

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

**IN SEARCH OF THE GENERATIVE QUESTION: A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO  
PEDAGOGY**

**Johann Graaff**

**A dissertation submitted to the Humanities Faculty at the University of Cape Town in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Higher Education  
Studies**

**Supervisor: Lucia Thesen**

**March 2005**

### Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Higher Education Studies at the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed: Signature removed

Date: 5/04/05

University of Cape Town

## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

*This dissertation investigates, first, the kinds of transformation that have occurred in the perceptions and identities of a first year sociology class at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and, second, the learning experiences that have led to, or been associated with, those changes. It does that through Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. On the first issue, Gadamer proposes that the social sciences brings individuals to a meeting with the alien, and that this meeting effects a transformation of the self. This means both (following Jardine) to 'return life to its original difficulty', and (following Kerdeman) to be 'pulled up short'. But meeting the alien is not the same as meeting the Other. And for Stuart Hall meeting the Other is not the same as for Frantz Fanon. These notions need to be quite carefully distinguished.*

*The transformations which students experience go through some of these variations, such meeting the alien, and experiencing the Other (as conceptualized by both Hall and Fanon). None actually meet the Other in the sense of re-integrating a projection. These changes are in addition impossible to predict, and this delivers an important critique of Outcomes-Based Education.*

*On the second issue, the experiences which effect these changes, it is the process of questioning or of challenging. Gadamer's writing discusses four different kinds of questions or challenges. The first forms part of our ongoing, everyday living. It is the ontological challenge which the unexpected poses to our existing stock of resources. The second is the challenge which hermeneutics poses to accepted public opinion or the doxa. This overlaps very considerably with the processes proposed by writers like Peter Berger and Anthony Giddens of debunking (delving behind the glossy images which people and institutions present of themselves, also known as ideology critique in critical theory), relativizing (making the unfamiliar familiar, and vice versa) and system-relating (linking the detail of individual lives with societal structures aka. theorizing) which the sociological imagination pursues. The third form of questioning derives from the Socratic dialectical method. In its generative (rather than destructive) form Socrates' questions aimed to produce a state of perplexity in his interlocutors by showing the logical untenability of their opinions and the need for clear definitions. The fourth form of questioning occurs in the research process with the interrogation of material world through the methods of ethnography and focus groups. Generative forms of questioning build on Carl Rogers' unconditional positive regard.*

---

<sup>1</sup> I am immensely grateful for the contributions by the members of the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) in discussions around this material, and particularly to Lucia Thesen, the supervisor of this dissertation, who persisted.

*While there are suggestive hints at the origins of the transformations in student experiences, it is very difficult to pin down explicit links. But the aim of hermeneutics is not the identification of causes. It is much rather the heightening of sensitivity, the elaboration of the detail and the recognition in oneself of the foreign.*

University of Cape Town

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>0</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE STORY OF A PROJECT: THE CONTEXTUAL FRAME</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: QUESTIONING AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES</b> .....	<b>11</b>
ONTOLOGICAL QUESTIONING.....	11
PRESCRIPTIVE PRINCIPLES .....	12
FIRST YEAR SOCIOLOGY’S AGENDA .....	18
PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS .....	21
THE SOCRATIC DIALOGUES: GRAMMATICAL QUESTIONS .....	25
THE EXERCISE OF POWER .....	30
POSITIVE POWER .....	31
EDUCATING OR CORRUPTING THE YOUTH? TEACHERS AND CHARLATANS .....	34
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOCUS GROUPS</b> .....	<b>36</b>
ETHNOGRAPHY.....	37
FOCUS GROUPS .....	38
METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS.....	43
RESEARCH ETHICS .....	46
<b>CHAPTER 4 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS AND COURSE EVALUATIONS</b> .....	<b>49</b>
THE 2003 INTERVIEWS .....	49
KATHERINE: AN IDENTITY CRISIS ON SUCH A HUGE SCALE .....	50
THE 2004 INTERVIEWS: EYE-OPENERS AND I-OPENERS .....	53
JENNIFER: “I SUDDENLY REALIZED, YOU KNOW, WHAT IT WAS” .....	56
NINA: “NAZISM – YOU’D NEVER DO THAT, BUT YOU WOULD. IT’S UNFORTUNATE, BUT IT’S HUMAN NATURE.” .....	59
LINDA: “AND THE WORLD JUST UNRAVELS IN FRONT OF YOU” .....	61
KAREN – “I KNEW THAT AT SOME POINT I WAS BUYING INTO THE STEREOTYPE” .....	64
ROLAND: “... IT’S ALWAYS DISGUSTED ME. ... I’VE ALWAYS CONDEMNED SUCH THINGS” .....	65
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION – TRANSFORMATIONS AND INSTRUMENTS</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>74</b>

*Among the greatest insights that Plato's account of Socrates affords us is that, contrary to general opinion, it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them. ... To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them. ... In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know.*  
(Gadamer, 1989:363)

*"... the logic of the human sciences is a logic of the question."*(Gadamer, 1989:370)

### **Chapter 1: The Story of a Project: the contextual frame**

This dissertation arises out of a context of teaching first year sociology at the University of Cape Town, a concatenation of events, which for our purposes starts in July of 2003. Umberto Eco writes in *The Name of the Rose* that texts are palimpsests. He means to say that all texts are written on top of, through, embedded in, other texts. One dimension of understanding is an apprehension of some of this multi-layered circumstance. (Circum – stance = finding yourself standing surrounded by pre-formed structures.) It is, of course, impossible to be complete in this work of context. All de-layering of the complexity of situations is partial. All research is fragmentary. It comforts itself that it's stitching together of pieces amounts to something more than just bricolage. What follows are some of the prior texts into, and on to, which this one was written.

The Sociology first year course, SOC105S, *Individual and Society*, had, in the second half of 2003, a troubled trajectory. During the first 6 weeks of the course (from mid-July to end August) there were recurring student complaints about the course. They centred around the lecturing style of a particular female lecturer (whom I shall call Carmen). One group of five students came to see me, as course convenor, to tell me their problems. Another student let me know that she intended to write a letter to the campus newspaper, *Varsity*, but first copied the letter to the Head of Department, the Students Representative Council, and to the Dean of the Faculty. She was outraged that debate in class had been stifled. Another student stood up in the middle of a lecture, shouted her frustration at the lecturer, "We don't have a clue what you are talking about!!", and then stormed out. Another group of students went to see the Head of Department. In effect, that was the crux, they didn't understand what the lectures were about, they wanted more discussion in class, they didn't grasp how the theory and the case-study (affirmative action) fitted together.

That sequence of complaints set in train a series of evaluations of the course. First, the Human Science Students' Council, in response to the complaints, administered a questionnaire to students as a mid-term evaluation (in October 2003). The result of the questionnaire was reassuring. But by this time, the 'offending' lecturer had completed her module, the frustration had subsided somewhat. In response to the statement, "The lecture's oral presentation stimulates interest in the topic" 72% of students either agreed or strongly agreed. This was, after all, a new lecturer. But there were still ominous signs. In response to the statement, "I understand what is required for my assignments", only 56% of students agreed or strongly agreed. And in response to the statement, "The level of feedback on my essay/assignment is adequate", only 49% agreed or strongly agreed.

All of which led us (myself and Carmen) to set up a focus group at the end of the course. We needed to delve into what had happened in the course, go beyond the cryptic comments which students scratch on to course evaluations. We suspected that students had changed over a period of five or more years, that we were dealing with a different cohort, a different generation of young people. The clearest indication of this, we thought, was their inability to sit still in classes. Despite continuing peevish calls to order from lecturers, they persisted in talking to each other through and over the lecturer's voice. We had not come across this level of recalcitrance before.

This was then a first conceptualisation of the 'problem'. The matter at hand was one of discipline. This angle was seemingly supported by anecdotal reports coming out of Western Cape high schools that significant numbers of teachers were struggling to maintain discipline in classes. Many were leaving the profession because they could not cope. Others, who could not leave, were suffering disabling levels of stress. I began to compile a list of school psychologists to talk to. I started making enquiries on academic literature around school discipline.

Another evaluation at the end of the course (in November 2003), which differentiated between the lecturers, encapsulated what had happened. In response to the statement, "This lecturer gives clear and understandable explanations", student agreement (plus strong agreement) was 29% for Carmen, and 78% for the second and later one (myself). But it was not that clear. In response to another statement, "This lecturer stimulated my interest in the subject", student response was 21% positive for Carmen and a meagre 56% for myself. In short, it was by no means clear that one lecturer was boring and the other interesting. Students were generally alienated from both.

So we invited five students from our respective tutorial groups to attend two focus group discussions. Somewhat perversely we invited some of the brightest, most articulate group members. Maybe, we thought, being serious students, they would give us the reality of what was

happening in the class. The students were asked to respond to two questions: how does university work differ from school work?, in the first discussion, and, how does sociology differ from other disciplines at UCT? in the second discussion. One discussion was facilitated by myself, the other by Carmen. Themes that came out of those discussions emphasized a number of things:

- a. that the course was far too theoretical with far too little empirical case-study material (as exemplified by their course in Social Anthropology);
- b. that the material and the assignments had no connection with student lives ("where's the me in this?");
- c. that (just as the complaint went about Carmen at the beginning of the course) students "didn't know what you were talking about and none of us, most of us were sitting there going, "What are you going on about?";"
- d. that the marking was dishearteningly stricter than in other first year courses, and students felt that they scored up to 20% less for their sociology assignments.

With this runup as background, the 2004 version of this course looked a lot different. Carmen was no longer part of the teaching team. From lecturing the second 6 weeks of the course or half the course, I now lectured the first 9 weeks of a 13-week course. Each of the various sections (there were four 3-week sections) started with some connection with the personal lives of students. So, the first section on the nature of sociology began with a survey of student attitudes on affirmative action, and used those views to illustrate the nature of scientific argument, the nature of social science, and the relativizing, debunking, system-relating functions of the sociological imagination. Another section on Crime and Deviance began with a survey of what students thought was 'the most vile and disgusting crime you can think of', and proceeded from there by showing how profoundly sociology opposes such views. (Rape was the overwhelming favourite.) Lectures were a lot less theory-driven. I used a lot more illustrative examples, told a lot more stories, made much of the counter-intuitive angle of social science.

It was at this point that I formulated a first version of this dissertation. I had been much taken by Shaun Gallagher's discussion of (Gadamer's notion of) the nature of questioning in the social sciences (Gallagher, 1992). Following the Socratic model I wanted to pursue what it was to ask 'the generative question', what the techniques were which one might use to spark off transformative experiences in students. To that end I did two things. I started studying the Socratic dialogues in some detail, and I arranged for a series of workshops with the course tutors on group dynamics. I thought that tutorial discussions were an interesting place to scrutinize the way tutors asked questions, and how students responded. I started taping tutorial sessions. I thought that an understanding of group dynamics would help tutors to read the signs of energy

and enthusiasm among students. Tutors then met five times in weekly hour-long workshops. The first of these comprised an introductory lecture on the principles of group dynamics. Later discussions were much more broadly-based reflections on problems which they had experienced in running tutorials.

This take on the project was however overtaken by events. It soon became clear that something much more interesting was happening under my nose, among students in the course. I started getting signs that the student response to the course was more positive. My perception of body language and interactions in class were a first indication that students were engaged and caught up in this course in quite a different way from the earlier (2003) version of the course. Quite early on in the course one student approached me after a lecture with the question, "But isn't sociology dangerous?". When I asked him what this meant, he said "It turns all our usual views upside down."

This impression was strengthened at the mid-term evaluation. A great many students were very enthusiastic. I asked them to respond to three questions: 1. What has your experience of SOC105 been this semester? 2. How can this course be improved? 3. What would you recommend in this course to others? Among the usual range of responses were several which used words like 'eye-opener'. Here is a sample:

1. "My experience of SOC105 has been so wonderful. It enabled me to learn things that are part of my everyday life that I never realized before."
2. "SOC105 has been an eye-opener for me ... (it) makes one look at the world in a whole new perspective."
3. "I have found this course fascinating. Finally, I have a better understanding of issues I had previously merely accepted and now I can formulate my own opinions."
4. "It has changed the way I perceive things in life to be. It has made me think about situations such as affirmative action in a way I never even thought existed. I originally had no opinion on this issue but now hold a strong belief."
5. "SOC105S has been an eye-opener to me. I have been taken culture, politics, technology and many other developments as things that does not affect me or does not need my input but as other people's responsibilities. I have now realized that I am part and parcel of everything that happens. i.e. globalization." (sic)

So I began to rethink what my research was about. I saw that Socratic questioning was not really about asking cleverly formulated questions. It was much more about the challenge that the social sciences poses to public opinion. And that challenge, i.e the way in which sociology was "dangerous" or the way in which it was "an eye-opener", could happen in a whole range of

formats, only one of which was a grammatical question. In effect, I moved from looking for ways to ask a magical 'generative question' (in the future) to investigating ways in which (in the recent past) my students' views had been challenged and changed.

To that end I formulated the end-of-term course evaluation questionnaire to probe beyond the mid-term evaluation, for example, what being 'an eye-opener' meant. I asked open-ended questions like "Which particular topics made the greatest impression on you? And why? (Please write a few lines.)" and "Did this course change your mind on some things? (Please write a few lines.)". And students did indeed write a few lines. There was a wealth of comment that appeared, much of it quite positive about the course. (These are discussed in some detail in Chapter Four.)

Now, even though these responses offered a lot more detail than the mid-term list, they nevertheless still hid a treasure-house of personal experience, and of individual narratives. I wanted to find out what lay behind them. This was then the basis for a second series of focus groups run by myself and a research assistant at the end of 2004. The aim was to probe deeper into particular stories, to uncover the emotional colour and the conceptual background of these embryonic transformations. What were the issues, events, concepts which had made the most impact? What did it mean to say that 'this course was an eye-opener'?

