where] Not the intelligence alone, but the total behaviour and mental state of the affected person proved to be modified by the change in language consciousness and in the use of language.<sup>34</sup>

In the clinical research of his cousin, Kurt Goldstein and his colleague, Ernst Gelb, Cassirer discovered the theory that, 'the true aphasic disturbances never merely affect speech as an isolated act, but rather that every change in a patient's language world always brings about a characteristic change in his behaviour as a

whole – in his perception as well as in his practical, active attitude towards reality.’<sup>35</sup> Intriguingly, Cassirer saw a link between clinical psychology and Von Humboldt’s theory of language: ‘Thus from an entirely new angle, we find confirmation of the words with which Humboldt headed his philosophy of language.’<sup>36</sup>

Cassirer was regarded by most of his contemporaries, including Martin Heidegger, as an orthodox neo-Kantian although he had moved away from Cohen and the Marburg school as his own philosophy of symbolic forms emerged. An orthodox neo-Kantian would be expected to take reflective self-consciousness as his or her starting point for an analysis of the constitution of knowledge.

However, Cassirer took an unorthodox approach to the problem

He assiduously avoided locating meaning in individual acts of consciousness because he was less concerned with an *idealism* of individual consciousness than he was with the question: ‘How is consciousness possible in the first place?’

From this angle his distance from Cohen seems clear. Idealists assume that individual consciousness is pre-given and Cohen had wanted to give mind absolute priority. Cassirer objected that idealists had been led ‘to the paradoxical view that everything that is apprehended seems to be placed within the sphere of one’s own self’<sup>37</sup> By contrast, he proposed a ‘radically new’ approach to the problem,

The pre-supposition that the epistemology of psychological idealism has so often set forth as self evident - the assumption that only our own states of consciousness can be given, that it is only through them, by inference, that the reality of the other worlds of experience and of a physical nature can be acquired - is shown to be thoroughly problematic as soon as we glance at mythical phenomena.<sup>38</sup>

For Cassirer, the structure of myth reveals the manner in which consciousness evolves from the group and not, as psychological idealism would have it, from subjective self-consciousness.

We can see how, from life as a whole, from its undifferentiated totality, which along with the human world also contains the world of animals and plants, one’s own being and also a form of

what in human rises up and separates out only very slowly - and how within this being the reality of the genes and the species always precedes that of the individual. From such formations of the cultural consciousness we gain a clearer view of the individual consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

The essential point is that Cassirer thought about perception as something that has been culturally evolved. On such a view, the consciousness of the group always precedes that of the individual.<sup>40</sup> Further to this, he thought that cultural symbol systems (including language) have played a transforming role in the evolutionary development of new forms of human behaviour. Such new forms of behaviour constituted the higher mental functions, especially those functions that are related closely to perception.<sup>41</sup> Thus Cassirer began to resolve problems, which Wundt had addressed, from a philosophical standpoint that engaged with legacy of Brentano.

It was only after the publication of the first two volumes of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, however, that the full significance speech pathology became clear. Gelb and Goldstein worked with patients at the Frankfurt Neurological Institute who had suffered cerebral injuries during the First World War. They studied the effects of lesions in the breakdown of categorical cognition and, more generally, the role of concepts in the organization of patients' psychological processes. Cassirer noted particularly that Gelb and Goldstein's findings showed that aphasic disturbances affected patients' manner of perceiving. He writes: 'The true aphasic disturbances never merely affect speech as an isolated act, but rather that every change in a patient's language world always brings about a characteristic change in his behaviour as a whole - in his perceptions as well as his practical active attitude toward reality.'<sup>42</sup>

Thus Cassirer found striking evidence in Gelb and Goldstein's case studies to show how closely language and cognition, symbolization and perception, are intertwined. These case studies revealed how patients suffering from aphasia had difficulty sorting colours. When patients who had lost the ability to recall the

names of colours were invited to perform a sorting task with coloured strands of wool, they proved unable to do so, even though there was evidence to show that they saw the colours correctly. However, when the colours were present as concrete objects the patients were able to choose 'with great certainty and precision': the colour of a ripe strawberry, a mailbox, a billiard table, chalk, violets, forget-me-nots etc. Intriguingly, patients succeeded when the concrete object was in front of them and they were able to point to colour of the named object, but they were unable to use colours as categories and to collect the samples into sets.<sup>43</sup>

However, some patients were able to accomplish tasks by taking an indirect route. When, for example, a patient was asked to choose a 'blue' he was at first - in line with his basic disturbance - unable to connect a definite meaning with it; but sometimes he solved the problem by translating it, so to speak, into another problem that he could understand more readily. Since he could recite the verse: *'Blue is the little flower called forget-me-not'* he provided himself with the means of passing from the realm of general colour names to that of concrete-thing names. And so also with other rhymes, which he knew purely by rote. Then he could point out a forget-me-not blue, provided it was among the samples, but he never selected any other shade of blue, however close to it, for no other shade exactly corresponded to the remembered colour of the forget-me-not that determined his choice.<sup>44</sup>

From their detailed clinical observations of such cases, Gelb and Goldstein concluded that the normal psychological connections that enable us to classify colours were disturbed in ways that caused aphasics to revert to an earlier developmental stage. This stage was not only more elementary, it was also less 'rational'.<sup>45</sup> Normal individuals were able to use colours as representative instances of a category: redness, blueness, yellowness and so on. By contrast aphasics suffered from an impeded 'categorical attitude'. That is, they were unable to move from a particular instance to representative instance of a category. Gelb and Goldstein took this to be significant because it seemed to

suggest an important difference between *immediate* and *mediated* perceptions. Such cases suggested that colour phenomenon had ceased to function as a means of representation for aphasics.

On this view, perception is liberated from being tied to immediate, concrete instances by 'progressively filling itself with symbolic meaning'. (This notion carried huge implications for the way that Vygotsky conceptualised imagination and creativity in the adolescent child). Moreover, it indicates the way that growth in our capacities to handle symbolic meaning makes possible new forms of psychological behaviour that in turn generate new modes of acting in the world. Cassirer takes the argument a stage further:

Here it seems pertinent to ask once again whether the new degree of freedom which perception gains in the purely representative achievement is due to language, or whether it does not first make language possible? <sup>46</sup>

Gelb and Goldstein had posed essentially the same question from the perspectives of psychopathology. They concluded that it is not at all the case that perception and language are in a relation where one depends upon the other, or that one is primary and the other secondary. Rather it seemed to them that they exist in a reciprocal relation to one another in what they call 'the same basic attitude':

The categorical attitude and the possessions of language in its signficatory function are expressions of one and the same basic attitude. <sup>47</sup>

Cassirer gained, first hand, knowledge of many of Goldstein's patients, and in the chapter, *The Pathology of Symbolic Consciousness*, which is the longest by far in *The Phenomenology of Knowledge* he makes detailed reference to Gelb and Goldstein's research. Thus he writes,

For such mediated operations are always symbolic: one must tear oneself away from the presence of the real object and freely actualise an ideal aim that exists only in thought. Here lies the same reflective attitude that characterises language and is indispensable for its development. An impairment of this attitude impedes and inhibits the use not only of language but also of every

other activity which - like reading or writing deals with the 'signs'  
for objects and their meaning rather than with objects themselves.  
48

It follows that we may begin to think about symbolic functions as transforming and reconfiguring our psychological processes. However, says Cassirer, this thought should not send us off searching for some general 'faculty of symbolization' – some Kantian *facultas signatrix*, or given capacity of mind- any more than we should search for some general faculty of walking or eating. And crucially, this line of enquiry does not lead us deeper into the recesses of individual consciousness. Rather, it points instead in the opposite direction, which is toward human culture. Kant redefined the 'faculties' or fixed capacities of mind – understanding, reason, judgement and so on – as mechanisms affecting perception. Thus mind shapes what is sensed. However, the Kantian model of mind is essentially a-cultural. Cassirer, by contrast, sought a model of mind in culture, and therefore within the processes of historical time. The break with eighteenth century 'faculty' psychology couldn't be clearer.

Vygotsky read *The Phenomenology of Knowledge* in Moscow almost as soon as it was published. We know this because he discusses Cassirer's account of patients exhibiting complex disorders of the higher mental functions that the German philosopher observed first hand in the Frankfurt Neurological Institute in the opening section of his chapter in 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' which was published in 1931.<sup>49</sup> (I shall be returning to this chapter in the third part of this dissertation). Vygotsky discovered in Cassirer's description of Gelb and Goldstein's research into aphasia a clue to understanding imagination and creativity in the adolescent child. He was especially interested in Cassirer's description of the behaviour of one particular patient who was incapable of pouring himself a glass of water when asked to do so, but who was able to perform this operation without the slightest difficulty when he was thirsty. Vygotsky's connected this description to the way that children gradually break away from the support they find in concrete, tangible objects through fantasy. The patient is completely unable to do something that is not motivated by the

actual situation. The patient exemplifies a complete absence of imagination. He can't free himself from his actual circumstances, which is precisely what imagination enables us to do.

Cassirer posed the following question: 'What can pathological changes in speech and in the related symbolic achievements mean for the structure and general form of culture?'<sup>50</sup> From a methodological point of view, the analysis of the structure and general form of culture – what we might call today a 'general semiotics' – offers a more reliable approach than introspection, which cannot meet rigorous standards of scientific enquiry.

What did Goldstein take from Cassirer? It is clear from Goldstein's later writings that he especially valued Cassirer's insight into the role of symbolising in the self-regulation of behaviour, without which human development would be inconceivable. He holds out a picture of mind operating to form images and to focus and direct behaviour – a mechanism that he describes as, 'giving ourselves commands'. Without such direction we would merely follow our instinctual drives. Crucially, Cassirer envisages psychological transformations, mediated by symbolization, without which moral behaviour, indeed ordinary co-operation and daily social intercourse would be impossible.

Finally, I want to set these ideas in their historical and political context. *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, emerged at a critical moment, when two hostile and contrary movements, phenomenology and logical positivism (three, if we include Marxist–Leninism) were besieging the citadel that neo-Kantianism occupied in the German universities. To some, Cassirer's ideas seemed out of key with the times. In 1929, when Cassirer debated publicly with Martin Heidegger at Davos, in Switzerland. Essentially, this debate was viewed as a struggle between two epochs. The painstakingly formal and conciliatory way that it was conducted masked the true nature of a confrontation between two radically opposed political outlooks.

The debate took place against a backdrop of social and political instability. At the time, Cassirer's way of philosophising seemed strangely old fashioned in the oppressive climate of crisis. His approach appeared rooted in the nineteenth-century. His manner of posing questions seemed too abstract, too remote, and too 'wooden'. Martin Heidegger, by contrast, seemed to offer a dynamic new way forward for German philosophy. His charismatic intensity – and his fatalism – seemed more in key with the times.<sup>51</sup>

Beneath the surface of the formal academic debate about Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* lay fundamentally contrasting conceptions of what it is to be human. From such conceptions issued contrasting political beliefs, and tendencies. At one level there was mutual incomprehension. As one observer remarked tellingly at the time, 'both men speak completely different language.'<sup>52</sup> Cassirer took up this theme in his response to Heidegger's challenging insistence that they must try to find a common centre from which to understand each other:

[Heidegger's position is that] we must search again for the common centre precisely in the disagreement. And I say we do not need to search. For we have this centre and, what is more, this is so because we have a common objective world in which differences between individuals have by no means been superseded, but with the stipulation that the bridge here from individual to individual has now been knocked down. This occurs repeatedly for me in the primal phenomenon of language. Each of us speaks his own Language, and it is unthinkable that the language of one of us is carried over into the language of the other. And yet, we understand ourselves through the medium of language. Hence there is something like *the* language. And hence there is something like a unity which is higher than the infinitude of the various ways of speaking. Therein lies the decisive point. And it is for that reason that I start from the objectivity of symbolic form because here the inconceivable has been done. Language is the clearest example. We assert here that we tread on common ground...<sup>53</sup>

Cassirer's optimistic notion that language asserts the common ground stands modestly against Heidegger's overwhelming *phenomenology of being*.<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, by contrast, broods on the isolation of the individual, on personal destiny and human finitude.<sup>55</sup>

In the spring of 1929 Cassirer was elected Rector of the University of Hamburg. Thus, he became the first German-Jewish academic to hold such an eminent position in the University system. Shortly after, Heidegger was appointed Rector at Freiburg in 1933, only months before the National Socialists came to power. That same year, Cassirer was notified of his dismissal. After teaching in England and Sweden, the Cassirers crossed the Atlantic in 1940 on board a Swedish freighter. By chance, the Russian linguist and literary theorist, Roman Jakobson was also a passenger. At Yale, where he took a teaching post, Cassirer's work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* was virtually unknown.

Looking back to the twenties and thirties, Cassirer refused to make a direct link between Heidegger's philosophy and National Socialist politics. Nevertheless, he showed precisely how it had contributed to the intellectual climate of fatalism and irrationalism that was symptomatic of German intellectual and political life in the widespread demoralisation following First World War. About the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the National socialists seizure of power, Cassirer asked, 'What did philosophy do to avert the danger?' Certainly, in the face of the deepening crisis, philosophy seemed paralysed.

\* \* \*

Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms connects developments in contemporary semiotics and psychology to the pictures of language that come down to us from Herder and von Humboldt. It also stands as a bulwark against contemporary Post-modernist and anti-Enlightenment thinkers. Cassirer continued a tradition of theorising the expressive-constitutive role of symbolising in human development as an ethical project that modern structural linguistics has wanted to abandon along with the individual psychology of speakers. Yet I have to admit that Cassirer's conception of symbolic form lacks substantial historical and social dimensions. Like theories of general grammar, it remains fundamentally an a-historical account of symbolising that says little about actual contexts and particular circumstances in which cultures are transmitted and transformed.

Cassirer's work has more than merely historical importance. Today, it offers perspectives for a broad, synthesising, view of education. It extends and deepens our understanding of the role of symbolic meaning in children's development. Cassirer's close links with Gestalt psychology are especially revealing. They show the profound influence of phenomenological thought – essentially, the legacy of the philosophy of Franz Brentano - on relations *among* various disciplines: philosophy, language studies, literary theory and psychology. Revisiting Cassirer's work affords opportunities to clarify what is at stake with ideas and problems that remain unresolved.

Cassirer never developed a *dialogical* picture of language and symbolization in the manner of Bakhtin, though he noted the collective, inter-subjective character of meaning making that comes down from von Humboldt. The educational significance of the dialogical nature of language is still being worked out. Current work stemming largely from the writings of Bakhtin springs immediately to mind). As yet, as far as I am aware there has been no substantial study of the history of the intellectual links between Cassirer and Russian thinkers like Vygotsky and Bakhtin - or indeed many of the thinkers I have been discussing here.

Finally, there is an ethical dimension to Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms that might provide a fundamental educational rationale for studying symbolization in the very broadest sense. In essence, we understand ourselves as well as others through medium of signs. Human co-operation depends upon it and without culturally evolved symbols human experience could never be shared. Cassirer's enduring insight was that with symbolising something extraordinary is achieved: 'here the inconceivable has been done...we assert here that we tread on common ground.'

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Heidegger, Martin, (1997), *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Translated by Richard Taft Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, p.205

<sup>2</sup> 'Symbols' and 'symbolization' are the terms Cassirer uses. 'Signs' and 'signification' would be possible alternatives. Symbolization refers to a 'wider' process than language or speech, though language is the principle mode of symbolising. For Cassirer, as Umberto Eco has noticed, symbolic and semiotic are essentially the same, which is problematic for some semioticians for whom the term 'symbolising' may lack precision. Eco makes an important point when he recognises that for Cassirer who was emerging from neoKantian epistemologies of science, the symbolic order of science does not mirror the structure of 'being' (the unobtainable Kantian '*thing in itself*') rather it is the creation of mind. In other words, Cassirer was interested in the Kantian theory of knowledge as if it were a semiotic theory in which the synthetic *a priori* is a cultural entity – not the transcendental structure of the human mind. For Cassirer, signs and symbols are not the accidental 'cloak of the idea' but rather its 'necessary and essential organ'. Signs do not merely serve to communicate a complete and given thought content, but a sign is 'an instrument, by means of which this content develops and fully defines itself.' Unfortunately Eco offers no account of where such ideas were elaborated in their modern forms, that is in the European Enlightenment. The line of indebtedness that extends from John Locke to Condillac, and from there to the *encyclopédie* and the *idéologues*, who theorised just such issues are not mentioned in this context. The origins of Cassirer's interest in symbolization lie in the German Enlightenment and in the writings of Herder, von Humboldt and Goethe. In Goethe's work for instance he discovered a active, transformative conception of symbolisation: 'Symbols transform the experience into an idea, and an idea into an image, so that the idea expressed by the image always remains active and unattainable and even though expressed in all languages remains inexpressible'. (Quoted in Eco, U *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, p.142.)

<sup>3</sup> Chapter Four of *The Bullock Report* (1975) sets out a fundamental argument about the relations between language and learning which, for all its depth and complexity, remains a breathtakingly clear and concise formulation. It argues that language plays a mediating role in intellectual development. When I first read Chapter Four, its themes and arguments were already familiar to me. I had met them in James Britton's *Language and Learning: The Importance of Speech: Children's Development* (1970). Chapter Four presents, in a highly condensed form, the theory on which Britton's book is based: "the theory that we use language as a means of organising a representation of the world - each for himself - and that the representation of the world - each for himself - and that the representation so created constitutes the world we operate in, and the basis of all our predictions by which we set the course of our lives". (p.78) "These current theories," we are told in "Chapter Four", stem from a powerful movement of ideas developed over the past fifty years." (p.47) Re-reading "Bullock", it is the relation between them that I want to examine. The first stems from the Cassirer; the second from the Soviet psychologist, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. Their ideas have been developed unevenly over the years. It has tended to be the case that, whereas interest in Vygotsky has grown, Cassirer has fared less well. In what follows, I will try to show something of the connection between Cassirer's philosophy and Britton's theory and, in addition, why Cassirer's thought deserves to be explored

<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin speaks of language as a 'treasure house of images', and he links the idea to his theory of 'chronotope' – 'time space'. The word 'chronotope' refers to the process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature. Two points seem relevant here. The first is the essentially neo-Kantian origin of the ideas, which, though they differ from Kant's, take up the notion that 'the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic', that is, located in time and space. The second point is to do with Bakhtin's reading of Cassirer, and especially the way that the German philosopher gives an analysis of the ways time is reflected in language. See especially Bakhtin's essay, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', in Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays By M.M. Bakhtin*, Edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, p. 251. According to Craig Brandist writing in *Radical Philosophy*, 85, September/October, 1997 Bakhtin's insight about

---

*heteraglossia* in the novel was actually based on Cassirer's amendment to Hegel's system in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Vol. I, p.117(1923) where Cassirer claims that: 'philosophical awareness arises only in and through language'.

<sup>5</sup> As John Michael Krois argues, 'With his theory of symbolic forms, Cassirer transform [Kantian] transcendental philosophy from a critique of knowledge into a critique of meaning' (Krois, 1987, p. 44). Krois also suggests that Cassirer's philosophy of symbols and meanings resembles the *semeiotic* theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, the point being that the modern term 'semiotics' covers both thinkers' works.

<sup>6</sup> The claim that Von Humboldt was the first to recognize the 'world disclosing powers of language needs to be viewed cautiously, especially in the light of Hans Aarsleff's acerbic criticism of Cassirer's account of von Humboldt's ideas on language. Aarsleff rightly shows how much of the thinking that was subsequently accredited to Herder and von Humboldt is to be found in Condillac. Neglect of the French contribution can be traced back to the prestige of German philology in the nine-tenth century and to the climate of academic nationalist rivalry. Condillac's striking conception of the role of signs in gaining conscious mastery over mental operations is, obviously, crucially important here. As Ulrick Ricken shows convincingly, Condillac's ideas were carried forward by the *idealogs*. Von Humboldt met them during his time in Paris, after the revolution. Aarsleff is probably right when he claims that Cassirer underestimates Condillac's contribution, and that he overlooks the *idealogs*. Aarsleff claims that Cassirer relies too uncritically on Rudolf Haym's 1857 biography and as a consequence he produces what Aarsleff calls 'his tinpot history.' (Humboldt, (1988) p.xxxiv). But see also Mueller-Vollmer's argument that critics like Aarsleff and Ricken, who have wanted to downplay the claim that Herder and von Humboldt made a truly innovative contribution to language studies fail to recognize what is genuinely new. One new element in von Humboldt's work concerns the inter-subjective basis of linguistic understanding..

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor contrasts the picture of language that comes to us from a tradition that runs from Hobbes, though Locke to Condillac, - what he calls an 'enframing theory' - in which language can be seen as arising within a framework of human life and fulfilling a certain function within it. The 'framework', on this view, precedes language. By contrast, what Taylor calls a 'constitutive' theory gives us a new picture of language as somehow making possible new purposes, new levels of behaviour, new meanings and hence it is not explicable within a framework of human life conceived without language. See especially Taylor's two chapters, 'The Importance of Herder' and 'Heidegger, Language and Ecology', in *Philosophical Arguments*, Harvard University Press, 1995

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, C. (1995) p.99. Taylor makes another crucial point that speech also expresses the different social relations in which we stand to one another - 'husbands and wives, parents and children, equal citizens in a republic, subjects of the same monarch' 'From this standpoint, he says 'we can see that it is not only the speech community that shapes and creates language, but language that constitutes and sustains the speech community.'

<sup>9</sup> See especially John Michael Krois' exceptionally clear study of Cassirer's philosophy, Krois, John Michael (1987) *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*, New Haven: Yale University Press. p.ix,

<sup>10</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p167

<sup>11</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p167

<sup>12</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p167

<sup>13</sup> Neo-Kantianism challenged the positivist climate of the late nineteenth century in German culture, and the return to Kant re-established epistemology, especially the epistemology of natural science, as the dominant concern of German philosophy. Neo-Kantianism spread rapidly through Europe. Significantly, in the Russian universities, from 1870 right up to the twenties, neo-Kantianism was the chief point of reference. Moreover, it was common for Russian philosophers to be educated in Germany. (The German educated aristocrat figures in Russian Literature. In *Eugene Onegin*, Lensky is described by Pushkin thus, 'A poet and a Kantian sage. He'd brought back all the fruits of learning/ from German realms of mist and steam/ freedom's enthusiastic dream') Boris Pasternak, actually went to Marburg to study under Cohen. In fact Marburg was so well known in Moscow, that the novelist Andrei Biely remarked that at the time, 'without even coming to Moscow, Cohen and Rickert reigned within the walls of the university for their

---

disciples sent them young people for the full treatment.' (quoted in Fleischman, 1990) and the terminology of neo-Kantianism was current among Russian thinkers.

In 1914, Herman Cohen visited Russia, where he gave a series of lectures at the invitation of Jewish philosophical circles in April and May. Neo-Kantians were also well established at Saint Petersburg University when Mikhail Bakhtin studied there. A key member of the Nevel and Vitebsk Circles, M. I. Kagan studied with Cohen in Marburg. When he was interned as an enemy alien in 1914, Cohen intervened on his behalf. Kagan's writings reveal two important features: the first is the extent to which he was immersed in neo-Kantian thinking; the second is his closeness to Bakhtin's ideas. During the 1920's Bakhtin grew increasingly critical of Cohen's system, but his own efforts to conceptualise consciousness have their origins in his efforts to push beyond Cohen's philosophy.

Lenin attacked neo-Kantianism in his polemic, *Materialism and Empiricism* (1909). The chief target of that work, however is the positivism of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius. Lenin's polemic is usually regarded as a 'strategic' work that sought to establish his philosophical leadership of the Party. It was not an especially 'profound' text. Yet the book is a significant one. It contributed to a climate in the twenties and thirties in which it became difficult, indeed dangerous for Soviet thinkers to find anything positive in 'idealist' works at all. Vygotsky, for instance, makes few references to Cassirer's philosophy in Russian versions of his published work, though there are references in English versions of his texts, intended for publication in the West. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, especially Volume 3: The phenomenology of symbolic forms*, (1929).

In the early thirties, neo-Kantianism was attacked as an especially 'dangerous' form of 'menshevizing idealism' during Stalin's campaign for ideological discipline. (see Backhurst, 1991). In the period of NEP 1921-1929 was one in which Soviet thinkers and writers were in contact with Western intellectuals and artists and frequently published their work privately in Berlin. (See, for instance Katerina Clark, *The Quiet Revolution in Soviet Intellectual Life*, in, *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick et al., Indiana University Press). After 1929, however, the climate changed. The stage was set for the Great purges. With the onset of Zhandovism, Soviet intellectual culture narrowed, became more parochial and expressed open hostility towards the cosmopolitanism, humanism and individual rights that Cassirer identified with the ideals of the European Enlightenment. Traditionally, then Marxists have deprecated Cassirer's work as an instance of neo-Kantianism and German idealism. As a consequence, the real connections among Soviet and European thinkers has been obscured. Nowadays, what was held in common has to be established before what is especially distinctive can be appreciated.

<sup>14</sup> Gawronsky D. (1958) p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> The neo-Kantian thinking that revitalised German philosophy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was born of a treble dissatisfaction. First, there was a strong desire to challenge the prevailing cultural climate of positivism. Second, there was an ambition to restore philosophy to the centre of German intellectual life, a position that it had not occupied since the decline of Hegelian thinking after 1848. Third, there was a deep disquiet, shared among many German thinkers, about the kind of philosophy that was being done. A new generation of philosophers thought that philosophy had taken a wrong turning after Kant. They wanted to return to Kant, but in a different spirit. Otto Liebman, Cohen's predecessor at Marburg, gave the movement its rallying cry: 'Back to Kant!' (*Kant zuruck!*) Thus, for a while, neo-Kantianism set a new course for German philosophy.

Marburg and Heidelberg were the chief centres of neo-Kantian thought. Whereas the main orientation in Heidelberg was toward the historical and social sciences, Marburg concentrated on the foundations of natural scientific knowledge. At Heidelberg, Heinrich Rickert was the first to attempt to grasp systematically the distinction between natural scientific and social scientific methods, while at Marburg, Herman Cohen shared Rickert's interest in scientific methods, but in a way that sought to give them a basis in mathematics and logic. Cassirer's early work concentrated on the nature of mathematics and natural science. Later, however, his interests broadened to include the domains of the humanities, as we shall see. Kant's 'Copernican revolution' stemmed partly from his dissatisfaction with ideas about the nature of knowledge

inherited from Rationalism and Empiricism. His critical philosophy established the importance of *synthetic* judgements. Before Kant, it was generally assumed that all *a priori* knowledge must be analytic in nature, that is it could be broken down into its constituent parts. Rationalists thought that concepts arise from the workings of pure reason. But they could not explain how such concepts get back into sense experience. By contrast, Empiricists thought that concepts arise as a result of sensory experience, but they could not account for the way sense experience is intelligible in the first place. Neither Rationalists nor Empiricists appreciated that sense experience is already permeated with order. And it is precisely the nature of this order that Cassirer aimed to clarify in his philosophy of symbolic forms. Kant held that we can never arrive at direct knowledge of things as they 'really are', that is as 'things in themselves'. Rather, he believed that we only know things as they are '*phenomenally*' given to us. In other words, we can only know things in the world as they are present in consciousness, not as things in themselves. Our knowledge of *phenomenal* objects comes about through the relations between the perceiving subject and the perceived object. Subjective mind supplies synthetic *a priori* categories – the ordering principles – which make our sensory experience of objects possible. Kant's critical investigation of pure reason is predicated on the notion that thought can only grasp what it has itself 'created'. Thus, he emphasises the contribution of the knower to what is known. A balance was struck between the world of perceiving subjects (mind), and objects (things in the world), and this balance was maintained until the late nineteenth century, when Herman Cohen's upset it. Cohen set out to eliminate all the static 'givens' by means of a radical idealism in which he gave mind absolute priority. By extending the notion that we can grasp only what is *phenomenally* given to mind, he attempted to do away with the Kantian 'thing in itself' altogether. In Cohen's system, philosophy concentrates exclusively on pure cognition. And the foundations of pure cognition, Cohen claimed, were only to be discovered solely in the propositions of pure mathematics and logic. Philosophical *realists* claim that just the opposite is the case. They are committed to a notion of an objective reality existing prior to, and independently of, thinking subjects. For realists the external world is the 'reality' of 'things-in-themselves' that do not depend on perceiving subjects for their existence. In a post-Darwinian age, and a world in which such ideas had political ramifications, idealists were challenged (especially by 'materialists') to give an adequate account of the world before humans evolved. Indeed, such discussions have carried huge political significance in the twentieth century.

Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1909) was a polemical book written at a moment when he was challenging rivals for the intellectual leadership of the Bolshevik party. It constituted a defence of dialectical materialism and a polemic against idealism from a Marxist viewpoint. *Empiriocriticism*, helped to set the stage for discussions in Soviet psychology in the twenties. Lenin especially singled out for criticism the neo-Kantian idealism of the Marburg school that had been pervasively influential among Liberals in Russia before the October Revolution. Later, after 1929, and subsequently under Stalin, Lenin's critique of neo-Kantianism was codified into the official philosophical position of the Party that claimed to represent the authentic tradition inherited from Marx. Such political developments made it difficult, indeed positively dangerous for Soviet thinkers like Vygotsky to discuss the work of a leading Marburg neo-Kantian such as Cassirer approvingly.

<sup>16</sup> The reasons for this are both complicated and revealing. When Cassirer first arrived in Marburg in 1894 there had been a degree of reserve between the two men. Cohen took Cassirer to be a converted Jew, a group for whom he had little time. (The issue of conversion was essential for German Jews from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of the Great War, where it was a matter, not so much of belief in Christianity, as a willingness to demonstrate loyalty to German institutions). When Cassirer got wind of this, he approached Cohen and the misunderstanding was cleared up. Subsequently, they became close friends.

<sup>17</sup> Vygotsky discusses Jaensch's work in connection with the function of *eidetic* images in the development of imagination in adolescents in an important paper published in 1931. Later, however, in the light of Jaensch's enthusiastic links to National Socialism, Vygotsky fiercely criticised his pro-fascist views in a blistering polemical pamphlet, *Fascism in Psychoneurology*, 1934. Hans Gadamer remembers Marburg in the twenties. He recalls that he was puzzled by an eminent philosopher's interest in experimental psychology: 'What kind of philosophical interest

---

could experimental psychology possibly have? We did have a fellow student who had prepared a dissertation with Jaensch on the learning capacity of chickens, and we certainly questioned this student whenever we ran into him...about Jaensch himself I obviously knew nothing –he seemed to me to be not at all philosophically interesting.’ (Gadamer, 1900, p15-16)

But there is more to be said. Erich Jaensch continued at Marburg until his death in 1940. His work on ‘eidetic images’ – the traces of impressions of material by the after effect of actual experiences (‘photographic memory’), where memory is close to perception itself - secured his international reputation. (Vygotsky, 1994c, p.143). In the thirties, however, he immersed himself in National Socialist politics. Here is the German –Jewish philosopher, Karl Lowith’s description of Marburg at the time:

Marburg University has shrunk at the same rate as the building of barracks progressed, and the number of theology students has been reduced from 700 to around 120. The dominant figure in the fore ground of all this bustling activity is E. Jaensch, a bachelor of about fifty with strong psychopathic tendencies. He has thrown himself into the movement [National Socialism] to experience his rejuvenation in the ‘awakening of youth’. All his innumerable lectures were about ‘the German human being’. The so called Marburg school (Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer), being a Jewish-liberal affair, is no longer listed under the philosophical faculty in the last Guide to Marburg University’ for 1939-1940 (Karl Lowith, 1994, p.105)

Lowith emigrated in 1933. In his autobiography he describes the changes that were made to the classification system of the philosophical libraries in line with a ‘*species specific*’ concept of science. He explains that there were four areas in all, the fourth being ‘the schools of Jewish-Liberal dissolution’. This area was sub-divided into two sections: liberalist philosophy and Jewish dominated schools. The second section included Marburg neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, *Lebensphilosophie*, Jewish legal thought Jewish cultural philosophy, Jewish aestheticism, Jewish mathematics and the relativity theory. (Lowith, K 1994, p153)

<sup>18</sup> Gershem Scholem once remarked that ‘among Cohen’s critics there was a nationalistic and mild but unmistakable anti-semitic orientation’ <sup>18</sup> Such remarks remind us that the events and ideas under discussion issued from the lethal entanglements of cultural (and racial) politics that criss-crossed twentieth century European science.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Cassirer published Henrich Mann, Wedekind, Rosa Luxemburg and Ernst Bloch.

<sup>20</sup> Cassirer writes, ‘In my book *Sustanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (1910) I started from the assumption that the basic and constitutive law of knowledge can most clearly be demonstrated where knowledge has reached its highest level of necessity and universality. This law was therefore sought in the field of mathematics and the exact sciences in the foundations of mathematical-physical objectivity. Accordingly the form of knowledge as these defined coincided essentially with the form of exact science. Both in content and in method The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms has gone beyond this initial formulation of the problem. It has broadened the concept of theory itself by striving to show that there are formative factors of a truly theoretical kind which govern the shaping not only of the natural world view implicit in perception and intuition. And finally, the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms was driven even beyond the natural world view of experience and observation when the mythical world disclosed relationships which, though not [amenable] to the laws of empirical thinking, are by no means without their laws and reveal a structural form of specific and independent character’. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, the Phenomenology of Knowledge* (1929), Vol.III, p.xiii

<sup>21</sup> The story of Cassirer’s work in translation need not detain us here, but it should be recognised that it has affected the way in which Anglo-American readers have come to view him. In England and the USA Cassirer has been regarded primarily as a philosopher of science, or as an historian of European Enlightenment thought. In Germany and on the continent more widely, he has been seen as a neo-Kantian epistemologist of the Marburg School, with the exception of France where he has been recognised as an expert on Descartes. When Cassirer went to Yale in 1941 he was welcomed as a philosopher of science due to the fact that an early chapter on Einstein’s theory of relativity happened to be available in translation. His major work *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* was unknown outside a small circle of Germanist philosophers who studied texts in the

original. Hardly anyone realised that Cassirer had developed a distinctive philosophy of his own, and it was against this background that friends encouraged him to publish in order to gain wider recognition. What started out as an attempt to introduce *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* to an Anglo-American readership actually prompted him to develop a fresh set of perspectives on themes that had occupied him throughout his life. It was in this context that Susanne Langer discovered Cassirer's work, and he remained for her primarily a theorist of art.

<sup>22</sup> *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol.III, p.196.

<sup>23</sup> Where did Cassirer's foundational concept of *symbolic pregnance* come from? The answer is that it came chiefly through Cassirer's contact with Gestalt psychologists. Indeed, the term, *symbolic pregnance* was first used by Max Wertheimer in the context of the psychology of perception. The Berlin School, Wertheimer, Köhler, Koffka and Lewin thought that understanding the nature of perceptual *fields* is the key to understanding perception. Perception, they argued, cannot be captured as a combination of bare sensations that can be used to explain more complex entities, in the way that Cartesian psychology had attempted to do. Behind the Gestalt School lies the philosophy of Franz Brentano. In Chapter 4 I argued the case that Brentano clarified the fundamental methodological issues of psychology in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He taught principally in Würzburg and Vienna. Christian Von Ehrenfels, along with Husserl, attended a series of seminal lectures in Vienna where he came under the spell of Brentano's ideas. Von Ehrenfels formulated the concept of *gestalt* to describe psychological events whose characteristics could not be captured adequately by the mechanical aggregation of separate elements. Thus he stood the Cartesian precept, that complex structures must be explained in terms of simple ones, on its head. He showed how, for instance, a melody depends upon a certain kind of order - a set of relations between elements rather than the elements themselves. Wertheimer, one of his students, along with Köhler and Koffka extended the application of the concept of *gestaltqualität* to investigations in the psychology of perception. They argued that perception has to be explained in terms of psychological wholes, and not, in an atomistic fashion, as bundles of bare sensations. Husserl was also deeply impressed by Brentano's lectures in Vienna. He once remarked that without him, 'I should have written not a single word of philosophy.' Husserl it was who transformed Brentano's, *descriptive psychology* into *phenomenological* philosophy. Karl Stumpf was another philosopher who came under Brentano's influence. When he was appointed to a chair of philosophy in Berlin in 1895, he was given the task of establishing an institute of psychology. He gathered together a group of researchers that included Wertheimer (who had previously studied with Ehrenfels), Köhler, Koffka and Lewin. Stumpf established a strict research methods programme that aimed to give psychology secure philosophical foundations. Far from constraining the development of psychology as discipline within philosophy, this rigorous grounding contributed to the success of the Berlin School, and, especially to the development of experimental-descriptive research methods. The publication of *Psychologische Forschung* in 1922 marked the beginning of an extraordinary productive decade and the emergence of Berlin Gestalt psychology. Köhler succeeded Stumpf as Director at the Institute in 1922, and the journal continued up until 1938, when it was suppressed by the National Socialists<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, Gestalt research became an important influence on Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms and, in particular, his use of the theory of *symbolic pregnance*.

<sup>24</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p.56.

<sup>25</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p.57.

<sup>26</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p.56-57.

<sup>27</sup> Krois, M. (1987) p.57-58.

<sup>28</sup> A great deal turns on just this insight. See, for instance, Merleau-Ponty's work *The Body as Expression*, (1945) where he develops his theory of word-meaning and of the relation of thought to speech. Merleau-Ponty draws extensively on *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, and the empirical psychological research to which Cassirer refers in the third volume, *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*.

<sup>29</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.202

<sup>30</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.202.

---

<sup>31</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) pp.206-207.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 2 for my discussion of this theme.

<sup>33</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, both psychologically oriented linguists and linguistically oriented psychologists had produced competing accounts of the relations between mind and the natural world. Von Humboldt's original insight into the 'world-disclosing' power of language was taken up by several language oriented psychologists, (especially Herbart, Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt), but progress was slow because they failed to grasp the foundational character of language analysis for psychology. Rather they were trying to establish psychology as a propaedeutic science.

Wundt began with physiology. He thought that signification was an important dimension of psychological inquiry, but he saw no reason to revise his methodology. Rather, he expected that ethno-psychological research (data drawn from languages, myth, religion jurisprudence and art and so on) would complement the findings of experimental psychology. Wundt was left stranded by developments in philosophy, where the influence of Brentano on psychology spread, and in language studies, where de Saussure's account of language as a self-regulating system reconfigured linguistics. With the advent of structural linguistics, individual psychology was no longer necessary to account for linguistic change.

<sup>34</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p. 208.

<sup>35</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p. 208.

<sup>36</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p. 210.

<sup>37</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p. 88

<sup>38</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p. 89-90

<sup>39</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) pp.89-90

<sup>40</sup> As von Humboldt phrases it, 'The individual man is always connected with the whole...From whatever aspect one may look at it his life is necessarily tied to sociality...every individual bears within him the collective essence of man, though only on a single line of development.'  
(Humboldt, W. von (1989a) *Kawi Introduction*, p.41)

<sup>41</sup> Here is a sidelight that helps to clarify the significance and the scope of the ideas I have been discussing. The Soviet psychologists, Vygotsky and Luria wrote a seminal article, *Tool and Symbol in Child Development*, shortly after the publication of *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*.<sup>41</sup> They take up the philosophical problem that Cassirer addressed:

We discussed the indirect nature of psychological operations as a specific feature of the structure of higher psychological functions. It would be a great mistake however to believe that this process appears in a purely logical way, that it is invented and discovered by the child in the form of a lightening quick guess (a so-called 'aha' reaction), thanks to which the child once and for all comes to realise the relation between the sign and the method of using it, resulting in this entire operation's further development along purely deductive lines. It would be equally wrong to believe that the symbolic attitude to some stimuli is reached intuitively by the child, derived as it were from the depths of the child's own spirit, or that symbolization is the primary and further irreducible Kantian *facultas signatrix*, from the beginning part of human consciousness capable of creating and comprehending symbols. Both these points of view – the intellectual and the intuitive – in essence metaphysically dispose of the question of the genesis of symbolic activity, since for one of them the higher psychological functions are given previous to any experience, as if they were inherent to consciousness and only waiting an opportunity to manifest themselves upon meeting with the empiric perception of things. This point of view leads inevitably to an *a priori* conception of the higher psychological functions (see Cassirer-my emphasis). For the other point of view, the question concerning the higher mental functions poses no problem at all, since it postulates that signs are invented and after that all corresponding forms of behaviour are deduced from them as conclusions from logical premises. (Valsiner and Van der Veer, 1994, p.147)

The fact that Vygotsky knew Cassirer's work is incontrovertible. However, we cannot take it for granted because there are so few direct references. As I suggested earlier this is chiefly owing to

ideological battles after Lenin's death in 1925, when neo-Kantian idealism was damned. Yet throughout the twenties, some Soviet psychologist remained in close touch with the work of contemporary Western (especially German) researchers in a way that became dangerous during the Stalinist era. Indeed, Vygotsky's writings are full of references to 'Western' psychologists such as Stern, who was a close friend of the Cassirer's in Hamburg. He also kept in touch with the Gestalt school in Berlin, whose members included Wertheimer – whom Vygotsky once described as one of the most outstanding contemporary psychologists of the day – Koffka, Lewin (who was a personal acquaintance) and Köhler, whose work on primates is described in unusual detail in the book Vygotsky wrote with Luria, published in 1930. Additionally, Vygotsky followed the research of Karl and Charlotte Buhler, whose work on child development, language and methodology in Vienna Vygotsky frequently discusses. It is helpful to see that Vygotsky, far from being an 'isolated genius' who was 'ahead of his time' and who 'fell foul' of hostile conditions in the Soviet Union (though it is true that Vygotsky lost support under Stalin) belonged to a constellation of Central and East European thinkers of extraordinary philosophical sophistication and rigour. This constellation also included Ernst Cassirer.

Besides, Vygotsky knew some of these people personally. For instance, Kurt Lewin visited Vygotsky in November 1931, and there exists an extensive correspondence between them. In 1933, when Lewin was returning from a congress in the USA, he learned that the National Socialists had seized power. He waited in Moscow, from where he could contact Berlin. During this difficult time, he visited Vygotsky's home. Shortly afterwards, after consulting colleagues including Köhler, he decided to emigrate. (He wrote to Köhler, 'I now know that there is no other choice for me but to emigrate, even though it will tear my life apart'. Lewin's mother and sister died later in the camps). *Psychologische Forschung* was the journal that Luria, and other Soviet psychologists chose to publish their work in the West. Clearly, it was an important source for Vygotsky, who translated and edited a great deal of the Gestalt research himself. His concept of inner-speech owes much to the work of Kurt Goldstein, (although it goes back to von Humboldt), and I am keen to know more, for instance, about Vygotsky's reading of the great nineteenth century Ukrainian von Humboldt scholar, Alexander Poebnja.

The links among the intellectual traditions that both Vygotsky and Cassirer worked in deserve fuller investigation if only because Vygotsky shared a German philosophical outlook for all the important differences between them. (Vygotsky was not an idealist!) Explaining the role of signs – not just speech – in the development of the higher mental functions was one of Vygotsky's greatest achievements. With Luria, he formulates the crucial insight like this: '...a broader study of other forms of symbolic activity of the child shows that not only speech but all operations related to the use of signs, their different concrete forms notwithstanding, are governed by the same laws of development, structuring and functioning as ...speech', and he goes on to make the connection between the elementary forms of psychological behaviour, and 'second order' symbolic processes that constitute the higher mental functions.

<sup>42</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.210.

<sup>43</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.224.

<sup>44</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.224.

<sup>45</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.224.

<sup>46</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.227.

<sup>47</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p.228.

<sup>48</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) pp.273-274)

<sup>49</sup> Vygotsky, L. S. (1994b) 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' first published in the original Russian 1931, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, pp.266-289.

<sup>50</sup> Cassirer, E. (1929) p. 275.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer's recalls Heidegger's striking manner of lecturing at in the twenties like this:

It is impossible to exaggerate the drama of Heidegger's appearance in Marburg. Not that he was out for sensation. His appearance in the lecture hall certainly had something

of a guaranteed effectiveness to it, but the unique thing about his person and his teaching lay in the fact that he identified himself fully with his work and radiated from that work. Because of him the lecture format became something totally new. It was no longer the 'lesson presentation' of a professor who put his energy into research and publication... Who can forget the acerbic polemics with which he caricatured the cultural and educational goings-on of those times ... who can forget the sarcasm with which he characterised colleagues and contemporaries? Who among those who then followed him can forget the breathtaking swirl of questions that he developed in the introductory hours of the semester for the sake of entangling himself in the second or third of these questions and then, in the final hours of the semester, rolling up the deep-dark clouds of sentences from which the lightning flashed to leave us stunned. (Gadamer, H. G. *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 1985, p.48)

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, M. (1997) p.203.

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, M. (1997) p.205.

<sup>54</sup> Just as Cassirer attempted to take the theory of knowledge to a fundamental level, Heidegger sought a theory of being, a fundamental *ontology* that would take him beyond the limits of Western rationality. The key feature of this fundamental ontology is his notion of the *prestructuring* of understanding. Whereas the thinkers of the Enlightenment consciously opposed and systematically criticised ways that prejudices and preconceptions distort rational understanding, Heidegger, by contrast, contends that, unavoidably, presuppositions and prejudices are what make understandings possible in the first place. In a Hermeneutic sense, they constitute our '*being-in-the-world*' (*Dasein*) at the very deepest levels. For Heidegger, the interpretation of meaning is always a matter of clarifying what we have already grasped. Our *involvement* in the world, he says, is always pre-disclosed in the language we inhabit. (Later, Foucault would elaborate a similar theory of selves constituted – and regulated – by historically produced discourses). On this view, meaning is inevitably and always a projection of our prior understandings. It is a 'way' of *experiencing* in which, whether we are reflexively aware of it or not, our whole understanding of existence is, as Heidegger taught, – '*fatally – committed*'

<sup>55</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, who studied with Heidegger in the twenties, has carried forward many of Heidegger's original insights into his own '*philosophical hermeneutics*'. (Here is proof, if proof were needed, of the continuing power of some of Heidegger's ideas, especially in the humanities). Gadamer returns to the problem of reaching understanding between people speaking different languages:

Where reaching an understanding seems to be impossible because we 'speak different languages,' hermeneutics is not at an end. Here the hermeneutic task poses itself in its full seriousness, namely as the task of finding a common language. (Gadamer, (1985) p180.)

Gadamer clarifies what 'finding a common language' entails. On his view, learning a new language is more than just the 'appropriation' of another tongue. He speaks of '*growing* into language' (my emphasis) and 'language as a mode of gaining knowledge of the world'. 'Experience realises itself' he says, 'in ongoing communicative improvement of our knowledge of the world'. Characteristically, Gadamer insists that experience is always 'knowledge of the known'. On this view, the preconditions of our experiencing the world are given to us by 'tradition'. In other words, the world as it is linguistically disclosed precedes us:

[the world] is communicatively experienced and constantly given over to us as an infinitely open task. It is not a world of the first day but one that is already handed down to us... Philosophising does not begin at some zero point but must think and speak with the language we already possess. (Gadamer, (1985), p181.

The picture of language as 'world-constituting' comes largely from von Humboldt. On his view, world-outlooks are linguistically inscribed. This insight emerged in the light of Von Humboldt's preoccupation with the evolution of languages and their relation to the mentalities of the peoples and nations who speak them. It may appear that linguistically inscribed world-views are always self-enclosed, and that reality is always already absorbed into one's own linguistic '*horizon*' (Gadamer). But such a picture of language ignores the basic fact that people *want* to reach agreement about things in a shared world and the states of affairs that surround them. Everyday social intercourse depends on reaching common understandings about things around us. This may

---

appear too obvious to mention, but around the turn of the last century, many theories of language – or, more accurately, speech – did not appear to take it into account.

Indeed, von Humboldt was the first person to grasp the world-forming character of speech *together with* the role of the second person, the interlocutor, in relation to things and states of affairs in the world. Philosophical hermeneutics developed the former insight but neglected the latter. Thus, it lost sight of the universal dimensions of speech that enable us to reach intersubjective agreement about *things that have an independent existence in the world*. Cassirer, discovered in Von Humboldt's picture of language such a universal dimension. He writes in the passage I quoted already (see p.9) 'without such rudimentary universality all understanding of others, human life within the medium of speech would be impossible.' Crucially, he understands this as a fundamental ethical principle *as well as* a feature of language. Again, his source is Von Humboldt, who writes:

'The individual man is always connected with the whole...from whatever aspect one may look at it, his life is necessarily tied to sociality... Mental cultivation, even in the loneliest seclusion of temperament is equally possible only through language and the latter requires to be directed to another being that understands it.'

For Cassirer, this was 'the clearest evidence and sure proof' that common humanity stands above self-enclosed individuality.

## Chapter 6

### **‘Grinding the Wind’: Excavating Memory and Imagination in a London Classroom**

*Slave. The little boy had heard the word for the first time and when the teacher explained the meaning he had a strange feeling. The feeling you get when someone relates a murder. Thank God he wasn't ever a slave. He or his father or his father's father. Thank God nobody in Barbados was ever a slave.*

George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*,<sup>1</sup>

*Piece of the Past* was a poem written by Kevin, a Black pupil, in a London secondary school in the early eighties. It tells of a party of schoolchildren in Montserrat who set off for a walk one chilly morning, led by the village schoolteacher, Teacher Lincoln. Along the way they stop to rest and some of the children begin to explore some ruins nearby. Teacher Lincoln, a stern disciplinarian, calls the children back, but not before one child, the poet, manages to peer inside a disused windmill. The windmill is a reminder of plantation slavery, but the fact passes unnoticed because no mention of it is forthcoming. It is only later, in a London classroom, when the boy is much older, that the windmill's true significance is grasped. 'I never knew at the time,' he reflects, 'I had an idea with no real meaning.'

This chapter is about the relationship between history, memory and imagination from the standpoint of a child's learning and development. The story I shall be telling will concern the way that a childhood memory was shaped by an adolescent's emergent understanding of the history of plantation slavery. In the West Indies windmills are reminders of the fields of cane that had once 'crept like an open secret' across the sugar estates of the islands. For those who reflect on their significance, they are unofficial *loci memoriae*, places of remembrance for the way they call to mind the fate of enslaved Africans in the New World. (By contrast, commercial representations of windmills that are frequently reproduced on posters and postcards to evoke the 'romance' of the past seem eerily removed from historical realities). By his account, Kevin barely glimpsed the windmill's significance at the time, yet it made a powerful impression on the nine-year-old's imagination.

Today, both the landscape and the way of life that he remembered have been utterly transformed. Montserrat was recently devastated by volcanic eruptions and now much of the island is uninhabitable. When the wind blows, fresh layers of volcanic dust cover the landscape and its once familiar features are eerily transformed. The human cost has been immense. Since the eruption, more than half the population has left the island to work in the United Kingdom. Kevin went to Montserrat when he was nine, before the disaster. He was there for only a short time, but the nine-year-old carried an image of the landscape back to London, where he was reunited with his mother. Six years later, when he was fifteen, the image flashed up unexpectedly during a heated argument about teaching slavery and the place of Black history in the syllabus.

Children learn how to remember. Their memories develop over time. Indeed, the nature of memory among infants and small children differs strikingly from that among adolescents and adults. I shall be saying more about these differences, which has a lot to do with imagination, in the closing section of this piece.

'When you are nine years old what you remember seems forever,' wrote Robert Penn Warren, 'You remember everything, and everything is important and stands

big, whole and fills up time and is so solid that you could walk around and around it like a tree and look at it'. A very young child can reproduce perceptions in the fullness of the original experience, the richness of concrete tangible details and with the vividness of a hallucination.<sup>2</sup> Later, in adolescence, conceptual thinking begins to rework concrete sensory images, which in turn start to play a significant role in the development of imagination. It has been aptly suggested that, 'adolescence is the rapprochement between fantasy and the imagination'.<sup>3</sup>

I shall say more about the relations between concrete and abstract thinking in relation to memory later, but first I need to distinguish among different kinds of memory. We develop our capacities for both the kind of remembering we do when we are by ourselves ('autonomous memory'), as well as the kind of remembering we do with others ('social' and 'collective' memory). Memory development is a socio-cultural process as well as a maturational one, though the balance between the two processes continues to be a matter for debate among psychologists. Here we shall be chiefly concerned with the way that young children and adolescents learn to remember by mastering what I am calling here 'technologies of memory'.

Anthropologists of memory have studied the way that memory has been evolved differently among various peoples. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, researchers, notably among them, Lévy Bruhl, attempted to compare memory among so-called 'primitive' and 'developed' peoples.<sup>4</sup> Lévy Bruhl was particularly interested in the way that the character of memory changes over time. He claimed that the function of memory alters when an experience is condensed into concepts that free individuals from the need to retain quantities of sense impressions. Paradoxically, on this view, the development of conceptual thinking actually leads to a reduced capacity for recalling concrete particulars, especially where these can be stored by other technological means such as pictorial and written records. Thus qualitative as well as quantitative differences in memory can be traced to differentiated mental functions, which have developed as a consequence of technological evolution. Indeed, such a principle was used to explain anthropologists' reports of outstanding memory among 'primitive' peoples, where the commonest form of memory was 'topographical memory' - the capacity to recall

a landscape. Topographical memory in 'primitive' man, it was claimed, involves retaining a concrete visual image of a place down to the smallest details.

In the twenties, the Soviet psychologist, Alexander Luria, stressed the primacy of the socio-cultural processes of memory development. Luria was polemicising against theorists of 'bio-genetic laws', according to which the development of the individual child merely recapitulates in compressed form the developmental path of the species. For Luria it was axiomatic that human activity has transformed the world as we experience it. 'We are born in a ready cultural and productive environment,' he insisted. (And thus we find the world already replete with meaning.) Moreover, Luria put culture at the centre of human development. Against a bio-genetic picture of development Luria argued that as well as growing and maturing, the child is also continually 're-armed' with new skills and new forms of behaviour'. In the process of evolution, says Luria, man invented tools (including psychological tools) and created culturally productive environments that have transformed man himself.<sup>5</sup> Through processes of enculturation, Children come into possession of an enormous stock of psychological mechanisms enable them to master mental operations and to develop higher mental functions. What I shall be calling 'technologies of memory' constitute a set of such mechanisms.

'Technologies of memory' typically include social practices like the 'memory talk', which is essentially a culturally evolved way of talking about one's past. 'Memory talk' goes on with varying degrees of intensity more or less continually over a lifetime. Indeed, family histories are usually passed on from one generation to the next by means of 'memory talk'. Memory talk is often organised socially around material objects, such as photographs, which help us to recall something of the past. In some cases, the power of material objects to evoke the past depends upon their personal significance, but there are also publicly shared objects of reference, which have been intentionally produced for the purpose of collective recollection.

And memory is linked to our sense of who we are. From a psychological standpoint, in learning to master 'memory talk' children also learn to distinguish between their present selves and the younger person, who is also somehow the 'I' that is the

‘objectified’ first person of their stories. Without such a distinction there could be no sense of personal continuity or development. Thus, memory and a sense of one’s own identity are inseparably connected.

The notion that recollection is a form of active perception and that it is essentially context bound is an especially interesting one for us to consider here. Such a notion rests on the idea that mind contributes to what is recalled. It does so variously, and according to particular circumstance. On this view, contingent needs, past experience and present interests govern acts of perceiving. It follows from this (phenomenological) point of view that memory cannot be thought about as the bedrock of autobiographical truth because memories are actively perceived – re-imagined and re-interpreted, re-read, if you like - in new situations. What is more, context becomes not so much the external setting for recollection, but rather something that enters into the process in a fundamentally constitutive way. On this view, there is no such thing as ‘invariant memory’ - memory that holds past experiences once and for all. Rather it is the case that the past is continually remade.

Today, it is a commonplace that identity cannot be described accurately as the ‘cumulative register of past experience’. Such common sense descriptions underestimate the contribution of mind to the processes of constructing experience and investing it with meaning. They underestimate, that is, the way the past is remade in new contexts. Further to this, on a ‘constructionist’ view of experience, we are prompted to reflect on the problem of the mediated nature of memory, and the fact that the mediational ‘technologies’ – the means by which we remember - are socially distributed. Such reflections point us towards a fully social picture of memory.

Identity, then, cannot be described adequately as something that is uniquely individual. Rather, it is something that is socially and, in a certain sense, collectively produced. Yet we are conscious of individual ‘selves’. Intuitively, my sense of the person I am seems somehow bound up with (and indeed dependent upon) my recollections of all that has happened to me – the totality of which no one else could

possibly know – right up to the moment that I do the recalling. So what is it that I recall, then, if it is not what actually happened?

One psychologist has recently formulated the question for memory researchers like this: ‘Can past experience be repeated, or is it necessarily – psychologically and neurologically – constructed anew in each memory event or act of recall?’<sup>6</sup> The argument is that body changes and alterations in consciousness make the recovery of the past, psychologically and neurologically impossible. The implication is that identity, very much like the past, is continually reinvented. And, crucially, such ‘re-inventions’ depend on symbolisation – symbolisation, that is, in the sense that Cassirer envisioned it. Moreover, there is an ethical side to autobiography, which is to do with the sharing of human experience by which common humanity is achieved.

The sociality of autobiographical fiction is crucial here precisely for the way that it suggests <sup>a</sup>powerful ethical dimension to symbolising that might otherwise be missed. Charles Taylor has identified a serious difficulty with theories of the self where the production of autobiographical ‘fictions’ is pictured as a wholly individual business. Intriguingly, his identification of such a difficulty has led him back to the picture of language that comes down to us from Herder and von Humboldt. An individualistic picture may capture something of the constructive and the creative nature of expressive language, and it may capture, too, something of the power of self-discovery, but significantly it misses the ‘dialogical setting’, that binds each of us to one another.<sup>7</sup> About the importance of the ‘dialogic relations’ in the shaping of ‘selves’, Taylor says this,

The general feature of human life that I want to evoke is its fundamentally *dialogic* character. We become fully human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. For purposes of this discussion, I want to take ‘language’ in a broad sense, covering not only the words we speak but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the languages of art, of gesture, of love and the like. But we are inducted into these exchanges by others. No one acquires the languages need for self-definition on their own. We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us - what George Herbert Mead called ‘significant

others'. The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not 'monological,' not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical.<sup>8</sup>

According to Taylor, we learn to tell stories about ourselves, not in isolation, but rather in dialogue with others. And the life-stories we tell and retell are always addressed to others, even when we are alone, because we have already internalised 'others who matter to us'. We each of us have many voices in our heads besides the one we think of as our own.

I find Taylor's argument a compelling one. First, he broadens his conception of language (because the picture of language which structural linguistics holds out is too narrow for what he wants to explore) to include a wide range of human 'expressivity', an idea that he traces back to Herder and von Humboldt. Secondly, Taylor explicitly links a broad conception of dialogic relations and expressivity to Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms.<sup>9</sup> Thirdly, he shows precisely how Cassirer's contemporary, Martin Heidegger and his views of language stood squarely in the Herder tradition of picturing language as a 'world disclosing' medium. Indeed, with Heidegger, especially in his later work, it is not humans who speak but language itself that discloses the conditions of 'being'.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary psychologists frequently underscore the central role of narrative in the development of memory. Typically, they draw on the nineteenth-century American pragmatist, William James, as well as the American cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner. Bruner argues that our sense of continuous identity is produced through acts of self-narration. Indeed, our whole sense of ourselves, our life histories, are to a great extent dependent on memory, while memory itself, of course, is organised by the already established narrative forms – the distinctive genres – that make up, or, indeed, make possible, life-histories.

Further to this, autobiographical memory emerges on the socio-cultural plane because narration relies upon culturally evolved forms and social practices – what I have been calling the 'technologies of remembrance'. The stories we tell about

ourselves borrow from the forms and structures that we encounter culturally as well as those that we 're-invent' for ourselves with others in mind. Thus what has traditionally been thought about as the private realm of individual experience turns out to be to be something that has been socially and culturally constructed.

Children meet public as well as domestic 'technologies of remembrance'. They are shown, and they discover for themselves officially designated 'sites of memory', '*lieux de mémoire*'. Official 'sites of memory' typically include the monumental architecture we meet everywhere in cities. Such sites serve to remind people of large narratives, the story of the nation for instance, into which personal, family and community narratives are typically woven. Metropolitan 'sites of memory', which often echo the styles classical antiquity (for the way they suggest enduring values), are coeval with the emergence of the modern state. They consciously aim to evoke collective memories of ancient (imperial) civilizations to evoke the grand narrative of the history of humankind.

In the modern era, self-conscious attempts to memorialise national politics began on a large scale with the French Revolution, when the Jacobins attempted to create a new kind of citizen and to perpetuate the radical ideals of the new revolutionary and order by commissioning buildings, monuments and statues. This was part of a grand plan to redesign Paris, though the plan was never realised. And '*Lieux de memoire*' have conservative effects as well as radical ones. Monumental architecture - particularly the neo-classical architecture of the imperial metropolis - conveys an aura of solidity, coherence and continuity to citizens of cosmopolitan capitals who might otherwise experience cities as impermanent, fragmented, dislocated environments - and thus open to change.

Modern states then have invested specific 'patrimonial sites' with enduring and emotive symbolic significance by associating designated buildings and monuments with events of national historical importance. The years immediately following the Great War were especially good ones for sculptors (usually seconded to the Ministry

of Information), who received commissions for designing war memorials. The Cenotaph in Whitehall is an obvious example. 'Sites of remembrance' have been important for the state's project of 'nation building' and national consolidation, particularly where they have attempted to create a sense of a shared national 'experience' – a memory of collective sacrifice that is both real and imagined.<sup>11</sup>

States organise public acts of collective mourning in connection with its *loci memoriae*. Despite the fact that grief is usually thought of as a private emotion, observing a minute's silence was instituted by the State to organise and to structure public expressions of grief. Citizens are meant to share –collectively – exactly the same thoughts and emotions, together, at one and the same time. Additionally, officially designated moments of commemoration provide large structures of national memory, just as national 'feelings' are organised through and regulated by collective acts of remembrance. What has been called the 'memory nation' (the image of the nation's past in the memories of its citizens) has been a compelling principle of social identity and cohesion ever since modern states began. Indeed, sites of memory encode sets of 'enduring' civic values (especially the public virtues of service and self-sacrifice) that together figure the ideal of the nation – what the nation 'stands for', what it 'means'.

As a consequence to all of this, the way that children learn that official '*loci memoriae*' carry potent public meanings not only marks an important stage in their mastering cultural 'technologies' of remembrance, it is also one of the chief ways that they learn about and imagine their place in society.

Official, public 'sites of memory' then both organise and frame private memories by providing common structures and by establishing common points of reference for the citizenry of an 'imagined' people, what we might call a 'memory nation'. Historical sites and landmarks that have been invested with public significance supply the 'master narratives' of an official national past into which individual's unofficial stories are inserted. Thus they shape, but never wholly prefigure the historically evolved, taken-for-granted national life-worlds that citizens habitually

inhabit, and which give their ordinary actions meaning. Seen from this perspective, social memory is a major constitutive dimension of everyday life.

However, the meanings of '*lieux de mémoire*' are never wholly fixed. Rather, they mediate social meanings and as a consequence, there is always a degree of indeterminacy. Despite official efforts to stabilise their meanings, they frequently provoke public discussion and dispute whenever questions of national identity is a subject of debate. '*Lieux de mémoire*' therefore are also sites of public contestation, especially during moments of national crisis.

\* \* \*

A recent, large-scale French study of '*lieux de mémoire*' took as its starting point the alleged erosion of the so-called 'memory nation' that it is claimed has taken place over the past twenty years.<sup>12</sup> In its place there has been a proliferation of 'patrimonial' sites of memory that reflects the multiplication of conflictual social identities, many of which are to do with the multi-ethnic, multi-racial character of contemporary French society.<sup>13</sup> At the outset, the study of national memory promised a redefinition of French national identity at a critical moment when racism was resurfacing on the national political scene. The study, which was begun at a moment in post-war politics marked by the resurgence of nationalism, has stressed the French revolutionary heritage that, it is often claimed, abolished ethnicity and race in its definition of French citizenship. I mentioned this earlier in connection with the circumstances surrounding the setting up of the French education system after the Revolution.

At least one reviewer has noticed that what is missing from the French study is what he calls 'a national memory of immigration'. The notion of a 'memory of immigration' is an intriguing one, but in some ways it is deeply ambiguous.

Ambiguity arises partly from the absence of concrete '*lieux de mémoire*' in the daily lives of recent immigrants, which is in one sense what this chapter is about. For the first generation, so-called 'memory of immigration' is linked chiefly to sites that are usually geographically as well as temporally distant. Indeed, the ways that

immigrants relate to '*lieux de memoire*' that they meet in new settings on a daily basis constitutes one of the mechanisms that engender a sense of 'foreignness' and dislocation. As a consequence of the absence of concrete '*lieux de memoire*' immigrants rely chiefly on representations.

It is a curious consequence of the way that we are apt to speak about national memory that immigrants may 'learn' the significance of sites of remembrance without being able to 'remember' them. Memory is often spoken about in this context as a kind of patrimony that is somehow passed on from one generation to the next. Indeed, local memory can be jealously guarded as the 'shared patrimony' of a particular community. Indeed, it may be said to define certain communities. This is especially the case where memories of past injustices and collective sacrifices have been concerned. From time to time, serious difficulties arise from liberal notions of a plural 'national' tradition, because memories of conflict, which relate directly to historical relations of domination and subordination, sometimes resurface with surprising ferocity.

Thus collective memories can also divide people. They can engender a powerful sense of 'natural' entitlement and constitute people as members or as non-members of particular social groups, each with its own particular history of relation to the 'host' nation as well as a stake in the shared, national patrimony. Where the historical relation has been one of coloniser and colonised, collective memory will recall histories of domination and subordination. Indeed, common sites of remembrance (and their representations) frequently evoke memories of past conflicts and sacrifices among the various communities that make up the nation as a whole.

And for the second and third generations of immigrants, things become especially problematic. Kevin's story is a case in point. When he set about making sense of slavery in a context where there was only a faint trace of shared remembrance, we should not underestimate the difficulty he was facing. This is how one contemporary historian has formulated the problem: 'the experience of millions of individuals who were the victims of slavery is not collectable; it is unrecoverable as a set of relics. There can be no archaeology of the memory of slavery that corresponds to an

emotional identification with a lost reality'.<sup>14</sup> And yet, as one of Kevin's classmates put it, 'it's actually history... we can't just skip history. And skip the whole matter of slavery'.

With slavery, '*lieux de memoire*' are curiously problematic. It is a measure of the continuing importance of sites of memory to the state that recent legislation (2002) has made it possible to 'rescue' and 'protect' English Heritage sites abroad. There is talk of restoring Georgian and Victorian edifices in Barbados, Jamaica and Antigua. For instance, there are plans to restore Barrett House. Built in 1799, Barrett House was the opulent sugar planters' home of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's ancestors. Today it has fallen into disrepair and the aim is to restore it. Paradoxically, today, such buildings are now thought worthy of preservation chiefly for their architectural merit and their literary associations. But how should the descendants of the slaves who worked on the sugar plantations relate to them?

Derek Walcott wrestles with just this problem in his quasi-metaphysical poem, *Ruins of a Great House*. *Ruins* constitutes a particularly searching, though not entirely successful exploration of the kind of difficulty I have been describing. Moreover, it sheds a revealing light on Kevin's own poem, *Piece of the Past*. Where there was an absence of an official '*lieux de memoire*' commemorating slavery, in Montserrat as well as in London - something that might provide a common focus for 'an emotional identification with the lost reality of slavery' - Kevin fashioned an 'unofficial' one in a poem. He did so partly from 'personal' memory, (it is an poignant irony that the features of the landscape he remembered had been buried beneath the accumulated layers of volcanic dust), partly from the history syllabus, partly with the help of his teachers and his peers in school, and partly - this is crucial - from his imagination.

\* \* \*

What lay behind the, large-scale study of '*lieux de memoire*'? French thinkers have been especially concerned with the mechanisms of social memory, and I want to recover something of the intellectual history of such concerns to give depth to my discussion of memory and imagination. The French tradition of researching into

links among memory, citizenship and nationhood goes back directly to the sociology of Emile Durkheim, and to work on social memory by his younger associate Maurice Halbwachs. Durkheim's sociology took shape in the aftermath of the Prussian war, at a time when the fabric of French national culture and society seemed to be disintegrating. It was shaped by an intense desire to delineate precisely what binds societies - especially nations - together.