These questions connected with the band of sociological theorizing which formed the basis for this course. In the writing of C. Wright Mills, Peter Berger, Anthony Giddens and Zigmunt Bauman, the sociological imagination is a mode of thinking which fundamentally confronts everyday common sense (Berger, 1966; Giddens, 1989; Baumann 1990; Mills 1959). For many of my students at the start of the course, for example, rapists were uniquely evil and sadistic individuals intent on indulging their lust and hunger for power. They were mentally unbalanced people who needed to be harshly punished. Against such absolutist, individualized, punitive and pathologizing views, the sociological imagination presents an approach which is relativizing, socially embedded, tolerant and theorized.

Two bands of theory, then, one from Gadamer's notions of questioning, the other from mainstream sociology's sociological imagination. Both present a challenge to everyday public opinion, but they come from very different places. Hermeneutics starts with the ongoing interaction between historical tradition and everyday life, the creative ferment arising from the unceasing meeting of the familiar with the unfamiliar.

The sociological imagination, by contrast, starts with the way in which society becomes like an inanimate thing and stands over and against the individual. Sociologists call it reification. And

much of this reification derives from the subtle way in which inequalities of power become accepted as normal and routine in social life.

The way to break this ossification is, for the positivist current in mainstream sociology, through an impartial, objective, logical and rigorous method. For the critical current in mainstream sociology, by contrast, the way forward is to reveal the hidden workings of power. For one truth is the prize, for the other freedom and emancipation.

For Gadamer's hermeneutics<sup>2</sup>, however, it is not possible to construct a world without prejudice, tradition and power. The way towards transformation is to engage in depth with authority and with historical roots. It is only through the intimate knowledge of and engagement with the 'alien' that fundamental change is possible. It is for this reason that hermeneutics embraces power, attempts to show that power has the potential to be creative and generative. Against positivist notions of clear and unambiguous truth, hermeneutics proposes perplexity. Against scientific aspirations to neat theoretical matrices, hermeneutics proposes messy context-bound case-studies. Against universal and eternal principles hermeneutics proposes ongoing and flexible compromise.

All of this has important implications for research methodology. In this dissertation I utilize focus groups as a process of ethnography. That puts considerable emphasis on the group context and the naturalistic circumstance of the research. It also focuses on the role of the facilitator in creating the framework for generative power.

At the same time it poses significant challenges to choosing an appropriate method. What kind of method is it that precisely targets personal transformation? The principles of ethnography (through focus groups) takes us some way in this search, but remains unsatisfactory. In the end, I have combined this ethnographic perspective with a version of psychodynamic analysis derived from Stuart Hall, and some principles of Jungian psychology.

It is not by accident then that a dissertation founded in hermeneutics should start with the elaboration of a shifting, hard-to-pin-down case-study which poses tantalizing questions rather than with a clean theoretical matrix which is mapped on to social reality.

What does this dissertation do? What is significant about the work that it does? The most important aspect of this dissertation is its elaboration and extrapolation of the practical pedagogical principles of hermeneutics. This forms part of a much larger project that I have

---

<sup>2</sup> The term, hermeneutics, is sometimes taken to represent all micro-sociology. This would include categories like symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology. In this dissertation I restrict the term to its use by Gadamer.

pursued in spelling out the (as yet unformulated) pedagogical aspects of hermeneutics (Graaff, 2004, Graaff et al. 2004). This dissertation focuses in on one aspect of this project, namely the notion of transformation.

But this has taken some work. Gadamer himself distances his philosophy from pedagogy. And very few other writers have set out the practical pedagogical implications of hermeneutics. Gallagher's treatment is quite philosophical (Gallagher, 1992). Flyvbjerg has much to say about the application of *phronesis* to the social sciences and specifically to research, but says hardly anything about teaching, or about qualitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Stewart is a first attempt but fairly embryonic (Stewart, 2003). Jardine is useful, although also very philosophical (Jardine, 1992) Kerdeman is the one person who, in two articles, has pursued this line, elaborating specifically the practical implications of transformation and 'meeting the alien' (Kerdeman, 1998, 2003). I have taken up Kerdeman's ideas, but gone considerably beyond them, distinguishing the notion of meeting the alien from meeting the Other, as set out in the work of Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon. Here I have found the principles of Jungian psychology useful to extend those of Kerdeman.

At the level of data analysis there is a similar dearth in guidelines. Gadamer's own research practice lies in the direction of *anamnesis*<sup>3</sup>, and the excavation of etymological histories, which is hardly helpful with transcribed material from interviews. Stuart Hall comes much closer in setting out psychodynamic principles of stereotypes and prejudice, but still falls short in spelling out the detail of data analysis (Hall, 1992, 2001). Here too then I have worked to extrapolate Hall's principles within the methodologies of ethnography and focus groups, while combining them with Jungian insights. In brief, then, an exploration of the practical aspects of hermeneutics in pedagogy in an area where not a great deal has been written.

There are three further comments to make in (negatively) delineating the outlines of this dissertation. The first is that this dissertation does not undertake to spell out the implications for practical teaching of this work, although there are clearly such consequences to be drawn. It is not in this sense action research. The aim here is rather to enhance the sensitivity of teachers to those normally invisible events, the transformations, which occur under their noses. Another way to say the same thing is that the word pedagogy in the title of the dissertation, 'a hermeneutic approach to pedagogy', refers to the effects of teaching among students rather than an exploration of new strategies of teaching.

---

<sup>3</sup> Anamnesis, for Gadamer, is the process of dis-forgetting, whereby historical cultural traces, which were thought to be forgotten, can be retrieved and resurrected.

The second comment to make is that this dissertation has an ambivalent relationship to discourse analysis. At one level I try to stay away from discourse analysis because I try to focus in on the micro- and situational rather than the macro-sociological, and because I do not concentrate on power and hegemony (in the Gramscian sense). From another angle, it is extremely difficult to avoid discourse analysis in contemporary qualitative research. Discourse analysis is everywhere. In addition, Stuart Hall, whom I have followed in my data analysis, could easily be seen as a discourse analyst. Perhaps the best way to say it is that I have not followed through on all the discourse analytical aspects of Stuart Hall.

Finally, while there are hints in this text to ways in which teachers and lecturers are also subject to transformation, particularly with regard to the use of power, this is not an area which I intend to pursue here. That would need far more space than is available. I concentrate for the moment rather on transformations among students.

University of Cape Town

## Chapter 2: Theoretical framework: questioning and the Human Sciences

"... the logic of the human sciences", says Gadamer, "is a logic of the question". (Gadamer, 1989:370) This chapter is an investigation of the various forms which questions can take in Gadamer's thinking. In one form, living everyday life is a process by which long-held views and practices are challenged by (even very slightly) unexpected circumstances. In this form, questioning is an ontological condition of existence. We would not be able to exist without this ongoing process.

In a second form, a questioning attitude is a prescription for the good life. A great deal of Gadamer's work, *Truth and Method*, is a meditation on the aspects of just this issue – how to take up a questioning attitude, what it is that is being questioned, what the aim of questioning is, how questioning relates to dialectics and debate, the roots of questioning in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the central role of practical wisdom or *phronesis* in this issue. In the chapter which follows I investigate both forms of questioning and the various issues which arise from them.

A third form of questioning arises from Socrates' dialectical method. This leads us to a series of considerations. One is the difference between constructive and destructive or *eristic* questioning. There is no guarantee that questioning will itself be generative. Another concerns the nature of the perplexity which Socrates induces through his questions. It is a perplexity intended to encourage people to use their own voices. Yet another relates to the nature of challenges and their grammatical forms. Finally, there is the way in which questions integrate with practical situations. This is a matter of theory and praxis.

Let us consider these aspects in more detail.

### Ontological Questioning

Gadamer's discussion of the matter of questioning starts by confirming the ontological status of questioning in hermeneutics. That means that everyday life is constituted by the challenge which the unfamiliar poses to the familiar, it is the task set for the accumulated knowledge and experience which we have in their meeting with the problems and tasks of everyday living. Life gets lived at that luminous edge where consciousness is engaged in the practical issue of getting on with the not-quite-expected problems of daily living. Those practical issues might entail making a sandwich or speaking to someone or reading a text.

Plato (through his mouthpiece, Socrates) points to this very issue in what has now come to be known as Meno's paradox in teaching. In Socrates' words:

It is thus impossible for a man to inquire either into what he knows, or into what he does not know. He cannot inquire into what he knows; for he knows it, and there is no need for inquiry into a thing like that. Nor would he inquire into what he does not know; for he does not know what it is he is to inquire into. (Allen, 1984:163)

This is a paradox which engages Gadamer centrally, and for which he finds an answer in the notion of the fusion of horizons. In their everyday lives, people always find themselves embedded in a particular tradition. They start with what they know. But they are, on an ongoing basis, confronted by the challenge of daily reality, i.e. what they do not know. They solve this by application, by applying the knowledge that they have to situations and problems that they have not encountered before. The fusion of horizons between the known and the unknown is an ontological condition of existence. Meno's paradox is being solved at every moment of our living. The issue for teaching, then, is not whether old principles can be applied in new situations, but how to use the exercise of application most fruitfully.

### **Prescriptive Principles**

The second form of questioning concerns a move from the ontological to the prescriptive. This move starts with the recognition that in everyday living, negotiating the challenges of living has the potential for taking on a mechanical and lifeless character. People can and do develop technical formulae for solving problems even with issues of considerable importance. In this mode of thinking the aim is, via rigorous and disciplined method, to find final truth such that no more needs to be said, to achieve mastery and closure, 'to render the world a harmless picture for our indifferent and disinterested perusal' (Jardine, 1992:119). It is in this sense that Gadamer says 'the method of modern science is characterized from the start by a refusal: namely, to exclude all that which actually eludes its own methodology and procedures'. (quoted in (Jardine, 1992:126) In this situation, says Jardine, the task of hermeneutics is to 'return life to its original difficulty', to re-instill in the negotiation of life a sense of personal engagement and value, to bring back a consideration of the bigger issues of living like the meaning of life, death, birth, pain, or mortality. To the extent that these issues are not amenable to final solutions, engaging them entails a necessary measure of ambiguity and uncertainty. Translated into questioning, this approach means adherence to Socrates's *docta ignorantia*, the knowledge of not knowing (Gadamer, 1975:362).

Kerdeman has a slightly different interpretation of Gadamer's view of change. (Kerdeman, 2003). For her, the essence of transformation is that people are 'brought up sharp'. They discover that their long-held views are mistaken, that they need to re-assess their opinions in a way that is unforeseen and indeed unforeseeable. "Being pulled up short discloses attitudes, qualities and behaviours we would prefer to disown, deny or recognize only insofar as we project<sup>4</sup> them on to others." (Kerdeman, 2003:296) Being pulled up short is to puncture a condition of self-inflation which fails to recognize the limitations of being human.

"What a man (sic) has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitation of humanity ... into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man (sic) from the divine." (Gadamer quoted in (Kerdeman, 2003:297)

In the parable of the prodigal son, a young man goes out from his father's home, squanders his inheritance, and finally finds himself feeding someone else's pigs. Here Gadamer talks of the meeting the alien.

It is oneself that one finds in the alien, even while feeding with the swine. There is always this sense of chastening and deflation when we discover that there is something more, something other than ourselves. But even in the humiliation of recognizing oneself in the other, there is also a sense of elation and expansion, of coming into one's own that Scripture depicts as homecoming and coming into one's inheritance. (Weinsheimer, 1985:70)

It is worth underlining that this meeting the alien is not the same as meeting the Other. In its most common form, meeting the Other derives from Freudian theory, the Other being the suppressed image of a significant Other, like a parent (Hall, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. As used by Edward Said, the Other is that which is feared and/or secretly desired, projected on to other (often foreign) people but likewise suppressed (Hall, 1992). Meeting the Other here sounds more like the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus (rather than the prodigal son), that which was hated and feared turns into

---

<sup>4</sup> I will argue below that reclaiming projection is not the same as being pulled up short. I think Kerdeman is confusing two different things here.

<sup>5</sup> Hall notes that there are at least three notions of the Other alongside Freud's. One derives from the Saussurian notion that meaning derives from syntagmatic difference or absence. Another is Bakhtinian, originating in the dialogic notion of meaning, i.e. that meaning is created only in dialogue with others. Mary Douglas's structuralism is a third. In this notion what is Other (fearsome, disgusting, outrageous) is that which is out of its place. Hall, S. (2001) "The Spectacle of the Other." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*(Ed, Hall, S.) Sage Publications in association with the Open University, London..

something to be respected. Meeting the alien is more a deflation of hubris and arrogance than the transformation of hatred and disgust (Samuels et al., 1986:81; Edinger, 1972<sup>6</sup>).

In Fanon's postcolonial theory the Other is seen through Manichean thinking, the oscillation between stark alternatives. The victims of colonial oppression either give over their own identity to take on European culture, or they reject all that is European in a version of black consciousness or Negritude. In the hands of Hall and Said, the construction of the Other is often the action of the colonial oppressor. The virtue of Fanon's position is that the oppressed participate equally in fixed, stereotypical and static thinking. But Fanon warns that meeting the Other is not a simple matter. Conceptions of the Other are cemented by social power and by deep psychological roots. So, Fanon enjoins revolutionary intellectuals to participate in the 'zone of occult instability' which is deadened, self-hating peasant culture to construct instead a 'fighting culture'. In this way historical symbols whose roots are hidden (occult) are mobilized and enlivened to confront the practical solution of contemporary and immediate problems. He warns that pessimistic and sterile culture is held in place by (colonial) violence, and that this violence will first need to be broken for any movement to occur (Fanon, 1968; Gibson 2003). Inasmuch as Fanon is addressing a familiar problem of fixed thinking here, he is underlining that an Other does not shift simply by the presentation of alternatives. Others are held in place both by power, and by deep emotional bonds, what Wendy Holway calls 'investments' (Holway, 2001)<sup>7</sup>.

In Lacanian theory (which frequently forms the base of postmodernism) the construction of the Other is seen as a futile attempt to bind the ontological fracturing of the specular self. In this situation the ethical teacher aims to create conditions for holding the tension in this fracturing, and this is done by demonstrating the slippages and uncertainties in language. Pickering speaks here of 'privileging the ruptures of form and the subversive potential of ambivalence as a political weapon' (Pickering, 2001:159).