Today, political interest in such themes has been powerfully rekindled. The presence of immigrants and asylum seekers in Western Europe has sparked national debates over immigration policies, much as it has in the United Kingdom. Definitions of national citizenship are presently being contested in culturally plural societies wherever the question of assimilation into the 'national culture' comes to the fore. In the aftermath to the Franco-Prussian war, Durkheim was particularly interested in the role of education as a source of social (and national) cohesion. From the perspectives of Republican nationalism, he wanted to establish a secular foundation for national solidarity.

Halbwachs' work on the nature of collective memory stemmed from the tradition of sociological enquiry that Durkheim established. However, sociology was not Halbwachs' starting point. He started out as a student of the philosopher, Henri Bergson. It was only later that he turned from philosophy towards sociology. The two thinkers' contrasting pictures of memory are highly relevant to discussions of the social nature of remembrance.

Bergson made individual intuitions of time the very foundation of his distinctive philosophy. On the one hand, for Bergson, the whole of past experience is actually present, and forgetting is due to obstacles in the path of recollection. For Halbwachs on the other hand, memory is always fragmentary and incomplete. Crucially, for him, recollection involved piecing together the fragments when we are prompted to do so by some external stimulus.

Eventually, Halbwachs turned away from Bergson's subjectivist philosophy towards the objective sociology of Durkheim. Whereas Bergson claimed that individual identity lies in our intuitive grasp of 'inner' time, Durkheim emphasised

the social nature of identity, and therefore he investigated the social factors that sustain individual consciousness. Halbwach took up the problem of the social nature of identity and role of memory in the nineteen twenties, arguing that there are no such things as 'individual' memories. Rather, he argued, 'individual' memories are always supported by the memories of others. They are both public and shareable, and therefore memory always inhabits the domains of the social. On this view, memory, indeed mind, extends beyond the confines of the individual's consciousness.

What is more, Halbwachs held out a powerful account of how societies go about their acts of remembering. He focused on social contexts (*cadres sociaux*) within which recollection is framed. And he showed the way that individual memory never functions independently of words and ideas that the individual has appropriated from his or her *milieu*. On this view memory is always semiotically mediated. And as a consequence of this, the business of appropriating semiotic materials from the concrete social *milieu* and learning how to use them is intrinsically part of learning to remember. For Halbwachs, therefore, the meaning of individual memories has to be sought not only in the recesses of consciousness, but also in the social *milieu* into which a child's life is already immersed. The notion of the concrete social *milieu* will be centrally important when we come to look at how Kevin's poem emerged.

For the contemporary French historian, Pierre Nora, who directed the large-scale study of national memory the pervasiveness of the subject of memory in discourse is symptomatic of the diminution of memory as a constitutive dimension of everyday life. He claims that modern societies have separated memory off from customs, rituals and traditions that memory had 'quietly inhabited' in the pre-modern world. According to Nora's, '*lieux de mémoire*' are the impoverished substitutes of the *milieux de mémoire* – the vanishing 'environments' of memory - in which pre-modern societies lived. It is therefore all the more important to grasp the nature of memory for those individuals and communities that have made the transition suddenly from pre-modern to modern societies, and to envisage what such a transition entails.

As Halbwach's work suggests, the meanings of individual memories - even the most private recollections - cannot be explained apart from the social and cultural circumstances of the person who remembers. Kevin's poem, *Piece of the Past*, didn't arrive out of the blue. Rather, it grew out of protracted discussions, debates, disputes and, quarrels that the class conducted among themselves and with their teachers, over four years. Telling how *Piece of the Past* came to be written will entail recounting events that occurred over a long cycle, that is, reconstructing a retrospect of the class's history.

Through such a retrospect, I want to connect the memory and imagination of a young writer to his social *milieu*. I am not seeking to picture an ideal child, abstracted from the concrete circumstances that shaped his life. Rather, I want to portray a particular child in history and culture. It was from a definite, culturally evolved, socially organised activity, (chiefly, a protracted sequence of Humanities lessons), in a concrete social setting (a London comprehensive school), and at a given moment in the lives of a group of students that *Piece of the Past* emerged.

\* \* \*

The intersection between learning and instruction and development is at the heart of what will follow. It has been claimed that development and instruction have different 'rhythms': 'The two processes are interconnected but each of them has its own measure'.<sup>15</sup> 'Instruction' here is meant broadly. It refers to the teaching of school knowledge – specifically knowledge framed by the school's Humanities syllabus. 'Instruction' typically includes 'instructional resources' – textbooks, worksheets and other 'pedagogical apparatus' – the 'artefacts of schooling' - selected or designed for specific 'instructional purposes'.

For all that there is a need to describe and explain the social dimensions of psychological processes there is also a need to retain a picture of individual development. I aim to show how 'instruction' awakened one child's developmental processes, and I shall be describing how his psychological processes followed their distinctive developmental trajectories. Such trajectories are never continuous. They cannot be plotted confidently in advance. Kevin's teacher could not have predicted

accurately what Kevin would make of things because he couldn't say for sure what would capture this thirteen-year-old's imagination. Neither could he estimate confidently beforehand what Kevin's 'investments' in lessons might be.

*Piece of the Past* was an unforeseen outcome of an extended series of lessons in which the pupils had a large measure of control over the pace and direction of their work. Kevin's poem was not typical of the written work that the class produced. But this was no individual, heuristic 'voyage discovery'. Kevin was not like Goethe's Wilhelm Meister who learned from experience directly, with no tutor guiding him. He did not encounter experiences 'freely'. Rather experiences were organised for him. The syllabus provided a common starting point and a framework for study. And the teachers' planning process was not at all haphazard. While the work was going on, he intervened, kept order, issued instructions, gave detailed advice, supplied resources, read, consulted, joked, cajoled, threatened, suggested fresh lines of inquiry and struggled to monitor each pupil's progress.

I shall be touching on themes and topics that appeared on the distant horizon as well as mapping the ground the class actually covered. The larger picture is important and it must be kept in view. I shall be showing where the pupils' knowledge remained undeveloped, as well as suggesting where their future learning might have taken them.

The notion of progress here is a broad, flexible one that seeks to incorporate the dynamic of pupils' emergent motives and interests. Learning outcomes could not be wholly prefigured because they hinged on too many complicated, intersecting lines of development. Sometimes individuals, and at other times the whole group made the running.

'Internal' developmental processes are generally hidden from direct observation, and this presents researchers with well-known difficulties. Notwithstanding such difficulties my assumption is that development might be reconstructed from appropriate evidence. The evidence presented here will typically include descriptions of episodes and incidents from lessons (drawn from a teacher's

narrative of pupils' practical activity); instances of pupils' writings; transcriptions of taped conversations; textbooks, novels, poems, posters, wall displays and more.

The work of reconstruction here chiefly resembles the historian's task. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, von Humboldt described such a task like this: '[A] network of events lies before him in apparent confusion...he must separate the necessary from the accidental, uncover the inner succession, and make visible the truly effective forces'.<sup>16</sup> The kind of historical account of Kevin's development that I am after will be a genetic one. I shall be describing a series of transformations in a pupil's understandings. But in order to picture a 'learner in history' and not merely a trans-historical, ideal one, abstracted from time and place, I shall need to trace Kevin's development as it occurred in concrete circumstances. By circumstances I mean the social realities that defined his life at the time.

Kevin was an adolescent Black male, growing up in Hackney in the early years of the Thatcher Government. In 1981, the Tory Government, fearing large-scale immigration from Hong Kong before the 'handover' to China, redefined citizenship for 'peoples of British Dependencies', including the then British citizens of Montserrat. They were given 'British Dependency', which amounted to second-class citizenship, with no rights to stay in Britain. Naturally, such political developments, as well as the national debates around immigration, national identity and citizenship that they sparked off affected Kevin's family, just as they affected the lives and outlooks of many of his classmates' families.

I must admit that a comprehensive account of the circumstances that shaped Kevin's development over four years remains a practical impossibility. Much of the detail is unrecoverable. I shall therefore be concentrating on selected episodes and critical incidents from Kevin's 'life' in Humanities lessons. Von Humboldt was characteristically sceptical about ever obtaining the historical truth of events. He was referring specifically to the tumultuous events of the French Revolution. Rather than trying to give a comprehensive, unified account of the past, he aimed 'to give a number of facts and observations to create a network of 'semiotic points of orientation. Such a network would enable the reader to visualise various 'strands' of

social reality, and the 'effective forces at work'. By selecting key episodes and incidents I aim to trace a single 'thread' that constitutes the developmental trajectory of a 'transitory learner' in history and culture, not an eternal one.<sup>17</sup>

This was an urban, racially and ethnically mixed, all-boys class, where differences in identity, culture and language figured largely. There is a peculiar dynamic, born of diversity, at work in classrooms like these ones, where boys from various backgrounds, with different starting points, work in close proximity. More often than not, they settle ways of working together over time. I want to suggest a way of thinking about such classrooms as sites of 'cultural making'.<sup>18</sup>

I use the term 'site' in two senses. First, I use it as a metaphor borrowed from archaeology.<sup>19</sup> I have in mind a notion of classroom excavation - salvaging archives, disinterring artefacts, recovering their histories, and generally sifting through the material 'remains' that made up the instructional detritus - fragments and shards, scattered across a 'pedagogic settlement'. I am interested in what such sites and artefacts can tell us of the psychological and social life that went on there. Secondly, I use 'site' as a metaphor borrowed from architecture to suggest that something new was being constructed too, something that was historically 'new in time', as Walter Benjamin puts it, 'not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now – *Jetztzeit*'.

Typically, contemporary urban classrooms like the one that I shall be describing are places where individual and community histories intersect in complicated ways. They are places where cultures meet, merge, intermingle and sometimes interpenetrate - there is always a degree of permeability. But there is imperviousness too. Sometimes cultures grate against one another. Sometimes they clash so that sudden, fierce conflicts erupt almost without warning. Individuals and groups battle over local hegemonies. There are protracted campaigns too, with long sieges during which communities eye one another suspiciously. Such developments cause friction in schools. Community-based cultures can interact in discomfiting ways. And where tensions and conflicts upset established social relations, they frequently unsettle or destabilise taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations in ways that

challenge teachers. For such reasons, social relations among the pupils – always unequal, sometimes disturbingly volatile - will be centrally important here.

Name-calling - the exchange of ritual insults that goes on furiously every day in urban schools - is symptomatic of the kind of continual, inward-facing struggles over local status (as well as boredom) that I have in mind. However, the history of such practices needs to be appreciated more widely than it is at present. What is needed is something like an historically informed ethnography of communications, and I shall come back to this later.

Paradoxically, I want to claim that urban classrooms of the kind I have just characterised can also be thought about as infinitely creative places. New ways of doing things and new ways of seeing things are continually generated, as I hope to show with Kevin's poem. By telling the story of how one boy's poem came to be written, and by tracing his writing back to the *cardres sociaux*, to concrete social *milieux*, I aim to offer a way of reading such classrooms and a way of grasping the development that goes on there. Thus, by drawing one thread I hope to show how the whole piece was woven.

\* \* \*

In the first term of their third year (November 1980) the class studied the movement of peoples as a topic in their humanities lessons.<sup>20</sup> The majority of the boys were from 'West Indian' backgrounds. Two came from Nigerian homes and two from Pakistani families. The others were mainly white Londoners, although, typically, many of these 'white Londoners' came from Irish and Jewish families. The topic, '*Why People Moved*' (00.11. 80), was approached from a 'world' perspective. Instances of migration were chosen from various geographical regions and from different historical periods. For instance, the boys looked at the colonisation of North America, the Highland clearances, the Atlantic Slave Trade and so on. Additionally, they touched on 'internal' migrations, such as the move from the countryside to the town during the industrial revolution. No single example was studied in depth because there were planned opportunities for further study later in the course. Behind such lessons lay an assumption that history, geography, social

science and literature could illuminate aspects of contemporary experience of migration, and could be taught effectively together in ways that were complementary.<sup>21</sup>

At the end of a sequence of lessons, lasting about three weeks in all, the class was given choices for written assignments. (04.12.80) They could, if they chose to, write a factually based historical account, looking at the reason why certain populations have migrated. Or, alternatively, they could write a story about people leaving their homeland to make a new start in a new country.

For the first couple of lessons, the boys wrote individually. Then, later, at the redrafting stage, they formed writer-editor partnerships. Up to this point, most of the class had regarded redrafting as an imposition. Usually it involved producing little more than a 'fair copy'. But on this occasion, the activity of editing each other's drafts proved a successful new departure. The strengths of redrafting from the perspective of 'process writing' with this class have been described elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> Here I need a broader canvas than the analysis of 'process writing' affords.

I shall be concentrating first on a writer-editor partnership between two boys, Kevin and Sunday. As I have mentioned already, Kevin's family came from Monserrat in the Eastern Caribbean, though Kevin was actually born in London. He left Hackney when he was nine (1976) and went to live in a village in Monserrat with his grandmother. He didn't stay there long, only eight months in all, but while he was there, he attended the local school. His poem, *Piece of the Past* recalls his time there.

Back in London, Kevin quickly acquired a reputation at his secondary school for being a 'difficult' pupil. Eleven, rising twelve, he was often at the storm centre of the class, where he reigned supreme at trading insults: 'runnin'' or 'cussin'', as it was called then - 'dissin'' as it's sometimes called now.<sup>23</sup> He was generally popular with his classmates, though not universally so with all of his teachers.

Characteristically, Kevin was quick to challenge authority whenever he detected inconsistency or unfairness in the way he or the rest of the class were treated. The way that he challenged teachers' authority (as well as the 'runnin'') would lead him and, all too frequently, the whole class, into trouble.

In the aftermath to one particularly destructive episode, David, one of Kevin's classmates, wrote candidly to his teacher, complaining about a string of discouraging lessons. In his piece, '*What Goes Wrong*' he objects indignantly to Kevin's bullying. All in all, David paints an unattractive, but fairly accurate, picture of the way things often went. He writes:

French lessons in general is being spoiled day after day buy real trouble makers. Namely Kevin. Kevin can never seem to mind his own business, several times he has to be sent out because of this, and his argumentative spirit...when Robert comes in late or says something kevin comes out with a reply like 'your early' or 'dig up up [*clear off*] you silly tramp can't even afford school uniform'...then Ejeovi gets involved and tries to stop things from going wrong and ends up in an argument and kick ups [*fight*s]. Then again Kevin would come out with sudenly 'what you get for christmas L [*David's surname*] or when was jesus born? Your cousin said october the first?' Also the sarcastic comments by Kevin in particular about answers, ones way of speech, ones clothes or physical apearence and ones wearing of full school uniform including ties should be stopped...(The original grammar and spelling has been retained). (06. 10. 80)

David was a Jehovah's Witness. As a matter of religious observance, his family did not give or receive gifts at Christmas, and this became a source of jibes directed at him chiefly by Kevin. Kevin was not the only one to bully David about his religion (as we shall see), but David resented Kevin's jibes and taunts especially.

Another form that the taunting took among a section of the Black pupils - significantly, it was a form of taunting that was not open to white pupils to join in - was 'runnin'' and 'cussin'' based on skin colour. This particular form of 'runnin'' operated against a background of an assumed correlation between skin colour and social status, and what is more it has a telling history. The novelist, George Lamming, describes how it worked in the Barbados when he was growing up there in the thirties:

No one was as black as Boy Blue. Trumper was what we called fair skin, or light skin, or best of all clear skin. Boy blue was simply black. His blackness made us laugh. Every child in the village had a stock response for the colour, black. We had taken in like our daily bread a kind of infectious amusement about the colour black. There was no extreme comparison. No black boy wanted to be white, but it was true that no black boy liked the idea of being

black. Brown skin was a satisfactory compromise, and brown skin meant a mixture of white and black.<sup>24</sup>

Colour, says Lamming, could be used as a weapon. But it was more complicated than that: 'No black boy wanted to be white, but it was true that no black boy liked the idea of being black '

Historically, the practice of name-calling based on skin colour among Black people is part of the legacy of slavery, and it needs to be understood as such. And it goes beyond the Caribbean. Such practices are widespread among Afro-Americans in the USA as well as among West Indians. However, it is also a way of speaking about your own kind, and it can be used creatively to mark membership. Name-calling can be an expression of intimacy or of solidarity as well as contempt.

The origins of demeaning social judgements based on skin colour lie in the harsh realities of plantation society and its aftermath, where the differentiated strata of the social 'pyramid' ascended, from darker at the base (field slaves) to lighter complexion (house slaves and people of mixed race) at the apex.

One callously inventive instance of this practice among Kevin's friends was directed at Audley, whose family background was Jamaican. Audley was a weak student with low status among his peers. He was graphically nicknamed 'Pirelli' by the others, as in the following expression: 'Im face fava [*resembles*] Pirelli [*tyre*]'. I shall come back to Audley, and to the name-calling, later.

Kevin's editing-partner was Sunday. Sunday's parents came from Nigeria to London, where he was born (1967). He spoke Yoruba, though English was his 'stronger' language. Sunday's family intended to return to Nigeria as soon as he and his younger brother, Babatunde, who was also at the school, had completed their education. Sunday shared Kevin's reputation for mischief, though if anything he was the more reckless of the two. Whereas Kevin might lead the whole class into trouble, Sunday's exploits were usually regarded as individual '*bravura*' performances - a

one-man show rather than an ensemble piece. I should make it plain, too, that they chose each other as writer-editor partners, not because they were friends - in point of fact, they were not - but rather because they both wanted to make slavery the focus of their writing.

At the end of the first lesson (December, 1980) the boys' first drafts were collected and then photocopied. A week later they got their writing back (unmarked) plus a photocopy of their partner's writing. They were then asked to do an editing job on the photocopy, in consultation with their partner. Later, photocopies were swapped back, and the original writer could incorporate such suggestions, corrections, improvements as he agreed with into a second draft.

Kevin and Sunday made steady progress as writers. Together they gradually increased their knowledge of the forms and structures of the writing system (Richmond, 1982; Hardcastle et al., 1984). However, my focus here is not so much the writers' developing mastery of the conventions of the writing system as progress of a broader kind. Over the weeks they worked together, the two boys arrived at a remarkable understanding of their topic, plantation slavery. They might have arrived at the same level of understanding individually, we cannot say, but as it was their understanding was a collaborative achievement. Moreover, it was driven partly by the conversations and arguments that went on continuously among their classmates up to and beyond the time of writing.

Here's a paragraph from Sunday's first draft. The original spellings, punctuation and syntax have been retained. No title was given:

*The earliet people to go to America in the 1600 were the British some were Quakers or Roman catholics there thought that in america they would be free to practise their religion  
Other people hoped to become rich in America. There was plenty of space and the calmate was good for growing sugar cotton and tobacco. In america were irish, Dutch, French protestants and swedish  
In the 1700's Scoltish and Irish people were driven off their land sometimes the British took the land I mean the government. Between 1610 and 1810 there was a steady stream of Africans coming to America by force as slaves working on plantations. The plantations were owend by English absentee landlords who were making an enormouse profit. some plantation owners wanted to work they slaves to death.*

*Why did people move because of better prospects and job opport and good money. The Jews moved because the Germans took them out so the had to new place some of them went to America and brought wealth to the counry*  
(04. 12. 80)

Plainly, there were difficulties with Sunday's writing. He needed help and that duly came. (Hardcastle et al. 1984) But without pausing over these difficulties I shall move on quickly to a moment when *second* drafts have been exchanged and the editing partnership is in full swing.

So far, Kevin has been attending to fairly minor features of Sunday's writing. And Sunday has already incorporated many of his suggestions into his piece. '*Scoltish*' was amended to '*Scottish*', '*work they slaves to death*' was changed to '*work their slaves to death*', and so on. And Kevin attempted to strengthen Sunday's expression. For instance, he changed '*the british took the land I mean the government*' to '*sometimes the lord chucked them off the land*'. Importantly, though, he included closely parallel sentences in his own final version, and it is fair to claim that they became joint authors as well as co-editors of their texts. Intriguingly, the term, '*absentee landlords*' appears in both boys' second drafts. Where did it come from? The short answer is that it came from a school textbook that Kevin used to gather information, *The People Who Came*.<sup>25</sup>

*The People Who Came* was a key resource for Humanities lessons. The class continually referred to it. Thirty or so copies were stacked in piles on a window ledge whenever the books were not in use. So they were readily available for the class to borrow or to browse. *The People Who Came* was written by West Indian academics and teachers for use in schools in the West Indies. The historian and poet, Edward Brathwaite was the series editor. The series aimed to provide an historical overview of the Caribbean, with a detailed picture of histories of the various peoples and cultures that made up the region. The story of *The People Who Came* was told from a West Indian perspective, but it fitted well with the London syllabus that aimed to study the complicated movements of the various peoples who make up British society.

The term that Kevin and Sunday picked up on, '*absent landlords*', was used particularly in the chapters dealing with slavery. It is introduced in the section about 'Plantation Slavery': 'The 'whites (European planters and settlers) consisted usually of the plantation-owner and his family (though sometimes he was 'absent', preferring to live in Europe), the overseer (whose job it was to look after the estate) and the book keeper.'<sup>26</sup> The term occurs again shortly after:

The wealthiest planters also preferred to live in Europe... They usually left an attorney behind to look after their estates; returning from time to time to inspect their property for themselves. The practice of absenteeism was most common in the British islands because during the period of slavery these were the most prosperous places.'<sup>27</sup>

And later: 'But life was not all disease, brutality and *absenteeism*.'<sup>28</sup> I need to establish that 'instructional materials', (the history textbook) provided Kevin and Sunday with terms like '*absentee landlord*', and to register the fact that they sometimes read the chapters concerning plantation slavery independently as well as with the rest of the class at other times. Up to now, I have been concentrating on the written text. The special significance of drawings and illustrations will be particularly important in the story of Kevin's development.'<sup>29</sup>

The concept of 'absentee landlords' is a difficult one for twelve, rising thirteen-year-olds to grasp. The class had met the concept of feudal landlords early on in their humanities lessons (January, 1980) while they were studying England in the Middle Ages. The teacher had explained (04.01.80) that feudal landowners sometimes owned land in different parts of the country and sometimes they held estates in France. He also explained that during the Middle Ages peasants were legally tied to the land and that their produce belonged to the landlord.

I want to revisit one of these earlier lessons briefly, not especially because the term 'absentee landlord' is mentioned (it isn't), but rather to suggest how it related to the kinds of issues that interested the class. Additionally I want to show how the boys' understanding of the concept had bearing on their work together later on.

Here is a moment from a lesson on the Middle Ages that took place in February 1980 (06.02.80). The whole class took part in a role-play exercise in which representatives from four factions (lords and merchants, guildsmen, churchmen and peasants) are met to discuss problems that face them all. During the exercise Kevin, in role as a guildsman, sided with the 'starving peasants' against their 'feudal lords'. The interaction among these eleven, rising twelve year-old boys, which was taped, was fairly 'robust' and consequently not always easy to follow.

The discussion leading up to the particular interaction I want to look at has been around the price of food. Simon (a white Londoner), in role as a lord, argues that it is up to the tradesmen to fix the prices fairly.

SIMON (*lord*): I think it's up to the tradesmen who get the goods to say how much they cost for them. The peasants can't worry too much 'cause they're working in the fields, they must take some produce from the fields, and sell it to the tradesmen, and eat some of the ... whatever they...Some of the crops... whatever they get themselves, so they can live. It's just up to the tradesmen, what they want to do. Know what I mean?

KEVIN (*guildsman*): We could sell...these foreign foods at fair prices, but the merchants here, they're selling it to us at such a rocketing price, we have to sell it back to you at the same price. So really we can't do anything about it, or we're going to have a great loss, and they're the ones who are going to get richer everyday from the goods they bring back from other countries.

*(The debate continues at a furious pace for about a quarter of an hour. Then Kevin comes back to the topic of prices)*

KEVIN: From what I see here... the peasants are working too hard and these lords here...coming back to prices, how can this fat lord here just drop prices just like that? It's the merchants here what are buying it [food]...buying it...or getting it from foreign countries [and] selling it at high prices, so we can sell it to you, we can't do no different about high prices, so we have to sell it on to you, we can't do no different about it. How can he drop? And if he drop the price, his friends her won't agree with it. And if the merchant do, then the taxes of the peasants and us will go up. And why do we have to pay taxes? We've got our own house, and yet we still have to pay taxes.

*(Pause while Kevin's comments are taken on board)*

PAUL(*churchman*) : Let me put it this way. The lord made...God made lords and churches and made rich people and peasants, and things which is tough for the peasants is just tough luck. God made it that way. (06.02.80)

Kevin struggles to formulate the systematic nature of pricing – the economic principles, if you like. To this he brings concerns over social inequalities and exploitation. From the perspectives of the history teacher, his concerns appear worryingly anachronistic. He hasn't yet built up a historically convincing view of the relations among landowners, merchants and peasants in the middle-ages. Rather he is trying desperately to visualise a picture of how the market works. ('It's the merchants here what are buying it [food]...buying it...or getting it from foreign countries [and] selling it at high prices, so we can sell it to you, we can't do no different about high prices, so we have to sell it on to you, we can't do no different about it...') The important point here is that later, he approached slavery in a similar manner - as an economic system. Crucially, Kevin's emergent interest in economic considerations is what distinguishes his grasp of the master-slave relation from Sunday's. This interest became extremely important for the way his understanding of the roots of racism developed.

The class met the concept of 'absentee landlords' again during their work on the Highland clearances, and yet again in the context of the Irish potato famine, where the teacher explained that the owners of Irish estates often lived in England. Kevin saw parallels among various instances of the unjust treatment of tenants by landowners whose lives were remote from the people on their estates, yet whose destinies the estate owners controlled. Independently, (the teacher didn't dwell on it) Kevin linked the brutality and exploitation associated with such instances of the arbitrary power of feudal lords over peasants' lives, with the 'absentee' plantation owners in the West Indies.<sup>30</sup>

Let's go back to the writer-editor partnership between Kevin and Sunday that took place in December (11.12. 80), ten months after the role-play exercise. Here is a moment where Kevin focuses on the economic 'logic' of slavery. They have just exchanged second drafts and are busily engaged in making suggestions for alterations and improvements to one another's writing. They move back and forth

between the conventions of the writing system and the substance of their topic. But above all they concentrate on meaning, which, from time to time, they pause to clarify. All the while, the routine business of trading insults ('runnin') and rivalry plays across the surface of their exchanges. (Kevin invariably gains the upper hand). But what grips them, and what focuses their concentration, is the account of exploitation, injustice, greed and brutality that is unfolding at the core of their topic. I shall quote the sequence in full. (Where the boys vocalise written text the words are printed in bold.):

SUNDAY: (*scornfully*) S - - ! (*Kevin's surname*) What did you put here?

KEVIN: (*with mock politeness*) Pardon?

SUNDAY: Didn't you think it...?

KEVIN: (*takes up Sunday's paper*) What? (*reading*) **plantation owners worked...worked their ...cross off... Slaves to death because it was cheaper to work them.. You know?** (*Returns to his own draft muttering*) '**twenty four million**'.

SUNDAY: Now listen to this then ... Look S - -, let's return to facts. I can hear...  
...(indignantly) That's copyright!

KEVIN: (*writing on his own draft – responds with mock affront to Sunday's accusation of plagiarism*) Oh my God!

SUNDAY: (*with feigned incredulity*) You done it again S - -!  
(*They work silently for a several minutes*).

SUNDAY: (*whispering*) S---, what you think of my writing, right? **It was ...** (*He turns back to Kevin's writing and objects abruptly and loudly in an appalled tone*). You took that out of the book!

KEVIN: (*with feigned lack of interest*) Uh?

SUNDAY: (*with mock incredulity*) You did!

KEVIN: Uh?

SUNDAY: You did!

KEVIN: (*He ignores the accusation of plagiarism and takes Sunday's script once more*) I read it to you again... OK? ... **Plantation owners worked their slaves to death.** (*Writes on Sunday's paper*).

SUNDAY: (*Genuinely concerned*) How 'm I spell that, all right?

KEVIN: (*Reading Sunday's script*)... **because it was cheaper to...**(*pointing to the words on the page with his pen*) **to work, to ... to work them to a ... to work... to do ...**

SUNDAY: *(Not quite following, impatiently)* Help me with that later!

KEVIN: *(Checks back over Sunday's text)... to work them to... (sighs, pauses, crosses out 'work them to death', which he had written in on Sunday's draft and writes in) buy new slaves.*

SUNDAY: Finish it off... *(With the air of master-to-servant)* I jus' goin' have a little nap.

KEVIN: It won't be a very long one.

SUNDAY: Wha' man? You finished that off quick!  
*(Kevin passes the edited script to Sunday and returns to his own draft once more).*

SUNDAY: *(Takes up his newly edited draft, repeating the words softly to himself)* **It was cheaper to ... it was cheaper to buy more slaves ... umm ... new slaves...***(He pauses to look at what Kevin is writing. He follows Kevin's text closely with visible satisfaction.)*

KEVIN: *(Kevin writes)* **Some slaves, newly imported to Jamaica, immediately escaped to the Blue Mountains and set up their own culture. They called themselves the Maroons. 'Maroons' comes from a French patois word ...** How you spell 'patois'?

SUNDAY: *(Responding instantly)* Don't know. *(Then, shouting)* Sir! Sir! Sir!

JH: *(From the other side of the room, crossly)* How do you spell what?

SUNDAY: Patois.

JH *(Joins the pair)* P-A-T-O-I-S.

KEVIN *(writes and vocalises)* **patois word.**

I want to pause over the substance of what the two boys are talking about, the history of plantation slavery. And I want to ask whether they were occupied with the same things. For instance, does Sunday see a material link between plantation owners striving to make a profit, and the brutal practice of working plantation slaves to death? Has he appreciated (in the way that Kevin seems to) the commercial 'logic' of the plantation owners' 'dilemma'? (Should they work the slaves to death and 're-stock', or should they 'breed' slaves on the plantation, and thus reduce the expense of importing new ones?) It appears that Sunday sees merely contingent instances of European racism and greed. This matters because, on this view, racism is a cause of slavery, not an outcome. The ramifications of the answer to this problem would be difficult to exaggerate. Therefore I shall say something more

about the way the history of the origins of racism has been debated among historians in recent years.

Historians have been divided both over the question of the ideological origins of slavery, and over the role of 'race prejudice' in establishing the plantation system. In the case of the USA evidence suggests that in slave-holding states like Virginia, Negroes were not 'listed' or treated as 'chattel slaves' in the first instance in the way that most nineteenth-century historians assumed they were. Rather, Africans were initially treated like European indentured labourers. So how and why did they come to be treated differently later on? The underlying question is this: 'Did slavery come before race 'prejudice', or did race 'prejudice' issue from slavery?' Our concern here is with the evidential bases of the answers that historians have given in recent years.

After the Second World War, with the increasing tensions in race relations in the USA, and, later, with the civil rights movement, nineteenth-century theories about the origins of slavery were substantially revised. Fresh documentary evidence was offered to suggest that Negroes were not regarded as belonging to an inherently 'degraded' or 'inferior' race until sometime in the 1660s, when they became 'chattel property' in law. Therefore it has been important to ask: 'Why did such a change occur at that moment and not before?' As one Black American historian has argued,

Rather than slavery causing 'prejudice' or vice versa, they seem rather to have generated each other. Both were, after all, twin aspects of a general debasement of the Negro. Slavery and 'prejudice' may have been equally cause and effect, continuously reacting upon each other, dynamically joining hands to hustle the Negro down the road to complete degradation.<sup>31</sup>

Day-to-day perceptions of difference – differences of *complexion* especially - were somehow distorted and regularised into a rationale underpinning theories of racial inferiority.

Linguistic analyses of contemporary documents revealed shifts in terminology and what is more, they showed how attitudes changed towards Negroes in the second half of the seventeenth century. Structuralist researchers traced changes in terminology by looking particularly at binary 'opposites': *Christians* and *pagans*,

*servants and captives, English and Negroes*, and - after 1680 - *whites and blacks*. Subsequently, structural analyses of such terms were linked to other kinds of historical evidence to determine the changing importance of religious beliefs in making such social distinctions. It emerged that words like *Indian* and *Negro* began to function within an evolving system of racial classification. Such descriptive terms appear in various forms of documentation – inventories and legal proceedings and so forth - and they can be dated accurately. Previously, colonists had referred to other races as *savages* and *pagans*. Crucially, after 1680, Englishmen in the colonies stopped describing themselves as *Christians* and began to refer to themselves as *white*. The historian's task was to uncover the relations among changes in the discourses of slavery, especially racial classification, and to relate them to other developments such as change in the legal status of slaves or the volume of slave traffic between West Africa and America.

Discussions around historical research methods were hardly on Kevin and Sunday's horizon. They were plotting their own course at this stage and making discoveries as they went along. (This is partly what I mean by the phrase 'developmental rhythms'). But explicit instruction in school had its place too. It became important for their teacher to envisage where their studies might lead them, and how their knowledge might be developed within the larger picture of the history of slavery.

The kind of knowledge I am calling 'school knowledge' here is both 'theorised' and 'systematic'. It is organised according to principles that derive chiefly from the professional activities of specialising historians. In this way official historical knowledge belongs to a body of 'scientific' work that is significantly different from everyday knowledge. Essentially, its status is judged by academic standards upheld among accredited historians through public debate. Specialising 'scientists' make a distinction between what we might call 'lay understandings' ('folk' or 'community-based' knowledge), and the theorised, systematically ordered knowledge of disciplinary enquiry. Sometimes 'scientific' knowledge and 'folk' knowledges overlap. But, equally, they sometimes clash.<sup>32</sup> Teachers and pupils are positioned and constrained in complicated ways in all of this. No individual possesses the complete picture.

Kevin was working according to the rhythm of his own development – that is, according to his particular, inward, intellectual and imaginative drives and needs. But crucially he did so inside a framework of school-based knowledge and school-based instruction. However, in one telling instance he got hold of the wrong end of the stick, as we shall see.