The point of this brief cook's tour of forms of Othering is to put Gadamer's notion of meeting the alien in some perspective, to pin down its particularity, and to indicate the variety of practical

---

<sup>6</sup> Jung's thoughts on religion have uncannily strong echoes of Gadamer's notion of meeting the alien. "To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse." (Jung quoted in Edinger p.101) And on p.49 "For this reason the experience of the self is always a defeat for the ego."

<sup>7</sup> It is a critique of Foucault that the effect of discourse happens too easily, without the workings of socialization, or of deeper roots into the unconscious. Nixon, S. (1997) "Exhibiting Masculinity." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Ed, Hall, S.) Sage Publications Inc., London, pp. 223-290.

action which flows from the variety of definition. I return to the matter of strategy below. Let us now return to Gadamer.

For Gadamer, the ideal of the good life, the *summum bonum*, is the pursuit of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. *Phronesis* stands in contrast with *episteme*, or pure theory, on the one hand, and *techne*, or technicism, on the other. While there is much debate around the definition of *phronesis*, for our purposes, it entails the following elements: (1) it retains a connection with questions of normative import, it asks, 'is this worthwhile?', 'where are we going?'; (2) it starts from practical situations or case studies rather than from theoretical principles, it promotes 'thick knowledge' as a basis from which to pursue questions of value; it engages in contemporary dialogues and debates, participates in public debate; (3) it promotes open-ended conversation rather than conclusive solutions, it continues asking questions (Gallagher, 1992); (4) it is a holistic, rhetorical, tactful approach to knowledge and skill rather than one pursuing mechanical, principled, rule-bound practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001)<sup>8</sup>; (5) it puts people in the way of transformation, and more specifically in the way of being 'startled out of themselves', of being 'pulled up short', of being caught unawares (Kerdeman, 1998).

In an illuminating discussion Gadamer compares *techne* and *phronesis*, technical skill and practical wisdom (Gadamer, 1989). Technical skill is itself, like good interpretation, and like practical wisdom, continually applied to real problems. The question is, how does this kind of application differ from that in the process of *phronesis*. Remember here Gadamer's bigger purpose in critiquing positivism and technicism, in returning life to its original difficulty. What then is the problem with technical skill?

Gadamer has three things to say in critique of technical skill, in comparing it with *phronesis*. First, technical skill is static in its application. *Phronesis*, like the law of precedents, moves and learns as it is applied. It is never the same skill, or the same principles, which are being applied to concrete problems. Every new application changes our understanding of the principle.

Second, unlike *techne*, *phronesis* draws in moral considerations in the making of decisions. Practical wisdom entails the quite delicate maintenance of personal proportion and balance in the making of judgment. It is as much self-deliberation as practical problem-solving.

---

<sup>8</sup> In his discussion of *phronesis* Flyvbjerg includes the critical investigation of power as a prominent element, i.e. a strong critical theory component. He puts the work of Foucault alongside that of Aristotle as exemplary of good research. As I shall argue further on, there is no power vacuum at the heart of hermeneutics. In some ways hermeneutics is more radically critical than Foucault's critical theory – which is not to say that Foucault is not a brilliant example of *anamnesis*. Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making Social Science Matter: why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.;

Finally, and most importantly, it follows that *phronesis*, or moral judgment, is about entering into the situation of the other. Technicians can fix faulty spark-plugs in an engine without 'entering into' the state of the engine, without asking what the engine is being used for. *Phronesis*, says Gadamer, by contrast, involves forbearing and forgiveness, an attempt to put oneself in other shoes. The practical technician, much like the Sophists, can make something out of any situation. He is, says Gadamer, 'a man who is capable of anything' for he has no morals, is totally given over to pragmatism. It is this which is most problematic about technicism.

We should remember that when Gadamer talks about moral judgment, about forbearing and forgiveness, he does not mean entering the mind of the author of a text. He calls this, somewhat critically, an uncertain and 'divinatory' process. What people end up saying always escapes what they originally intended. It is the text itself to which we submit ourselves, which one approaches with respect and empathy<sup>9</sup>.

How do these philosophical principles translate into practical pedagogy? This is not an easy question to answer for two main reasons. One is that Gadamer himself puts a distance between his work and that of pedagogy. Gadamer says, for example, "Interpretation is not something pedagogical" [quoted in (Gallagher, 1992:2)]<sup>10</sup>. The second is that much of Gadamer's writing is ontological, or put more carefully, there is a very fuzzy boundary in Gadamer between the ontological and the prescriptive. Inasmuch as teaching entails a strong moral and prescriptive component, it is difficult to deduce principles of good teaching practice from the conditions of human existence.

Despite these difficulties there is quite a lively prescriptive literature that is based on Gadamer, some of it also on teaching (See for example, the work of Gallagher, Rorty, Taylor, and (Graaff, 2004; Noel, 2001, Taylor, 2002; Rorty, 1980; Gallagher, 1992). Without entering that debate in detail, the following are principles of good teaching derived from Gadamer's work, in general, and *phronesis*, in particular.

---

<sup>9</sup> Compare the similar stance by Clifford Geertz who rejected the notion of an intuitive entering of other people's souls. For him, the task of ethnography was to analyze "the symbolic forms in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another". (quoted in Schwandt, 1994:123)

<sup>10</sup> Jardine differs quite sharply from Gadamer where he says 'hermeneutics links up essentially rather than accidentally with education' Jardine, D. (1992) "Reflections on Education, Hermeneutics, and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics as a Restoring of Life to Its Original Difficulty." In *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*(Eds, Pinar, W. and Reynolds, W.) Teacher's College, New York.

1. Teaching should be a process of sensitive listening to students. So, for example, assessment should be flexible to ongoing student responses, it should be a conversation between teachers and students. It should be continuous assessment that shifts to accommodate new enthusiasms and difficulties. Likewise, assignment grading should happen rapidly (turnaround time of a matter of days rather than weeks) with attention paid to detailed feedback comment.
2. Learning is a matter of ongoing practical execution. Students should be engaging hands-on with material via discussion, multiple exercises and assignments. Academic skills require bodily engagement with the routines, and procedures of the discourse, or in Bourdieu's terms, the *habitus* of academia.
3. Curriculum content needs to draw strongly on contemporary and current debate around public issues and case studies. Theoretical principles follow on from, rather than, precede such empirical material. One of the dangers of the social sciences is dogmatic prescription on the basis of theoretical fiat. Theory needs continuous adaptation to new situations.
4. The skills of logical argument need to be combined with committed rhetoric. In practical terms, students need to practice also a range of writing styles that include journalism, advocacy, report-writing, and letters to the newspaper. The social sciences need to participate in moral and political issues rather than Olympian impartiality and objectivity (who ever decided that the gods of Olympus did not take sides in human affairs?).
5. The outcomes of teaching cannot be planned. Individuals respond to the curriculum in an infinite variety of ways. Students can only be 'put in the way' of learning. There can be very little 'road-map' planning of the kind which states (confidently) "at the end of this course students will be able to ...". Kerdeman argues that a great deal of contemporary teaching which emphasizes competence and mastery might work to contradict precisely the disposition to be pulled up short. In the end, it is extremely difficult to teach something that is so unpredictable. One is left, she says, with teachers who themselves can be pulled up short, who illustrate and model by their own actions what this means (Kerdeman, 2003:308)
6. Good teaching entails personal transformation, for both teachers and students. Curriculum content and pedagogic practice needs to engage the participants in the learning process on an immediate and intimate basis, to speak to their everyday concerns.

The first four of the above principles I have discussed in some detail elsewhere (Graaff, 2004, Graaff et al., 2004). This dissertation focuses on the last two aspects, the nature and origins of transformation in teaching sociology, and their unpredictability.

## First Year Sociology's Agenda

In the previous section I have argued that Gadamer considers the human sciences to constitute two questions, one ontological and the second prescriptive. In this section I consider how far these prescriptive questions are reflected in a first year sociology course which uses concepts like debunking, relativizing and system-relating in elaborating the sociological imagination. It is worth underlining that Gadamer addresses the human sciences, *geisteswissenschaft*, rather than merely the social sciences. We should expect then that Gadamer's questions would be posed in a much broader and encompassing sense.

Earlier on I indicated that 'mainstream' positivist and critical sociology strive towards, on the one hand, an objective, impartial and scientific method, and on the other, to unveil the hiding places of power. Both often talk about undermining the naturalized and routines assumptions of everyday common sense. At this fairly superficial level, hermeneutics pursues a very similar agenda. It also aims to challenge, ask questions of, public opinion, the *doxa*. Once one goes into more detail, however, it is evident that these three streams of theory are actually pursuing quite different agenda's.

What were the explicit aims, then, of the first year sociology course? In the language of Peter Berger, the sociological imagination aims to do three things: first, to *debunk* the public images which individuals and social entities present of themselves (Berger, 1966). This parallels critical theory's goal of unveiling and undermining the subtleties of power in society. Examples used in the course were the awful 'sweatshop' conditions which lie behind glossy advertising; the salaries paid to company CEO's compared to those of their unskilled workers; Marx's depiction of religion as the opium of the masses; Marx's analysis of the compulsions and coercions of the so-called 'free' market.

The second aim was to *relativize* opinions which see themselves as unique and absolute by comparing them with equivalent cultural phenomena in other times and other societies. This breaks down into two contrary moves. One is to de-familiarize things that seem very ordinary and banal – for example, to bring out the oddness and curiousness of a can of Coke or a cup of coffee. This is a quote from the textbook.

What kind of activity is it when, for example, people sit around a table, talking, 'having a cooldrink'. And how would the social situation change if they were 'having a smoke' with a cigarette in their hand instead of a cooldrink? People 'having a smoke' are different

from people 'having a coldrink'. And they are different again from people 'having a beer' or those 'having a cup of tea' or those 'having a glass of champagne'. (Graaff, 2001)

The other task in relativizing was to familiarize what seems foreign and outrageous. One example here was the torture of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. The media at the time had made a great deal of these incidents, of the hypocrisy of the US invasion on the pretext of bringing democracy and human rights to an erstwhile oppressive dictatorship, of the outrage at the abandonment of just those human rights and the Geneva Convention dealing with the treatment of prisoners.

In lectures during this course I took a different line. I questioned the implication that the US was unique or singularly evil in perpetrating these atrocities. After all, war is war. Soldiers are taught to hate their enemies. This is the way war has always been, back through thousands of years. What did one expect? Which is not to condone the violations, just that, when ordinary members of society, 'like you and me', are put in situations of violent conflict, that's what happens. Under extreme pressure, anyone can quite quickly lose the semblances of civil, decent behaviour.

It is at the end of this particular lecture that a student approaches me. "Isn't sociology dangerous?", he asks. I ask, "What does that mean?". "Well", he replies, "it takes all people's ordinary beliefs and turns them upside down".

Another example of this approach concerned the topic of Crime and Deviance. At the start of the module on Crime and Deviance in the course, I asked students to respond to three questions: (1) Who do you think are the most vile/disgusting/despicable criminals? List one or two types. (2) What do you think they are up to, these types, when they are committing this crime? (3) How do you think they should be dealt with? Here are some answers.

*"I feel that sexual offenders like child molesters etc ... are the most vile criminals. 'Public hanging is the only answer.' Rape is also a disgusting crime. Its not about sex its about power and control. They should be castrated as their punishment."*

*"1. Rapist. 2. Revenge ... 3. They thrown (sic) in prison for life/ their penis should be chopped off like the bible says "If your hand causes you to sin, remove it." The word rapist should be written on their forehead."*

*"1. a) pedophiles b) mercenary killers 2. They are sick people who are selfish and convince themselves that it is okay. They mess up innocent people's lives. 3. I think that both types act fully consciously and they're lucid and know what they're doing. It is their fault – so they should*

*punished accordingly. Savagely. They should be put in solitary confinement for 30 years then death sentenced.*

*"1. Murderers and rapists. 2. murderers are driven by hate some are just psychotic, rapist I believe are driven by the sick pleasure they derive and a need for power over their victim. 3. I think both murderers and rapists should be tortured and made to suffer and they shouldn't be killed. They should just be made to suffer & get a glimpse into how they made others suffer."*

These are precisely the kinds of views that sociology would aim to relativize. They are examples of absolutist, highly emotional, punitive, pathologizing and individualized thinking around a sociological problem. It is exactly against this kind of view that a social, culture and structural view of crime would be pitted.

In attempting to follow this agenda, one class discussion (in reconstructed and summarized form) went something like this.

*Lecturer: "What is the rapist up to while committing this crime?"*

*Student A: "Rape is a matter of power being exercised over the woman. It is not a case of sex."*

*Lecturer: "Why is it that men need to exercise their power over women?"*

*Student B: "Because they have insecure male identities?"*

*Lecturer: "If rape is an exercise in compensating for damaged identity, what then would be the woman's equivalent of committing rape?"*

*Student C: "When she beats her children."*

*Lecturer: "What would be other examples of men compensating for insecure identities?"*

*Student D: "The school bully".*

*Lecturer: "Who are the people who are school bullies?"*

*Student E: "The under-achievers."*

*Lecturer: "What would be the effect of punishing someone with a damaged identity?"*

*Student F: "It would aggravate his humiliation and increase his desire to commit rape."*

In this sequence, rape is being juxtaposed with equivalent acts. What is strange and monstrous is being familiarized. It is no longer a unique, or a uniquely horrible, act. It is one of many, it is a symptom of a deeper lying problem – insecure and damaged self-identity. There are many such symptoms visible in the world. More importantly, there is the hint that many ordinary people do just these things as well. This exercise is similar to the example above on the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison. It is a strategy of de-absolutizing. At the same time it problematizes the knee-jerk response of vengeance against the perpetrator, "castrate them", "lock them up and throw away the key" since it shows that punishment is in one sense counterproductive. In other

readings, students encountered the individual and cultural lives of particular rapists, the circumstances under which they had grown up, the way their parents had treated them. In short, cardboard cutout stereotypes confronted real-life individuals.

It was in response to this kind of information that students could say later on, "I had not realized that a criminal can be anybody and that criminals need my support and care... I now look at the homeless and other marginalized groups differently"; and "It made me empathize with (some) rapists and understand where deviant people are coming from."

Up to this point I have considered two legs of the sociological imagination, debunking and relativizing. The third leg of the sociological imagination is to show how seemingly free-floating entities connect up into wider societal systems and theoretical frameworks, which I have called *system-relating*. One way to do this is to show how apparently impersonal phenomena 'out there' have very tangible personal effects 'in here'. So, in the case of globalization, lectures focused at the micro level on the new religions, psychopathologies, identities, and entertainment which accompanied the macro-'juggernaut'.

It is from this system-relating background that we get responses like the following in the Course Evaluation. "SOC105S has been an eye-opener to me. I have been taken culture, politics, technology and many other developments as things that does not affect me or does not need my input but as other people's responsibilities. I have now realized that I am part and parcel of everything that happens. i.e. globalization."(sic)

How close is this sociological agenda to the one posed by Gadamer? At a certain level there a great many overlaps. When a student asks, "Isn't sociology dangerous?" or writes that the course was 'an eye-opener", or says "I don't take things at face-value any more", it is public opinion or the *doxa* which is being questioned. When students say (on p.37) "I do not have absolute truths" or everything is not black and white" or later on, that this lack of closure is 'frustrating', there is a level of perplexity. When a student says "I had not realized that a criminal can be anybody", she is meeting the alien in a very significant way.

But what kinds of transformation are these? Are they significant shifts or are they merely ripples on the surface-skin of a large lake?

### **Psychological Implications**

One way to investigate the nature of these transformations is through a psychodynamic approach, following Stuart Hall (Hall, 2001). Seen through this lens the process which students undertake in this course can be seen as the movement from stereotype to empathy, from anger to understanding, from repression and projection to a meeting with the Other. Stereotypes function to essentialize, reduce and naturalize. That means, that they reduce a phenomenon to one or two characteristics which are said to represent the whole. Stereotypes simplify and exaggerate. They work to exclude all those characteristics which do not fit the essence. And those characteristics are fixed. The attempt is to anchor a world in which foundations feel unstable, vulnerable to the temptations of precisely that which is being exorcised (Hall, 2001:257; Pickering, 2001:79). In practical terms, students start by saying of rapists, that they are monsters who are consumed by lust and sadism, and should be tortured, castrated and branded. They end by saying 'I understand that criminals also need my empathy'.

Which are the methods by which people shift from one pole to the other? Well, most of the methods which we have investigated, either as part of the sociological imagination, or as part of Gadamer's questioning, are part of this process. Let us look at these in more detail.

Seen through a psychodynamic lens, *relativizing* is an important way of challenging stereotypes. It is not simply a cognitive skill. It also entails an emotional transformation. For it challenges those attitudes which are angry, individualizing, pathologizing and punitive, and presents an alternative which ascribes causality to society rather than the individual, and is tolerant of difference. It replaces a sense of innate evil with a sense of causation, it replaces a sense of blaming and judgment with one of understanding. Emotionally it is less charged and less heated.

From another angle, relativizing presents alternatives to truths which believe themselves to be unique, universal and absolute. Where there was one holy book with a single truth, there are now many. Where there was one culture, one nation, one ideology which were inviolable and flawless, there are now many, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Where there was clear and absolute truth, there are now grey areas of ambiguity. In these circumstances it is difficult to sustain beliefs which are based on unsubstantiated exaggeration, i.e. stereo-types. In discussion of theories, for example, this process happens on an implicit basis. Students discover that no theory is perfect, that all have their flaws and their benefits, that theorizing is very much a matter of debate and weighing up rather than an easy black-and-white judgment.

Another mechanism which confronts stereotypes is the encounter with the detail of *real lives*. Being driven by strong emotions of fear, disgust, and disapproval/outrage, stereotypes tend to construct exaggerated and monstrous images. Confronted by 'real' people who do not conform,

stereotypes are challenged. In this course students read accounts of individuals who were rapists, the communities they came from, and the cultures which produced them, what they said about themselves, and how they explained their actions. Rapists suddenly appeared as ordinary and small compared to the enormity of the stereotypes. In these cases students can begin to feel a measure of sympathy with criminals. The final and most dramatic shift occurs when individuals can acknowledge that stereotypes are suppressed parts of themselves and recognize the criminal or the monster in themselves, they can themselves feel the temptation to commit crime. This is the true case of empathy.

The mechanism of *system-relating* has the function of emphasizing the social embeddedness of individuals, the degree to which individuals are unable to choose who they are, the hidden nature of much of their social behaviour, and the degree to which they cannot carry full responsibility for who they are. In psychological terms it serves to deflate the importance of the ego, and the belief that the world can be planned and controlled. It serves to underline the inscrutability and unpredictability of the unconscious to which they are bound.

These then are some of the conventional cognitive aspects of the sociological imagination which important psychic implications.

For Gadamer's hermeneutics, on the other hand, there are close parallels with these sociological perspectives. Gadamerians speak of perplexity, original difficulty, *phronesis* and being pulled up short. Inasmuch as these arise from philosophical considerations of the good life, they are not far removed from psychic concerns in the way that academic concerns are. But they do not operate explicitly as mechanisms for challenging stereotypes or doing psychodynamic work. Yet it is a fairly simple task to show, for example, the overlap between Kerdeman's 'being pulled up short' and what Jungians would call deflation. (Edinger, 1972) Deflation for Edinger, a Jungian writer, is the process whereby over-confidence or hubris, is brought back to earth. The Icarus legend of what happens to overly ambitious and grandiose high-flyers explains this principle in mythic form.

The pursuit of perplexity through Socrates' model of dialectic speaks to a similar process. Young men come to Socrates with formulaic answers which they take over from their parents or teachers. Socrates shows them the inadequacy of this 'dead' approach. He wants them to engage in their own way with concepts which live in the world. He wants to return life to its original difficulty. Jungians also speak of the danger of fixed dogma, and the need to make moral principles live and engage with a moving world. (Edinger, 1972) This is what Nietzsche meant when he proclaimed God to be dead. For the conception of God was an external and static

anchor on human thought. It constricted human creativity within stifling boundaries and it offered the false prospect of closure and finality on issues of a moral nature.

There is a warning here however. Some postmodern writers aim to pursue the ambiguities and slippages of language in an unending process of 'différance', a tantalizing offering/distancing of the object of theoretical desire, emphasizing 'the ruptures of form and the subversive potential of ambivalence' (Pickering, 2001; Bensusan & Shalem, 1994). This is not what I understand the pursuit of perplexity to be, or at least not at junior student levels. Briefly put, for first year students, their first meeting with the theoretical practices of academia is a disorienting process, a severe culture shock, in itself. The first and primary task of teachers at this level is through whatever means to establish the temptations of theory, to build the conditions under which theory can be seen as desirable. Only once this is accomplished, and this is often no mean undertaking, can the task of deferring have any meaning. Taken prematurely, ambiguity can be an excess which disheartens, and demotivates students as a first step on their academic journey. Some never recover. "I hate theory with a passion" was one senior student's verdict to me.

Fanon's solution of engaging in 'the zone of occult instability' to build a 'fighting' culture, seems to offer more promise. For it harnesses the resources of existing (student) culture and identity to grapple with contemporary and practical problems. It works with the excitement of immediate engagement and of group enterprise to tackle issues of intimate importance. This is where, in this course, the importance of personal engagement lay, i.e. working with, and departing from, sources of student Othering, in their views on rape or affirmative action.

How far have we come, then, in this section? I have put alongside each other the hermeneutic and sociological agendas. The sociological imagination's notion of debunking is very close to Gadamer's idea of challenging the *doxa*. The sociological notion of relativizing, for its part, is very close to Gadamer's idea of promoting flexibility and of meeting the alien. There is no easy parallel in Gadamer with system-relating and theory-building.

For sociology these are cognitive and political goals. It promotes a particular conceptual take on the world, and it pursues emancipation from inequality. Gadamer's notion of meeting the alien and of transformation, I argue, goes beyond the conceptual and the political. While Gadamer's work starts out as an exercise in epistemology and moral philosophy, it also has strong echoes in Jungian psychology, in the affective side. As a matter of pedagogic strategy it proposes a deepening and elaboration of student experience rather than a premature deferring.

## The Socratic Dialogues: Grammatical Questions

Having considered the ontological and prescriptive forms, let us now consider a third form of questioning, namely the process of dialectics pursued by Socrates. What Gadamer has to say about questioning is substantially influenced by Socrates, or more precisely by Plato's dramatic rendering of the Socratic dialogues. Within this rhetorical form, Socrates is put into conversation with a range of characters, pursuing his ends by means of persistent questioning.

In this section I want to draw a number of principles from Socrates' method. One is that questioning can be either constructive or destructive. For Plato, *eristic* or destructive questioning (and I understand some postmodern questioning to be of this kind) is immoral. Perplexity becomes productive when it leads to transformation. Second, that the kind of question or challenge that Gadamer has in mind operates on a very different level from grammatical questions. But we shall see later on that the ability to ask good grammatical questions is also an important skill for facilitators in focus groups. Third, Gadamer, along with Aristotle, is very critical of Plato's notion of pure ideas. For Gadamer, ideas cannot be separated from their use in practical application. The important implication here is that each historical period, each generation, each individual will come to texts with different issues and different questions. Questions cannot be separated from specific contexts.

Let us start with Socrates' dialectical method. Here is a brief example. Socrates is talking to a young man, Meno, and they are examining the nature of virtue (Allen, 1984: 154). Socrates is pursuing the point that, in looking for a definition of virtue (and Socrates/Plato spends a lot of time looking for definitions), one cannot have a range of virtues. If it is real virtue, it must be the same in all cases.

*Soc: ... Didn't you say that a man's virtue is to manage a city well and a woman's a house?*

*Meno: Yes, I did.*

*Soc: Well, is it possible to manage city, house or anything else well, without managing it temperately and justly?*

*Meno: Surely not.*

*Soc: Now, if people manage justly and temperately, they do so by reason of justice and temperance?*

*Meno: Necessarily.*

*Soc: So both men and women alike have need of the same things, namely justice and temperance, if they are to be good?*

*Meno: It appears they do.*

*Soc: What about a child or an old man. Could they be good if they were intemperate or unjust?*

*Meno: Surely not.*

*Soc: Only if temperate and just?*

*Meno: Yes.*

*Soc: Then all human beings are good in the same way: for they become good by obtaining these things.*

There are a number of interesting things to note about this strip of dialogue. First, it occurs against the background of a very similar-seeming process of question and answer used by Plato's antagonists, the Sophists. However, their aim, in Plato's eyes, was quite destructive. It was to make other people look stupid, and often to elicit the applause of an audience in attendance, whether this was in a court of law, or in the legislature, or in a class of students. Plato, then, makes a clear distinction between cooperative, helpful dialectics, on the one hand, and *eristic* or destructive dialogue, on the other. Plato brings this point home with some force in the *Euthydemus* where Socrates is put into dialogue with two 'smart-arse' Sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. In the process he demonstrates, with some gentleness, how one might elicit an enthusiasm for philosophy and for the pursuit of virtue in a young student (Guthrie, 1975:270(Shorey, 1933:160-68). Questioning is not necessarily or always helpful.

I return to this issue in two different places further on. One concerns the process of facilitation run by a facilitator in focus groups. In their direction of the discussions in these groups and in their questioning facilitators can elicit detailed and quite intimate responses from participants, or they can produce defensiveness and boredom. As Gadamer emphasizes, asking questions is quite a skilled activity. The second connecting issue that I will discuss later is the matter of generative power. I will argue that critical theory follows a hermeneutic of suspicion concerning power, while hermeneutics follows a hermeneutic of faith. One assumes that power is necessarily destructive and oppressive. The other acknowledges the possibility of fruitfulness in power.

Another way of saying the same thing, is to note that this strip of dialogue occurs in response to a definition of virtue given by Meno. If questioning can be either constructive or destructive, what kind of questioning is helpful? Let us consider Socrates' wider project here. As I have indicated, Meno, following the philosopher Gorgias, gives a string of examples in lieu of a definition. Virtue for a man is one thing, virtue for a woman is another, and yet another for children, or an old man, or a slave, says Meno. Socrates is well aware that this is what Gorgias thinks, and wants Meno to trot out this 'formulaic' answer. His strategy is now to dismantle this definition, show how

inadequate it is (which is what is under way in our strip of dialogue above), and then ask for another. Meno complies by reciting another one from Gorgias. Socrates follows the same procedure. He repeats this procedure another three or four times until Meno, in some exasperation, says:

Socrates, I kept hearing before I ever met you that you are yourself in perplexity, and cause perplexity in others. And now I think you've cast a spell over me; I am utterly subdued by enchantment, so that I too have become full of perplexity. ... (Allen, 1984:162)

It is a central principle of Socratic dialogue that formulaic responses cannot stand unchallenged. And this rhymes precisely with Gadamer's critique of positivism's technicist approach to problems (Gallagher, 1992:152). It follows also from this that we should not expect Socrates' dialogues to provide easy or final answers. It is significant that many of these dialogues end unresolved. They do not have clear answers to the issues involved. Indeed, Socrates appears at times to be little more than willfully pedantic. In fact, it is part of Plato's strategy in writing the dialogues that he returns to issues time and again, makes some progress along the way, but only gives some finality to this in his later writings, *Republic* and *Laws* (Shorey, 1933:73). Returning life to its original difficulty means to make it 'full of perplexity' and a path to transformation. It is this end-purpose which makes the difference between constructive and destructive questions, and which rescues Socrates from pedantry.

The third point to make here concerns the nature of Socrates's questions. It is clear that the important 'questions' which Socrates is asking are not questions in any grammatical sense. They should much rather be seen as challenges. In other words, questions can be posed in many formats, and only one of them entails a question mark at the end of the sentence. Conversely, the grammatical form of the question (with a question mark at the end of the sentence) can do a whole of things other than asking a question. If I say to my child, "Won't you take the dog outside?", I am not asking for information or even challenging. It is rather a command in question format. Likewise, it is quite evident, when reading Socrates' strip of dialogue above, that he is not really asking questions. The series of (seeming) questions is in effect a lecture on a particular topic while checking to see that the student has understood the argument so far. The real question, or challenge, occurs at a much more subtle level. Socrates is challenging Meno's adherence to formulaic definitions of virtue, but that specific question is never posed in so many words. It is much rather implicit in Socrates' whole procedure.