What I'm calling Kevin's 'drives' and 'needs' arose from the totality of his social situation. By 'drives' and 'needs' I don't mean metaphysical ones. I am not speaking about the essential properties of the 'human psyche' or 'the human condition'. Rather, I mean the particular 'drives' and 'needs' that arose from his concrete circumstances. Kevin wanted to know about the history of West Indians like himself. Moreover, while he learned more about this history his perceptions of his situation altered. Also he began to see Sunday in a new light and, as a consequence of this he related to him differently.

It was sometimes difficult for Kevin's teacher to plan the next step because it was hard to judge when to intervene and when to hold back. For the teacher to point prematurely to a link between plantation slavery and merchant capitalism and then go on to analyse the historical evolution of racism might have been to miscalculate the direction of Kevin's expanding interests. Such teacher initiatives always risk underestimating (or indeed overestimating) the extent to which students have (or have not) consolidated the 'scientific' concepts they had met so far. Forcing the pace by introducing new information might overload the student or disrupt his way of making sense of things. There was always a risk of robbing him of the initiative. Students need a measure of control over the flow of new information. Besides, as Vygotsky argued so powerfully in the thirties, teaching is only effective when it points to the road for development.<sup>33</sup> To be told something successfully, to borrow James Britton's apt phrase, Kevin had to have somewhere to put it.<sup>34</sup>

The commercial nature of the slave owners' decision making was precisely what Kevin sought to clarify. Thus he crossed out Sunday's original phrase, '*work them to death*' and substituted '*buy new slaves*'. A moment later, he extended the original sentence, so that it read, '*it was cheaper to buy more slaves*'. After, when Sunday

read his edited script, he also started to grasp how commercial interests governed plantation slavery as an economic *system*. Only at a much later stage would they discover how commercial interests were instrumental in ending it.

By making the connection between 'costs' and 'profits' explicit, and by showing how the slave owners were engaged in commercial decision making, Kevin not only consolidated what he had already begun to understand for himself, he also prepared the ground for future advances in his own knowledge. While he edited Sunday's script, he developed the logic of his analysis. And what followed depended, crucially, on his growing appreciation of the fact that slaves that were no longer capable of working in the cane fields were continually replaced with newly imported Africans right up to the time it was no longer *commercially* viable to continue shipping in new 'stock'. Indeed, at one stage in the Caribbean and the American South (the system worked differently in Latin America), the calculation was often that it was cheaper to 'restock' than to 'breed' new slaves. But this didn't last. Later, when the Black population of 'unseasoned' slaves grew to outnumber the whites (and people of mixed-race), recent arrivals from West Africa, who were not yet 'acclimatised' to the discipline of the plantation regime proved increasingly difficult to control. Significantly, they were also more *costly* to govern. Slave rebellions became more frequent and they became increasingly expensive to put down. Eventually, large-scale plantation slavery lost its economic viability, especially when the market prices for sugar, cotton and other staples fluctuated because of unpredictable trade cycles associated with political events in Europe.

Kevin's second draft marked a significant advance in his 'scientific' understanding of the history of slavery. In his first draft he had written, '*some slaves, newly imported to Jamaica immediately escaped to the Blue Mountains and set up their own culture*'. (By now, both boys had discovered that the Maroon culture of Jamaica was essentially West African). In his second draft Kevin wrote, '*The Western Africans (mainly Western Africans) brought their superb farming skills*'. When he added the adjective, '*superb*', he showed that he had appreciated an appalling paradox: Africans contributed the necessary expertise in tropical farming needed to grow tobacco and sugar cane in the early years, when a 'plantation' merely meant an

estate were crops where raised. The question arises then as to what extent the commercial exploitation of the Caribbean region by Europeans made possible by Africans' technical knowledge.

Kevin grasped that the West Africans were the bearers of an agricultural 'technology' and that farming was the economic basis of the ancestral culture. Once he had understood this functional connection between traditional know-how and the plantation system, he gained new insight into the nature of West African history and culture before Africans were shipped off to the Caribbean.. Previously, he had shown little interest in (or regard for) African culture and civilisation as such. Indeed, in London classrooms like this one, there was no special affinity among West Indians and Africans. Kevin and Sunday were positioned differently in relation to the history that was unfolding. The new insight cut through their routine, mocking exchanges, Kevin recognised and *openly acknowledged* the substance of Sunday's heritage culture. In doing so, of course, he also acknowledged (or conceded) openly the fact that the African heritage was also, partly, his own.

Sunday arrived at new levels of understanding through his collaboration with Kevin. We can't say for sure whether he would have arrived at the same destination by himself. But in the event, he got there with Kevin's help. Together the two boys started to co-construct a discourse that provided a foundation for future learning. They were taking first steps towards grasping the history of economic exploitation in West Africa and the Caribbean by Europeans that grew with the Atlantic slave trade. Crucially, such understandings were developed within the instructional framework that the school's Humanities syllabus afforded. And a key feature of their progress together was the degree of control that they had over the pace and the direction of their work together. Crucially, they were able to regulate the flow of new information, and what is more they had the space to fit it into emergent, but as yet unstable, frameworks of understanding. Given that their teacher supervised their progress and that he provided the overall orientation of the work, and given that he intervened from time to time to guide them and to offer additional resources, Kevin and Sunday found the framework broad enough to follow their interests and deepen their commitment to their project.

But in certain ways their understandings of the history remained undeveloped, and I want to indicate how this was so. Once Kevin grasped the idea that Maroon communities reconstituted West African culture in the New World, and that the Maroons successfully resisted the British, he began to see three centuries of Maroon society as three centuries of 'continuous resistance'. He quickly connected the Maroons to the Rastafarian movement in rural Jamaica and to reggae music.

History, unfortunately, offers a less heroic picture. In reality, the Maroons who had established their own communities frequently collaborated with plantation owners by tracking down and recapturing escaped slaves.<sup>35</sup> Such considerations could have constituted an important corrective to the 'heroic' story that Kevin was weaving. In the event, however, it did not, largely because the teacher had not yet understood the historical realities for himself.

Kevin and Sunday were also growing interested in the languages of the Caribbean. For instance, Kevin wrote about the French *patois* derivation of the word *maroon* (he wrote, '*maroon comes from the French word*'). Where did this information come from? Intriguingly, his textbook, *The People Who Came*, offered a different derivation: '*Maroon*', it said, 'is derived from the Spanish word *cimarron*, meaning 'wild' or 'untamed'.<sup>36</sup> This is a small point, perhaps, but it suggests the way that Kevin was using more than one source, and that his understanding was developing 'unofficially', that is independently of what was offered in class. Moreover, his interest in the roots of Caribbean words was (potentially) connectable to the kind of historical analysis of terminology that I mentioned earlier, associated with the change in attitude towards Africans in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Several weeks after their work on migrations, the whole class read together *Young Warriors*, by the Jamaican novelist, Vic Reid<sup>37</sup>, in which a group of Maroon boys, after a series of adventures, save their mountain village from destruction by British soldiers. The story, which evokes and celebrates the traditional folklore of the African Maroons for young readers in the Caribbean *Young Warriors* was an apt choice for Kevin and Sunday for the way it chimed with many of their own 'discoveries'. Moreover, it opened up the possibility of going on to read *New Day*

(1949)<sup>38</sup>, a path-breaking novel for adult readers, written by the same author. *New Day* (which was also by now a possible learning destination on the distant horizon) traces the development of Jamaican society, from the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, to the new constitution of 1944. Reid has said about *New Day*, that it aims 'to tell the Jamaicans who they are, remind [them]... where they came from to show them that the then self-government we were aiming for, and the then change in the constitution that we were getting was not entirely a gift'.<sup>39</sup> For Kevin, it could have been a way of connecting his interest in the history of resistance to colonial rule, the setting up of Maroon societies and slave rebellions with contemporary social and political issues in the Caribbean.

But some way down the road, as I have already hinted, these two young Black Londoners would meet a bleak corrective to the 'heroic' version of plantation slavery as the story of resistance and rebellion that they were constructing together.<sup>40</sup> They would have to engage with the fact of West African complicity in the slave trade. The Caribbean historian and political activist, Walter Rodney, (who was assassinated in Guyana in 1979) offers the following account:

[For] nearly the whole of the period of the Atlantic slave trade in West Africa (and East Africa also), there were many Africans who were prepared to sell their fellow men in exchange for European manufactures such as cloth, pots and pans, beads and fire-arms. With the exception of the Portuguese in Angola, the Europeans never went inland to obtain captives. In fact the Africans on the coast prevented the Europeans from going into the interior, so that they themselves could bring down the slaves and receive as many European goods as possible. It must be emphasised that the rulers in West Africa were in full political control during the period of the Atlantic slave trade... To a large extent therefore, the Europeans conducted their slave trading on the West African coast under conditions laid down by the Africans. (Walter Rodney, *West Africa and the Slave Trade*, East African Publishing House, 1967, p.7).

Kevin and Sunday did not touch on this issue at the time. Like some of the other considerations I have mentioned, it was barely visible on their (expanding) horizon. But other students at the school did touch on it. Here is a moment from a taped conversation between an older student, Derek (age seventeen), with Edward Brathwaite, who besides being historian and poet, you will recall, was also the series

editor of the textbook, *The People Who Came*. Derek's father, who was a musician and a radical spirit, came from Georgetown, Guyana. He probably read Walter Rodney in the seventies, and the relation between father and son is an important (hidden) dimension in the background to this exchange. Brathwaite is speaking about the significance of Akan (one of the ancestral languages of modern Ghana) for his epic poem, *Masks*, when Derek breaks in:

BRATHWAITE: I think that's the idea of all poetry to lead you into something else, but before that I would say, if you don't have the Akan background, which very few people have, I hope that it doesn't destroy the poem. I think that the Akan Background will add to it, but the poem as a poem should still stand ... At school, when I read Eliot, for instance, I had to start reading about *The Golden Bough*, and the images Eliot presented. I did it because I was interested, but I also did it because it was on the syllabus, it was demanded. And they had books available, which helped, like Gardener's *The Art of T S Eliot*. But in any culture when you come upon a poem in your own language, that is different...

DEREK: You said that one of the aims of the poem, or one of the aspects of the poem was a celebration of Akan culture. But one of the things that you seem to have done, that seems to me very courageous, is that you don't seem afraid to look at aspects of African culture that you think perhaps are culpable. I mean the sections where it says, '*fever of quick sales rock the branches of bone*'. As if the corruption of slavery affected the whole culture ... the involvement of Africans themselves in the slave culture. How did you feel about taking that aspect on at a time when, for a large number of people in the Caribbean Africa still had a very bad image. It must have involved a tremendous amount of heart searching.

BRATHWAITE: I agree. Yes, it took me a long time, but I had to do it because unless you do that, people would remain in a romantic relationship with Africa, which is no good to anyone. 'Cos the whole point of the *Trilogy* (*The Arrivants*) ... is to ask 'Why is it that that the slave trade was possible, how is it that fifty million people were exported to the New World?' 'What was the African resistance to that?' 'What was the African Attitude?' And although it is clear that Europe has to take a great deal of the blame, some blame must also accrue to the native culture, right and therefore my concern is, 'What is it at that moment in time that made it vulnerable to that intrusion?'

When Derek challenged Brathwaite about the way he had chosen to approach African complicity with European slave traders, quoting the line from *Masks* –

‘fever of quick sales rock the branches of bone’ – the teacher was startled. (He hadn’t picked up on the line’s significance). The atmosphere in the room chilled. It was a question that a white teacher could not have asked comfortably without arousing suspicion. However, Brathwaite was interested in the issues the question raised and he responded encouragingly in a way that welcomed Derek’s challenge.

There is no direct evidence to connect Derek’s ideas about slavery with Kevin’s work, beyond the fact that he belonged to the same socio-cultural *milieu*. They knew each other, though Derek was slightly older, and they were both prominent figures in the school’s Black peer culture. But a connection existed nevertheless. Ideas like these ones circulated in classrooms and outside them. Sometimes the ideas stemmed from conversations with parents or older siblings. Indeed, this circulation of ideas went on most of the time without teachers’ knowledge or approval. It was a powerful aspect of the intellectual culture of the school and the ideas were an important dimension of the social *milieu*.

Like Derek, Kevin and Sunday grew to *care* passionately about their history. Emotional as well as conceptual development - affect as well as cognition – was involved. What these boys felt about slavery - and what they felt about each other when they were studying it - mattered a great deal to them. Yet it is difficult to say concretely exactly *what* Kevin felt, because his feelings were not open to direct observation.

While he was editing Sunday’s piece and redrafting his own Kevin broke off to say, ‘You know?’ The tone was numbing. A moment earlier he had been teasing Sunday – playing the teacher, pretending to be unimpressed by Sunday’s writing and deliberately withholding praise because he guessed that Sunday wanted his approval. It was a way of staying on top. Then he intervened. Sunday had originally written ‘*absentee landlords who were making a enormos profit. Some plantation owners worked their slaves to death*’ in his first draft. At Kevin’s suggestion, he changed it to ‘*some plantation owners worked their slaves to death because it was cheaper to buy new slaves*’. Kevin read Sunday’s amended draft approvingly. And when he said aloud, ‘You know?’- [‘Do] you know what I mean?’, ‘Wouldn’t you know it?’ ‘I

could have guessed as much'.] Kevin was making a powerful evaluative comment. He was not asking Sunday whether he had followed the logic of the argument (that profit seeking among plantation owners led to the practice of 'restocking'). The utterance was not addressed to Sunday at all. Rather, it expressed powerful feelings – feelings of indignation, anger, sadness, disbelief, disgust and bitterness that I can only guess at. As a form of utterance 'You know?' solicited a common evaluation of the total situation, including the present condition of the descendants of slaves. Immediately after, he took up his own script and wrote '*twenty-four million*', repeating the number aloud. But it's hard to be sure what he felt. So while I want to leave open *what* he felt, I want to insist that *something* had touched him to the core. Kevin and Sunday went on to borrow books on related topics and, as we shall see, Kevin's interest and independent research led him to reconsider his time in Montserrat. This reconsideration led to writing the poem, *Piece of the Past*.

\* \* \*

Between December, 1980 and March 1981 the class studied more topics from the Caribbean, among them, Toussaint l'Ouverture's short-lived Black Empire in San Domingo. They touched upon the rise of the labour movement during the inter-war years and from the Cold War era, they studied the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>41</sup> Over time, Sunday grew more assertive about his Nigerian background. Sometimes his assertions provoked angry responses, and often they irritated other members of the class. In an altered climate, some boys grew openly resistant to the inclusion of Black history in the Humanities syllabus. And a handful grew mistrustful of the supposed aims behind the changes to the traditional curriculum. In a short space, the work on Black history had had an unforeseen impact on the social relations in the class, especially where issues of local status – the 'natural' pecking order – were at stake. In the following section I shall be looking closely at some of these unforeseen developments among the whole group.

In their Humanities lessons the class was regularly divided into two groups for a double period once a week. Half the class did drama, and the other half worked on

various topics with one of their Humanities teachers. The two halves of the class alternated. Talk was an important feature of the 'non-drama' work, and class discussions were regularly videotaped. The following account is based on a transcription of part of a discussion that was recorded in March 1981. (03.04.1981) (Sunday and Kevin did not take part). The main speakers in this sequence are: Ricky, a white Londoner with a Jewish background; David, whose family came from Trinidad; and Simon, a white student who came from a long-settled, 'labour-voting' East End family. Importantly, too, as I mentioned earlier, David's family belonged to the Jehovah's Witness Church. Nominally, the topic for discussion was Standard English, which had been a focus for recent work in class. Initially, the discussion went according to plan. Then, after a short break (during which the boys' conversation was not recorded), things took an unexpected turn.

RICKY: Yeah, sir. When we like, there does seem a topic where there's a sort of white person's view and a black person's view, then you get a lot of people and they always argue and like. Because like Sunday, right, sir,

TEACHER: Yes?

RICKY: He's always saying how bad Britain ... that is ... but he doesn't say it ... he wouldn't say it to W... because he counts W... when he's talking like that as a West Indian person. But when you're in like a normal class he counts him as what he is, English like. You know?

TEACHER: Yeah?

RICKY: (*inaudible*)...in an English country. But when you get a topic like that he starts saying about England and the crises it's in, and Nigeria is doing so well for itself and things like that, which is probably true but you don't ... he wouldn't say it to, um, like W...or David or etc. He'll say it to a white person because he thinks that because you're white you've got .... er ....um ..... you're disagreeing with him. Because you're British.

SIMON: What, so he's trying to be better than the white person?

RICKY: Yes. He's trying to say that ...

SIMON: Black is better than white. Nigeria is better than England.

RICKY:        Yes.

Ricky was addressing the teacher when he remarked that the introduction of controversial issues in Humanities lessons (slavery) somehow divides the class along racial lines. Implicitly, he was reminding the teacher of his responsibility for maintaining good race relations among the class members. Ricky was conscious of the way that some of the Black students in Humanities classes claim multiple identities for themselves. And he resented the way that Sunday's criticism of Britain was polarising Black and white students, both in and out of class. Simon sums up his argument: 'So he's (Sunday) trying to be better than the white person?' However, Ricky, is treading warily. His manner suggests that he is keen to present himself as the 'reasonable' commentator.

Then David takes up the argument. Tellingly, he refers back to an incident from their shared past. He recalls an incident that occurred when the class was studying England in the Middle Ages. (02.80) (Possibly they had been talking about an incident during the break). The class had been looking at the three-field system as well as the structure of the medieval village. John, a white student (with a reputation for mischief), asked the teacher how it was that English houses used to be constructed out of wattle and daub ('sticks and mud') and in Africa, people were still living in 'mud huts'. This caused a major row.

John's motives were not clear, and most Black members of the class were incensed by what they took to be racism. John seemed to imply that 'Africans' were 'primitive'. However, if this really were the case, then it would have signalled an important departure from settled norms of behaviour. Racial insults were rare and there was a tacit agreement among the students that this was 'off limits'.

Surprisingly, David chose to interpret Ricky's account of Sunday's recent criticism of Britain as an instance of Black 'prejudice'. But he couched his response within a '*richer-heritage*' discourse about the positive contributions that Black and other ethnic and minority groups had made to the wider culture. He speaks (uncharacteristically) in a conciliatory manner:

DAVID: Probably [there] is a bit of prejudice in this case. I'm not saying that black people can't be prejudiced, but going back to the point where .... about mud huts and all that .... um .... probably if you, if, if, I said to that ... um ... before West Indian people or black people came to this country or English people ate roast potatoes and um ... mainly that for their dinner they didn't have no wide choice of food then you'd probably be a bit down-graded but that is actually a true fact from what I've read ...

RICKY: Can you tell me what food you've brought over here, please. What food?

DAVID: Well, there's rice ...

RICKY: Because we had meat ... but excuse me, I think you'll find that most people don't eat rice.

*(Several voices)* They do. They do ... some do ... yeah.

RICKY: White people I mean. Well ninety per cent of people I know.

SIMON: Well I do ... I like rice.

*(Several voices speaking at once, taking sides)* I eat rice. I like curry.

RICKY: But I eat potatoes more than I eat rice.

DAVID: They ... Well, before all... there was, was potatoes, they could jacket, roast it, fry it ... different ways they could have it, right, but since then the foods that I know that has been brought over is, um ... the varieties of ways of doing meat, there's rice, there's different fruits ... because you used to have, um, honey ... but I don't think you had sugar before.

SIMON: So?

DAVID: Or did you have sugar but not in that quantity because we came from the West Indies with the cane production. And so forth ... and um foods like dumplings ... things like that ... they're even cooking it for school dinners don't they?

SIMON: So what point is that on?

DAVID: No, but listen. I'm making a point, because if I said to you, you'd probably feel a bit hurt, so if somebody said to a black person that

they used to live in mud huts before, that's the kind of, the same down-graded thing, even though it was meant to be a question.

RICKY: But I think ... I said it wrong because I can remember exactly what John said. It was about when we done, when England was living in mud huts and things like that which is true ... right?

SIMON: And he thought, he thought we were talking about the time ...

RICKY: And he said ... How come, sir, that in Africa they were still living in mud huts when in England they wasn't. And then everyone started to go ... as if ... he meant that he was better than them because we were living in ...

SIMON: They were uncivilised.

RICKY: Yeah, but a house and facilities, etc. etc.

DAVID: But that was the thought conveyed, I thought, don't you? But if someone said that he must be living in mud huts and we're living in ...

RICKY: But he never said you ... he said '*when they*', he didn't say ...

DAVID: '*When they*' ... that's what I mean, '*when they*'

RICKY: So really he's just asking a question that if you would have asked, nothing would have been said about it ...

DAVID: Yeah but this ...

David usually kept his distance from Sunday, whom he regarded (with Kevin) as a 'trouble maker'. Their different attitudes towards the school's Black peer culture were fairly striking. David was more inclined to conform to the school's official norms of behaviour than Sunday, as is instanced by his wearing full school uniform. (Recall his piece about Kevin's taunts). His way of speaking was usually closer to Standard English too (for example, '*that was the thought conveyed*') than Kevin's and Sunday's. This was a fact that Simon mentions explicitly in the discussion. Yet David could speak creole when he chose to, and Kevin code switched towards Standard English when it suited him. And David was more open than the other students about his academic ambitions. This often led him into conflict with some of

his Black classmates, and, occasionally, with white ones too, especially Ricky. He quarrelled with Ricky from time to time, and though they were generally friends they were also rivals.

In this discussion David consciously matched Ricky's 'reasonableness'. He explains (needlessly, because everyone knew) why many of the Black students found John's question offensive. Diplomatically, he implies that there was some kind of 'misunderstanding' - one that could easily be rectified. He allows that John was genuinely asking a question, and that he spoke in good faith. However, this was not a view shared by the others.

Ricky insisted that the Black students were seeing racial issues where they didn't exist. The temperature soared and the teacher quickly intervened to defuse the situation. He mentioned the history of handling controversial issues in Humanities lessons invoking a shared memory of successful lessons.<sup>42</sup>

**TEACHER:** At this point ... This is not a discussion about mud huts is it? But your point is that there are a lot of difficulties you get into when you take on these kinds of questions that we take on in Humanities.

Ricky, David and Simon were recalling an incident from the life of the class that had resulted in a furious row. (02.80). Such incidents belonged to the shared memory of the group. They went on to attempt a reconstruction of John's intentions from their fragmentary recollections of what was said at the time. No doubt they each put their own 'spin' on things, and an outsider might have found their style of interacting noisy and combative, but principally they tried to settle on a common version of events. Beneath the surface of their robust exchanges lies an 'ideal' model of what constitutes a 'reasonable' discussion. Mostly, they try to reach *unforced* agreement - an agreement that is not achieved by invoking status, by insulting one another or by making intimidating threats. They argue. They make and demand relevant points ('*So what point is that on?*' and, '*No, I'm making a point*'). They criticise each other's contributions, they accommodate each other's views and they revise their

respective versions (*'I think I said it wrong because I can remember exactly what he said'*). Indeed, for much of the time they appear to be prepared to give way to the better argument.

David persists. He follows through a line of argument, suggesting that there are racial tensions in classes generally throughout the school, and that their class is no exception.. Ricky takes him up. 'But tell me', he says, 'have we got a racial thing in our class?' Perhaps he doesn't believe that David is serious, but David's response is sharp and to the point: 'Only when the subject [slavery] is going on'. And this, paradoxically, is precisely what Ricky is getting at. Lessons about slavery somehow divide the class.

RICKY: Yeah! See! So why is it that normally we haven't, but when you get a subject like that [slavery] there's sort of ... you have.

DAVID: I think it's because when a subject like that and they're talking about the Caribbean, a lot of Black people in the class ... try to grab on to their roots like, like, 'I come from the West Indies', 'I come from...' and so forth. When you're talking about another subject...[it's different]. Like the other day [it] happened to me and Nicky. He said I must go back to Africa. So I told him I was born in this country. So then he said you changed your roots to England, like you say you're English - as much British as the other person is. When the subjects change then you change your roots again. You know what I mean?

RICKY: It's funny how we can have only one roots yet you can have as many as you want. You can be Caribbean, African, English ...

SIMON: It's funny we planned to talk about [Standard English].

Ricky objects to David swapping his roots around. But, David has no difficulty with the idea of changing your roots to suit the circumstances. The inference Ricky wants to draw is that David is somehow being disloyal to Britain. Simon, (possibly because he can see where the argument is leading) tries to change the subject. But Ricky and David stick at it:

RICKY: You 're just having your one point of view. You can't have all different roots ... you ... you originally probably came from Africa.

DAVID: Not me I was born in England.

RICKY: But I am saying your ancestors originally came from Africa.

DAVID: Yes, I agree with that. But then your ancestors came from Rome.

RICKY: Yes, so?

DAVID: And from Scandinavia.

RICKY: Yeah, I agree.

DAVID: But then how could you say you're British then?

RICKY: Because ...

SIMON: He was born in Britain.

DAVID: So was I.

RICKY: I was born in Britain. Yeah, right ..

DAVID: So was I.

RICKY: So? I stick by what Britain does, I don't change myself and say, 'So, I'm going to do what the Italians do, right, I'm going to do what the Scandinavians do'.

SIMON: It's true. It's true.

RICKY: An' Scandinavia's doing better than what the Caribbean is. Like, it's not, but just saying it was. Well, I'm not going to pretend I'm Scandinavian.

DAVID: I think, when the point comes to it, it's really what a lot of people think about slavery. [It's] what their parents tell them, what they see on television - probably a biased view. And if it was from your view, it would be biased. It wouldn't be told to you like it was told to us, so there is two biased views. And when you try to discuss 'em everyone sticks to the biased view that they know if you know what I mean.

[A short pause]

RICKY: Another thing I notice, sir, in Humanities is, is in any other subject like in, if you take the other Humanities lessons we have with Mr. Brennan, right, you, you get a lot of people mixing together. Like on

each table you've probably got a black kid and a white kid, right. If you take our Humanities lessons, with you, you'll find the majority of the black children are at the front and the majority of the white children are at the back. And you'll have one white kid at the front - like Simon, say. And you'll have Steven at the back. Mainly you'd get that. I don't know, sir, [I don't know] that's right, sir. But a lot of people are saying, especially white people in our class, that you're sort of splitting them. [That is] when you talk about that ... then it's ... we're finding that in the end you're not making things better because it's moving the black people forward and the white people back.

DAVID: Yeah, but I think it's actually history. If we're learning History ... um, we just can't skip History. And skip the whole matter of slavery. It's a fact. And even though when it's discussed a lot of um, white people blush and they kind of [don't] like the subject; it's ... We can't really skip it. It's a fact in History. It has to be told.

David grasps the nettle. He acknowledges the way that slavery is perceived divides the class. The subject is so powerful that it forces people to take sides. Everyone tries to hold on to positions of strength, he says, and they cling to the version of history that they know best: *'Everyone sticks to the biased views that they know'*. Once the defences go up, and opinions become entrenched, he maintains, nobody's views will change. What the transcription cannot show is the measured style of his delivery. There is a calm assurance about David's manner of speaking as well as a marked degree of composure.

David appeared to have concluded the argument, when Ricky suddenly switched his line of attack. Earlier, he drew attention to the way that the introduction of the topic of slavery had altered boys' behaviour towards one another in tangible ways. Now, his remarks are addressed directly to the teacher. In a 'normal lesson', he says, the class integrates well. but with the recent concentration on slavery, sharp divisions have opened up. As he puts it, 'It's moving the black people forward, and the white people back'. The inference is clear: the new dispensation privileges the Black students.

Ricky spoke unwelcome truths. Moreover, his statement (he was thirteen at the time) constituted a careful, articulate critique of the syllabus. He was probing an area

where the school's aims were not clear, and his forthright statement was unanticipated. Crucially, there was an underlying assumption that critique was permissible, and that students and teachers shared the responsibility for building a tolerant working environment. Interestingly, such a critique sat comfortably with the school's liberal traditions.

For a brief moment Ricky gained the initiative. But then David snatched it back. He insisted that slavery was intrinsically a part of history – and what is more it was part of the history of most the class, though he didn't suggest that the topic of slavery was for Black students only. Besides, the history of slavery has to be faced as a common history, he says, and not glossed over because some white students feel embarrassed ('a lot of white people blush'), or appear bored.

And Ricky's claim that he found the subject interesting should not surprise us. What struck him, he claims, was the contrast between home and school versions of Black history. And this leads me to paradox. On the one hand, the topic of slavery had produced (or revealed, depending on whose viewpoint you adopt) deep divisions among the class members. On the other hand, it produced a serious discussion around fundamental ethical and political issues that was conducted in an atmosphere of striking openness and passion. A shared perception was beginning to emerge: history has to be dealt with 'properly', as Kevin put it later.

David was beginning to expand in a rather teacherly way on the theme of prejudice when Ricky reminded him about a time in class when he had been especially vulnerable:

DAVID: A prejudiced thing, isn't it? It's like saying that the white people treated black people so bad, which is true. But then from a white person's [view], if you've been accused of all these things, it weren't you it were your ancestors. But because of the race [issue] it makes you feel bad. That's what I'm saying...

RICKY: But David what about in the first year right?

DAVID: Go on.

RICKY: When you were ... so strongly about your religion, right, and everyone was going against you. And I don't believe in the same

things as you, right, but yet I sat there and I tried to think, well, from both views. Then I started to say ... well, put it David's view. I think you can remember, and then I used to make *them* (Kevin, Sunday and the others) feel small. Because I was trying to work out where both of you was right, and (where) both of you was wrong. You have good points of your religion and probably a lot of things that ...(*inaudible*)

SIMON: Both of them are right really. Whatever you want to believe, you believe.

RICKY: Well that's the same sort of thing. You get a biased view. But if you've got people... Our class should think, well, just because you're black it doesn't mean you're different.

SIMON: That's true.

DAVID: That's true.

David's argument around the common legacy of slavery and the nature of problematic, inherited guilt opened up productive new ground for discussion. Crucially, it was an issue he would return to again over a year later, as we shall see. But Ricky was chiefly concerned to settle the argument about bias and prejudice there and then because it raised fundamental issues about trust. Plus he wanted to regain the initiative.

Once more, what the transcript cannot show, but what the video reveals clearly, is that while Ricky is speaking about religion, David is correcting him by forming the word 'evolution' soundlessly. In the first year, David had objected strongly to learning about evolution in humanities lessons. Here he is silently registering an important objection. The teaching of evolution was the issue, he insisted, not his religion. But as he recalled the episode, he was visibly discomforted. His body language changed: he shifted his posture, bent forwards, shook his head and smiled.

Ricky's family was partly Jewish and lived locally. They were long-settled in Hackney in a way that very few of the West Indian, African, Pakistani, Turkish, or Greek families were. Moreover, Ricky was in tune with the school's ethos. It is important to grasp this point to understand his confident tone and the measured nature of his outspoken criticism of the syllabus. It was extremely well judged.

There was a robust tradition of debating controversial issues at the school going back at least as far as the inter-war years. To give just a couple of examples, in 1928 the school's Debating Society decided, against the prevailing spirit of militarism and imperialism of the inter-war years, that 'the Great War had done more harm than good'. Also in 1930 it decided that India should be granted self-government.<sup>43</sup> The distinctive character of the school's population powerfully shaped the schools' politically liberal climate. Early on, the Hackney Downs had served an almost exclusively Christian community. Later, especially during the inter-war years and the forties, it 'welcomed the sons of Jewish immigrants'.<sup>44</sup>

By the 1950's over half the boys at the school were Jewish. By this time the school had an awesome academic reputation and pupils were enrolled from all over North London. Indeed, the Jewish presence in the school (pupils and staff) undoubtedly strengthened the schools' anti-racist ethos in the mid-seventies. But by then, the proportion of Jewish pupils had dropped to less than a third, as more boys were enrolled from what was then characterised as 'the coloured Commonwealth community'. Such changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the school population coincided with the changeover from a grammar school to a non-selective comprehensive. As a consequence, more children from white working class families (many of them with comparatively low levels of literacy) as well as comparatively more children from Black families, (especially from the Eastern Caribbean) entered the school. With the arrival of this new population, the school's academic status changed.

Ricky's family was sharply conscious of the changing nature of the school's local reputation, which they perceived to be declining. Such complicated perceptions, along with a general sense of loss of prestige among some of the school's Jewish children lay behind his critique of the Humanities syllabus. Notwithstanding his coolness towards Caribbean history, Ricky got on extremely well with Kevin, for whom he showed genuine respect. There was as an assumption of equality between them and quarrels were rare.

The exchange between Ricky and David about the place of the history of slavery in the syllabus took place in February 1981. In June the following year the issue resurfaced. It came up in a way that harked back directly to the previous discussion. On this occasion, Kevin and Sunday, who had missed the earlier discussion took part.

The class was reviewing the humanities syllabus. Still mindful of Ricky's stinging critique of the Humanities syllabus, the teacher put the following question to Sunday:

TEACHER: Sunday, what would you say then if you took a white middle class teacher who was going to come and work in an area like this, right, and that white middle class teacher, whose probably just got trained says, 'Why should I raise issues like race in a classroom? Why should I handle black materials? Because all it's going to do is divide kids.' What answer would you give to a teacher like that?

SUNDAY: Argue about it. You bring black boys and white boys closer together. They would know their point of view.

TEACHER: But it might make the white kids, or the Asian kids feel out of things.

SUNDAY: It depends how they're gonna take it, you know what I mean. If it's just young boys, the first years, you know how stupid they're going to go. But the more you get older, the more you gonna sit down and think about it. And you don't wanna fight about it. Jus' sit down an' get together.  
You know what I mean? It's not worth it.

DAVID: Yeah. [*Screwing up his face in concentration*] I forgotten what I was going to say. Oh yes! Race: it applies to everyone. Because many people are interested to know about the history of Black people (and white people, of course) not just the present day racism because racism isn't (just) something that is happening now. It goes back a long way. It goes back to days of slavery, you could say.

[*Several competing voices*]

KEVIN: Its true, sir. When I was in the West Indies and we was in class...

TEACHER: Just a moment. Let Kevin speak.

DAVID: [*Cutting across Kevin*] It goes back to the time of slavery. Because some Black people got views about slavery and how they were

treated, or how their ancestors were treated. And the reason why it offends some white people is because ... when black people would like to blame it on white people *as a whole*, and say, 'I hate this person', they would realise it's not them, it's their ancestors that's doing it. Or that cause' the state of things. So the race issue has got different views from different people, and it kind of like, boils down to what it is today.