Now, while this is a seemingly obvious comment to make on the nature of (grammatical) questions and challenges, it has important implications for the way in which one conducts research around questions in teaching. Because it is no longer a matter of when and how literal questions are asked, but rather the more subtle ways in which student modes of thinking are challenged.

While Gadamer is much influenced by Plato and Socrates, he also has serious problems with them. Most of these problems can be encapsulated in the differences that they have with Aristotle, and more specifically, Aristotle's notion of application. In brief, Plato works with a notion of pure ideas which can be attained by diligent questioning, by removing the multiple veils entailed in everyday living, and by eventually winning through to the ideal. Often these pure ideals, for Plato, can be expressed in very precise mathematical form. Education for Plato entailed a great deal of training in mathematics and geometry.

For Aristotle, however, the principles of knowledge do not float in supreme transcendence, separated from particular situations. As in law, principles are guidelines which need to be applied in practice, filled out and brought to fruition, in real life situations. So also, in living the good life, virtue, for Aristotle is not something that can be defined prior to their insertion into concrete problems and issues.

Gadamer affirms this principle of application with some vigour with regard to hermeneutics. Interpretation and understanding do not occur in a vacuum. They are bound by the particular historical circumstances of the interpreter and with regard to particular issues and problems. In an ontological sense, then, interpretation is always about something and addressed to someone, always has a time- and place-bound context within which it happens. This is also the tradition which encapsulates all our actions, provides the starting point and ground for our existence.

But also from a prescriptive point of view Gadamer wants to underline that good interpretation cannot follow inflexible rules, follow a 'pregiven universal'. The text which one is interpreting is not dogmatically given in its meaning. Texts should provide the guide. They should operate lightly as an 'image' (p317), 'schema' (320) or 'sketch' in the direction they give to interpretation. Each person comes to a text with different questions, a different background, and a different audience in mind. Each person should make questions her own. "We are genuinely responsible for ourselves only when we challenge the ready-made answers provided to us by others." (Gallagher, 1992:157)

Interpretation is not a matter of reconstructing the meanings intended by the author or even, going one step back, of reconstructing the real (historical) events to which a text might refer. It is rather a matter of inquiring as to the question behind the text, to which the text is an answer. What Gadamer means by this is that texts (or events as texts) occur within a broader historical context, are given meaning by that context, and that those contexts go way beyond what actors or authors intend. Authorial intentions are a poor indication of social meaning because what people intend is always outstripped by what happens.

However, 'historical context', the 'meaning of what happens', is itself not an eternally given truth, but one reconstructed each time an interpreter approaches the text at hand. It is a central part of the consciousness of historical effectiveness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) that the interpreter understands her own location in the nature of the questions being asked. "Thus the relation of question and answer is, in fact, reversed. The voice that speaks to us from the past – whether text, work, trace – itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness." (Gadamer, 1989:374) It is in this sense that interpretation, asking questions, is a matter of self-understanding. And that self-understanding is enhanced when they are genuinely self-constructed questions. One constructs oneself most effectively when the questions one asks are one's own, not those provided by public opinion.

What does all of this tell us about teaching? As time- and place-contexts (i.e. traditions) change so will understanding and interpretation. There is no fixed and eternal truth to be applied through bureaucratic fiat. There is no fixed and eternal theory which floats supremely above practical reality. As one formulation has it, theory follows on from thick description, not vice versa. Compare Geertz's idea that "theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them" (quoted in Schwandt, 1994:123)

At the same time, Gadamer is not a relativist. It is not the case that 'anything goes'. Just as 'a man who is capable of anything' is seen as without morals, so interpretation also cannot draw anything at all from a text. One must hold on to principles/texts as guides, as 'schemata', as 'images'. However flexible, however light their touch, they do provide a touchstone in the shifting process of application. Likewise the human sciences cannot proclaim any truth. There is still a place for systemic theorizing, for the classics and the canon, and for moral judgment.

Let us now turn our attention away from destructive and constructive questioning, to the matter of negative and positive power.

## The exercise of power

There are, for our purposes, two broad notions of power in the social sciences. One derives from critical theory and it is seen as the source of oppression, inequality, and domination. In the form of authority, seen as legitimated power or hegemony (in Gramsci's sense), it interweaves into individual lives in very subtle and delicate ways. Individuals come to accept unequal power as normal, routine, naturalized parts of their lives. It is the role of critical theory (and of critical pedagogy) to unveil these interstitial, delicate, veiled yet crucial layers of power.

The other notion of power is a positive one. It sees power as fruitful, productive and creative. Some writers call it voluptuous or rhizotomous power. In this section I counterpose these two types, and show how this dissertation is based on the second positive notion<sup>11</sup>.

Thesen's analysis of a pedagogic event in a foundation course at UCT gives us a detailed and practical example of the critical notion of power (Thesen 2004). In this event, a lecturer presents students with a photograph from an exhibition, and introduces alongside it the author of the photograph, the photographer. But he challenges them to make their own interpretation of it, to own the image, to see him, the lecturer, as just another interpreter. "Shakespeare is dead" he says. And students comply (perhaps predictably), "I'm concerned that we're working through Robert's (the lecturer's) eyes", says one. "He's throwing his weight around", says another. They parody, make jokes about, him, use sarcasm, take the mickey out of him. In all of these ways the lecturer's authority is deflated, punctured, unraveled, demythologized and students practice their own embryonic voices. (Contradictorily, as Thesen shows, this lecturer bolsters his own authority by calling into question the authority of academia, of all lecturers. He presents himself as the compelling and attractive rebel. But that comment in itself further chases down the possibilities for power to hide itself.) In short, this is an example of sophisticated critical theory doing what it ought to do.

Now, hermeneutics, in general, and Gadamer, in particular, are often accused by critical theorists of not dealing with the phenomenon of power (How, 1995; Bernstein 1983:156; Warnke, 1987). Where Gadamer does deal with power he, quite provocatively, defends the notion of authority as justifiable. (Remember that authority is power that has been successfully legitimated.) Where, for example, an individual demonstrates superior skill and expertise, says Gadamer, there is a good reason for according her authoritative status. But such skill needs to be continually tested and affirmed.

---

<sup>11</sup> By calling one negative and other positive power, I do not mean to imply any judgment of the value of critical theory's analysis of power.

There are a number of ways of responding to this critique. The first is to say that one cannot deal with power without hermeneutics. How would one know that it was power unless it had first been interpreted as such? In short, the hermeneutics of power necessarily precedes any critical analysis of power. A close corollary to this interpretative premise is the principle that the effects of power are always subject to interpretation. There can be no easy assumption that power will achieve what it intends, what Thompson calls the internalist fallacy (Thompson, 1990: 24) This principle is amply born out by my own case-studies where the outcomes of teaching can only be said to be wildly unpredictable.

A second response is to say that a narrow focus on power excludes a wide range of other social phenomena. Critical theory is brought to a premature closure in its analysis of social reality. Hermeneutics can and does deal with power, but it also goes way beyond power.

A third response is to say that, in practice, Gadamer is very often more radical in his deconstruction of social aspects than critical theory. In effect, he shows that critical theory, even in its Habermasian form, retains residues of positivism, and the will to power that goes with that (How, 1995). In other words, critical theory commits a performative fallacy in 'speaking truth to power' but on the premise of unequal power. Critical theory cannot be critical without assuming that critical theorists have more to say than people on the street. As de Certeau comments on Foucault in this regard:

Who is he to know what no one else knows, what so many thinkers have 'forgotten' or have yet to realize about their own thought? He acts as though he were omnipresent (since all heteronomies of history constitute the only account his thought will relate), but he is absent (since he has designated his own place nowhere in that history). (quoted in McNay, 1994:82)

Critical theorists cannot speak without assuming a superior right to speak. They work from the assumption that their use of power is positive and that it leads to emancipation.

### **Positive Power**

Now, these responses to the critiques around power might perform an effective hatchet job on critical theory's critique. But this response ignores the alternative notion of power as positive. Power can be seen as positive in two different ways. One is ontological. In this sense, power is constitutive of social reality. In Anthony Giddens's terms, power is both constraining and enabling.

What he means is that agency is not possible without the use of power, hence the notion of transformative capacity. All people have the capacity 'to make a difference' in the ordinary run of things, merely by being present in social situations, even being slaves (Giddens, 1984).

But there is another notion of positive power which has more fruitful and productive outcomes, and it is strategic rather than ontological (Angen, 2001). There are hints of this notion of power in Gadamer's discussion of games. Players submit themselves to the rules of the game, says Gadamer. They are swept up by the contest, by the deliberately unpredictable contest, and find themselves changed by it. In this sense, submission to power differential is transformative and creative.

Consider the example of traditional adolescent rites of passage. Let us assume a typical traditional process whereby an adolescent boy is brought to manhood. Conventionally, such processes go through three stages. In the first, a young boy is separated from his mother in frightening circumstances. Masked men, intending to terrify, tear the child from his (complicit) mother's arms. He is stripped of his clothes and possessions. In the second, liminal stage, the boy, frequently without clothes, must endure physical hardship. He is required to display courage and tenacity. At the same time, he is instructed in the principles of manhood. In the third and final stage, he is reintegrated into the social structure with a new status, a transformed identity, new clothes. He has become a man (van Gennep, 1960).

There are a number of points to note here. First, this is not an ontological analysis. The outcome of this chronological process is not necessarily beneficial. It depends on the way that it is used. There are productive rites of passage, and there are destructive ones. Practitioners need to learn how to use their instruments of power, just as medical doctors or psychotherapists do.

Second, the effect of such power is dependent on its acceptance and legitimation. If such power were to be deconstructed it would lose its beneficial effect. Xmas loses some of its allure when Santa Clause is revealed is nothing more than Dad with a funny hat. The most difficult client in psychotherapy is the one who knows too much psychology. The rite of passage would not be as effective if the initiate knew the (safe) outcome and the identity of the players. Against critical theory, the condition for power to operate here is that it remain veiled.

How then does positive power operate in a pedagogic context? In the interviews discussed below I show how students respond, are swept up and transformed, have 'aha'-experiences, find the world around them responding all of a sudden in quite different ways. One (married) student says, "... it's an identity crisis on such a huge scale" and "... suddenly your husband's married to a

completely different woman". Another says, "(The course) pressed all the buttons, whereas if I wasn't doing the course, I wouldn't have felt a thing". A third says "It throws your whole brain out." These are responses to the exercise of power across a range of pedagogic sites. Teachers exercise their power in designing curricula and constructing a chain of curriculum content, in formulating and marking assignments, in the shape and content of tutorial group discussions, and in the performance of lectures. They construct an itinerary analogous to a rite of passage which has fruitful outcomes.

Researchers perform in a parallel world of power, in the choice, design and administering of research instruments. In our particular case, it is a matter of the composition and conduct of focus groups and more particularly, the process of questioning. The role of the facilitator is a critical part of the focus group procedure. The facilitator is in large part the medium through which positive power plays itself out. The facilitator is of course not an autonomous agent. He/she operates within the framework already set by the genre of tutorial discussion groups which universities embody. In addition, as we have seen, each group has its own history and experience of the course which colours focus group discussions. Yet, even within that framework with all its built-in protocols, practices, rewards and sanctions, the facilitator is a key part of the circumstance to which focus group participants respond. It is important therefore to investigate in some detail the role which facilitators play.

In these focus group discussions, with two different facilitators, the interventions which facilitators made varied across a range. They looked like this:

1. Introducing the process, and introducing participants to each other;
2. Keeping in touch: facilitators nod, they say "ja" or "OK", they maintain a light touch of control over the discussion, to show understanding or empathy; this is a very frequent, almost background participation, creating a supportive frame for the discussion;
3. Active empathizing: facilitators echo the sentiment in an intervention, "that's brilliant!", "that was quite intense!", "Shoo! That's terrible!";
4. Reflecting back: this is done often in the form of a summarizing question, "What you're saying is ..?", and participants will respond, "Mm, that's right";

This reflecting and summarizing happens at times in the form of chained questions:

Facilitator: OK, so you're making connections?

Student: Mm

F: You're making sense?

S: Ja, sometimes

F: There are systems kind of falling into place?

S: Mm

5. Probing, looking for further detail: " .. what's behind that?", " .. can you put your finger on it?", "... what does that mean?", "can you give me an example?", "OK, I'm interested in that. What happens when ...?".
6. Clarification: "What does that mean?", "Which year are you talking about now?"
7. Changing direction, a facilitator moving down the scheduled list of topics: "... Are lectures a waste of time?"
8. Personal opinion: "I mean, to be blunt ...you're a privileged group .. if you weren't enjoying what you're doing here, then there would be something wrong";
9. Disagreeing with participants, "No, that's not true ... do you think that's entirely true? ... No, it's not that"; or self-revelation: " you know, when I did First Year History and I wasn't young either, but I had never done any (essays) ..."
10. Debriefing: "Have you felt comfortable with this experience?"

Looking down this list, it is quite evident that facilitators can exercise (negative) control over the process in any number of ways. They can change direction to avoid particular topics, suppress others. Control can be clothed and disguised in any of the above forms. On the other hand, positive power is best pursued in the form of the 'unconditional positive regard' characteristic of Rogerian psychotherapy. On the basis of that principle, the facilitator's most productive and fruitful role is one of creating a safe environment (by for example explaining the aims of the process, and the principles of confidentiality and anonymity), reflecting back, summarizing, empathizing, probing, encouraging, staying in touch and debriefing. Thus can positive power be exercised. The facilitator aborts that process and exercises (negative) control when she disagrees, presents personal opinion, loses track of where the discussion is going, does not allow time or space for elaboration and detail, or at worst takes over the conversation.

### **Educating or Corrupting the Youth? teachers and charlatans**

In the previous section I have argued that teachers and social scientists have the power to do good. In this sense power must be embraced. At the same time, one must ask how teachers become sensitive to the dangers of abuse. As I have indicated, critical theorists, in their exposure of the hiding places of power, excuse themselves from critical analysis. But that is not good enough. How does one then go about a moral embracing of power?

In 399 BC Socrates was condemned to death by an Athenian court for 'corrupting the youth, and of not acknowledging the gods the City acknowledges, but other new divinities' (Allen, 1984:86). It is immensely interesting that the city of Athens took the education of their youth so seriously that

they were prepared to put someone to death in pursuit of this cause. The question which arises here is, is it not proper that we should be concerned about the kind of values, the gods, which our youth are being taught?

In our present circumstances the accusation against Socrates speaks to the pressure on teachers and lecturers to catch the attention of learners and students in competition with television shows, films, advertisements and shopping malls, to improve their course evaluation ratings. There is rising pressure on academics to become more acquainted with the marketplace, to make their research available for 'useful' government policy, or for private sector activities. There are powerful temptations for lecturers to become showmen, dedicated to nothing more than course evaluation ratings, i.e. to an abuse of their positions of power.

Now, this pressure is not without value. There is something to be said for the ivory tower meeting the market place, for the pure meeting the mongrel, for the ascetic meeting the charlatan, for principle to be applied in practice. The mix has a robust and hybrid-vigour feel about it. If academic ideas are worth anything then they should be able to be 'sold' like any other product. In short, there are powerful temptations and not invalid reasons in the teaching environment to seduce 'impressionable minds', to play to the audience, to play the game as well as the competitors play it, to don the robes of the charlatan (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971:17). And, as we have seen, Plato was not insensitive to the value of playing the game *in order to transcend it*.

But playing the game to what end? How to transcend it? Selling ideas in the market-place can become nothing more than quackery if it contains no transcendent motive. For Gadamer that motive is self-transformation for both students and teachers. This is not the place to investigate the crucial area of transformation among teachers and lecturers. That would take another dissertation. But it is important, for Gadamer, that teachers move beyond both the positivist and critical theory notions that ideology can somehow be shrugged off, or exorcised. For power to be morally exercised teachers need to recognize and acknowledge its temptations. They need themselves to empathize with those who abuse power (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971).

But even if (the psychotherapist or lecturer) partly attains genuine consciousness, he cannot avoid a deepening of the shadows in his own unconscious. And within this darkness function the dark brothers of the priest and the doctor, to whom the therapist is related – that is the false prophet and charlatan. (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971:116)

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology: Ethnography and Focus Groups

We have so far considered three forms of questioning: the ontological, the prescriptive and that deriving from the Socratic dialectical method. Here I want to look at a fourth dimension to asking questions. This concerns the way in which researchers ask questions of the world around them, that is, the process of research. Traditional positivism thought that objective and impartial researchers could ask questions of an independent and autonomous empirical reality. The criterion of reliability meant that other researchers could ask the same questions and get the same answers. For grounded theory, the principle of saturation, for example, means that if researchers ask the same question of a sample of people often enough, the independence of empirical reality means that the answers will start repeating themselves eventually.

For hermeneutics subject and object in research are irrevocably bound. They influence each other continuously. Asking questions itself changes reality. One should not then expect the answers to repeat themselves.

In this chapter I elaborate on and justify the use of ethnography and focus groups as research instruments in a hermeneutic project. I argue that particular instruments are not tied to any one theory. I show how focus groups have moved from being adjuncts to positivist research, to a position where they are now seen as sources of very detailed qualitative data. I also investigate a number of problems arising from the use of focus groups, one being their group-context, and the second being their neglect of the macro-perspective.

There is a strong narrative in the social sciences which depicts a historical process of growth from adolescent submission to the authority of the natural sciences to a more self-assured assertion of their own identity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). That image of the move to adulthood in the social sciences is visible also in the history of research methodology. In an earlier time of tentative uncertainty the social sciences obeyed the positivist instructions to reliability, validity, generalizability and impartiality. While postpositivist methodologies like grounded theory still aspire to these basic criteria, at least in some attenuated form, they have gradually been abandoned by critical theory and hermeneutic positions.

As I have indicated earlier, my understanding of hermeneutics is not relativist in the same sense that constructivism is. It is not the case that any position is equivalent to any other. There are still criteria for judging the value of an interpretation which transcend particular positions<sup>12</sup>. In addition,

---

<sup>12</sup> Schwandt notes that even postmodernist constructivists do not abandon criteria for judging the quality of research. Thus Guba & Lincoln can still talk of 'malconstruction' in research and of bad

for Gadamer the function of interpretation is transformative through the process of investigating prejudice and tradition. That means that it goes beyond the building of 'more informed and more sophisticated reconstructions' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:112). For Gadamer, the construction of more elaborate and sophisticated narratives is a means for taking the further step of encountering, and being reconciled with, the alien.

Flowing from the anti-positivist position is the further principle that particular research methods have no theory embedded in them. Almost any research technique can be used for either quantitative or qualitative ends (Giddens, 1984). That quintessence of positivism, statistics, can quite comfortably be used for qualitative ends. And conversely, face-to-face interviewing can be used for hard science ends, as in grounded theory. In this study, then, I have used materials and techniques of very different kinds to serve a hermeneutic purpose. The basic techniques used in this research are ethnography, and focus groups (although one could argue that focus groups is simply a subset of ethnography).

### **Ethnography**

Let us consider each of these briefly. *Ethnography* has its roots in social anthropology and was spread most famously and most eloquently by Clifford Geertz. It has however long since broken out of its anthropological foundations and become an accepted part of many social sciences. In its common-or-garden format it denotes a style of research characterized by (1) *naturalism* – that is, it examines social behaviour in the real rather than the laboratory world; (2) *participant observation* – it is conducted by researchers who spend considerable time in the everyday lives of their informants, (3) *understanding* – it breaks away from positivist research methods and is committed to the qualitative; and (4) *discovery* – it is guided by the research questions which arise from particular situations rather than sticking rigidly to particular preset hypotheses (Hammersley, 1994, Kumaravadivelu, 1999). Many ethnographers would add that good ethnography is 'thick description'. For Denzin, thick description 'gives the context of the experience, and reveals the experience as a process' (Denzin, 1994:505).

Ethnography has come in for considerable critique on the grounds that it is politically quiescent and colludes with the (colonial) oppressor by not taking a clear stand on issues of power (much like hermeneutics does) (Ortner, 1999; Clifford, 2001). In a sense this is an unfair critique. Ethnography sets itself the quite different task of understanding, of standing in the shoes of, different cultures, of expanding our understanding of others and other cultures. This has value in

---

research being 'incomplete, simplistic, uninformed, internally inconsistent or derived by inadequate methodology' (Schwandt in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:129).

its own right. One could just as well critique critical theory for neglecting cross-cultural tolerance in the name of social justice.

Does this study then constitute ethnography? First, yes, it is *participant observation*. These students and I spent nine weeks together engaged in the minutiae of a university course, interacting in the various ways required by academic situations. I planned the course, I lectured, tutored, discussed; they listened, took notes, wrote assignments, asked questions, discussed, consulted. We were all engaged in an ongoing project.

Second, it was indeed a quite *natural* situation. We were all engaged in the standard and routine activity that happens in tertiary educational institutions. It is in the nature of 'data-collection', however, that it disrupts such everyday 'natural' activity. Research is never (except perhaps in the reading of printed texts) a simple process of distant observation, especially not when it is participant. But that is what ethnographers mean when they say a situation is 'natural'.

Third, the aim of the research is, via a range of methods, to probe into, to elaborate the meanings behind, the views and opinions given by students. It is quintessentially an attempt at understanding (of a particular kind) rather than explanation.

Fourth, as I have indicated, I did start out with a *set of questions* to ask, my research agenda, but, unsurprisingly, new facets appeared which drove me in new directions. It is part of the ethnographic agenda that there is no fixed agenda, that the focus of the research is strongly influenced by the informant and by the information.

This research is, fifthly, participant in another sense, that the information gathered here is fed back into the ongoing process of teaching, what some might have called participant action research – but that inserts a critical theory component which I would not want to pursue too far.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a technique for interviewing groups of 6-10 people about a particular topic or focus. The discussions are initiated and often directed by a moderator or facilitator<sup>13</sup> who may then either lead the discussion or observe from outside the group. At times facilitators use an image or film clip or a text to start the discussion.

---

<sup>13</sup> The standard term used in the literature is 'moderator' which I dislike. I shall use the term facilitator throughout.

The history of focus groups recapitulates the history of the social sciences, in general, and research methods, in particular, that is, moving out from under the shadow of the natural sciences. Focus groups as a research technique migrated across to the social sciences from marketing and communications research in the 1950's (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). As first used by Robert Merton, focus groups were seen as a subsidiary adjunct to survey research. Focus groups were a source of new ideas for questionnaire items or the first site of testing out an embryonic hypothesis. Public opinion was seen as focus groups writ large. Over time, however, focus groups have come to be seen as an important source of information in their own right. Indeed, Morgan & Spanish (Morgan and Spanish, 1984) argue that focus groups combine the advantages of personal interviews (giving indepth information) and participant observation (arising from a naturalistic situation).

It is the group aspect of the focus group technique which has drawn considerable attention. For theorists sensitive to the imbalances of power in social research, the group context provides a way to lessen the dominance of the interviewer/ researcher (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996, Strebel, 1994, Wilkinson, 1998). Participants can within a supportive environment broach sensitive and potentially embarrassing ideas. Focus groups provide a way to empower participants. Focus groups have been used to start up support groups for vulnerable individuals. Strebel used her groups to distribute information around AIDS and condoms (Strebel, 1994). She found also that participants were able to air quite intimate problems and find solutions from the group. In my own research, student participants often found such discussions extremely helpful in sharing and reflecting on problems.

From another angle the group can be seen as a site of social interaction. That is important for a number of reasons. For Vygotskians, knowledge is mediated by society. The group context does not contaminate individual views, as the positivists liked to think. It is itself the source of social knowledge (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). For symbolic interactionists, on the other hand, participants in a pre-existing group operate in a naturalistic context. They will exhibit here distinctive language and behaviour, at times as part of a separate subculture. In this context participants will initiate ideas, challenge other participants' ideas, call for detailed justification in ways that are impossible in an individual interview. Focus groups have the potential to deliver material of a very high quality.

It is of course not the case, as Wilkinson claims, that individual interviews are free of social context (Wilkinson, 1998). "The difference between group and individual interviews is not one that contrasts social with psychological frameworks of theoretical interpretation, but one that distinguishes among the varieties of social context within which discussion occurs." (Lunt and

Livingstone, 1996). Nor is it the case, as Robert Merton was wont to think, that focus groups are a small sample of a wider, constant, uniform public opinion. In more recent theory, public opinion is rather seen as multivocal, fragmented, context-bound and continually shifting. There is in fact considerable doubt that one can speak at all of 'public opinion' (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). It is public opinion which is the epiphenomenon, not the group.

The focus groups in this study occurred within the broader circumstance of a university. That situation has one profound impact on the experience of focus groups, namely that all participants are very familiar with tutorial group discussions. Focus groups in this study have a very close relationship to this particular group genre. Participants in these focus groups were drawn from pre-existing tutorial groups, many of them run by myself. Within these groups there are set routines, protocols, practices, power relationships, and all of these are carried over almost seamlessly into the focus group. Students often remarked during the post-focus group debriefing that "this is how tutorial groups ought to be".

There were of course interesting differences with a pure tutorial group session. For a start, students were not required to prepare anything for the focus group. This was 'free' discussion. Second, they sat in armchairs around a small coffee table with drinks and snacks at hand. It was then more relaxed than a tutorial group. Third, it was much smaller than a normal tutorial group. Focus groups here were typically five or six students, compared to the 25 or 26 in tutorial groups. There was much more opportunity for each individual to participate.

The familiarity that students might have felt with the focus group context has advantages and disadvantages. It is helpful in that participants can feel relaxed. This is a place they have been before, they know the people, they know the routine, nothing surprising. On the other hand, it would make it quite difficult to do things differently, to break out of that set mould, particularly to change the structures of power. Tutorial groups, after all, are embedded in an academic structure with very severe sanctions against misbehaviour or failure and great rewards for success. The stakes are high. At the same time, as I have indicated earlier, the authority of academic staff in a social science is contradictory, in that it is built on the systematic critique of authority. What I am suggesting is that focus groups within an academic environment carry a very particular and quite complex set of associations, freedoms and compulsions.

The group context of focus groups is substantially affected by the role of the facilitator. As I have discussed earlier, research techniques do not belong inherently to any theory. By the same token focus groups can be used for very different purposes, either positivist, as Merton did in the 1950's, or poststructuralist and feminist, as Wilkinson does. What that means is that it is up to the

researcher to shape this instrument to her own purposes. This applies particularly to the role of the facilitator. So, for instance, a researcher interested in the detail of a specific subculture would probably remain substantially in the background, listening for the spontaneous appearance of topics, or the language used in discussing them. Critical theorists of a feminist bent would be looking and probing for hidden power positions, and would downplay the dominance of the facilitator.

From a hermeneutic perspective, by contrast, and given the particular take on generative power in this study, the facilitator might be much more active in structuring the conversation, in probing beyond the surface level of everyday talk, eliciting personal experiences, looking for meaningful, intense experiences. Facilitator techniques would be drawn from therapeutic situations. They would summarize, reflect back, encourage and nurture participant responses. They will also, as I have said, draw quite substantially from the practices set up in pre-existing tutorial groups. Discussions in this environment will tend to centre around the facilitator. She will hold the reins of the discussion, however lightly. Much of the dialogue will be with her rather than with other participants in the group. Participants might also frequently look for approval. They are all talking to someone who has the power in a not too distant context to assess them. The role of one facilitator (in this study) who was not an academic then also becomes an interesting one.

The positivist voice in focus groups, though relativized, has however not been completely silenced. That voice still questions the scientific rigour, and the reliability of focus group information, as well as the problematic possibility of the group pushing participants towards false consensus, or conversely towards an equally false polarity. This positivist voice is indeed not limited to focus group techniques alone. It is part of a much wider debate between quantitative and qualitative research, between positivists, critical theorists and hermeneutics, which cannot be fully discussed here. In broad terms, the responses from qualitative research have been of two kinds (Lunt & Livingstone). One stream has attempted to replicate positivist 'rigour' in some form in the qualitative arena. This can be most clearly seen in grounded theory and, for example, their principle of theoretical saturation. That entails repeating the focus groups sessions until the topics broached in discussion start repeating themselves. Others in this first stream work with residual realist notions like triangulation (Angen, 2000).