RICKY: David, how can white people accept the fault of what their ancestors done?

DAVID: [Forcefully] They can recognise that it's not THEM!

Recall that David had introduced the issue of inherited responsibility for slavery in his discussion with Ricky earlier (12.02.81)). On that occasion, David had suggested that nowadays people should be able to distinguish personal responsibility from the collective legacy of guilt. But the issue was never resolved. Curiously, Ricky opens the way for an argument in favour of teaching about the history of slavery, which, implicitly, he had opposed earlier.

RICKY: How do you reckon that people know that, right?  
Don't you think that black people using that as an excuse? Sort of asking for more sympathy?

DAVID: Don't you think that some white people don't even know about the history of Black people? They know about what's happening today. But they don't know how far it goes back. 'Cos they wasn't actually [taught properly].

*(David continues above a rising swell of voices)*

[Indignantly] I tell you something. From Primary School all we been learning is Romans. And that is one extreme. Celts and Normans an' all them. How much Black history is taught in school today? Not as much as white!

Unusually, David has struck a chord with many of the Black class members who were looking forwards to quarrelling with him. There was a pause while individuals reconsidered their positions.

KEVIN: [Thoughtfully] It's building up.

DAVID: Black and white people live in England you know.

*(Several voices, inaudibly)*

TEACHER: Listen to what he's saying. One at a time! Let Ricky speak.

But before Ricky can say anything, Simon intervenes. He gestures towards the wall displays around the room. Two posters are especially relevant to the discussion. concerns African cultures before the European incursions. (The dominant image was of a tribal mask). The other poster was an annotated map of the Atlantic slave triangle. (Both posters were laminated, by the way, which indicated their 'permanent' status.)

SIMON: (*Pointing to the wall displays*) There's Romans over there. There's Africans over there. There's... I don't know, bleedin' Wales. (*laughter*) It's true, sir! Look how many things there are on the walls.

RICKY: As I said, though, you're living in an English country. So you learn an English history. You live in another country...

Ricky trails off without completing his sentence. Nevertheless, the inference is clear: schools should teach national histories. John takes up the theme.

JOHN: What do you think they teach mostly in Jamaica or somewhere like that? English culture or Jamaican culture? Course they gonna favour it, ain't they?

TEACHER: Hang on. One at a time. Kevin next.

KEVIN: I tell you, I tell you, when I was there, right, teacher tell me 'bout Columbus. Everything! Teacher didn't tell you 'bout slavery. Teacher didn't tell you anything. One time, when we go for walks and ting, I see one of those slave houses, right. I didn't know what it was then. But I know what it is now. We just walk pas' it like it was an old building that's been there for ages. Teacher didn't tell you what it was or anything. (*He changes his tone and adds reflectively*) I think he was afraid it might cause resentment or anything.

[*Several voices*] That's right!

There followed a short pause while everyone drew breath. Then Ricky spoke up.

RICKY: Why is it, this is just a question, they never told you, right? And in England they're trying to learn you, right, [your] history. And in your own country, right, they ain't even tellin' you what went wrong.

*(Several raised voices)*

TEACHER: Hang on! Woah!

Kevin wanted to return to the theme of his unfinished sentence (the one that David cut short earlier). In Montserrat, he says, when he was there, they didn't teach the history of slavery. Thus he challenged John's generalisation about the kind of history that is taught in the West Indies, and he ignored John's failure to make proper distinctions among particular islands, which was a common, though sometimes an irritating, mistake that the white Londoners routinely made when speaking about the Caribbean. Sometimes the entire region was referred to simply as 'Jamaica'<sup>45</sup> 'When I was there', he says, meaning when he was in Montserrat.

Later, writing about this incident in April 1983 he slightly misrepresented his disagreement with John as an opposition between two large generalisations: 'They should only teach Caribbean history in the Caribbean'; and 'But they don't teach Caribbean history in the Caribbean.'. Thus, Kevin puts words into John's mouth. Actually, John was trying to suggest something more like this: 'Common sense' tells us that 'Jamaican' culture will be privileged in Jamaican schools, because each country 'naturally' teaches its own history and culture. John's implicit assumption was that it is both reasonable and *fair* to expect that English culture should be taught in London schools.

Kevin's anecdote about his class's morning walk was intended both to prove a point and to settle an argument. He meant it to illustrate his point: 'they don't teach children about slavery in the West Indies'. But then, in a markedly altered tone – a sort of coda - he reflects about the reason why this was so, reflecting that it was because 'the teacher thought it might cause resentment or something'. Many of the Black pupils agreed with him on this point. But by now the whole nature of the interaction had changed. The discussion had thrown up a genuine problem that the group seems to want to resolve.

Ricky's response to Kevin's anecdote is delicately judged: 'Why is it', he asks quietly, 'this is just a question, they never told you, right?' Notice the way that his manner towards Kevin contrasts strikingly with the way he speaks to David. With David, for much of the time, he is really (as they both know) challenging the status of David's assertions. For example, he demands: 'Can you tell me what food you've brought over here, please?' The exaggerated tone of politeness barely masks his intention, which is to undermine the status of David's claims. Later, with Kevin, however, he is at pains to be clear that he is asking a genuine question. He is respectful of Kevin's status, and he doesn't want to offend him. Moreover, he is sensitive about the likelihood of his being misconstrued and mindful too of the row that John caused when he asked the question about mud huts. Ricky is on dangerous ground and he is not sure whether he can raise the issue of slavery at all without giving offence.

Thus Ricky has to establish that he is asking a genuine question and that his intentions are 'honourable'. What actually prompts the question is a perceived contradiction. Previously, he had assumed (with John) that they teach Black history in the Caribbean. But this turned out to be wrong. He continues in a genuinely puzzled manner, 'And in England they're trying to learn you, right, [your] history. And in your own country, right, they ain't even tellin' you what went wrong?'

I have no space here to describe where the discussion went from there. The boys carried on for over an hour. But I need to say a word more about what John was up to. He was impatient to tackle what he considered to be more urgent and more relevant questions than the teaching of Black history. He was keen to discuss contemporary politics and his classmates' future prospects.

JOHN            I think it's right to learn about the history and where you come from and all that. But they [teachers] should put more emphasis on the future. You know, about the governments and that. They should teach history, but they should do more about the future.

John's father was a trade unionist. John, like Simon, came from a traditional Labour-voting household. Round about the time that Kevin was in Montserrat, John's family

went to Australia. Things didn't work out there and they returned to Hackney. When John speaks of the future he means specifically of the steeply rising levels of unemployment in the local area during the late seventies and early eighties. Moreover, he shared the common perception among all the members of the class that levels of unemployment were significantly higher in the Black community.

Unemployment had recently emerged as a powerful theme in the class's discussions as well as in their written work. Simon, for instance, wrote a long piece, *Ambitions*, where he tried to imagine his future beyond school. Immediately after, he wrote '*Could it have been Different?*' (28.06.82) in which he attempted to make realistic predictions about what would happen to his classmates when they left school. He was especially concerned about Audley, and he touched on Audley's increasing involvement in petty crime. It was a powerful piece that resonated for everyone. At a later stage, Simon revised '*Could it Have Been Different?*' in collaboration with Kevin, who brought to the task of editing Simon's piece the experience that he had gained through his editing partnership with Sunday. It was later typed, duplicated and circulated among the class.

\* \* \*

By this stage the class, now in its fourth year, had three years' experience of regular discussions behind it. The character of the interactions was generally calmer. The way that David, Ricky, Simon, Kevin, Sunday and John interpreted each other's intentions as well as the inferences that they made about meanings depended on their sharing tacit frames of reference that they carried forward from previous discussions. Further to this, these boys operated with what they knew of each other's values and behaviour both in and crucially out of school. By and large, they knew who was likely to make a racist remark, who would try to dominate discussions and who was skilful at trading insults and so on. But the boys participated unevenly in class discussions. There were always issues around inclusion: getting a fair hearing; interrupting; turn-taking; resolving conflicts (verbal and physical) and ways of

negotiating one another's meanings. Whereas these features of classroom discourse were regularised by the class and their teacher over time, the crux was always the operation of social power and its mediation in discourse.<sup>46</sup>

\* \* \*

Kevin claimed that the history of slavery was not taught properly in the West Indies. In reality, Caribbean history and literature was on the CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council) syllabus. However, he was generalising from his time in rural Montserrat, and it is likely that his experiences there reflected older educational attitudes and practices of the kind that George Lamming describes in pre-war Barbados:

Moreover they [*the pupils*] weren't told anything about that [*slavery*]. They had read about the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror. That happened so many hundreds of years ago. And slavery was thousands of years before that...History had to begin somewhere, but not so far back. And nobody knew where this slavery business took place. The teacher simply said not here, somewhere else.<sup>47</sup>

The discussion around Caribbean history took place in June 1982. Four months later, at the start of the new school year, Kevin wrote his poem, *Piece of the Past*. In truth, it took his teacher by surprise. By the end of his fourth year in school Kevin had been writing very little. Unusually, at the end of what had appeared to be an unproductive lesson (eighty minutes or so) he handed in four sides of untidy manuscript. The following lesson he began revising the 'rough version' of a narrative. Here is the final, edited version.

### **Piece of the Past**

Cold Thursday morning  
Bright but cold  
Not English cold, but West Indies cold  
Teacher Lincoln checking our nails  
Checking our feet  
Checking our tree bark head  
'Time for we walk' say teacher

'No teacher it's too cold!'  
'Did you speak Margaret?'  
'No teacher.'  
'Everybody outside, MOVE'  
'Where we going?'  
'Colin's Gut.'  
All on the move  
Heading North  
'Teacher why you have stick?'  
'For beat the person who las''  
Poor Gregory stopped for his lace  
And he did feel the licks  
15 minutes pass  
Walking down hill  
On a road or path what was once there  
We strode up to this tower  
'Everybody res.'

There were *cropus*<sup>1</sup> everywhere  
Small and large, all dullish green  
I had never been here before  
'Teacher what is this place?' Frog Eye asked with interest...  
'An ol' building.'  
'What it use for?'  
'It's an ol'fashun win'mill'  
But I knew better, not totally, I wasn't sure at first  
On the other side of the path was a house.  
One floor, verandah outside and made purely from wood.  
Few of us explored inside.  
The floorboards creaked.  
No one was scared.  
For it was broad daylight outside.  
The shutters had been blown off from time.  
It definitely wasn't a W I style house.  
Certainly European styled.  
Possibly a mixture of both.  
There was a chair inside  
Utensils still lying around,  
Some covered in cobwebs.  
Then everybody become giggly.  
Gregory made jokes about *Jancro* in the house.  
No one was in there for much longer,  
We all ran round the back of the windmill  
Then climbed in for a peep.

---

<sup>1</sup> Frogs

We didn't manage to see everything  
For teacher called us out.  
What I did manage to see  
Was some form of contraption,  
Where slaves were made to pedal to create power for the windmill.  
Time to continue our walk.

Most of these facts  
I never knew at the time  
I had an idea with no real meaning.  
Hackney Downs educated me with these facts  
What I saw was part of that fact.  
Behind stood a fascinating piece of history  
Probably some thing I'll never forget.  
For now, all I can do is remember.  
But someday I'll RETURN.

In Kevin's poem the teacher and the children share a common *creole*. It is more usual to hear of and to read about teachers who maintain a rigid Standard English, whether or not this is always so. Teacher Lincoln's snappish manner creates a gulf between himself and his pupils. The naive question, 'Teacher why you have stick?' wins the brisk response: 'For beat the person who las'!' A bleak comedy is played out, and the account of Gregory's misfortunes is calculated to make the reader laugh. Read aloud in class, the phrase 'he did feel the licks' was a cue for a chorus from the Black students of 'murder' and 'blood' accompanied by a quick flurry of flicked wrists and snapped fingers.

Teacher Lincoln is a familiar figure in Caribbean Literature. Here for instance is a moment from Austin Clarke's autobiographical account of growing up in Barbados in the forties:

The entire school and the teachers were singing at the top of their voices  
*Ride on, ride on, in Majesty*  
*In Lowly pomp ride on to die...*

'Fingers!' he said to the six of us at the door. The boy at the end of the line held out his hands. The Headmaster inspected his fingers and nails. They were dirty. They were always dirty. We always had dirty fingernails. Not one of us in that school had a nail file. They were not common in our village. When the time came we cleaned our fingers with a stick. We pitched marbles

at noon and our nails bore that evidence... We seemed to want the inspection and the punishment.

He held the boy's ear and looked inside it.<sup>48</sup>

As was customary, the boys received a flogging.

Intriguingly, Kevin wrote a reminder to himself in red ink at the redrafting stage:

*'Change from dialect to English since most is in English but talking stays in dialect.'*

This instruction reveals the degree of linguistic sophistication at work. He knows most of the conventions of the English writing system, and he uses them (and occasionally subverts them) to make his poem more effective. This is especially true where he deliberately breaks with convention:

#### **1st draft**

Poor Gregory did stop fe do im lace an im did feel the licks

#### **2nd draft**

Poor Gregory stopped for his lace /And he did feel the licks

The second version preserves the flavour of *creole*. If Kevin had simply followed his instructions to the letter he would have transposed all the dialect into Standard English, but the standard equivalent would be dull and unfunny by comparison. This is a fine, but crucial point. In Kevin's first draft there is no suggestion that the *creole* features are unintentional errors or miscues due to 'dialect interference'. Rather, they serve as markers to evoke a Caribbean narrative voice. There are other instances, however, where he simply made mistakes. For example, in his first draft Kevin confused the word '*lavenda*' (his spelling) with '*verandah*'.

The way that Kevin uses what I have just called 'the flavour of *creole*' is especially interesting, not least because it is something that has occupied generations of writers in the West Indies. The novelist, Jean D'Costa has written about her own fiction for children as exemplifying some of the central dilemmas of Caribbean writers.<sup>49</sup>

Linguists have suggested that the writers in the Caribbean operate within a

‘polydialectal continuum’ with a *creole* base. For D’Costa, the whole of the continuum is a ‘felt reality’ within a person’s consciousness. She argues that the linguistic continuum corresponds to a cultural continuum in which the ‘boundaries of grammar and its minimal shifting are not simple alternatives – but are tied to history and social consciousness, and to the very identities of speakers.’

D’Costa’s first novel, *Sprat Morrison* (1972) was written to meet specific criteria.<sup>50</sup> The register had to be Standard Jamaican English because at the time the Ministry of Education in Jamaica would not admit literature with non-standard English in schools. D’Costa had to cut certain scenes of street life and backyard which could have been the liveliest aspects of a novel about a ten year old boy in his last year at primary school. Nevertheless, certain Standard Jamaican English phrases are used imaginatively to evoke the experiences of childhood. (Such phrases are sometimes spoken of as ‘tonally creole’) Yet, as she says, many expressions in normal usage would be in Jamaican *creole*. Thus she compares the ‘meaning potential’ of the two forms: ‘A caning was handed out to all’/ ‘a hot lick fe every one a dem’. D’Costa marks the shift from a style of punishment associated with school that has echoes of Victorian English literature to a particularly ‘West Indian’ style of punishment that is not confined to school. She hoped that for children who would normally use the *creole* form there would be an inward shift of perception and an appropriate cultural response (such as the chorus of ‘murder’ and ‘blood’ that I described above). ‘Outer’ audiences, she says, may perceive a thinner world of meaning.’

In Kevin’s first draft he used the creole word ‘*cropus*’. He preferred it to ‘frogs’. Indeed, it appears that he had originally intended to write frogs because he formed the first two letters, (‘fr’), then changed his mind mid-word, and crossed out the letters before he completed the whole word. Then, having chosen *cropus*, he added a footnote explaining that it meant frogs. Thus he shows that he is familiar with ‘scholarly apparatus’, but there is also a degree of playfulness involved). Kevin must have been aware that a general - that is an ‘English’ or a ‘white’ - reader would be unfamiliar with the creole word. The footnote was not an afterthought. Rather it was

something that he attended to during the composing process while he took the reader(s) into account. Crucially, there were no fixed alternatives, no clear choices to be made between Standard English and *creole*. Rather, the entire process was a dynamic one in which his alertness to the possibilities of different voices and audiences shaped the way that he constructed and maintained the narrative voice at the point of utterance.

Let's look at another, contrasting instance of Kevin's use of *creole*. No sooner do the children stop at the ruins than they rush off to explore the abandoned house. Once inside, however, their confidence begins to ebb away:

Then everybody became giggly  
Gregory made jokes about *Jancro* in the house  
No one was in there for much longer.

The word *Jancro* has resonated powerfully for 'West Indian' audiences. With '*cropus*' Kevin acknowledged that a general ('English'/'white') reader would be unfamiliar with the term so he added the footnote. But he offered no help with '*Jancro*'. Moreover, it appears from his first draft that *Jancro*' was not his first choice. He originally wrote '*dopey*' - a 'West Indian' ghost, sometimes spelled '*duppy*' - then, as he did earlier with the word 'frogs', he crossed out his first choice and wrote in '*Jancro*' instead.

I should say where the word '*Jancro*' comes from. In Jamaica, according to Caribbean lexicographers, 'John-crow' is a folk etym formation from '*carrion crow*'.<sup>51</sup> It was reduced in popular pronunciation to '*cyancrow*' and then to '*jankro*', which is close to the African word *Ewe* '*dongró*'. Significantly here, '*Jancro*' has rich folkloric associations. '*Jancro*' is a favourite figure in proverbs and tales where the bird - a scavenging buzzard - often symbolises the 'unfavourable traits' attributed to 'the Negro' by other Negroes. (I touched on this theme earlier in connection with ritual insults.) For instance, one nineteenth-century folklorist and lexicographer recorded proverbs such as, 'John Crow neber make house till rain come' (lacks foresight) and '*John Crow tink him own pickney white*' (gives himself airs and graces). Sometimes the scavenging nature of the buzzard is fore-grounded,

as with, 'When John Crow see mauger [sick] cow, him roast plantain fe him'. (Roast plantain implies a forthcoming feast). Like Anancy Spider, *Jancro* has remained a popular figure in the Caribbean, especially in Jamaican and Trinidadian folk-tales, where the folk tradition is chiefly West African. In some islands, for instance St Vincent the name 'Corbaux' or 'Corbo' (Scots 'Corbie') is commonly used.

In the USA, the term is 'Jim Crow'. There, too, the figure of the crow has been used traditionally as a symbol of Afro-Americans. To give just one important instance, the Black American painter, Jacob Lawrence, has used 'crows' to symbolise African Americans in his magnificent series of painted panels. These panels depict the causes and effects of the migrati of Black people from the rural South to the industrial North during and after the Great War.<sup>52</sup>

It was only after Kevin wrote *Piece of the Past*, that it came to light that 'Jancro' was a name that one of Kevin's classmates, Anthony, whose family background was Jamaican used to insult Audley, whose family, you may recall, was also from Jamaica. Usually in Jamaican folk culture *Jancro* denotes a combination of stupidity and low status.

And we should not underestimate what Kevin was learning to do here. Consider by way of comparison, the opening lines of Martin Carter's magnificent poem of resistance, *University of Hunger*:

is the university of hunger the wide waste.  
is the pilgrimage of man the long march.  
The print of hunger wanders in the land.  
The green tree bends above the long forgotten.

We are given four ringing, declarative statements. The first two statements look like questions, but they are not. The Standard English form would read, 'The university of hunger is the wide waste', or 'It is the university of hunger *that is* the wide waste'. This is not a hand-wringing musing on the human condition. Rather it is a political statement about what grinding poverty teaches the poor in the Caribbean. *University of Hunger* is from the collection, *Poems of Resistance* (1954), and it was written during Martin Carter's detention in Guyana in 1953. It aims to give a voice to popular protest against colonial rule in the 'West Indies'. The syntax is

uncompromisingly Caribbean because it is addressed directly to the people of the Caribbean. As it appears on the printed page it evokes the tonal qualities of the popular voice. Such a voice evokes solidarity. Carter holds out an invitation (preserved in syntax) to an 'inner' audience - an audience that is attuned to the spoken language of the Caribbean - to bring forward for collective recognition and affirmation a shared web of cultural and political assumptions. And it is in just such a web that the poem's meanings are caught. These meanings emerge from an unwritten and largely unmarked history of brutal injustice and unspeakable suffering. An outer audience - a literate, metropolitan one - would perceive 'a thinner world of meanings'. In my view, Kevin is learning to do something similar.

\* \* \*

I chose to look at a poem that arose from the conversation that a class conducted with itself over several years. An idea that started out as anecdotal evidence intended to settle an argument about the place of Black history in the syllabus, with a warrant of personal experience behind it, lay dormant for several months before it issued as a rather scrappy first draft.

I claimed that the intersection between learning and instruction and development would be central in the story I would tell. I also claimed that development and instruction have different 'rhythms', and that they are in reality 'two interconnected processes, each with its own measure'. I have explained that by 'instruction' I mean the teaching of school knowledge, in this instance knowledge that was classified and framed by the school's Humanities syllabus. And instruction here includes material artefacts and 'instructional apparatus' - textbooks, maps and resources designed for 'pedagogical purposes'. In this section I shall be looking at the history of some of these artefacts.

I have shown how 'instruction' awakened one student's developmental processes. I have also traced the way that Kevin's development followed its individual trajectory according to his needs and interests. Such trajectories are rarely linear. Rather they

are recursive. *Piece of the Past* issued from a long cycle of lessons that extended over months (indeed years, if we take into account Humanities lessons that I mentioned on the Middle Ages, the Highland clearances and the Irish potato famine and so on). Kevin had a measure of control over the pace and direction of his work, especially so when he was working in the editing partnership with Sunday. The syllabus provided him with a starting point and a planned framework. Additionally he received specific guidance from his teacher. However, Kevin made progress unevenly, and by the time he was fifteen some lessons went by when nothing much was accomplished. Indeed, several of these apparently ‘unproductive’ lessons occurred between the class discussion around the place of Caribbean history in June 1982 and the appearance of the first draft of *Piece of the Past* in September. In this next section I shall try to reconstruct something of what happened during this time.

\* \* \*

Three lines from Kevin’s poem baffle me. Here they are:

What I did manage to see  
Was some form of contraption  
Where slaves were made to pedal to create power for the windmill.

Has Kevin misunderstood how windmills work? Surely, slaves didn’t pedal to create power to turn windmills. That seems senseless. Where did the tread-wheel (‘contraption’) come from? Did he really see a tread-wheel in Monserrat? Where? He had seen drawings of tread-wheels in history textbooks when the class looked at England in the nineteenth century. Did he muddle the two things? I will try to show that the answer to this question lies in the way that Kevin made sense of the history textbook, *The People Who Came*.

*The People Who Came* was an attractively designed, three-volume set of school textbooks written chiefly for use in the Caribbean. I should be clear that it was a uniquely valuable resource for the development of the school’s Humanities syllabus. There were pictures, maps and photographs (many of them coloured), with tasks at the end of each chapter - ‘things to do and think about’ that were designed to

encourage students to extend their understanding of the book's underlying themes and concepts. As I mentioned earlier, Edward Brathwaite was the series editor.<sup>53</sup>

I want to look at some of the pictures in *The People Who Came* now from the perspectives of what I have called 'classroom archaeology'. This will entail scraping away many layers of accumulated dust. I shall be concentrating especially on the history of these pictures as instances of 'pedagogic artefacts', and I shall be looking in some detail at the history of these images of plantation slavery, at their origins and at what was problematic about the way they worked in the textbook.

The students knew the book well. I mentioned already that Kevin and Sunday borrowed the term '*absentee landlords*' from *The People Who Came* and incorporated it into their work on migration. Indeed, they referred to the textbook continually over the years, more often than not, without being directed to do so by their teacher. Throughout this section I shall be concentrating especially on the visual material in the book to shed light on the baffling lines in Kevin's poem.

At the start of chapter fifteen of *The People Who Came*, 'The Plantation', there is a picture of a plantation house. It is a modern drawing that shows a wooden veranda similar to the one Kevin described in his poem. (Incidentally, one of the references to '*absent*' landlords that Kevin and Sunday noticed appears in the opening paragraph.<sup>54</sup> Over the page there are more drawings in a similar style, and then a page with four smallish coloured drawings (three inches by two inches) in a different style representing 'the five stages of sugar production'. (Figure 1) These four drawings - they are miniaturised reproductions of coloured engravings - belong to a set of ten engravings that were published at the start of the nineteenth century called *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua* by the English artist, William Clark. I shall be focusing on these drawings' complicated history.



#### How sugar was made

The whole routine of plantation life revolved around the making of sugar. The sugar-cane plant, which had been introduced into the New World from Madeira by the Portuguese, had been brought to Barbados by the Dutch and Portuguese Jews moving out of Brazil. These later showed the colonists how best to convert the cane to sugar. Newly planted canes took about 15 months to mature, while the older 'ratoon' canes took about 12 months.

When the cane-carts came from the fields into the factory yard, they were unloaded and the canes were passed by hand into the mill. The mill, which was turned by two pairs of mules, a water-wheel or a windmill, consisted of three heavy iron rollers which crushed the cane and squeezed the juice out of them. A wooden gutter carried the juice to the boiling house where it ran into a large copper tank called a *clarifier*. Here it was heated with a small quantity of *milk of lime* (white lime) which made all the impurities rise to the surface as a scum. These impurities were scooped out with wooden ladles and used in the making of rum.

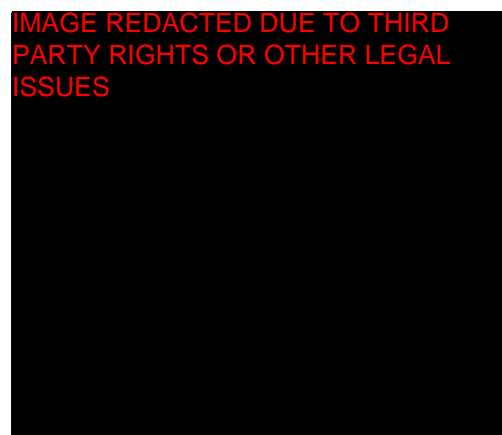


Figure 2

Clark's *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua* were published by Thomas Clay of Ludgate Hill, London in 1823.<sup>55</sup> They appeared at a significant moment in the history of the West Indies. In that same year, the Anti-Slavery Society was formed in

London. Thus Clark's *Ten Views* appeared after the slave trade was abolished (1807), but before the slaves were emancipated. Indeed, *Ten Views* were published when the national debate about the future of plantation slavery was at its height. Slavery was finally abolished in 1833. After that date, Africans were technically no longer slaves, but they were legally bound to work for their former owners as 'apprentices'. Full freedom came in 1838 when it became clear that the apprenticeship system had failed. The debate about the future of plantation slavery in the West Indies and the nature of the work on the plantations is therefore a critical element in any consideration of the reception of Clark's engravings at the time, and the intentions that lay behind the publication of his book.

Clark's drawings had an unusual claim to 'authenticity' in their day. For three years the author had served as an overseer on an estate owned by Admiral Tallemach in Antigua. The overseer's responsibility was to look after the daily running of the entire estate, and it is evident from Clark's drawings, as well as from the verbal commentary that accompanies them that he had an extensive technical knowledge of plantation work. One of Clark's aims was to inform a metropolitan readership about the nature of plantation economy. Intriguingly, seven of the ten views in the 1823 edition (and four of the five views reproduced in the textbook) include representations of plantation windmills. It is on one of these representations, *The Mill Yard* that I want to concentrate now.

Clark's representation of the mill yard fairly bustles with industrious activity. (figure 2) (Figure 2) The process of cane crushing is in full swing and the various operations are clearly delineated. But the picture of slaves working in the yard resonates eerily today. For all that *The Mill Yard* depicts something particular - the technical business of milling the cut cane and the division of labour that it entailed - it also evokes disquietingly something larger, which is the brutal history of the plantation slavery.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Figure 2

Plainly, the purpose of Clark's drawing was to explain to an early nineteenth century reader how sugar was extracted from raw cane stage by stage. Thus it describes graphically and in specific detail the technical nature of the slaves' work. As a consequence of this, the drawing may be read for evidence of the slaves' ordinary lives. Essentially, the subject of *The Mill Yard* is the mode of organised production that was evolved to transform a raw material, sugar cane, into a commodity, sugar, for profit - it shows slaves feeding a windmill that crushed newly cut cane to extract the juice. Long after the mode of production has disappeared (and when the conditions surrounding the creation of the representation, its publication and its distribution are beyond recall), the engraving documents the process of sugar production with an unusual degree of historical authority.<sup>56</sup> The drawing is a primary source of historical evidence about plantation work. But it also speaks (unwittingly) of an inhumane system of exploitation on an unimaginable scale that still haunts us. Thus it constitutes a powerful representation of a site of remembrance, and one that must have resonated for Kevin.

Since its publication as one of the *Ten Views*, *The Mill Yard* has often been reproduced separately in textbooks, displays and exhibitions, and it is likely that Kevin met the image more than once.<sup>57</sup> For instance, *The Mill Yard* appears on the front cover of a pioneering textbook for advanced studies in Caribbean history by J. H. Parry and Philip Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies* (1956).<sup>58</sup> Curiously, the image that is reproduced on the inside of that textbook is attributed to Edward Suter of London, and this strange misattribution deserves further ‘excavation’. Evidently *The Mill Yard* was printed by Suter around 1830, three years before emancipation, specifically for The Ladies’ Society for Promoting Early Education of Negro Children. Indeed, this particular instance of reproducing Clark’s original image separately from the sequence of drawings suggests how Clark’s print has been appropriated from very early on as ‘illustrative’ material for various pedagogic projects and enterprises.

What kind of a drawing is it? Paradoxically, Clark’s drawings borrow elements from a genre he inherited from the Enlightenment: the plates of Denis Diderot’s *Dictionnaire des Sciences* (1762). However, Clark’s debt to the *encyclopédie* is not immediately obvious because he borrowed from at least two other genres besides, and I shall say something about them in a moment.

Diderot’s *Dictionnaire des Sciences* contains a wealth of plates whose primary purpose is instruction. Each plate aims to teach an educated general reader (or a specialist one) about specific domains of technical – that is ‘useful’ – knowledge. Crucially, they constitute paradigmatic instances of Enlightenment ‘pedagogic’ apparatus and they are historically important today as the major precursors of modern textbook technical ‘illustrations’. Altogether, Diderot’s plates provide a detailed, comprehensive picture of the crafts, trades, arts and sciences practised in France in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Crucially, the subject matter of Diderot’s plates was not confined to France. It is especially interesting in our context that his *Dictionnaire des Sciences* contains a plate

depicting the typical features of 'an ideal plantation' in the West Indies, with a slave owner's house, slave huts, a boiling house, a windmill and so on.

Each plate in the *Dictionnaire* describes a 'model' or 'type' that contains all the elements necessary to explain how an 'object' (in this instance a sugar plantation) 'works'. Thus Diderot's plates were specifically intended to provide condensed images of useful items of knowledge. Each element of the drawing is properly labelled, with words accompanying the visual representation. Typically, the plates represent practical knowledge of their 'objects', such as how a windmill works and its place in the processes of sugar production.

Diderot's plates constitute forerunners or prototypes of a particular kind of modern 'pedagogical apparatus' - the textbook 'illustration'. Typically, textbook 'illustrations' are meant to teach readers specific discourses (usually certain 'scientific' principles and concepts) by 'visual means'. Illustrations in school textbooks usually work on the principle that pictures are, as the phrase goes, 'worth ten thousand words'. But in practice this is rarely straightforwardly so. Crucially, the *Dictionnaire* rests on a body of well-defined epistemological principles. The encyclopaedic plates represent the 'idea' of the object. They present a discourse about the object of study: they do not represent (copy) the objects themselves as they 'naturally' appear in the world.

For Diderot, human knowledge derived from sensory experience. He took over the sensationalist explanation of how perceptions are transformed into ideas from his contemporary, the Abbé de Condillac. For Condillac, who was the epistemological father of encyclopaedic discourse, signs stood for ideas of things, not for things themselves. The 'illustrations' depict ideas and the ways that ideas are combined into conceptual discourse. Crucially, they do not hold up a mirror to nature. Instead, the structural organisation of the visual images is meant to reveal a human, conceptual ordering of nature rather than a reflection of the natural state of things.

It is not hard to see why Clark's drawings have wound up in school textbooks. But the way they appear in textbooks is problematic. *The Mill Yard* is one of a series of ten images that together present a step-by-step description of the processes of sugar production in the West Indies. The drawings, which represent the seasonal cycle of work on the plantation are meant to be looked at in a particular order.<sup>59</sup> The verbal text, which is printed on the facing page opposite each drawing explains what is going on in each drawing, but the relation between the verbal and the visual material is often a complicated one.

*The People Who Came* shows only five of the ten scenes that appear in Clark's folio edition. And it gives a different verbal explanation of the processes. The explanation in the textbook is integrated into the 'body text' of the whole chapter. Four scenes are shown on a single page. (Figure 1) These scenes comprise: 'Hoeing cane' (Plate II, Digging, or Rather hoeing, the Cane-Holes); 'Planting sugar cane' (Plate III, Planting the Sugar Cane); 'Crushing the cane', (Plate VI, The Mill Yard); 'Interior of a boiling the juice' (Plate V The Boiling House). The explanations given make no explicit cross-references to the visual images.

What is more, the drawings cannot be 'read' in the manner that Clark originally intended. There are at least three reasons for this: first, because the series is incomplete; second, because Clark's verbal commentary, which often contains supplementary information, does not appear; and third, because the instructions telling the reader how to read the images are missing. From Kevin's point of view, the arrangement of pictures in the textbook was less than clear

In the original folio edition the verbal commentary printed on the facing page explains what each drawing is supposed to show. Words and pictures are meant to compliment each other and work together to tell the story. But significantly the verbal text does not simply mirror the visual information. Nor does the drawing simply 'illustrate' the verbal commentary that accompanies it in any consistent way.

In some instances, the visual text, and in others the verbal text supplies different kinds of information.