The second stream has abandoned a correspondence theory of epistemology and accepted that there can be no clear separation of observing subject and observed object in the social world. In this line, writers like Guba & Lincoln work with notions of authenticity: ontological authenticity which 'enlarges personal constructions'; and educative authenticity which aims at 'improved understanding of others' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lunt and Livingstone, 1996)

There are two dilemmas for researchers that I want to look at arising out of focus groups. One concerns the importance of the group context of social interaction. The dilemma here is, in very practical terms, one of where context starts and stops. Given the influence of context it is in principle inappropriate to pull quotes from a group interview to illustrate, let us say, a particular reaction to sociology teaching. The point is that (1) a three-line quote is often part of (2) a longer (page-long), more rambling explanation with several interjections by other participants or the facilitator, which is itself then said in response to (3) another participant's contribution on a particular issue, which comes as a response to (4) the facilitator's intervention/ prompting (3 pages previously). And so one could go on.

To some degree the particular area of focus is determined by the theoretical framework. In the hermeneutic-psychological framework I have chosen for this study, the focus hones in on the individual and situational, and brackets out temporarily the broader macro-issues which something like discourse analysis might have pointed to. I am well aware then that my analysis makes very little mention of the South African political or the post-modern globalizing context, or even the managerialist discourse that higher education is presently caught up in.

This bias towards the micro is accentuated by the nature of Gadamer's philosophy. For Gadamer addresses primarily the position of the individual and individual meaning. It is true that he makes much of the influence of tradition and prejudice on the individual, and these are both inherently social factors. But his point of departure is the individual and the individual's process of transformation in meeting with the alien. It is not surprising then that there are then close parallels between Gadamer's hermeneutics and (Jungian) psychology. They complement and overlap with each other very neatly. But that puts hermeneutics at odds with, for example, critical theory and the discourse analysis deriving from it, which both attempt to link, the individual to broader societal issues. While not denying the structural perspective, I have followed Giddens's principle of 'bracketing out' the macro while analyzing the micro (Giddens, 1984).

In my analysis of responses from focus groups I have consolidated the contributions of (six) particular individuals. In other words, I have collected together a range of responses from a particular individual from across the group conversation in an effort to show combinations, contradictions, developments and transformations. In strict contextual terms, this is inappropriate. The responses of each of these individuals could have been evaluated with the broader group conversation and the facilitator's interventions as backdrop. This I have not done in the interests of brevity.

At the same time, with other participants' contributions edited out, this mode of analysis gives an illusion of great emotional intensity in the discussion, almost as if it had been a face-to-face interview. This effect is a hint that face-to-face interviews might have been a more appropriate mode of data-gathering.

### **Methodological problems**

All research is flawed in one way or another. It is an attempt, as I have indicated, to stitch together fragments of an incomplete narrative. In this study, three problems stood out. The first concerns the choice of focus group participants. I have said that the course evaluations during 2004 (in September and November) produced a number of extremely intriguing and quite enthusiastic responses. Many felt that the course had been 'an eye-opener'. I was interested in finding out what the term, eye-opener, meant. But here was a dilemma. Course evaluations were anonymous and confidential. If I was to pursue the meanings and stories behind the word, eye-opener, I would have to identify those individuals who wrote it. But I was debarred from doing this by the ethics of the case. In the end, focus groups participants were chosen from two tutorial groups, one run by myself, and one by a senior tutor. I simply invited students in these two groups to be participants. It was, in short, a wildly random selection. I had no guarantee beforehand that the participants had found the course an eye-opener, or even if they were particularly positive about it. In the event, a number of students had had extremely intense experiences which they were prepared to talk about.

The second problem was a technical one. The tape-recorders which I used produced recordings with a high level of static noise which made people's voices extremely difficult to hear. Large swathes of conversation were simply indecipherable. This I tried to remedy by trying out a number of different tape-recorders, sometimes with conference microphones attached. There was some improvement, but not a great deal. Certain voices were persistently inaudible (and, bizarrely, most of these were African ones) or unidentifiable. For a research instrument like the focus group which makes much of the group context of conversation, missing out on the voice of one of two participants can seriously undermine one's understanding of what preceded and what followed particular contributions. From this perspective the concentrated focus on one particular (clearly identifiable) individual's contributions works to counteract this technological fragmentation.

The third methodological problem derives from a theoretical problem. I spent a lot of time searching for a mode of data analysis which served my purposes. At a fairly late stage I discovered Stuart Hall's psychodynamic approach. While, theoretically, this seemed to fit my

purposes extremely well, his elaboration of specific methods of confronting stereotypes is quite elementary. There were very few detailed and practical guidelines. In my data-analysis, then, I have needed to feel my way along.

As a start I was helped by John Thompson's elaboration of a methodology for a depth hermeneutics of mass communication, drawing as he does on the writings of Ricoeur and Gadamer (Thompson, 1990: 272ff). Thompson proposes that a comprehensive methodology of interpretation should include three aspects: (1) social-historical analysis; (2) formal or structural analysis; and (3) interpretation and re-interpretation<sup>14</sup>. Social-structural analysis investigates the givens and regularities of the social structures within which the interpretative activity takes place. This includes, says Thompson, spatio-temporal settings, fields of interaction, social institutions, and social structure. In my study I have concentrated more on the immediate situational aspects than the broader structural ones. Thus I have explained the historical runup to the 2004 first year sociology course in Chapter One; the details of the taught curriculum and course content elaborated in Chapter Two in the section, 'First Year Sociology's Agenda'; and the circumstances of the focus group interviews, their resemblance to tutorial groups and the importance of the group context, in Chapter Three under the heading, 'Focus Groups'. I have not examined, for example, the broader managerialist transformation of universities, or global pressures towards post-fordism.

In Thompson's schema, the second element, formal or structural analysis refers to the method of data analysis. This may take on any number of forms, from semiotic analysis through conversation analysis to narrative analysis. This stage of Thompson's schema corresponds to my own use of the concepts of the alien and various forms of Othering. Let us consider this in further detail here.

I started with identifying the indicators for these various notions of alien and Othering in the transcripts, what I have called 'points of energy', i.e. where my interviewees have used expressions like 'disgusted', 'depravity', 'shocked', 'amazing', 'I was excited', 'I cried', 'passionate', 'crisis' and so on. These could be both negative (like disgust) and positive (like awe and respect). From here it was a matter of selecting the appropriate form of Freudian or Fanonian Other, or Gadamer's alien.

---

<sup>14</sup> These aspects he applies to the three phases of mass communication, namely production, transmission and reception. While I have not done this in my study, it would be extremely interesting to apply the phases of production, transmission and reception to the process of teaching. In my study it is clear that I have concentrated substantially on the phase of reception.

From there I looked for the discursive framework which bound the various elements together. Sometimes this appeared as a political ideology. Here it was important to investigate the power position of the experience. Was it from a position of being powerful, or from one of being powerless? For one participant it was her battle against a more powerful apartheid system and its racist heritage that energized her. This had a subordinate class and politically radical framework. For another it was an encompassing religious approach, with some resemblance to a liberal ideology but from a suffering/victim perspective. For yet another it was a discourse of human rights.

A third step was to look for signs of movement in individual attitudes as indications of transformation. One woman said that she had experienced 'an identity crisis'. Another had gained confidence, found a particular identity and left another one behind. Important in these shifts was their function. Meeting the alien is an acknowledgement of a mistake, of having operated under a misconception, of having learned something significantly new. It is often a humbling process. Encountering or experiencing (as opposed to meeting) the Other, by contrast, engenders strong emotions like disgust and awe. Re-integrating a projection (which is in a strict sense what meeting the Other is) is the dramatic popping of an emotional bubble, like the Pauline conversion. Unburdening oneself of long-held emotional experiences, on the other hand, produces a powerful cathartic effect, a release of tension (Samuels et al., 1986:18).

An important question here then was what the person was doing with the Other or the alien. Were they simply feeling the energy of the Other (experiencing feelings of disgust and outrage)? Were they fighting the Other (as in Fanon's case of the fighting culture)? Were they actually 'meeting' the Other in the sense of recognizing those temptations in themselves (the real case of empathy), or developing a certain understanding or 'fondness' (the case of sympathy)?

Finally, there was the question as to the metaphors which shaped the Other and the alien, which constituted their essence. Metaphors are themselves often points of energy which also point to background associations. For one participant criminals who committed crimes of violence suffered from a 'mental imbalance', an image of crime as insanity. For another, among prisoners who participated in male rape there was 'depravity'.

Let us now turn to Thompson's third aspect of depth hermeneutic analysis, namely interpretation and re-interpretation. Thompson here emphasizes the principle that interpretation in the social sciences, unlike the natural sciences, deals with a pre-interpreted phenomenon. The objects of research already have their own interpretation of what they are on about. Social researchers then re-interpret this first interpretation in their own terms in what Giddens calls a double hermeneutic.

Social researchers, then, are first considering what particular individuals make of the various structures (of alien and Other), and are then going a step further in attributing meanings which those individuals might not be conscious of. This sets up a possibility, says Thompson, of a conflict of interpretations and the possibility of intervention – which happens when researchers relay their interpretations back to their interviewees.

For Thompson, then, researchers stick their necks out in making an interpretation of a pre-interpreted text. They need to support those interpretations with evidence and argument. In some cases researchers go back to the original interviewees to check whether their interpretations 'ring bells'. In others they conduct more than one interview with each group or individual in order to build up further background context. In all of my case-studies, there was only one interview, and I had not (yet) taken the material back for validation.

### **Research Ethics**

In this section I want to address two issues. The first concerns the conventional ethics issues in research of confidentiality, anonymity and transparency. The second concerns the issue of the validation of qualitative research. In a post-positivist environment, validation is no longer a matter of checking data against an independent reality, but often more one of trust and good faith i.e. again a matter of ethics.

Let us consider the first set of issues concerning confidentiality, anonymity and transparency in relationships with the participants in this project. These were, as I have indicated, groups of students from the sociology first year course who participated in focus group discussions. In each case at the commencement of the focus group discussion, students were given a detailed explanation of what the research project was about, and how they fitted into it. They were given the option of leaving the group at any time. Following this, they were assured that their names would not be mentioned in the research report, and that if material from their group was used in a public document, they would have access to both the transcripts of the discussion, and to the final material before publication. They were then informed of their conditions of employment i.e. the fact they would be paid, and how long the 'employment' would last. Finally, in a debriefing at the end of each session, they were asked to reflect on their experience of being in the group.

These various interactions passed without problems. No students left the group, and during the debriefing many felt that the discussion had been very worthwhile. One said, "This is what all university tutorials should be like".

The second issue of validation concerns the demise of positivist criteria for qualitative research. For it has become clear that positivist criteria of reliability and validity rely on the separation of subject and object in research. Put differently, positivist criteria posited the autonomous existence of objects of research such that different researchers could, independently of each other, observe the same phenomenon and come to the same conclusions. It was then in principle possible for one researcher to check on, or validate, the results produced by another.

In the social sciences, and particularly in qualitative research, this position has been seen to be untenable, for the reason that observers cannot extract themselves from the situation being observed. Observers are integrally part of the situation that they are observing. In this case there is no longer any foundation for reliability i.e. the repeatability of research results, or for validity i.e. checks on the accuracy of observation. Nor for that matter, for the third positivist criterion of generalizability, for this criterion relies for its feasibility on replicability.

If these criteria for empirical verification are no longer possible, what criteria remain for qualitative research? Well, it depends a great deal on which tradition of research one is dealing with. There are still remnants of positivist criteria to be found in qualitative research in such principles as triangulation, constant comparative method, collegial audit, and theoretical saturation especially within grounded theory (Huberman & Miles 1994; Angen, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

However, any claims to correspondence with an independent reality have been abandoned by both critical theory and hermeneutics. For critical theory, with its commitment to political intervention, writers speak of catalytic authenticity (research that stimulates action), and tactical authenticity (research that empowers its objects of research). Hermeneutic writers for their part, speak of ontological authenticity (research which 'enlarges personal constructions), and educative authenticity (research which improves our understanding of others) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Angen considers that research must be beneficial to its objects, generative of new ideas (she calls it 'voluptuous validity'), transformative and transgressive (this last sounds reminiscent of critical theory). In addition, it must be 'thick' description, i.e. it must exhibit an intimate knowledge of the situation and of the objects of research, and exhibit verisimilitude. Finally, she says, researchers must be 'resilient, patient, persistent, meticulous, passionate, and personally involved' (Angen, 2000).

Coming from a hermeneutic perspective, I have pursued the goals of ontological and educative authenticity, voluptuous validity, transformation and thick description. Whether I can at the same time be 'resilient, patient, persistent, meticulous, passionate, and personally involved' is difficult to judge. Indeed, most of these criteria are extremely difficult to judge from the inside.

Let us now turn to the empirical material.

University of Cape Town

## Chapter 4 Focus Group Interviews and Course Evaluations

As I have indicated, there were two sets of focus group interviews, and two course evaluations from which I drew my data. The focus groups split between those held in November of 2003 (which is the first case that I will investigate), and those held in November of 2004. The course evaluations were held in September and November of 2004 respectively. The September 2004 evaluation was quite cryptic for our purposes, but provided the first hints of something interesting happening. I do not report on those responses here. The November evaluation, however, was much more detailed, and I do provide a categorization of these responses below. The sequence of the discussion below then follows the strict chronology as they happened:

1. The November 2003 focus group interviews – from which I extracted one interview called Katherine
2. The November 2004 course evaluation questionnaire – which I have categorized according to the concepts of debunking, relativizing and system-relating
3. The November 2004 focus group interviews – from which I extracted five individuals – Jennifer, Nina, Linda, Karen and Roland.

Let us start with the first focus group interview.

### The 2003 Interviews

There were in the 2003 groups, as I have indicated earlier, two discussions here, both with the same group of students. The groups were run at the end of a troubled SOC105 semester course in November 2003. Students in the course had complained that they could not understand what the lecturer was talking about; that there was no connection between the case-study on affirmative action and the theoretical concepts being proposed; that the lecturer was suppressing discussion in the class.