Here is one telling instance. One drawing (Plate VIII) shows the exterior of the curing-house and stills, with a small building under some trees in the background. The verbal commentary tells us that this was 'the residence of the author, as overseer'. Crucially, this new information alters the manner in which the whole book 'works'. It diverts the reader's gaze towards the building in the background of the composition. Thus a relatively minor feature of the landscape - takes on major significance. What is in the background pictorially is brought to the foreground of the reader's attention by the verbal commentary to make an implicit claim about the 'authenticity' of the representation and the status of what the reader is being shown. Additionally, the 'objective' representation of the plantation is suddenly personalised by Clark's subjective recollection.

Clark's intentions were primarily didactic. The verbal commentary instructs the reader how to read the visual representations. It introduces a temporal sequence (the slaves do this, then this) into a composite set of landscapes, with vignettes that otherwise could not show the linear processes of sugar production. To 'read' the image correctly, the reader's gaze must reconstruct the sequence of steps by putting vignettes of various operations in linear order, although they appear simultaneous in the overall composition. This makes sense pictorially because the slaves' work is continuous, with several different operations going on at the same time. Thus the reader's gaze retraces the whole process, starting with the arrival of the cut cane on bullock carts and ending with the disposal of the 'bruised cane' trash after it has been crushed and the juice extracted.

In the verbal commentary Clark describes the division of labour among the Negroes in the drawing of the mill yard like this:

The bundles of Cane are carted and deposited as near as possible to the Mill, to lessen the labour of the Negro girls, who convey them on their heads to the mill door, where the junks are placed on a receiving board, and the tops

which bound them drawn away for the convenience of the Negro whose duty it is to feed the mill.

In high winds, two, and sometimes three, feeders are required to supply the cylinders...

The *Magos* or bruised cane, returned by the dumb-turner glides down an inclined plane through an aperture in the Mill-wall, whence it is conveyed away upon wooden frames by women, and old negroes spread and turn it in the sun to be afterwards used as fuel.<sup>60</sup>

*The People Who Came* also describes how cane was crushed, but unfortunately the textbook description is not linked explicitly to the miniaturised reproductions of Clark's original drawing. The layout of the page is unfortunate too. The verbal description in the textbook begins in the top right hand corner of the page (diagonally opposite the drawing), so the reader's gaze can shift back and forth from the verbal description to the image, but the verbal description does not refer directly to the activities depicted in the drawing. Instead, it characterises the crushing process generally: 'The mill, which was turned by two pairs of mules, a waterwheel or a windmill, consisted of three heavy rollers which crushed the cane and squeezed the juice out of them.'<sup>61</sup> Thus, the reader has to somehow abstract an 'ideal' (free-floating and generalised) reconstruction of the process from what appears to be a naturalistically represented scene. Clark's method of working holds the key. In reality, separate elements were drawn from nature to be combined later (as was common practice) into a landscape 'composition'. In *The People Who Came* the folio size of the original image has been reduced to a format two inches by three inches with the consequence that the three heavy rollers – only two of which are just visible in the original drawing – cannot be identified clearly.

On the previous page (Figure 4) a modern drawing shows the insides of a sugar mill with three rollers driven by a water wheel (top left). Diagonally opposite (bottom right) there is another drawing in the same contemporary style of slaves being punished by whipping or, alternatively, by working a tread-wheel.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Work was resumed until midday when there was a two—hour break for lunch. This meal was similar to breakfast, but salted meat or pickled fish was usually added. Each slave was supposed to receive a regular allowance of this. 'I'hev then worked on until it was dark.

In the lull between planting and crop time, the slaves were put to work repairing the plantation roads and fences and manuring the helds. The skilled slaves, (luring this period, made barrels (called *hogsheads*) for the sugar, and carried out repair work in the factory and other plantation buildings.

During crop time the routine changed. The slaves were summoned to the helds earlier and worked until later in the evenings. 'I'here was less time for eating and rest. 'I—he slaves in the mill and boiling houses sometimes worked in shifts right around the clock.

Inside a sugar mill.

they cut and carted the cane to the mill. The third gang was made up of young children and weak or elderly slaves. They did light weeding and got food for the animals. There were also the domestic slaves who worked in the Plantation House and who felt superior to the field slaves. In addition, there were skilled slaves such as masons, carpenters, coopers and wheelwrights, whose services the planter could hire out; and the equally skilled slaves who worked inside the mills and boiling houses, producing sugar.

The field slaves were summoned to the field before sunrise by the ringing of a bell or the blowing of a conch shell. They were checked by the overseer or book-keeper who, with the slave-driver (himself a slave), supervised their work. They worked for about four hours and then had half an hour's break for breakfast, which was prepared by certain of the slave women. The meal was usually boiled yams, okro, callaloo and plantains seasoned with salt and cayenne pepper.

Some owners made the slaves work too hard and punished them cruelly for the slightest fault.

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

95

Figure 4

The caption reads: 'Some owners made the slaves work too hard and punished them cruelly for the slightest fault.' The modern drawing is based on a nineteenth century engraving of a tread-wheel in Jamaica. Like the image of *The Mill Yard*, the image of the tread-wheel has also been frequently reproduced. Indeed, a cropped

reproduction of the original engraving is printed in another school textbook, *The West Indian Heritage: A History of the West Indies*.<sup>62</sup> However, the representation of the tread-wheel is problematic and I shall come back to it in a moment.

Crucially, in *The People Who Came* the contemporary style of the drawings has the effect of making the tread-wheel and the water wheel resemble one another.

Confusingly, it appears as though the tread-wheel and the water wheel belong to the same mechanical assembly. It is therefore plausible that Kevin reasonably assumed that the water wheel and the tread-wheel both provided power to turn the windmill and this appears to answer our question about the baffling lines in the poem.<sup>63</sup> But the confusion does not end there.

A moment ago I claimed that Clark's *Ten Views* drew on a genre associated especially with Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*. Yet, at first glance, Clark's drawings contrast strikingly with Diderot's plates. Clark's views are represented 'naturalistically' whereas the plates present a discourse about the object of study, not the objects themselves as they appear 'naturally'. Moreover, Clark's views do not attempt to represent the processes of sugar production schematically, there are no accompanying labels and they don't use conventions of encyclopaedic representation such as 'cross-section and assembly' drawings of the kind favoured by Diderot that were common around the middle of the eighteenth century. Hence, the windmill is not drawn with its casing cut away to reveal the three rollers. Rather, at first glance, Clark's depictions appear to be executed more in the manner of topographical sketches that were popular in England around the turn of the century.

Indeed, Clark's drawings owe much to the genre of the topographical sketch in the way that they follow established rules of landscape composition. (I mention composition again here because it will be important for what I shall go on to say about what Kevin was doing later). Indeed, *Ten Views* resembles many period sketches of Caribbean 'prospects', such as Johnson's *English Harbour, Antigua. From Great George Fort, Monk's Hill*. *Monk's Hill* is a particularly good example

of the military topographical sketch genre. Such drawings became fashionable around the turn of the eighteenth century. When public attention became focused on political developments in the West Indies, and Caribbean such subjects became lucrative.<sup>64</sup> Like many drawings and paintings of the genre, *Monk's Hill* shows a 'prospect' with a storm approaching. This is a conventional device used in topographical sketches to provide a focus on the horizon (to create an illusion of distance and depth), and to introduce dramatic narrative into the scene. Two years after Clark's *Ten Views* were published, another artist, James Hakewill produced *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica*. Hakewill's drawings, like Clark's, depict sugar plantations, showing the arrangement of the key features on particular estates, such as the book-keeper's barrack, the still house, the boiling house and the overseer's residence and so on.

I need to touch on the way that *Ten Views* figured in the market place of metropolitan art. With the advent of lithographic printing techniques in the first decades of the nineteenth century, travellers' topographical sketches became especially popular in England. Artists usually drew their designs on transfer paper and handed them over to a skilled lithographic printer, who reproduced them. Clark's drawings were published at the start of a highly lucrative period for British artists and engravers. A decade after the publication of *Ten Views*, John Frederick Lewis published *Sketches and Drawings of the Alhambra* (1835) and *Sketches of Spain and Spanish Character*. Shortly after, David Robert's magnificent collection of sketches, *The Holy Land, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia* (1842-1849). The way that the market developed is illustrated by the fact that Roberts' sketches were issued in forty parts made up of two hundred and forty plates, which could be plain or coloured. Although these sketches record Roberts' subjects with an unusual degree of accuracy they are primarily aesthetic prints. Crucially, he recomposed the elements in his sketches to achieve certain 'artistic' effects.<sup>65</sup> Above all, his paintings and lithographs were meant to convey the romance of exotic locations with an historical and cultural resonance for a nineteenth century, well-to-do readership.

Clark's views of Antigua, of course, held no such historical and cultural resonance for nineteenth-century readers. Instead, *Ten Views* offered aesthetically pleasing, but chiefly (where, allegedly, there were no historical associations) they offered 'authoritative' quasi-anthropological descriptions of life and work in the West Indies. They are meant to show 'well-managed', rationalised Antiguan sugar plantations. Indeed, Clark's drawings also borrow from a genre of paintings depicting rational farming methods that were popular in England in the 1740's, such as *The Dixon Harvesters*, (currently in the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum).<sup>66</sup> For those nineteenth century readers who were familiar with paintings of rational farming as images of modernisation and progress, Clarke's drawings depict the extension of essentially the same 'improving' methods to the colonies in the West Indies.

Clark's drawings were not literal representations of 'real' places and events. They did not 'copy' nature. Rather, they were, like Roberts' landscapes, compositions. But the rules of composition that Clark followed differed significantly from Roberts' in a way that connects *Ten Views* to the *Encyclopédie*. *Ten Views* resembles Diderot's plates chiefly in the way it aims to instruct the reader about a particular domain of economic activity, 'useful' knowledge. For Diderot, technical development was explicitly and implicitly related to Enlightenment ideology around the progress of Mankind.

In a way that resembles Diderot's plates, Clark's drawings typify the processes of modern sugar production to edify specialist and non-specialist readers. They instruct the reader how to read the images to see how sugar was produced on a well-managed estate. Clark's style is 'naturalistic' not 'realistic'. The drawings depict the outward appearances of things, but they are structured in a way that is different from the way things 'really are'. As such, *The Mill Yard* is not a faithful representation of a particular place. Rather it is a composite of materials drawn from several locations, as Clark himself explains: 'The Mill is that situated at Gambles, and the accessories [*sic*] are taken from other estates, to bring them under one point of view, to represent

the Mill-yard.' Hence, the organising principle for Clark's drawing is the pedagogic *idea* of the mill – it teaches the reader about what mills in Antigua were for and how they worked. It both specifies and concretises the operations involved. Thus the drawings and the text, words and pictures in combination represent a *discourse* about plantations. They do not depict plantations as they 'naturally' occurred.

Moreover, Clark's discourse on sugar plantations is not a neutral one. It is ideologically accented in the way that it idealises plantations at the very moment when the future of plantation slavery was being debated at the national level. (Contrast Clark's drawings with William Elmes' illustrations for the Abolitionist tract, *The Adventures of Johnny Newcome* (1811) satirising the lives of slave-owning planters). In sum, Clark superimposes an Enlightenment discourse about the progressive nature of rationalised labour onto scenes of plantation slavery.

However, the differences between Clark and Diderot are also telling. Here is a description of how Diderot's plates work.

The general image of the worker in the *Encyclopédie* is that of a body reduced to its hands. The individual carding cotton, for example, has no existence beyond the wrist and the hand that perform the task. It is not, moreover, the hands of innumerable workers and craftspeople that are shown, but rather two hands always the same...It is this 'manualisation' of the worker that allows Diderot to propose the following explanation of why one method of manufacturing is superior to another...It is the anonymity of the workers and their interchangeability that make it possible to rationalise production: that is, not only to subject the production process to the order of reason, but also to capitalize on methods designed to increase efficiency, quality and finally profitability.<sup>67</sup>

In Clark's drawings by contrast the slaves are not 'manualised' abstractions. Rather they are figured fully and concretised. Indeed, *Ten Views* teems with vital, individualised figures. This is strikingly so in *The Boiling House* where a voluptuous Black woman, wearing red turban and a yellow dress with red and white striped underskirts, sways down the gangway between the boiler (the *teache*) and the trays of crystalised sugar.

And Clark is unafraid to describe physical labour. In *The Mill Yard* women carry bundles of cane on their heads to the mill door. They stoop to gather and bundle the cane. Elsewhere he sketches the repetitive, mechanical nature of men and women hoeing, cutting cane, boiling cane juice. Indeed, Clark appreciated the skills and difficulties involved in performing specific tasks, as in this example taken from one of his verbal explanations:

Opening the land preparatory to the planting of the sugar cane is the most laborious occupation for the Negroes; they are always allowed relaxation during the hottest hour, and on this occasion an extra allowance of rum, with a plentiful supply of sugar and water'

And again:

The younger Negroes distribute two or three plants into each cane hole, while the most experienced Negroes open cavities in the holes about six inches deep, place the plants horizontally, so that the buds may appear on either side and cover them. This process requires great attention on the part of the Negroes who are thus entrusted.

Yet notwithstanding the differences between them, in a way that is strikingly similar to Diderot, Clark depicts the technical nature of human productivity. (Ironically, the verbal commentary in *Ten Views* provides an excellent primary source of evidence to support what Kevin and Sunday discovered for themselves during their editing partnership: slaves supplied the necessary, technical farming skills as well as brute labour that made the sugar plantations of the West Indies economically viable). What is particularly problematic though is Clark's *Ten Views* offer disquieting instance of instrumental rationality that constitutes the negative strand in the 'dialectic' of Enlightenment. The discourse around rational forms of labour masks the violence that lies behind.

Like the Diderot's encyclopaedic plates (but for different reasons) Clark's *Ten Views* speak of progressive modes of production.<sup>68</sup> *The Mill Yard* (image and word combined) explains how each separate operation contributes instrumentally to efficient productivity of a total enterprise – an enterprise that was in reality unspeakably harsh. Disquietingly, the compositional elements that Clark borrowed

from the genre of the topographical sketch contribute to an overall impression of harmony. The drawings filter out brutal social realities of enforced labour, the controlling threat of violence and the slaves' (reciprocally violent) resistance. Overall, Clark depicts the model plantation as a harmonised, calmly ordered, hierarchical world (superintended by the overseer and the slave-driver) where male and female, young and old are industriously employed in the business of transforming nature (in the form of raw sugar cane) into wealth that benefits mankind.

I found it necessary to recover something of the material history of Clark's *Ten Views* to show how in this particular instance the original drawings were transformed by processes of selection and design into 'instructional materials', or what I have been calling 'pedagogical apparatus' and the artefacts of schooling'. My concern has been to uncover the diachronic depths of the signifier. These drawings have circulated in different social *milieux*, they have a history of distribution as well as a particular social character. Crucially, they refer back to their previous existences beyond the immediate contexts of their present articulations. What is more, they bear the marks – the scratches and dents - of their previous usage. I have tried to show how Clark's drawings were appropriated, reproduced and imported into new contexts where their meanings become unexpectedly problematic. Originally, *The Mill Yard* was intended to inform metropolitan readers about the efficient management of sugar production in Antigua. But in a school textbook, *The People Who Came*, Clark's images have been reduced, cropped, separated from his verbal commentary and turned into illustrations (pedagogic apparatus) to teach contemporary schoolchildren, chiefly in Caribbean schools, about the realities of plantation society. As a consequence of this, the drawings are given new ideological accents, and the morally and politically ambiguous nature of Clark's original drawings lay buried. Crucially, this ambiguity could have been a focus for Kevin and Sunday, but as it was the opportunity was missed because the history of Clark's drawing only emerged for the teacher long after Kevin's poem was written.

I may seem to have strayed from the story of how *Piece of the Past* came to be written, but I don't think so. I shall conclude the story with a discussion of creativity and imagination that relates directly to my account of *The Mill Yard*. This relation turns on a notion of composition from the perspectives of psychological processes rather than from text description of forms and structures.

When Kevin wrote about the windmill, he showed that he had grasped the fundamental principle on which the entire plantation system depended: slaves provided the energy needed to produce sugar for profit. In the Caribbean, as elsewhere in the New World, enforced labour transformed a crude, raw material into a valuable commodity. Despite some confusion over the function of the tread-wheel, Kevin's learned much from *The People Who Came*. Indeed, his conceptual grasp of the principle behind plantation slavery penetrated and transformed the very structure of his memories.

Here is an ironic twist to finish this section. The nineteenth-century engraving of the Jamaican tread-wheel that was reproduced in the early edition of *The People Who Came* was in reality a copy of a wood engraving (1834) representing a scene from a 'house of correction'. (Figure 5) The plate depicts the punishment of convicted 'apprentices' in a Jamaican prison, not slaves on a plantation. (Slavery was abolished in 1833). However, the fate of former slaves, who were legally apprenticed to their former owners became a serious cause for concern for The London Anti-Slavery Society from 1835 on. As part of a mass publishing campaign against the abuse of apprentices they reproduced a pamphlet in 1837, written by an ex-slave, with a wood engraving showing conditions in a house of correction in Jamaica. The engraving, which is the model for the modern drawing in the textbook, had a huge impact at the time. Recently, a historian of visual representations of slavery has described the original plate like this: 'The landscape format is dominated by the enormous cylinder of the treadmill, the line of prisoners strapped by the wrists to a pole, and performing their appalling parody of dance'.<sup>69</sup>

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Figure 5

The tread-wheel, which was one of the new ‘technologies of penal discipline’, was a relatively recent invention (it was introduced in 1818). Notwithstanding its novelty, by 1834 it was already a standard feature in most English prisons. It is therefore additionally interesting to see how quickly and efficiently penal technology spread to the colonies. Ironically, Kevin assumed that the slaves were somehow engaged in enforced, productive labour. Nothing could be further from the truth. The ‘work’ required to turn the wheel was purposely unproductive, futile and therefore deliberately a waste of the prisoners’ time. As a consequence convicts spoke aptly of time on the tread-wheel as ‘grinding the wind’.

\* \* \*

In this closing section I shall be looking at how Kevin’s emergent grasp of Caribbean history shaped his childhood memories. So far I have been concentrating on the story of his growing understanding of the history of plantation slavery. I have suggested how school instruction awakened certain developmental processes, and how these processes progressed according to ‘their own rhythms’. Further to this, I

have indicated why Kevin's progress cannot be adequately described without looking at his particular circumstances and at the concrete situations that unfolded in the classroom over time. Now I want to focus on the role of Kevin's imagination in relation to his memories. Specifically, I want to look at his poem, *Piece of the Past* in the light of Vygotsky's striking claim about the nature of adolescent thought: 'A child's thinking is governed by sense. An adolescent's thinking is intellectual thinking'.

In a characteristic passage about the changing role of signs in shaping human behaviour, Vygotsky describes an incident that occurred during an experiment where a child of five and a half had been drawing a streetcar. The child's pencil breaks:

He tried, nevertheless, to finish the circle of a wheel, pressing down on the pencil very hard, but nothing showed on the paper except a deep colorless line. The child muttered to himself, 'It's broken,' put aside the pencil, took watercolors instead, and began drawing a *broken* streetcar after an accident, continuing to talk to himself from time to time about the change in his picture.<sup>70</sup>

The description of the child's struggle to complete the drawing arises in connection with Vygotsky's discussion of the fate of egocentric speech. He is taking issue with Piaget's view that egocentric speech gradually dies away as the child is socialised into new forms of behaviour. Rather, says Vygotsky, it is the case that, 'Besides being a means of expression and of a release of tension, it [egocentric speech] soon becomes an instrument of thought in the proper sense – in seeking and planning the solution of a problem.'<sup>71</sup> In his analysis of the incident, Vygotsky claims that the child's accidentally provoked egocentric utterance 'so manifestly affected his activity that it is impossible to mistake it for a by-product, an accompaniment not interfering with the melody.'

Thus Vygotsky's analysis throws light on the changing interrelations between egocentric speech and activity. At the first stage of development, egocentric speech marks the end of the activity; later, it shifts to the middle; and eventually it appears

at the beginning of the activity, where it takes on a planning function that raises the child's actions to the level of purposeful behaviour.

The Soviet psychologist was the inheritor of Condillac, who was the first to argue that signs are necessary for achieving mastery over mental operations.<sup>72</sup> Without the use of signs, insisted the French Enlightenment thinker, man could never achieve *voluntary* control over his faculties. For Condillac, language is no longer just the chief means of communicating ideas. Rather, it is a necessary instrument for the development of thinking itself – what we might call the mental manipulation of ideas. Condillac summarised this seminal insight in a sentence: 'In order to develop the real cause of the progress of the imagination, contemplation and memory, we must inquire what assistance these operations derive from the use of signs.'<sup>73</sup>

Two centuries later, Vygotsky noted the pivotal role of signs in his genetic account of a child's gradual mastery of planning functions. He writes: 'A small child draws first, then decides what it is that he has drawn; at a slightly older age he names his drawing when it is half done; and finally he decides what he will draw.'<sup>74</sup> Thus he links the changing character of egocentric speech powerfully to the child's growing mastery of new forms of behaviour. And, crucially, something similar happens with the changing character of perception in adolescence, when abstract thinking begins to penetrate and transform concrete and visual features typical of a child's thinking, and it is on this development that I want to focus now.

Vygotsky insisted that the key to understanding the nature of such developments was the changing character of structural relations among intellectual functions. He challenged contemporary views (1931), which assumed that adolescent thinking was a stage dominated by imagination. By contrast, Vygotsky argued that the changing role of fantasy has to be understood as a function of related psychological developments. 'Fantasy', he writes, 'is not really a primary, independent and leading function in the development of adolescent psychology, and its development is a consequence of the function of concept formation, an end result which completes

and implements all the complicated processes of change which the adolescent's whole intellectual life has to overcome.'<sup>75</sup> Children do not 'outgrow' fantasy. Rather fantasy is transformed by the development of new functions so that what was once dominated by concrete visual images is reconfigured by conceptual thinking.

I shall say more about the genetic picture of the development that Vygotsky constructed now, and I want to connect this picture to the philosophy of symbolic forms that Ernst Cassirer developed in the twenties. This connection is a reminder, by the way, that for all the differences among them, and these were substantial, Vygotsky shared an essentially German philosophical outlook with the Berlin School of Gestalt Psychology with which Cassirer was associated.<sup>76</sup>

Vygotsky read Cassirer's major work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume III* almost as soon as it appeared in Berlin (1929). We know this for certain because the Soviet psychologist discusses Cassirer's account of patients exhibiting complex disorders of the higher mental functions in the opening section of his chapter 'Imagination and creativity of the adolescent' (1931). The full significance of speech pathology was brought to Cassirer's attention by his cousin Kurt Goldstein, a clinical psychologist, and his associate Ernst Gelb.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Cassirer observed their work first hand in the Frankfurt Neurological Institute.

Vygotsky discovered striking evidence in Gelb and Goldstein's clinical research to support his picture of the mediating role of signs in the development of mental functions. The German clinical psychologists' case studies of aphasics showed how patients experienced difficulty with sorting colours. Such difficulties opened windows onto developmental trajectories. When patients who had lost the ability to recall the names of colours were invited to perform a sorting task with coloured strands of wool, they proved unable to do so, even though there was evidence to show that they saw the colours correctly. But when the colours were present as concrete objects the patients were able to choose 'with great certainty and precision': the colour of a ripe strawberry, a mailbox, a billiard table, chalk, violets, forget-me-

nots etc. In sum, aphasics succeeded when the concrete object was in front of them and when they were able to point to the colour of the named object, but they were unable to use colours as categories and to collect the samples into sets.<sup>78</sup>

From their clinical observations Gelb and Goldstein concluded that the normal psychological connections that enable us to classify colours were disturbed among aphasics in ways that caused them to revert to an earlier developmental stage. This stage was not only more elementary it was also less 'rational'. 'Normal' individuals were able to use colours as representative instances of a category: redness, blueness, yellowness and so on. By contrast, aphasics suffered from what Gelb and Goldstein called 'an impeded categorical attitude'.<sup>79</sup> In other words, they were unable to move from a particular instance to a representative instance of a category. Gelb and Goldstein took this to be hugely significant because it seemed to suggest an important difference between what they called *immediate* and *mediated* perceptions.

For Vygotsky such cases provided a 'zero' point from which he could construct a genetic account of the development of the imagination. His account turns on the way that perception is gradually liberated from being tied to immediate, concrete circumstances by 'progressively filling itself with symbolic meaning'.

Gelb and Goldstein's findings revealed how growth in our capacities to handle symbolic meaning makes possible new forms of psychological behaviour. Cassirer took up their discoveries and absorbed them into his phenomenology of symbolic forms. Indeed, he connected their findings from clinical research to the question of the origin of language – almost as Herder had posed it in the eighteenth century. Cassirer reflects, 'Here it seems pertinent to ask whether the new degree of freedom which perception gains in the purely representative achievement is due to language, or whether it does not make language first possible?'<sup>80</sup>

Essentially, Cassirer rediscovered Herder. For the neo-Kantian thinker, Herder's achievement was one of the greatest intellectual triumphs of the European

Enlightenment. His reading of Herder suggested a new direction for philosophy. He became especially interested in Herder's notion of the way that language (symbolisation) liberates humans from the immediate constraints of their concrete circumstances to afford (in James Britton's apt phrase) both a prospect and a retrospect of experience. According to Herder, the state of reflection that signs of man's own making (objective symbols, artefacts) make possible releases man from 'the vast ocean of sensations, which permeates [the soul] through all the channels of the senses'.<sup>81</sup> Herder distinguished between natural cries and human speech, a distinction that corresponded broadly to Condillac's division between 'natural' and 'instituted' signs. And human speech, says Herder, depends on the uniquely human capacity for reflection (*Besonnenheit*). Thus he singles out reflection, not as it features in Condillac's account, as one faculty among others, but rather as the chief faculty on which the other faculties hinge.

Herder saw the appearance of language as the key moment in the progressive development of Mankind. Reflection is what separates humans from animals. It provides the semiotic tools with which humans both order the world and mediate their inward operations. He did not picture language as a static system of 'instituted' signs in the manner of Condillac, rather he saw it as a fundamentally constitutive human activity.

Reflective consciousness enables us to engage in acts of primary signification. Such acts make recollection (voluntary control over memory) possible. It is just this capacity - to recognise and signify within a unitary mental operation, Herder claimed, that makes us intrinsically human. Correspondingly, Gelb and Goldstein concluded that perception and language are not in a relation where one depends upon the other, or that one is primary and the other secondary. Rather it seemed to them that they exist in a reciprocal relation to one another in what they call 'the same basic attitude'.

Vygotsky discovered in Gelb and Goldstein's research into aphasia a clue to understanding the development of imagination and creativity in the adolescent child. Moreover, he fully appreciated the German psychologists' reading of Herder: 'Gelb formulates the idea in a paradoxical but quite correct manner, when he recalls Herder's thesis, which says that the language of thinking is the language of freedom.'<sup>82</sup> What is more, Vygotsky was especially interested in Cassirer's description of the behaviour of one particular patient who was incapable of pouring himself a glass of water when asked to do so, but who was able to perform this operation without the slightest difficulty when he was thirsty. Intriguingly, Vygotsky connected this description to the way that children gradually break away from the support they find in concrete, tangible objects through fantasy. The patient was completely unable to do something that was not motivated by the actual situation. Thus he exemplified a complete absence of imagination. He couldn't free himself from his concrete situation, which is precisely what imagination enables us to do.

At the start of this chapter, I mentioned the concrete character of memory in small children, and I suggested that 'they can still reproduce real perceptions in the fullness of the original experience, the full richness of their tangible details and with the vividness of a hallucination.'<sup>83</sup> I want to concentrate on memory now. Vygotsky discusses the quality of memory among small children in connection with research into eidetic images that was carried out at Marburg by Erich Jaensch.<sup>84</sup> The key issue for Vygotsky concerned the fate of eidetic images, just as the fate of egocentric speech was the key issue in his critique of Piaget. Jaensch claimed that eidetic images dominated the 'primitive stages' of human culture. However, with the development of cultural phenomena (essentially what I have been calling 'technologies of memory') eidetic visual images are gradually replaced with abstract ideas. With the intensification of abstract thinking, eidetic visual images proper tend to disappear. But in Vygotsky's view this is not the end of eidetic visual images in thinking.

For Vygotsky, Jaensch's special contribution was the discovery that visual eidetic images are analogous to concepts in the sphere of concrete thinking. It is not at all the case that abstract thinking simply replaces concrete visual thinking and that eidetic visual thinking dies away (in the manner of Piaget's egocentric speech); rather, abstract thinking qualitatively transforms visual thinking, as fantasy combines concrete visual imagery with abstract thought. Further to this, the visual reworking of concrete sensory images is the basic characteristic feature of the imagination.

Crucially, the function and character of fantasy alters over time: 'The essential change that fantasy undergoes in adolescence is its liberation from purely concrete, imagistic features and at the same time, its infiltration by elements of abstract thinking.'<sup>85</sup> From a genetic standpoint, Vygotsky claims that imagination in adolescence is the successor to child play. Just as children find support for play in concrete objects that stand for things in the 'real' world (for example, 'a chair representing a steam engine') images – visual conceptions – begin to play the same pivotal role for the imagination. Essentially, fantasy in adolescents strives for concretisation.

The example that Vygotsky gives resonates with the story I have been telling about Kevin. It comes from a contemporary novel by Jacob Wassermann, *The Maurizius Case* (1929). In the novel a sixteen-year-old boy reflects on the unjust sentence given to Maurizius who has been in prison for eighteen years due to a legal error: '...whilst thinking about the fate of this man, the boy's inflamed brain draws pictures while at the same time [he] desires nothing more than it should function in a logical way.' First, the boy tries to calculate the time that Maurizius has spent in prison: He calculates that eighteen years and five months equals two hundred and twenty-one months or approximately six thousand six hundred and thirty days and six thousand six hundred and thirty nights.' The description of the boy's increasing frustration as he tries to concretise the abstraction is particularly harrowing.

Recall the moment when Kevin is trying to grasp the scale of the Atlantic slave trade: 'What? Plantation owners worked their...worked their...slaves to death because it was cheaper to work them...You know? Twenty four million...' Thus he struggles to concretise the human meaning of what otherwise would remain an abstraction - the estimated number of Africans transported to the New World. Vygotsky uses the example from the *Maurizius Case* to show how tightly adolescent fantasy is still bound up with the concrete support which adolescents find in sensory conceptions. 'In this sense', says Vygotsky, 'the genetic fate of visual or concrete thinking is of great interest. Visual thinking does not disappear from the intellectual life of the adolescent along with the appearance of abstract thinking. It only moves on to another place, goes off into the fantasy sphere, partly undergoes change under the influence of abstract thinking and then, like any other function, rises to a higher level.'<sup>86</sup>

The quotation from George Lamming's novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* with which I began this chapter poignantly evokes similar efforts by a small boy, G, to make sense of slavery. G struggles to concretise the notion of owning a man or a woman:

He asked the teacher what was the meaning of slave, and the teacher explained. But it didn't make sense. He didn't understand how anyone could be bought by another. He knew horses and dogs could be bought and worked. But he did not understand how one man could buy another man.' G concludes, 'It was simply unreal. The idea of ownership'.<sup>87</sup>

For Kevin, slavery was a historical reality, but no less difficult to grasp for that. As one historian has put it recently, the last ten years have witnessed a phenomenal increase in books which attempt to describe the minutiae of day-to-day existence on plantations. In addition to such descriptions there have been studies of images of slavery that have exerted an immediate and frequently lasting, impact on Western culture – especially visual culture.<sup>88</sup> Interest here focuses on the way that Kevin drew upon a particular instance of such imagery to make sense of the past. He used visual information that was available to him both to make sense of slavery – to concretise the historical abstraction – and, crucially, at the same time, to 'rework' his

childhood memories of Montserrat by a process which Vygotsky's work on imagination powerfully illuminates.

The impressions that we carry away from scenes and events are not identical to our perceptions at the time. What we believe we remember, we imagine. Experimental psychology in the twenties revealed the way that the most elementary impressions – eidetic images – are duly 'altered' by mental processes. For Vygotsky, Erich Jaensch's research into eidetic images at Marburg shed light on the processes of combination whereby images are combined into new formations that are analogous to concepts. Crucially, Jaensch's experiments showed that whole new images are created from several concrete impressions that constitute visual concepts. He claimed that this happens in two ways. First, there is a type of combination based on a process of 'fluxion', where the eidetic image represents a dynamic combination of separate concrete impressions. With fluxion, one image changes into another. The second type of combination is composition, and it is this type which chiefly concerns us here.

Vygotsky describes composition as consisting in 'the subject forming a new sensible whole which is constructed according to a known usable attribute selected from various features of concrete objects'.<sup>89</sup> But a concept, says Vygotsky, is not just a combination of images, rather it is a 'combination of assessments'. Through a combination of assessments we gain a *mediated* knowledge of the object. And this holds the key to the difference between the thinking of a child and the thinking of an adolescent – 'a child's thinking is governed by sense. An adolescent's thinking is intellectual thinking'.<sup>90</sup> Essentially, concepts are a condensation of assessments. They have a non-visual character. However, visual thinking does not break off in adolescence. Rather it undergoes what Vygotsky calls 'a vigorous transformation' under the influence of concepts, which cannot be excluded from the influence of the imagination'.

Vygotsky characterised the qualitative difference between imagination in childhood and adolescence like this. It does not take much, he says to satisfy children's fantasy: 'Days on end can be filled with thoughts about a horse drawing a cart.' Imagined scenes hardly differ from reality. It was Wilhelm Wundt, he notes, who first pointed out the extreme poverty of the creative aspects of children's fantasy. Researchers have pointed to an inner drive for creative expression and an inner tendency for productivity during adolescence. This is sometimes associated with writing poetry. Vygotsky quotes Charlotte Buhler who remarks: 'It is startling how people without any talent for poetry begin to write poetry in adolescence.'<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, in the research of Charlotte Buhler in Vienna, Vygotsky found clear evidence of a lack of co-operation between abstract thinking and visual thinking in adolescence, where internal images, coloured by emotion, follow one another without being influenced by 'creative' thinking. From a genetic perspective, the separation of thinking and imagination is only a stage in the whole process. Whereas thinking proper consists in establishing logical relations among entities, imagination focuses on content as such and breaks up existing combinations between images and thoughts to make new combinations.

Gelb and Goldstein's clinical research on aphasics' loss of speech as a means of concept formation was particularly revealing for the way that it threw light on the earlier stages of development. Additionally their findings showed how patients showed an inability to comprehend metaphors and figurative language that resembles adolescent behaviour. The individual is unable to divert his or her attention from the concrete situation, to transform it creatively, to regroup the attributes and to free himself from the actual situation. Development hinges on the dynamic relations between abstract and concrete thinking which constitute the main feature of fantasy in adolescence. Vygotsky encapsulates the whole dynamic like this: '... purely concrete thinking, which is devoid of any concepts, also lacks any trace of fantasy. For the first time the formation of concepts brings with it a release

from the concrete situation and a likelihood of a creative reworking and transformation of the elements'.<sup>92</sup>

Concrete images of childhood made up the memory traces that Kevin carried back to London from Montserrat. Later, in school, he conceptualised plantation slavery as an economic system. Along the way he met visual representations of plantation slavery such as *The Mill Yard*, and textbook drawings in *The People Who Came*. Then a memory of a particular incident in Montserrat flashed up during a discussion around Black history. In the aftermath to the discussion, Kevin drew together –composed – various elements creatively in his poem *Piece of the Past*. And thus he reshaped his memories.

His overriding insight – that slaves provided the labour necessary to transform raw materials into wealth – marked an important level of conceptual understanding. This understanding subsequently shaped his visualisation of the scene in his poem where the boy manages to peer inside the ruined building. An additional complication occurred where confusion around the separate functions of the windmill (productivity) and the tread wheel (punishment) entered the picture. The confusion this gave rise to (as instanced by the three puzzling lines) offers a clue to the processes at work.

Kevin mixed up the two functions (productivity and punishment) and as a consequence the picture he drew in the poem is a confused one. But this is not the whole story. The paradox that lay behind his original utterance – his quarrel with John – was that his teachers in the West Indies failed to teach children the facts of slavery, whereas in London they did. His poem seeks to concretise this paradox. The figure of Teacher Lincoln; Margeret's complaining voice ('Teacher, is too cold'); Gregory's antics; the dullish-green 'cropus'; the house with its shutters blown off from time; jancro; and the wind mill with its dark secret all contributed powerfully to the total composition. Together they constitute an evocation of Kevin's time in Montserrat. Furthermore it was an evocation that was offered for enjoyment in a

contemporary London classroom (witness the joke at Audley's expense), as well as settling an argument about the importance of teaching Caribbean history in London schools.

Vygotsky summarises his argument about imagination and creativity among adolescents like this:

But one of the characteristic features of imagination is that it does not stop developing at this stage and that, from its standpoint, abstraction is only a transitory link in the chain, a stage along the road of development, or simply a leap forward in the process of its movement towards the concrete. From our point of view, imagination is a creative transforming activity which moves from one form of concreteness to another. But the mere movement from a given concrete form to a newly created form of it and the very feasibility of creative construction, is only possible with the help of abstraction. So abstraction is incorporated into the process of imagination as an indispensable constituent part, but it does not form its centre. The movement from the concrete through the abstract to the construction of a new form of concrete image is the path which describes imagination in the adolescent age.<sup>93</sup>

Earlier I quoted a contemporary historian writing about the memory of slavery:

'There can be no archaeology of the memory of slavery that corresponds to an emotional identification with a lost reality.' Yet the impulse to re-imagine slavery and to recover the lost reality has been a powerful one. This is exactly what Kevin was attempting to do. 'It is the creative character of concrete expression,' says Vygotsky, 'and the construction of a new image which exemplify fantasy. Its culminating point is the achievement of a concrete form, but this can only be achieved with the help of abstraction. An adolescent's fantasy moves from the concrete visual image through a concept to an imaginary image.' For Kevin, concrete images in this context took two forms. The first form was the visual trace of the landscape that he remembered as a nine-year-old child – the traces of visual memory. The second form was the 'instructional material' that he met in school. He reworked these forms in the light of his historical understanding of slavery and, finally, the whole sequence of development culminated in the creation of an imaginary landscape, a site of remembrance, in his poem, *Piece of the Past*.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Lamming, George, (1970) *In the Castle of My Skin*, London: Longman , p.57
- <sup>2</sup> Vygotsky, L S (1994) 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' first published in the original Russian 1931, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, pp.266-289.
- <sup>3</sup> Vygotsky, L S (1994) 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' pp. 275.
- <sup>4</sup> In the last quarter of the nineteenth century ethno-psychologists tried to combine experimental psychology with anthropologically oriented research into ethnic 'mentalities'. Notions such as the 'primitive mind' were commonplace. Moreover, such developments led to ranking the mentalities of various peoples in damaging (ie what we would describe as racist) ways. But it also involved a new appreciation of the role of signs and symbol systems in the development of the 'higher mental functions'.
- <sup>5</sup> 'It is men', wrote Marx, 'who, in developing their material production and their material intercourse, change along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.' *German Ideology*, 1845-1846, Bottomore and Reubel, (1961) p. 90.
- <sup>6</sup> Eakin, P. (1985) *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- <sup>7</sup> Taylor, C. (1991) p. 67.
- <sup>8</sup> Taylor, C. (1991) p. 33.
- <sup>9</sup> Taylor, C. (1995) p. 110.
- <sup>10</sup> What Heidegger meant by this characteristically oracular assertion is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate. The public debate that took place between Cassirer and Heidegger in Davos, Switzerland in 1929 that I touched on in chapter 5 is particularly relevant here for the way that it throws into relief the two thinkers' contrasting pictures of Kant's philosophy, language, and, above all his vision of individual autonomy.
- <sup>11</sup> See especially, Benedict Anderson (Anderson, B. (1993) 'Replica, Aura and Late Nationalist Imagining', *Qui Parle*, Volume 7, Number, 1, Fall/Winter, 1993). Anderson's article concentrates on public memorials to the national dead and their role in the official national imagination.
- <sup>12</sup> See Nora, Pierre, (ed.) (1984) *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Volumes I, II, III*, ed. Lawrence D Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. , New York Columbia University Press
- <sup>13</sup> According to the French historian, Pierre Nora there has been a shift from the 'reign of memory-nation' to the 'era of commemoration'. What Nora means by 'living within memory' is neatly expressed in a couple of sentences: 'If we were able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate '*lieux de mémoire*' in its name. Each gesture down to the most everyday would be experienced as the repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning.' Instead in modern societies experience is highly mediated and acts are interpreted as 'signification'. One writer has summed up the present situation in France like this: 'sectoral memories have restructured the way the relationship between past present and future is experienced, and reshaped the forms of collectivity that now cohabit the national space.'
- <sup>14</sup> Wood, Marcus, (2000) *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865*, London, Routledge, p.7.
- <sup>15</sup> See Vygotsky, L. S. (1996) *Thought and Language*, translated and edited by Alex Kozulin, The Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, p. 185.
- <sup>16</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1985) p.108. Here is the quotation in full: '[A] network of events lies before him in apparent confusion...he must separate the necessary from the accidental, uncover the inner succession, and make visible the truly effective forces in order to give his inner depiction a shape upon which is not an imaginary or dispensable philosophical value or a poetic attractiveness rests, but rather its primary and most essential requisite, its truth and faithfulness'.

---

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Minick, N (1989) 'Mind and Activity in Vygotsky's Work: An Expanded Frame of Reference' in *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol.II, Number 2, pp. 162-187.

<sup>18</sup> In an earlier, published version of this chapter, I wrote about the sense of creative possibilities that urban classrooms afford. It was a sense that many English teachers shared in the seventies: 'For many teachers' I wrote, 'there exists a double awareness: a sense of the classroom history and broader cultural change taking place outside the school. We glimpse the connection between the classroom culture with its powerful emergent trajectory and the dialectics of the broader cultural dynamic. Cultures are produced and lived, not merely consumed. If we are to entertain a view of classrooms as sites of cultural making then we need a bridging theory of education which connects language and history in order to make sense of our classroom realities'.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Lawn and Ian Grosvenor (Lawn, M. and Grosvenor, I (1999) 'Imagining a Project: Networks, Discourses and Spaces –Towards a New Archeology of Urban Education', *Paedagogica Historica*, Volume 35, No. 2 ppp. 381-393) have recently developed a new form of historical research in education, which attempts to reconstruct the culture of the classroom and its social relations. I can see how my own work might connect with this exciting initiative. However, my own focus concerns the psychological life of classrooms – in particular, the operations of memory and imagination as they are mediated by signs.

<sup>20</sup> The school developed its own lower school humanities curriculum in the second half of the 1970's. Humanities, which comprised history, geography, social studies and religious education, had English as its core component. The design of Humanities was influenced particularly by the Schools Council/Nuffield Humanities Curriculum Project, 1970, though it differed in significant respects. Notwithstanding, the thinking of Lawrence Stenhouse, the Project Director, helped to shape much of the overall curriculum design. The Government document, *Education in Schools*, 1977 - 'The Green Paper' which seemed to offer support for the kind of 'multiculturalism' that the school wished to develop, underpinned integrated Humanities, though, with the benefit of hindsight, we may think that *The Green Paper* contained some curiously contradictory statements. (See, for example, Robin Richardson, 'Culture and justice: key concepts in World Studies and multicultural education' in *Teaching World Studies: an Introduction to global Perspectives in the Curriculum*, edited by David Hicks and Charles Townley, Longman, Harlow, pp 20-37). Anti-racist initiatives were important too. The work that the class did on the movement of peoples represents an attempt to develop the students' understanding of the *global* character of migrations and the factors that have led to the uprooting and resettlement of whole populations, in the contemporary world as in the past.

<sup>21</sup> See especially, Stenhouse, L (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, Heinemann, London.

<sup>22</sup> Hardcastle, J. *et al.* (1983) 'Growth community and control in secondary school writers', in B. Kroll and G. Wells (eds.) *Exploration in the Study of Writing*, London: Wiley.

<sup>23</sup> To use Brown and Levinson's term (1978), an insult is a 'face threatening act'. Insults are intended to 'shame' individuals or groups in order to undermine their status. The kinds of stereotyped and ritualised forms that insults take often allow for a good degree of creativity and invention. There is an extensive literature concerning the anti-languages of inner-cities (Haliday) and 'the ritual insult' (Labov). In the UK, Hewit and Rampton, have looked at the manner in which different ethnic groups learn each others' languages for certain purposes. Their research sheds light on the kind of classrooms I am describing. Most recently, (June, 2001) a French study of '*verlan*', the language of the poor suburbs of French cities has suggested that rather than undermining the French language and dividing populations, it offers a way of 'federating' the different ethnic groups of the *banlieues*. This is true to some extent in the ethnically diverse, inner-city British context: But among these students the chief exponents of the ritual insult were Black (chiefly Kevin, Sunday and Anthony, among others). Here, the ritual insult, like the anti-languages of the inner-city, is fundamentally about group identity in opposition to 'mainstream' culture. It reflects an essentially inward looking preoccupation with local conflicts and status among 'insiders', for whom the practice defines both membership and position in a parochial hierarchy of status. Additionally, I am calling attention to the historical anthropology of ritual insults among students from West Indian backgrounds. My point is that the rules for insults

---

based on skin complexion were shaped in the first instance by the social realities of plantation society.

<sup>24</sup> Lamming, George, (1970) *In the Castle of My Skin*, Longman, London, p.127.

<sup>25</sup> Carnegie, J and Patterson, P, (1968) *The People Who Came*, Book 2, illustrated by Clyde Pearson, with maps by Ted Powers, series editor, Edward Brathwaite, first published in 1968, Longman..

<sup>26</sup> *The People Who Came*, Book 2 p. 93

<sup>27</sup> *The People Who Came*, Book 2 p. 101

<sup>28</sup> *The People Who Came*, Book 2 p. 101

<sup>29</sup> In a Later edition of *The People Who Came* (1989) there is a half-page coloured reproduction of a contemporary engraving of an eighteenth century English country house. Beneath the drawing the text reads: 'A country house built in England in the eighteenth century by a wealthy landowner. Many absentee planters built country homes in this 'Georgian' style which copies Greek and Roman buildings.' (P.112). The drawing is meant to suggest how, in the 'West Indies' planters, lived as 'country gentlemen' in their so-called 'Great houses' which they built on their sugar estates.

<sup>30</sup> By 'lords' Kevin usually means the people who owned the land and therefore didn't pay rent. However he sometimes confuses rent with taxes.

<sup>31</sup> Winthrop J Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812*, University of North Carolina Press 1968, pp. 80-81.

<sup>32</sup> Access to 'scientific' knowledge, knowledge that has been systematised and theorised, usually depends on specialist practices and procedures of 'instruction', notably schooling. Such practices and procedures are constitutive of the wider social practices of academic professions regulated, endorsed and authorised by the academy and other such specialising institutions. Thus an adequate appreciation of the distinctive nature (and value) of 'scientific' knowledge depends chiefly on a prior appreciation of highly differentiated specialist practices and methods. Therefore, the status of 'scientific' historical knowledge about the origins of chattel slavery in the New World depends upon an appreciation of the 'principles' of interpreting 'primary sources' whence such knowledge is derived. From time to time, when new research methods alter the practices within the historical research community. For instance, new ways of tracing etymologies to illuminate the meaning of historical documents or texts might involve working with structuralist methods such as discovering binary oppositions – paired terms within a system of differences – rather than trying to establish contemporary meaning of individual terms. After Kuhn, we are likely to speak of 'revolutions' in the ways that science is done. Periodically, shifts in practices change the relations obtaining among 'folk' and 'scientific' understandings.

<sup>33</sup> 'To implant [something] in the child...is impossible...it is only possible to train him for some external activity like, for example, writing on a typewriter. To create a zone of proximal development, that is to engender a series of processes of internal development we need the correctly constructed processes of school teaching.' Cited in Van der Veer, R and Valsiner, J,(1991) *Understanding Vygotsky: A quest for Synthesis*, Blackwell, Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, p.331

<sup>34</sup> I'm paraphrasing James Britton's apt sentence in the *Bullock Report*.

<sup>35</sup> See especially, Mavis Campbell (1988) *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal*, Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Mass.

<sup>36</sup> *The People Who Came*,(1999) p.118.

<sup>37</sup> Reid, VS, (1976 ) *Young Warriors*, London: Longman.

<sup>38</sup> Reid, VS (1949) *New Day*, , New York: Alfred A Knopf.

<sup>39</sup> Donnell, A and Welsh, SL (1996) *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, London: Routledge pp.114-115.

<sup>40</sup> The chapter dealing with the Maroons in the textbook *The People Who Came* is called 'Resistance and Rebellion' pp. 116 –123.

<sup>41</sup> Perhaps I should make it clear, that other work besides Caribbean history was also going on too.

---

<sup>42</sup> See for instance David Bridges' chapter, 'So Truth be in the Field?': Approaches to controversy in World Studies Teaching' in *Teaching World Studies: an Introduction to global Perspectives in the Curriculum*, edited by David Hicks and Charles Townley, Longman, Harlow. Bridges discusses the notion of teacher neutrality in lessons dealing with controversial issues in the Humanities.

<sup>43</sup> Alderman, G. *The History of Hackney Downs School*, published by the Clove Club, London, 1972, p.35

<sup>44</sup> Alderman, 1972, p 79

<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, some of Sunday's teachers assumed that he was Jamaican, which was a source of bitter resentment.

<sup>46</sup> Earlier, I spoke of Kevin and Sunday co-constructing a discourse that created the preconditions for their future learning. I want to return to this theme. Before I do, I should make it clear, that I am seeking a conception of classroom discourse that goes beyond formal linguistic analysis, and which includes the historical and social dimensions of language as social behaviour. What I have in mind turns on a theory of discourse suggested to me by my colleague, Tony Burgess. In his article, *Diverse Melodies*, Burgess offered a critical account of traditions of classroom discourse research. He makes two theoretical moves. The first move is to enter a crowded debate among applied linguists (Sinclair and Coulthard, Stubbs), sociologists, psycho-linguists and English researchers. He wanted to flag the limitations of a picture of classroom discourse that concentrates exclusively on the underlying forms and structures of verbal interactions in classrooms. Secondly, Burgess wanted to draw upon a radically different conceptualisation of discourse that derives chiefly from the work of the French philosopher Jean Michel Foucault, especially as it was being interpreted by sociologists like Valerie Walkerdine in the eighties. This radical conceptualisation attends to the role of historically constructed discourses in the constitution of subjectivities in conjunction with the operations of social power:

In referring to this classroom process as one of the construction of discourse I am making a very wide set of assumptions. By discourse I have in mind a concept which cuts across accepted divisions between spoken and written language, between language and context and social relations, and between form and content. I am not using discourse to refer, then, just to the verbal level of actual utterance. I am meaning more than merely stretches of utterance and more than the internal, systematic organisation, which such stretches of utterance may display. Because my use of this term has a bearing on thinking about language outside as well as inside the classroom, it is necessary to explain this more fully. Discourse is offered here as a category, which, above all, preserves the perception that behaviour in language is behaviour. In using language, something is done. Language reflects intentions, motives, purposes, interests actions. Intentionalities of this sort, however, do not simply happen. Even in their individual origins, they are socially constructed and, as they become regularised, are socially maintained. I am seeking, then, to include within the notion of discourse these further assumptions, as well as that of behaviour. Discourse is also offered here as a category, which preserves the perception that behaviour in language is social and historical as well as just linguistic. (Burgess, T. *Diverse Melodies*, (1984) p.61.)

What appealed to me with this particular formulation when Burgess wrote it was that it insisted that discourse is developed and maintained socially and historically. Further to this, it suggested that social *identities* (class, gender, and race) are constituted within particular 'discursive formations'.. These two articulations seemed especially illuminating for my analysis of the interactions between Sunday and Kevin, and equally so for an analysis of the discussion between Ricky and David about racial and ethnic identities. When David says, 'I think it's because when a subject like that and they're talking about the Caribbean, a lot of Black people in the class ... try to grab on to their roots like, like, 'I come from the West Indies', 'I come from...' and so forth', discourse theory seemed to explain how the topic of slavery positioned children differently in ways that reordered their identities. On Burgess' account, the discourses that are constructed in classrooms stand in relation to wider discourses circulating beyond the school with which they intersect and overlap. Behind the wider discursive formations, as Foucault appeared to show, lie historically specific *practices*. Thus, the

---

operations of social power appear to be constitutive elements in all discourse. 'Critical discourse analysis' –which is the term that is usually used to describe the tradition of research that has grown from such ideas - refers to more than the formal system of self-generating structures that is the object of modern, structural linguistics. Rather, regularity, in the Foucauldian sense, seeks to account for the way statements, or claims to knowledge, are combined within determinate historical conditions and historically constructed practices.

At issue is a way of theorising subjectivity. Foucault (1972) suggests that there are a number of discursive *positions* available to *subjects*, inscribed within specific discursive practices, from which they (subjects) speak. Positionality governs the knowledge claims that individuals can make. An obvious example is the professional who speaks from within an institutionally defined field, a specialist field with its internal discipline regulating what may or may not be said. The psychoanalytical mechanism that was necessary to explain the process of the constitution of subjectivity in discourse was supplied by the French thinker Jacques Lacan. Valerie Walkerdine and Cathy Urwin, working in this tradition considered discourse additionally from the perspectives of 'post-structuralism'. Using Lacanian theory, they aimed to suggest ways that we might begin to conceptualise language and learning in classrooms. Typically, Walkerdine asks how children learn to enter and speak from discursive positions. She argues that at a very early stage children acquire knowledge of discursive formats, and that they learn how to create new ones by internalising the system of rules that make discourse possible. Moreover, they learn without ever being shown explicitly how to do so. By the age of three, she claims, children are able to switch in and out of discursive positions and to take up positions in play that would not be available to them in their actual lives. Through play, she says, children learn that an opening metaphor calls up an appropriate discursive format, and this it is claimed carries significance for subject learning and teaching strategies in schools.

Teachers implicitly draw on children's capacities to imagine situations and to be able to 'inhabit' them in games, Walkerdine and Urwin suggest, but sometimes things go wrong. For instance, a maths teacher who introduces an imaginary every day object or a familiar situation to anchor or to contextualise an abstract problem may unwittingly send children off in entirely the wrong direction. Sometimes this is done to make the topic seem more relevant. Thus children start sifting their own everyday experience to 'ground' arithmetical problem and simply overlook or ignore the kind of abstract operation that, say, subtraction requires. So for example, when a teacher says, 'When I go to the supermarket, and I buy an apple, which costs twenty five pence, and I give the check-out girl a pound coin, how much change will she give me?', she may get unpromising answers such as, 'I don't like apples' or 'we go to Tesco'. Children take up positions in a familiar discourse about shopping, when it's really all about sums. (Of course, the children might also be saying something about why they don't want to or can't take up positions in the teacher's discourse). They are being invited to suppose that such things happen in their lives; they have to substitute themselves for the teacher in the make-believe to occupy the teacher's subject position, or slot. The pedagogic assumption is that they already possess the means to solve the problem. All they must do is draw on their own life-experiences. What happens usually? How do people behave? What does the checkout girl do? How does it go? The point is that there are underlying patterns of regularity that *structure* everyday interactions; and once we become familiar with them, once we know how things go, we can predict what is likely to happen because we have unconsciously grasped an implicit knowledge of the constitutive rules. If it were otherwise the make-believe would be simply unintelligible. Thus we move through the day. In a rather different context (and in a way that took me closer to understanding the interactions between Ricky and David) Valerie Walkerdine (1981) used discourse theory to examine language and power from a feminist perspective. She suggests how the authority of a woman teacher is subverted by primary-age boys' use of sexist language. How is this possible? She writes,

The boys are not grown men yet they take up the positions of men through the language, which has material effect because particular individuals are produced differently within a variety of discursive practices. Their power is gained by refusing to be constituted as powerless objects in her discourse and recasting her as the powerless object of theirs.

This is a striking analysis, but there are difficulties with this kind of formulation. Here are a couple of them. It can lead to an assumption that discourse constructs passive subjects, thus removing human *agency* from the picture altogether. Through her analysis of the way children resist certain discursive positions in their games, Walkerdine's work tries to avoid this cul-de-sac. Moreover, she suggests the potential for actively constructing new discourses in classrooms: 'Neither the children nor the teacher can change without the production of new discourses in which to read their actions and to produce different actions and different subjectivities. Thus, Walkerdine envisages classrooms as sites for constructing new discourses where new identities will emerge.

<sup>47</sup> Lamming, George, (1970) *In the Castle of My Skin*, Longman, London, p.58

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, Austin (1980) *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, Toronto.

<sup>49</sup> D'Costa, Jean (1983) 'The West Indian Novelist and Language: A Search for a literary Medium', in *Studies in Caribbean Language*, edited by L. Carrington, Trinidad, 1983.

<sup>50</sup> The debate over the use of non-standard creoles in Caribbean schools has had a shaping influence on parental attitudes towards creole usage in British settings. According to D'Costa, in the sixties the Ministry of Education in Jamaica 'would not introduce any text containing the smallest trace of non-standard language into any school or school library – the censorship of the adult authoritarian group was absolute'. (D'Costa, Jean (1983, p.256) Moreover, she says, the research of linguists like Cassidy and LePage (see below: endnote 33) was misunderstood by the authorities. No one would admit that there was a learning problem bound up with language varieties. The picture in Trinidad was similar. However, a significant change occurred with the introduction of the Language Arts Syllabus (1975). This proposed that the language that community languages should be the starting point for learning standard forms, and that such languages were appropriate as the medium for learning. This sparked off a controversy that has been well documented. See Carrington, L. D. and Borrelly, C. B. (1977) *The language Arts Syllabus 1975: Comment and Counter Comment*, School of Education, Trinidad.

<sup>51</sup> Cassidy, F G and Le Page (eds.) *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, , 1980 p.250-251.

<sup>52</sup> Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration of the Negro, 'Jancro'* (1940-1941) currently in the Phillips Collection, Washington DC.

<sup>53</sup> See my discussion of Brathwaite's project which has been to make visible the culture of the slaves in the West Indies.

<sup>54</sup> See *The People Who Came*. The reference to absentee landlords reads, 'The 'whites' (European planters and settlers consisted usually of the plantation owner and his family, though sometimes he was absent, preferring to live in Europe), the overseer and the book-keeper.' p.93.

<sup>55</sup> Clark, William, *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua, in which are represented the process of sugar making, and the employment of the negroes in the Field, the Boiling House, and Distillery made by W Clark during a residence of three years upon the estates of Admiral Tallemach*, published by Thomas Clay, London, 1823. The price of the book was two guineas.

<sup>56</sup> Fifteen years later, after slavery was abolished, a photograph would have done the job – photography was introduced in the USA in 1839 Lithographic printing made the reproduction of such images possible after it was introduced in England by Rudolf Ackerman around the turn of the eighteenth century. Clarks prints, however are more likely to be aquatints with lines added with normal engraving or etching. Aquatints were often hand coloured. The advantage was that prints could be made from artists drawings.. See Raymond Lister, (1984) *Prints and Printmaking: A Dictionary of the Art in nineteenth-century Britain*, London: Methuen.

<sup>57</sup> I am especially grateful to Sue Giles, Curator of the permanent exhibition showing Bristol's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade at Bristol Industrial Museum for pointing out to me just how frequently the images have been used.

<sup>58</sup> Parry, J. H.P and Sherlock, Philip, *A Short History of the West Indies*, Macmillan African and Caribbean History Series, third edition 1971, Macmillan, London.

<sup>59</sup> I am especially indebted to the work of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen for my description of the visual design of *Ten Views* and *the People Who Came*. Kress and van Leeuwen give a fascinating analysis of the relations among the elements that go into the design of texts from the

standpoint of what they call the 'multimodality of signs', which involves the textual integration of different semiotic codes beneath 'an overarching code, whose rules and meanings provide the multimodal text with the logic of its integration'. The chapter dealing with the meaning of composition in their book, *Reading Images* (Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. (1996) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, London: Routledge, pp. 181-229), helped me to tease out some of the structural elements that organise Clark's words and drawings.

<sup>60</sup> Clark, William, *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua* (the folio is unpaginated) Facing Plate V

<sup>61</sup> *The People Who Came*, p103.

<sup>62</sup> Watson, Jack (1979) *The West Indian Heritage: A History of the West Indies*, John Murray, London. Like *The People Who Came*, *The West Indian Heritage* is a textbook written for schools in the Caribbean for those taking the examinations set by the Caribbean Examinations Council and London and Cambridge O-levels in West Indian history.

<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, in the recent, revised edition of *The People Who Came* (1989) the contemporary drawings have been replaced with an C18 engraving of slaves cutting cane in Jamaica, which suggests that the authors were not happy with the original text. However, the description of crushing cane now appears on the page before the Clark drawings, so it is impossible for the readers gaze to travel back and forth between the picture and the written account.

<sup>64</sup> Lonson, J *English Harbour, Antigua. From Great George Fort, Monk's Hill*, published by T and G Underwood of Fleet Street, London, 1827.

<sup>65</sup> Roberts occasionally rearranged the elements in the landscape for poetical effect. For instance he showed the Sphinx, which faces east, and the setting sun with the pyramids of Dahshur silhouetted against it in his painting *Approach of the Simoon*.

<sup>66</sup> See Porter, Roy, (2000) *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, Allan Lane, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Bewer, D (1984) 'The Work of the Image: The Plates of the *Encyclopédie*, in *A History of Book Illustration: 29 Points of View*, pp. 391-411, edited by Bill Katz, Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ and London, 1994, p. 405.

<sup>68</sup> Brewer argues that Diderot's encyclopaedic plates represent an imaginary world in which the images constitute a visual counterpart to the utilitarian rationalism, the sensationalist philosophy and the experimental method that Diderot proposes in his *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*. The encyclopedic gaze, he says, disassembles the finished machine or building, dividing it into its parts and orders them into a series, the logic of which leads from part to whole, from tool to its use, from raw material to finished product.' Although the plates appear to represent as a 'reality' a progressivist history of ideas, science and technology – Man's progressive mastery of Nature, rather they produce such a history as their chief effect. Clark's drawings are *partly* similar to the plates in the way they explain a process of production, but they also depict the conditions of peoples' lives. The issue is around what Clark includes in the depiction (rationalised labour, social hierarchy and harmony), and what he filters out (the slaves' *enforced* labour and the harsh, often brutal conditions of their existence).

<sup>69</sup> Wood, Marcus, (2000) *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865*, Routledge, p.240.

<sup>70</sup> Vygotsky, LS (1986) *Thought and Language*, translated from the Russian and edited by Alex Kozulin, first published in 1934, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. London England, p.31.

<sup>71</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1986), p.31.

<sup>72</sup> Condillac, Etienne Bonnot, Abbe de (1771) *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge: Being a Supplement to Mr Locke's Essay on Human Understanding*, originally published in 1756, edited and introduced by Robert E Weyant, Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, Gainesville, Florida.

<sup>73</sup> Condillac, Etienne Bonnot, Abbe de (1771).

<sup>74</sup> Vygotsky, L. S. (1986), *Thought and Language*, translated, revised and edited by Alex Kozulin, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. Vygotsky, 1986, p.31.

---

<sup>75</sup> Vygotsky, L. S. (1994b) 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' first published in the original Russian 1931, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, pp.266-289.

Vygotsky, L S (1994) 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' pp. 270.

<sup>76</sup> For an extremely clear picture of what might properly be called a 'German' philosophy see Gerner, P. (2000) *Twentieth Century German Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>77</sup> I discuss Cassirer's connection with clinical psychology in Chapter...Goldstein worked with patients at the Frankfurt Neurological Institute who had suffered cerebral injuries during the First World War. He studied the effects of lesions in the breakdown of categorical cognition and, more generally, the role of concepts in the organization of patients' psychological processes. Cassirer noted that in their published research, Gelb and Goldstein's findings confirmed 'that the true aphasic disturbances never merely affect speech as an isolated act, but rather that every change in a patient's language world always brings about a characteristic change in his behaviour as a whole - in his perceptions as well as his practical active attitude toward reality'. (PSF 3:210)

<sup>78</sup> For a description of these studies see Cassirer, E. (1954) *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, p. 224.

<sup>79</sup> Cassirer, E. (1954) *The Phenomenology of Knowledge* p. 228.

<sup>80</sup> Cassirer, E (1954) *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, p.227.

<sup>81</sup> In his treatise, *Essay on the Origin of Language* Herder argued that humans share with animals the ability to make natural cries, but this on its own is not sufficient to explain the origins of speech. Indeed, what Herder says about the differences between humans and animals is particularly relevant here. He writes:

'And now it follows that if a man's senses, when applied to any small area of the earth, to work and to enjoyment of the world, are inferior to the senses of the animal which lives within that segment, then it is precisely this that gives his senses the advantage of freedom. Because they are not senses for one spot, they become general senses for the universe...If a man has powers of conception which are not confined to the construction of a honey cell or of a cobweb and which hence are inferior to the artifactive capacities of animals within their particular sphere, it is precisely for this reason that his powers of conception achieve a wider perspective. There is no single work of man in which his actions are not improvable, but he enjoys the freedom of exercise in many things and hence the freedom of improving himself forever. A thought, any thought is not a direct work of nature, and for that very reason it can be a work of his own.'

<sup>82</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p 268.

<sup>83</sup> See footnote 2 above.

<sup>84</sup> The history that links Jaensch and Cassirer is significant for the way that it throws light on the political world in which the thinkers that I am discussing worked. In 1918 most German philosophers expected Cassirer to be 'called' to a chair in philosophy at Marburg as the natural successor to the great neo-Kantian philosopher, Cohen. But against the wishes of Cohen and Nathorp Erich Jaensch, an experimental psychologist, was appointed instead, which says something about the professional base for specialising psychologists in Germany in the early years of the twentieth century. Jaensch's work on eidetic memory won international acclaim. Vygotsky discussed Jaensch's work in connection with the function of *eidetic* images in the development of imagination in adolescents in an important paper published in 1931 that is before the National Socialists came to power. Later, however, he became an ardent National Socialist. When he was working on imagination (1929-1931) Lenin's attack on neo-Kantian idealism was probably more significant for Vygotsky - references to Cassirer became especially problematic after the rise of Stalin and the 'proletarianisation' of academic institutions in the Soviet context. Later, however, in the light of Jaensch's enthusiastic links to National Socialism, Vygotsky polemicised against Jaensch's pro-fascist views in a blistering polemical pamphlet, *Fascism in Psychoneurology*, 1934.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p.275.

<sup>86</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p.272.

<sup>87</sup> Lamming, G (1970) p.58.

---

<sup>88</sup> Wood, M. (2000) pp 9-10.

<sup>89</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p. 278.

<sup>90</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p. 279.

<sup>91</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p. 280.

<sup>92</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) p. 282.

<sup>93</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1994b) pp. 282-83.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

I have told the story of how a poem came to be written by a Black student in a Hackney classroom. This has entailed reconstructing in detail events that took place over five years in all. In telling the story I have tried to describe something of the learning that went on and to show how the debates and discussions that a class conducted over time contributed to a student's intellectual engagement with powerful themes and issues. Further to this, I have also attempted to connect the changing social relations among the students to wider social realities outside school. Kevin's poem emerged from his deepening interest in and understanding of the history of plantation slavery and its legacy at a moment when family links to the West Indies were problematic. Indeed, his writing about an episode from his childhood had much to do with forging an identity. Kevin's story calls for a theoretically complex picture of the dynamic relationship between memory, conceptual thinking and imagination. <sup>It is</sup> ~~is~~ a central theme in my description of his overall development.

Crucially, I have found it necessary to build detail into the story to concentrate the level of theoretical awareness. I selected just one from many possible narratives, but my contention is that the account is true for more than a single case. One of the major implications of this account is that English teachers will need a long-term view of learning as well as a broad developmental approach to language, literature and culture in classrooms today. Additionally, such an approach needs to be aware of the dynamic social relations among students within the wider currents of cultural change. Another implication is that teachers will need an historical understanding of the role of signs in learning and

development, as a background against which to read contemporary classrooms. I have attempted to provide such a background in my account <sup>of</sup> the history of ideas.

A picture of language in learning and development that is capable of making sense of how *Piece of the Past* came to <sup>be</sup> written has to include, centrally, history: not just the particular language biography of the writer, but also the history of the language and its use. This also holds true for more than a single poem. An adequate picture of language also will need to include a strong sense of the essentially creative business of binding words to experience. The drive to represent our experiences to one another, to make sense of it and to give our past significance in the present is a fundamentally self-constitutive activity. This is both an ordinary and a miraculous, humanising business – a process we all must engage in to maintain a sense of who we are. It is my contention that teachers will need to understand such processes if they are to plan for and foster the kind of conceptual and imaginative development I have been describing.

Three of the chapters concentrate on the intellectual history of language studies. It is fair to say that the historians of language have not been primarily concerned with education as such. Therefore I have attempted to connect the history of ideas to key developments in education in a way that I think is new. A picture of language as a creative, constitutive activity first emerged in the late eighteenth-century in the writings of Herder. With Herder, languages are linked to a vision of cultural development. But the Herder legacy is in some ways a deeply problematic one. For Herder, the historical experiences of peoples issue in particular linguistic world outlooks. On this view, linguistic world outlooks are evolved in a fundamentally historical fashion. Thus language is seen as centrally part of a long historical process of collective, cultural development.

Herder has been a major source for notions like national ‘mentalities’ and ‘literature as the expression of the spirit of a people’, where nations are spoken about as ‘organic’ communities and national identity is defined as belonging to historical cultures. Indeed, German thinkers like Herder and von Humboldt began to suggest that the languages and cultures that we inherit not only make us what we are, they actually prefigure what we become. Thus language was linked

to a dynamic, quasi-anthropological conception of individual and collective cultural self-realisation. On this view, the defence of heritage languages and cultures becomes a matter of survival, for without them cultural continuity is inconceivable. Such currents of thought run deep in European nationalism.

With the early formulations of the language-culture link, out and out nationalistic impulses were counterbalanced by generous cosmopolitanism in the works of thinkers like von Humboldt, for whom difference was a necessary condition for human development. But nationalistic tendencies were carried forward powerfully into nineteenth-century literary and linguistic studies right across Europe. More often than not, they were connected to political nationalism and to damaging notions of race. Yet they also galvanized scholarly research into a wide range of languages and both classical and vernacular ancient texts. Such ideas remain embedded in the culture today where they have traditionally provided a rationale for state language and literature syllabi. English teachers might usefully know something of their complicated European origins.

In my account, quasi-metaphysical notions like ‘national mentalities’ and the ‘expression of the spirit of the people’ represent the negative side of the dialectic. But Herder also took from the thinkers of the French Enlightenment a seminal picture of language as the means by which we gain mastery over mental operations. On this view signs afford the means whereby we gain conscious control over our behaviour. Thus, with the aid of signs we develop our conceptual understanding of the world as well as the potential for changing it. On this view, signs play a central role in the story of human development.

From the perspectives of Kant’s epistemology, Von Humboldt fashioned this notion into a principle of world history. Following the French *ideologues*, he gave language studies the central role in the reformed Prussian education system. He also gave German philology an institutional base from which to develop its hugely influential teaching and research programme. I have tried to show how many of the features of modern education systems, such as the notion of phases of education with no overlap (primary, secondary and tertiary), which reflect a coherent sense of students’ intellectual development and progression, come from

the educational discussions in which von Humboldt played a leading part. In the aftermath to the French Revolution, intellectuals linked language education to the creation of a new citizenry for the Republican social order. The importance that de Tracy afforded the analysis of signs (ideology) as a foundational element in the French curriculum is especially striking in this context. Although the *ideologues'* project was cut short, it might provide a new vantage point from which to reconsider the purposes of English.

The history of the intellectual developments I have given carries significant implications for the way that English is presently understood. Recent histories of English have been content with criticising the presuppositions of nation in the founding moves in thinking about English language and literature. Frequently, they have missed the scale of the European project that lay behind it. Lacking proper historical perspectives, contemporary accounts of English studies have failed to appreciate the scale of the earlier vision that might usefully inform contemporary debates about the future of the discipline.

In returning to developments taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, I have attempted to restore both a broad picture and a sense of scope that English is in danger of losing. Additionally, I have attempted to uncover the intellectual roots of English, which extend across a range of disciplines, including philosophy, philology, linguistics, literary studies, education, anthropology, history, cultural sciences and psychology. English has been a loosely bonded aggregate of many disciplinary approaches, and this, surely, is the reason why no single shaping idea dominates its heartland. Further to this, it also suggests why English has been an arena for competing (residual and emergent) professional domains. Paradoxically, I have needed to restore the enlarged picture of English to make sense of the local particularities of contemporary classrooms at a moment when English appears to fragmenting.

In calling for a unified approach to language literature and culture I was led to examine fundamental questions about the purposes of English. I contend that English has much to do with the public discussion of human experience. Such a

notion, which emerges in Locke's writings, links citizenship to a conception of individual sovereignty in matters of what we may claim to know.

I see at least two directions for future work. The first direction concerns further research in the history of ideas. In Chapter Six I discuss Vygotsky's theories about memory and imagination in connection with learning and development. My overall aim was to shed light on a student's progress from the perspective of the role of signs in development, and my analysis carried forward themes and arguments from earlier chapters. Implicitly, I located the work of the Soviet psychologist in traditions of thought that have their roots in the European Enlightenment. Although I discussed Vygotsky's ideas in relation to contemporary work in philosophy and especially to developments in clinical psychology in the aftermath to the Great War, I did not make explicit connections to the work that was going on, particularly in Berlin and Vienna, at the time. Specifically, I did not link work stemming from Brentano's philosophy of mental acts in detail to the work of the Gestalt psychologists, especially Wolfgang Kohler and Kurt Lewin, or to the fascinating research programme in child psychology that the Buhlers established in the twenties.

A full account of Vygotsky's relation to such work would make clear, for instance, the grounds of his refusal to go along with reductive accounts of mind that emerged in the Soviet Union concerning reflexes. By such accounts mental operations are explained primarily in terms of physiological causes. By contrast, for Vygotsky, new forms of mental behaviour are developed with the aid of historically evolved signs.

In the history of ideas that I have been giving, Vygotsky is the inheritor of the European Enlightenment, and his conception of development as an inward process as well as an external one owes much to the tradition of von Humboldt. However, as with many of the psychologists I have just mentioned, his relation to German idealism was a complicated and in some ways a problematic one. Finally, Vygotsky's relation to Brentano's philosophy, which explicitly rejected the idealist tradition of Kant and Hegel, calls for further investigation.

The second direction for future work concerns the subject English. In the Introduction I make the point that histories of the subject lack perspectives that might be usefully gained from the historiography of European language studies. The commonplace notion that modern English studies freed students from the dead hand of philology, though it contains truth, needs handling carefully for the very reason that some of the subject's fundamental values were imported from European philological scholarship. (I touch on this theme in Chapter Three). I should like to know more about the complicated ways that these values entered English education during the nineteenth-century. Chiefly, however, I should like to revisit the history of continental philology for the relevance it might hold for a unified developmental approach to language, literature and culture in contemporary classrooms.

My main concern has been to sketch theoretical traditions of thought about the role of signs in development and to recover a vision of education that might be powerfully relevant to contemporary discussions about pedagogy. However I also see Kevin's story as contributing to a theoretical awareness among researchers of the need for historical perspectives in reading classrooms. Recent research has vastly enriched our theoretical understandings of learning contexts and processes. Ethnographies have shown us that qualitative data drawn from individual instances can expand our theoretical insights. While the focus of my work has been on history and with setting the dimensions of time within the frame of theoretical consideration, I also think that it would complement ethnographic work too.

## Bibliography

- Aarsleff, Hans, (1984) *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, London: Athlone.
- Aarsleff, Hans (1983) *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860*, London: Athlone.
- Aarsleff, Hans, (1984) 'Locke's Reputation in Nineteenth Century England' in *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, London: Athlone.
- Abrams, M. H (1958) *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, New York: Norton.
- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M.(1979) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, first published in 1944, London: Verso.
- Albertone, Manuela, (1984) 'Enlightenment and Revolution: The Evolution of Condorcet's Ideas on Education' in *Condorcet Studies*, 1, edited by Leonora Cohen Rosenfield, Atlantic Heights, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Alderman, Geoffrey (1972) *The History of Hackney Downs School*, London: Clove Club.
- Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Anderson, Benedict (1993) 'Replica, Aura and Late Nationalist Imagining', in *Qui Parle*, Volume 7, Number, 1, Fall/Winter, 1993.
- Ash, Mitchell, G. and Woodward, William, R. (1987) *Psychology in Twentieth Century Thought and Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ashton, R. A. (1994) *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860*, London: Libris.
- Backhurst, D. (1991) 'Social Memory in Soviet Thought', in Middleton, D. and Edwards, D. (eds.) *Collective Remembering*, London: Sage Publications.
- Backhurst, D. (1991) *Consciousness and Revolution: from the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bacon, Francis (1965) *Novum Organum, Book I, first published in 1620*, in Victor Harris and Itrat Husain eds. (1965) *English Prose, 1600-1660*, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto and London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays By M. M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Essays*, translated by Vern W. Magee, edited by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, introduced by Wayne C. Booth, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990) *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov, supplement translated by Kenneth Bostrom, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. and Medvedev, P. N. (1985) *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, translated by Albert J. Werle, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Baldick, C (1983) *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Berger, P. and Luckman, T. (1972) *The Social Construction of Reality: a Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Berlin, Isaiah (1998) *The Proper Study of Mankind, An Anthology of Essays*, London: Pimlico.

Berlin, Isaiah (1956) *The Age of Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, selected with an introduction and interpretative commentary, London: New English Library.

Bernal, Martin (1987) *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, London: Free Association Books.

Bhabha, H. K. (1990) *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge.

Bloomfield, L. (1935) *Language*, London.

- Blumenthal, Arthur (ed.) (1970) *Language and Psychology: Historical Aspects of Psycholinguistics*, New York: John Wiley
- Boring, Edwin, G. (1950) *A History of Experimental Psychology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Brandist, C. (1997) 'Bakhtin, Cassirer and Symbolic Forms', *Radical Philosophy*, 85, September/October, 1997.
- Brathwaite, E. Kamau (1984) *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, Port of Spain: New Beacon Books.
- Brathwaite, E. (1973) *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy: Rights of Passage, Islands and Masks*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brauer, George, C. Jr. (1959) *The Education of a Gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England, 1660–1775*, New York: Bookman Associates.
- Breazdale, D and Rockmore, T. (eds.) *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Brentano, F. (1973) *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint*, translated by A C Rancurello, D. B. Terrell and L. McAlister, (first published in German in 1874), New York: Humanities Press.
- Brewer, D. (1984) 'The Work of the Image: The Plates of the *Encyclopédie*, in *A History of Book Illustration: 29 Points of View*, edited by Bill Katz, Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press.
- Britton, James *et al.* (1975) *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18*, London: Macmillan.
- Britton, James (1987) "Vygotsky's Contribution to Pedagogical Theory," in *English in Education*, Vol. 21, No. 3, NATE, Autumn 1987, pp.22-26.
- Britton, James (1970) *Language and Learning*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press.
- Britton, James (1982) *Prospect and Retrospect: Selected Essays of James Britton*, edited by Gordon Pradl, Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton /Cook.
- Britton, James (1993) *Literature in its Place*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Boynton Cook.
- Bruford, W H (1962) *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Buhler, Karl (1973) 'The Psychophysics of Expression of Wilhelm Wundt', first published in 1933, translated by Mara Abolins, in Wundt, Wilhelm (1973) *The Language of Gestures*, with an introduction by Arthur Blumenthal and additional essays by George Herbert Mead and Karl Bühler, the Hague: Mouton.

Burgess, T. (1984) 'Diverse Melodies', in Miller, (ed.) (1984) *Eccentric Propositions: Essays on Literature and the Curriculum*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.61.

Burgess, T. and Hardcastle, J. L. (2000) 'Englishes and English: Schooling and the Making of the School Subject' in *School Subjects in an Era of Change*, edited by Ashley Kent (General Editor), London: Kogan Page,

Burke, P. and Porter, R. (eds.) (1991) *Language, Self and Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Burke, S. (1992) *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Campbell, M. (1988) *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal*, Cambridge, Mass.: Boston, Bergin and Garvey Publishers.

Carnegie, J. and Patterson, P. (1968) *The People Who Came*, Book 2, illustrated by Clyde Pearson, with maps by Ted Powers, series editor, Edward Brathwaite, Harlow: Longman.

Carrington, L. D. and Borelly, C. B. (1977) *The language Arts Syllabus 1975: Comment and Counter Comment*, Port of Spain: Trinidad School of Education.

Carter, M. (1977) *Poems of Succession*, London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books

Cassidy, F. G. and Le Page, R.B. (eds.) (1980) *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst, (1951) *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, translated by Fritz Koellin and James Pettigrove, first published in the original German in 1932, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst. (1953-1957) *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 volumes first published in the original German 1923-1929: vol.1, *Language*, vol. 2, *Mythic Thought*, Vol.3 *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, translated from the German by Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst. (1944) *An Essay on Man, An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst. (1946) *Language and Myth*, translated by Susanne Langer, New York: Dover Publications.

Cassirer, Ernst. (1953), *Substance and Function and Eisenstein's Theory of Relativity*, translated by W C Swabey and M C Swabey, first published in English by Chicago Open Court Publishing, 1923, New York: Dover Publications.

Cassirer, Ernst (1970) *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe*, translated from the German by James Guttman, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cazden, C. B. (1988) *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heineman.

Clark, K. and Holquist, M. (1984), *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Clark, Katerina 'The Quiet Revolution in Soviet Intellectual Life,' in, *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick et al., Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Clark, William, (1823) *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua, in which are represented the process of sugar making, and the employment of the negroes in the Field, the Boiling House, and Distillery made by W Clark during a residence of three years upon the estates of Admiral Tallemach*, London: Thomas Clay.

Clarke, Austin (1980) *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, Toronto.

Cole, Michael and Scribner (1974), *Culture and Thought*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Condillac, Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de (1971) *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge: Being a Supplement to Mr Locke's Essay on Human Understanding*, originally published in 1756, edited and introduced by Robert E Weyant, Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints.

Condillac, Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de (2001) *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, originally published in 1756, translated and edited by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cornfield, P. J. (ed.) (1991) *Language, History and Class*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Crowley, T. (1989) *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan.

- Crowley, T. (1995) *Language in History: theories and Texts*, London: Routledge.
- D'Costa, Jean (1983) 'The West Indian Novelist and Language: A Search for a literary Medium', in *Studies in Caribbean Language*, edited by L. Carrington, Trinidad, 1983.
- Descartes, René (1986) *Meditations on a First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, translated by John Cottingham, with an introduction by Bernard Williams, first published in 1641, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dews, P. (1987) *The Logics of Disintegration: Post Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London: Verso
- Dixon, John (1972) *Growth Through English: Report based on the Dartmouth Seminar, 1966*, London, Reading and Fakenham, Cox and Wyman for N.A.T. E.
- Dixon, J. (1991) *A Schooling in English: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Doyle, B. (1989) *English and Englishness*, London: Routledge.
- Donnell, A. and Welsh, S. L. (1996) *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, London: Routledge.
- Eco, Umberto (1984) *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, London: Macmillan.
- Eagleton, T. (1983) *Literary Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Eakin, P. (1985) *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fink, K. J. (1993) 'Storm and Stress Anthropology', in, *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 6, No.1, pp.51-7.
- Fleishman, L. (1990), *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and his Politics*, Cambridge Mass. Harvard University Press.
- Formigari, L. (1995) 'Language and Society in the Late Eighteenth Century' in *Language and the History of Thought*, edited by Nancy Streuver, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, pp.153-170.
- Forsyth, M (1987) *Reason and Revolution: The Political thought of the Abbé Sieyès*, Trowbridge: Leicester University Press.

- Foucault, M. (1997) *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, translated from the French, London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1995) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated from the French by A. M. Sheridan Smith, London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1986) *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Jameson, F. (1977) *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: Verso.
- Gadamer, H.G. (1976) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated and edited by David E. Linge, Berkley: University of California Press.
- Gadamer, H.G. (1985) *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, translated by Robert Sullivan, Cambridge, Mass: MIT.
- Gawronsky, Dimitry. (1958), 'Ernst Cassirer: His Life and His Work', in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, Library of living Philosophers, no.6, first published in 1949, reprinted by Tudor Publishing.
- Geuss, R. (1981) *The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geuss, R. (1999) *Morality, Culture, and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geuter, Ulfried. (1992), *The Professionalisation of Psychology in Nazi Germany*, translated from the German by Richard J Holmes, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Glass, B., Temkin, O. and Straus, W. L. (1968) *The Forerunners of Darwin, 1745-1859*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Godzich, W.(1994) *The Culture of Literacy*, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press.
- Goldman, Lucien. (1977), *Lukacs and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, translated from the French by W.Q. Boelhower, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Goldstein, Kurt. (1939), *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Bioplogy Derived from Pathological Data in Man*, first published in 1934, New York: American Book Company.
- Gorner, P. (2000) *Twentieth Century German Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Graves, D. H. (1986) *Writing: Children and Teachers at Work*, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Gumbrecht, H. U. (1986) 'Un Souffle d'Allemagne ayant passé: Friedrich Diez, Gaston Paris, and the Genesis of National Philologies', *Romance Philology*, 15: 1.

Habermas, J. (1989) *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT.

Habermas, J. (1992a) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with assistance by Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1992b), *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated from the German by Fredrick Lawrence, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1994) *The Past as Future*, interviews with Michael Haller, translated and edited by Max Pensky, with Foreword by Peter Hohendahl, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1995) *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, translated from the German by William Hihengarten, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Halbwachs, Maurice, (1980) *The Collective Memory*, translated from the French by Francis J. Ditter, and Vida Yazı Ditter, first published in 1950 in French under the title, *Memoire collective*, New York: Harper Row.

Hall, Stuart (1978) 'The Hinterland of Science: ideology and the 'Sociology of Knowledge' in Swarz, B. (ed.) *On Ideology*, London: Hutchinson

Hardcastle, J. *et al.* (1983) 'Growth community and control in secondary school writers', in B. Kroll and G. Wells (eds.) *Exploration in the Study of Writing*, London: Wiley.

Hardcastle, J. L. (1985) 'Piece of the Past: Classrooms as Sites for Cultural Making', *English in Education*, Autumn, 1985.

Hardcastle, J. L. (1996) 'Cassirer's work on Symbolization: James Britton's European Inheritance', in *Changing English*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1996, pp79-97.

Hardcastle, J.L. (1997) 'History into Mind: English Teaching and the Idealist Legacy', *Changing English*, Vol. 4, No 1, 1997, pp31- 49.

Hardcastle, J.L. (1999) 'Von Humboldt's Children: English and the Formation of a European Ideal', *Changing English*, Vol.6, No 1, 1999, pp. 31-45.

Hardcastle, J.L. (2002), 'Carlos' Task': Pictures of Language and English Teaching' in *Changing English*, Vol.9, No 1, 2002, pp. 31-45.

Harding, D. W. (1974), *Experience Into Words*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Harding, D. W. (1937) 'The Role of the Onlooker', *Scrutiny*, vol. 6, no.3, December, 1937.

Harris R. and Taylor, T. (1997) *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought 1: The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hearnshaw, L. S. (1987) *The Shaping of Modern Psychology*, London, Routledge and Keegan Paul,

Heidegger, Martin. (1962), *Being and Time*, translated by J Macquarrie and E Robinson, Harper Row, New York.

Herder, Johan, Gottfried (1992), *Selected Early Works, 1764-1767, Addresses Essays and Drafts; Fragments on Recent German Literature*, edited by Ernest A Menze and Karl Menges, translated by Ernest Menze with Michael Palma, University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Herder, Johann, Gottfried, (1986) 'Essay on the Origin of Language', first published in 1772, translated from the German by Alexander Gode, in *On the Origin of Language: Jean Jaques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Languages, and Johann Gotfried Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language*, translated with afterwords by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Herder, Johan, Gotfried, (1968) *Reflections on the philosophy of History of Mankind*, abridged and with an introduction by F. E. Mannel, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Hegel, G.W.F (1988) *Introduction to the Philosophy of History with Appendix from the Philosophy of Right*, first published in 1821, translated from the German by Leo Rauch, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company

Heidegger, Martin, (1997), *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Translated by Richard Taft, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press

Hofstetter, M. J. (2001) *The Romantic Idea of the University: England and Germany, 1770-1850*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.

Hoffmeister, Gerhart (Ed.) (1989) *The French Revolution and the Age of Goethe*, Santa Barbara CA: Gerg Olm Verlag,

Hollis, M. (1973) *The Light of Reason: Rationalist Philosophers of the C17*, edited by Martin Hollis, London: Fontana.

Holub, R. (1984) *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, London: Methuen.

Holub, R. (1991) *Jurgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, London: Routledge.

Holquist, J. and Clark, K. (1984) 'The Influence of Kant in the Early Work of Bakhtin,' in *Literary Theory and Criticism: Festschrift in Honour of Rene Wellek, Part 1. Theory*, edited by Joseph Strelka, New York: Peter Lang.

Humboldt, Wilhelm von, (1989a), *The Diversity of Human Language- Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, known as *The Kawi Introduction*, first published in 1836, translated from the German by Peter Heath, with an introduction by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *Thinking and Speaking*, in Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989b), 'Thinking and Speaking: Herder, Humboldt and Saussurean Semiotics: A Translation and Commentary on Wilhelm von Humboldt's Sixteen Theses on Language', in *Comparative Criticism*, edited by E.S. Schaffer, Cambridge.

Humboldt, Wilhelm von, (1969), *The Limits of State Action*, edited with an introduction by J.W. Burrow, based on the 1854 translation by Joseph Coulthard, first published in the original German in 1792, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honneth, Axel (1993) *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Honneth et. al. eds. (1992) *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Hunter, I. (1988) *Culture and Governmen: The Emergence of Literary Education*, London: Macmillan.

Ingram, D. (1987) *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Judt, T. (1994) *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, Berkley: University of California Press.

Kant, Immanuel (1974) *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, first published in 1798, translated by Mary J Gregor, Martinus Nijhoff,

Kant, Immanuel, (1983), 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History and Morals*, translated by Ted Humphrey, first published in 1784, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Kant, Immanuel, (1983) *Speculative Beginning of Human History*, first published in 1786 in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History and Morals*, Translated from the German by Ted Humphrey, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Kennedy, E (1978) *Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology*, Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society.

Kelly, Michael (1992) *Hegel in Modern France*, Birmingham: Birmingham Modern Languages Publications.

Koepke, W. (ed.) (1990) *Johann Gotfried Herder: Language, History and the Enlightenment*, Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House.

Kojève, Alexandre (1969) *Introduction to the reading of Hegel: Lectures on 'The Phenomenology of Spirit'*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom, translated from the French by James H Nichols, Jr. first published in French under the title *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel*, Paris, 1947, Basic Books: New York.

Kozulin, A. (1990) *Vygotsky's Psychology: A Biography of Ideas*, Hemmel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Kress, G. and Leeuwen, van T. (1996) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, London: Routledge.

Krois, J. M. (1987), *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lamming, George (1970) *In the Castle of My Skin*, London: Longman.

Langer, Susanne K. (1953) *Feeling and Form*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Langer, Susanne K (1960) *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Langer, Susanne, K. (1962) *Philosophical Sketches*, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore.

Lawn, M. and Grosvenor, I (1999) 'Imagining a Project: Networks, Discourses and Spaces –Towards a New Archeology of Urban Education', *Paedagogica Historica*, Volume 35, No. 2 pp. 381-393.

Lenin, I.V. *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1909)

Leventhal, R.S. (1990) 'Critique of Subjectivity: Herder's Foundation of the Human Sciences', in Mueller-Vollmer, K. (Ed.) (1990) *Herder Today: Contributions from the International herder conference 5-8 November, 1987 Stanford, California*, New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Lichtheim, George, (1970) *Lukács*, London: Fontana Collins.

Lipton, D. R. (1978), *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany, 1914-1933*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Lister, R. (1984) *Prints and Printmaking: A Dictionary of the Art in nineteenth-century Britain*, London: Methuen.

Locke, John, (1993) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (abridged) edited by John Youlton, London: Everyman J. M. Dent.

Lofts, S. G. (2000) *Ernst Cassirer: A Repetition of Modernity*, Albany, State University of New York.

Lohnson, J. (1827) *English Harbour, Antigua from Great George Fort, Monk's Hill*, London: T. and G. Underwood of Fleet Street.

Lukacs, Georg (1968) *Goethe and his Age*, London: Merlin Press

Lukes, S., 1973, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work; A Historical and Critical Study*, London: Allen Lane.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois, (1986) *The Post Modern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, translated from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, with a Foreword by Fredric Jameson, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Marchand, Suzanne, L. (1996) *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970*, Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Marx, Karl, (1961) *German Ideology*, selected from work first published in 1846, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social philosophy*, edited by T. B. Bottomore and M. Reubel, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Marx, Karl, (1961) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, first published in 1844 in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social philosophy*, edited by T. B. Bottomore and M. Reubel, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Marx, Karl, (*Die Heilige Familie*) Quotations from T. B. Bottomore and M. Reubel, (1963) *Karl Marx: Selected writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

- Mathieson, M. (1975) *The Preachers of Culture: A Study of English and Its Teachers*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- McAlister, Linda (1982) *The Development of Franz Brentano's Ethics*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Merquior, J. G. (1986) *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post Structuralist Thought*, London: Verso.
- Merquior, J. G. (1985) *Foucault*, London: Fontana.
- Middleton, D. and Edwards, D. (eds.) *Collective Remembering*, London: Sage Publications.
- Minick, N (1989) 'Mind and Activity in Vygotsky's Work: An Expanded Frame of Reference' in *Cultural Dynamics*, 2. pp.162-187.
- Miller, J. (1983) *Many Voices*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Momigliano, A. D. (1994) *Studies on Modern Scholarship*, Edited by G. W. Bowersock and T. J. Connell, with new translations by T. J. Connell, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Miller, J. (ed.) (1984) *Eccentric Propositions: Essays on Literature and the Curriculum*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.61.
- Morton, M.(1990) 'Discourse and Gesture: The Poetic Dialectics of 'On Diligence in Several Learned Languages'', in Koepke, W. (ed.) (1990) *Johann Gotfried Herder: Language, History and the Enlightenment*, Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House.
- Mounce, H. (1997) *The Two Pragmatisms: From Pierce to Rorty*, London: Routledge.
- Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, (1989a) 'Thinking and Speaking: Herder, Humboldt and Saussurean Semiotics: A Translation and Commentary on Wilhelm von Humboldt's Sixteen Theses on Language', in *Comparative Criticism*, edited by E.S. Schaffer, Cambridge, 1989, pp.193-214.
- Mueller- Vollmer, Kurt, (1989b) 'The Abstractness of Reason and the Real Life of Individuals and Institutions: Von Humboldt's Educational Politics and the French Revolution' in *The French Revolution and the Age of Goethe*, edited by Gerhart Hoffmeister, Santa Barbara: Geog Olm Verlag, pp.159-179.

- Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt (Ed.) (1990a) *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder conference, 5-8 November, 1987 Stanford, California*, New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt (1990b) 'From Sign to Signification: The Herder-Humboldt Controversy', in Wulf Koepke (ed.) *Johann Gottfried Herder: Language, History and the Enlightenment*, Columbia, South Carolina, Camden House.
- Murray, David, J (1995) *Gestalt Psychology and the Cognitive Revolution*, Hemmel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Mearleau-Ponty, (1945) 'The Body as Expression and Speech' in *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Chris Smith, New York: The Humanities Press.
- Niethhammer, Lutz, (1992) *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* translated from the German original by Patrick Camiller, London: Verso.
- Nora, Pierre, (ed.) (1984) *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, Volumes I, II, III, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Norton, Robert, E (1991) *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment*, Columbia, South Carolina: Cornell University Press.
- Palmer, D. J. (1965) *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature from its Origins to the Making of the Oxford English School*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parry J. H.P and Sherlock P. (1971) *A Short History of the West Indies*, Macmillan African and Caribbean History Series, third edition, London: Macmillan,
- Pennycook, A. (1994) *Incommensurable Discourses*, Applied Linguistics, vol.15, number 2. pp.115-138.
- Porter, Roy, (2000) *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, London: Allan Lane.
- Reid, V.S. (1967) *Young Warriors*, Harlow: Longman.
- Reid, V.S. (1949) *New Day*, New York: Alfred A Knopf.
- Ricken, U. (1994) *Linguistics, Anthropology and Philosophy in the French Enlightenment: Language Theory and Ideology*, translated from the German by R. W. Norton, London: Routledge.

Ringer Fritz (1978) *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890 –1933*, Hanover, New England: Wesleyan University Press.

Richardson, R. 'Culture and justice: key concepts in World Studies and multicultural education' in *Teaching World Studies: An Introduction to Global Perspectives in the Curriculum*, edited by David Hicks and Charles Townley, Harlow: Longman,

Rockmore, T. *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Rosen, H. (1972) *Language and Class*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press.

Rosen, H. and Burgess, T. (1980) *The Languages and Dialects of London School Children*, London: Ward Lock.

Rousseau, Jean Jaques (1991), *Emile or On Education*, introduction, translation and notes by Allan Bloom, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Sapir, E. (1907) 'Herder's 'Ursprung der Sprache'', in *Modern Philology*, July, 1907, pp.109-142.

Scheerer, E. (1980) 'Gestalt Psychology in the Soviet Union,' in *Psychological Research*, 41, pp.113-132, Springer Verlag.

Scheerer, E. (1987) 'The Unknown Fechner', *Psychological Research*, 49:197-202.

Schultz, D.P. and Schultz, S.E. (1996) *A History of Modern Psychology*, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace.

Shayer, D. (1972) *The Teaching of English in Schools, 1900-1970*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Schilpp, P.A. (ed.) (1958) *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, Library of living Philosophers, no.6, first published in 1949, reprinted by Tudor Publishing.

Sinclair, J. McH. and Coulthard, M. (1975) *Towards an Analysis of Discourse*, London: Oxford University Press.

Sinha, C. (1989) 'Evolution, Development and the Social Production of Mind' in *Cultural Dynamics*, Volume II, 2.

Smith, Barry (ed.) (1988), *Foundations of Gestalt Theory*, Munich and Vienna, Philosophia Verlag.

Smith, O. (1984) *The Politics of Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Smith, W. D (1991) *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Sparrow, J. (1967) *Mark Pattison and the Idea of the University*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Streuver, Nancy, (ed.) (1995) *Language and the History of Thought*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press
- Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann.
- Stewart, J. H. (1951) *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, New York
- Stubbs, M. (1983) *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*, Oxford: Basil Blackwood.
- Sweet, P. (1978) *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography*, in two volumes, Columbus: Ohio State University Press
- Taylor, Charles (1979) *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charles (1995) *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, Charles (1995) 'The Importance of Herder' and Heidegger, Language and Ecology', in *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Taylor, Charles (1995) 'Heidegger, Language and Ecology', in *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Temkin, Owsei (1950) 'German Concepts of Ontogeny and History around 1800' in *Bulletin of History of Medicine*, 1950, 24, pp227-246
- Van der Veer, R. and Valsiner, J, (1991) *Understanding Vygotsky: A quest for a Synthesis*, Blackwell, Oxford UK and Cambridge USA
- Volosinov, V. N. (1973a) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, edited by L. Matejna and I. R. Titunik, New York: Seminar Press
- Volosinov, V. N. (1973b) *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, translated by I. R. Titunik, first published in 1929, New York: Seminar Press.
- Vries, Willem A. de (1992) *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, vol.1, *Problems of General Psychology, including the volume Thinking and Speech*, edited by R.W. Rieber, and A.S. Carton (eds.) translated by N.Minick, New York: Plenum Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1997) *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, vol.4, *The History of the Development of the Higher Mental Functions*, edited by R.W. Rieber, translated by M. J. Hall, Plenum Press, New York.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978), *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, edited by Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner and Ellen Souberman, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986), *Thought and Language*, translated, revised and edited by Alex Kozulin, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1994) *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Oxford: Blackwell.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1994a) 'The Problem of the Cultural development of the Child', first published in the original Russian 1929, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1994b) 'Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent' first published in the original Russian 1931, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, pp.266-289.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1994c) 'Fascism in Psychoneurology', first published in the original Russian 1934, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by Jaan Valsiner and René Van Der Veer, Oxford: Blackwell.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1994d) 'The Socialist Alteration of Man' first published in 1930, in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by René van der Veer and Jan Valsiner, Oxford: Blackwell.

Walcott, D. (1962 *In a Green Night*, London: Methuen.

Wassermann, J. (1985) *The Maurizius Case*, First published in the original German in 1929, translated by Caroline Newton, New York: Carroll and Graf.

Watson, J. (1979) *The West Indian Heritage: A History of the West Indies*, London: John Murray.

Weber, Eugene (1979) *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870 – 1914*, London: Chatto and Windus.

- Wertsch, J. (ed.) (1985a) *Culture Communication and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J. (1985b) *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. (1991) *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Widdowson, P. ed. (1982) *Re-Reading English: Essays on Literature and Criticism in Higher Education*, London: Methuen.
- Williams, R. (1958) *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Williams, R. (1965) *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Williams, R. (1977) *Keywords*, London: Fontana.
- Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Williams, R. (1979) *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, London: NLB.
- Williams, R. (1981) *Culture*, London: Fontana.
- Williams, R. (1980) *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London: Verso.
- Williams, Bernard in the 'Introduction' to René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, with Selections from the Objections and Replies, edited by John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. vii.
- Wood, Marcus, (2000) *BlindMemory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865*, Routledge
- Woods, N. (1994) Memory's Remains: *Les lieux de memoire*, in *History and Memory: Studies in Representations of the Past*, volume 6, number 1, Spring/Summer, 1994.
- Wundt, Wilhelm (1973) *The Language of Gestures*, with an introduction by Arthur Blumenthal and additional essays by George Herbert Mead and Karl Bühler, the Hague, Mouton
- Wundt, Wilhelm (1973) *The Language of Gestures*, with an introduction by Arthur Blumenthal and additional essays by George Herbert Mead and Karl Bühler, The Hague, Paris: Mouton.

Winthrop J Jordan, (1968) *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