Given this historical context, the two discussions have very different atmospheres. The first, facilitated by myself, is freer of the troubles of the course. I am not the source of the 'troubles', although very evidently, I have not been a great hit with the students either. The topic of discussion does not broach the problems of the course. Students can, therefore, be more relaxed. They can relate their positive experiences of school and of the university in a relatively free-flowing exchange.

But the second discussion is more difficult. Students are confronted by the lecturer (Carmen) about whom complaints had been laid. They are being asked in thinly disguised language, "What

is wrong with sociology? What did I do wrong?". There are moments of considerable tension. At one stage, Carmen asks "Did you guys all attend lectures? Well, this is now getting to Johann's part...". She acknowledges that students found her lecturing difficult and that they might not have attended her lectures. So, she exempts herself from the question.

At another quite charged point, a student says quite bluntly, in effect, that this person's lectures were incomprehensible:

*" ... most of us were sitting there going "What are you going on about?" and we were getting like, you know, "Should we even go to lectures?", you know, because we didn't know what was going on."*

These two discussions then generate very different ranges of topics. The first elicits mostly positive experiences, and these from disciplines outside of sociology: social anthropology, social work, psychology, the foundation course (DOH). So, students talk about the value of the orientation week, of DOH tutorials, of writing essays for the first time, of receiving feedback comments on essays, and of some lecturers (in psychology). They marvel at the changes which have come over them, in their identities, in their way of looking at the world, and the difficulty of 'not having definite right and wrong answers'.

The second discussion draws mostly negative experiences, and most of these from sociology. The Sociology course lacked definition, there were too many pointless and indistinguishable theories, too much economics for a sociology course, the course didn't match the faculty handbook description or the orientation week introductions, there was too little class interaction, there were too few case-studies, mark allocation was too strict, essay topics were boring, it was difficult to connect theory and case studies, there was no connection with current news, assignment topics were vague and 'wishy-washy'.

#### **Katherine: an identity crisis on such a huge scale**

Ranging across both of these discussions is the input of an older social work woman student who has come back to university after 15 years, whom I shall call Katherine. She dominates the discussions in both groups, introducing new topics, setting the tone for each one. She is passionate, enthusiastic and idealistic, often hyperbolic. She goes through intense experiences in a number of different areas. There are interesting overlaps with Linda (below) who is also an older student with strong political views. What follows is a consolidation of Katherine's views collected across two different group discussions.

She launches the group's discussion by praising the usefulness of the orientation week for new students, *"I found it very helpful, because I would have been completely lost"*. In her previous entry into the university there was no such help *"so I had something to compare it with"*, and this time it made 'a huge difference'.

Katherine's most dramatic experience occurs through self-analysis in her social work course. She prepares the group for this. *"Look, heaven forbid we leave university and we're still the same as when we entered"*. But the result for her is quite emphatic: *".. I mean, its an identity crisis on such a huge scale"; "... and it's been hard to take especially if you're married with three kids and suddenly your husband's married to a completely different woman"*. In her marriage it leads to conflict. *"You know, the minute you have change you have conflict"*. She contrasts the social work course with 'the superficiality of things that are thrown to you in the world around you' because she was asked to 'dig so deep'. The process has a powerful emotional impact on her, *"so I can spend a week crying, because suddenly going back to childhood memories I didn't want to go to..."*. *"It's a hard thing ... a very hard thing to self-analyse and to then .. and to then and also to write it down in 20 pages and give it to a complete stranger to mark. 'OK, here's my life'"*.

What has happened to Katherine here is not altogether clear. She does not say how her attitudes have changed although she does indicate some of the effects of it on her marital and parental relationships. She is brought into conflict with her husband. She treats her children differently. What is a strong possibility is that, for the first time, she has spoken about emotional material which she has carried with her for a long time. Jungians speak about the cathartic effect of such unburdening. (Samuels, 1986)

She also finds that she is in awe of intellectual brilliance. She admires a tutor in the DOH course: *"I used to go home to my husband and say "I sit in the presence of greatness at tuts or workshops"; she calls it "this academic cynicism"*. Later on she provides more detail on this aspect of cynicism, *"its just really around a cynicism, maybe, of, of, of the face-value and the superficiality of things that are thrown at you in the world around you"*.

Two things seem to be happening in this fragment. She has found a positive rather than negative Other. It is awe and respect rather than anger or disgust which drives her here. At the same time she finds her views pulled up short. She describes her earlier views as 'face-value' and 'superficial'. The 'brilliance' of her tutor has shown up her erstwhile views as inadequate.

She relates a story about another member of this tutorial group. *"I walked out with a girl who was just never interested and she just looked at me and she said 'I wish he'd just shut his mouth, because I want to shop without a conscience and I don't want my world rocked'"* (general laughter). Katherine defines herself by her critique of a student who just wants to shop. We shall see further on that this is a common theme among students who have experienced change. Later she again speaks critically of students who are so 'driven in getting to their course', 'there's this huge drive in terms of working exceptionally hard'. *"And I will say 'Why aren't you finding something to protest about? Why aren't you bunking more? I mean, have some fun!' .. your time at university is the time to push the boundaries and to really protest, explore ..."*. About her own time on campus *"we didn't get to lectures half the time, because the security police were on campus ..."*

In Katherine's new identity this is the new Other, those students who just want to shop unperturbed, those who have no political conscience, those who are so career-stricken that they cannot have fun. We shall see further on that this is a recurring theme among students who have experienced change.

In social anthropology she has a range of reading on cultural relativism around the topic of Islamic female circumcision: *"At the end of (the reading), I suddenly thought to myself, 'Okay, who the hell do we think we are from the West?'" .. What will happen to a 15-year old girl who's about to be circumcised if you come in and stop it? What happens to her sense of identity of being a woman? ... and it shook me that I actually ended up saying 'Who the hell are we to go try and stop circumcision in Africa?'"*.

Katherine has experienced further change here. Her views on Islamic female circumcision have been pulled up short, and it 'shook' her, a second instance of her meeting the alien. She accuses 'the West' of moral arrogance, and there is a moment of empathy with a young Muslim woman. *'What happens to her sense of identity of being a woman?'*.

A final experience concerns moral outrage at the evil things that happen in the world: *".. the example of whichever basketball player, Michael Jordan, who got \$30 million, more than 20 million (people) of Indonesia ... and I was just "Do you realize what capitalists you've been and how the globalization is impacting on your life that you're so blind to ..?"*". Here then is an Other with a strong class influence. She speaks as someone to whom injustice has been done by the world's super-rich.

As an older student (like Linda below) Katherine experiences university life with enthusiasm and passion. She has strong responses in both positive and negative directions: she is in awe of intellectual brilliance, she scorns students who are politically passive, she is outraged at Michael Jordan's endorsements, she empathizes with young Muslim women. But there are contradictions here. In many ways, her views here, even though newly articulated on some topics, are a direct extension of her previous political activism. For one who protested against apartheid 15 years ago, it is not surprising to find her now critical of Michael Jordan or of Western cultural imperialism over Muslim culture, or of politically quiescent students. These are all familiar to a discourse of working class political consciousness. Her cathartic experience through self-analysis is however something different. Here she undergoes a very significant change – although difficult to pin down given the available information.

### **The 2004 Interviews: Eye-openers and I-openers**

As I have indicated, the 2004 set of interviews takes place after a very different experience for students. In a nutshell, the course has been a 'success' because students have responded very positively to it. I have indicated earlier on quite briefly some of the responses that came through two course evaluations, one in September and one in November. The November responses were much more detailed and I provide below examples and a first categorization of these responses. I also show how these responses relate to the attributes of the sociological imagination: *debunking*, *relativizing* and *system-relating*. It is important to underline that these responses are not universal processes. They are cognitive and emotional developments linked to a particular historical and social context in which universities and their containing societies stand in a very specific relationship to each other.

Social Embeddedness – the equivalent of *system-relating*, students come to realize the link between their individual lives and social structures, the way that 'big' society 'out there' enters into the interstices of their everyday existence. The category of Explanations below is the theorizing leg of system-relating, whereby disparate elements are now linked into broader systems of thinking, where social phenomena are seen to have causes and origins which differ from their 'street' theorizations.

1. "I have been tak(ing) (X) ..as things that does not affect me .. as other people's responsibilities. I have now realized that I am part and parcel of everything that happens."
2. "It made me look at how much society influences my actions daily."

Explanations –

3. "Affirmative Action. Well it didn't change my mind but I now know the reasoning so it makes more sense."
4. "Yes, because now I have some of the explanations on things that I did not have answers for";
5. "... rounded scientific insight into our everyday life's";
6. "... each section gave me deeper, more informed and intelligent view of society which I found immeasurable useful."

Independent Thinking – both this category and the following two, critical thinking and challenges, are key parts of *debunking*. In its critical theory form, this is a process of ideology critique, the way in which sociology 'calls the bluff' of the constellations of self-justification and self-legitimation which the powerful use to further their own interests. But it is also, for students, a process whereby they break free for the first time of the opinions of teachers, parents and older people. Before, they were taught to respect and repeat the views of the guardians of the *doxa*. The social sciences calls on them now to formulate from the beginning their own views, to write essays in which they analyse and reflect. It is in this context that we need to see the response mentioned earlier, "Isn't sociology dangerous?".

7. "I can now formulate my own opinions".
8. "it made me think more critically and on many issues I never had an opinion but now I've developed an opinion for myself."
9. "I never felt as if I had anything to do with Affirmative Action in fact I didn't even know anything about it."
10. "I didn't really have any strong opinions, but this course showed me new concepts, and developed my understanding."
11. "Sociology helps me to think for myself."

#### Critical Thinking

12. "Yes, I know not to believe everything I see and hear. "Question what you know" will always stay with me."
13. "It challenged my 'shallow' and uninformed opinions and made me realize how little I really know and think about real issues. I feel my ways of thinking have matured.";
14. "... it taught me to have a thorough knowledge on something before drawing conclusion";
15. "I don't take things at face value any more, more critical, try to look at situations from all points of view.";

16. "It gave me an informed view, I'm more interested now on where things come from and why."

#### Challenges

17. "... challenging to our everyday thinking."
18. "The theories in these sections defied stereotypes and provoked much thought."
19. "... it makes you think about things that you don't always want to think about."

Absolute and Relative Truths – this category is one aspect of the broad process of relativizing, of de-absolutizing, whereby strongly loaded views lose their emotional power. Views infused with anger, disgust, fear come, in the final instance, to be recognized as parts of the self. What is unfamiliar becomes familiar, what is absolute and unique becomes relative and more ordinary. When a student says below, "I am now neutral about apartheid" I understand her/him to be saying "I do not consider this to be uniquely evil". The logical result of this emotional journey is *empathy*, where someone can put herself in the shoes of what was previously evil and disgusting. People become less judgmental and punitive.

20. "I realized I had narrow perspectives on some topics."
21. "I have a more open mind when it comes to issues such as affirmative action and crime."
22. "I do not have absolute truths."
23. "... everything is not black and white. Things have grey areas too."
24. "Yes, my mind changed concerning affirmative action from a negative to a positive mindset";
25. "I am now neutral about apartheid, AA and the role of criminals."

#### Empathy

26. "I changed my mind as to how I see people, and as to the influence of society on why people do what they do."
27. "...u realize that circumstance plays a huge role in people's lives."
28. "I had not realized that a criminal can be anybody and that criminals need my support and care... I now look at the homeless and other marginalized groups differently."
29. "It made me empathize with (some) rapists and understand where deviant people are coming from";
30. "Taught me not to judge people too harshly, made me see criminals differently";

31. "It was made apparent that there could be some justifications for why people commit crime, especially things like rape."

What is of interest in this classification of responses is how well they fit into the concepts consciously pursued by the course: debunking, relativizing, system-relating. One might expect where lectures had pursued these ideas, given specific examples and exercises around them, that students would reflect these in a fairly explicit and literal way. They might use the same stories that a lecturer had told in class, repeat the same theoretical points. But what is happening here goes beyond that. In effect, the processes of debunking, relativizing and system-relating have happened in a much wider, substantive and un-conscious sense. Students have undergone changes without knowing it. More interestingly, sociology is doing what it claims to be doing. That would be a quite banal statement if courses did not so often fail to achieve what they manifestly aim to do.

The course evaluations were followed by focus groups after the end of the course. They were intended to delve further into the meanings which lay behind the quite cryptic responses given in the course evaluations. There were four focus groups, three run by myself and the fourth run by my research assistant. There is a fifth face-to-face interview.

**Jennifer: "I suddenly realized, you know, what it was"**

In the first group, a white woman student (I will call her Jennifer) talks about her experience of affirmative action. She says that she comes from a relatively well-off family, has been to a private school, has a strong sense of religion, and has led quite a sheltered life. She had not met many blacks in her life before coming to university. In the focus group discussion, I have gone round the circle of the group. Other students have mentioned the parts of the course that struck them. It is now Jennifer's turn.

She starts by saying that it was affirmative action in the course that struck her. It was a new concept for her. She explains that children "*take on the opinions of their parents*", "*I'd never really thought it through myself*". Later on she elaborates, "*at varsity you are given the chance to experience and explore your own point of view and substantiate to form your own opinion and you learn to stand up for it and um it's a really good thing to be able to do that*". Now she has an opinion on something she never really thought about before. A different world has impinged on hers.

Of course, she says, affirmative action can be threatening to people who might be disadvantaged by it, but it's different when you understand the reason behind it. *"And naturally someone will be against a policy that is against you and then I realized its not so much against me but its for people who haven't had the opportunity before. And so I kind of got a chance to take on ... I got an understanding"*.

Then Jennifer relates the event that shook her in quite a profound way. *"... with the assignment I interviewed a black girl in my res and it really hit home and I sat and cried after that. Because I suddenly realized, you know, what it was.."* She goes on to explain *" ... (the black girl) said, "The school that I went to I didn't receive education that was good enough for me to get good enough marks to get into university". And I thought, that's shocking, because I've had a privileged education, been to a private school, had really competent instructors in all my subjects. And I thought, this girl, its not her own fault that she didn't have ... like her parents couldn't afford to send her, like she went to a government school, where she just didn't receive like the same level of education that I did, and now she's doing Chemical Engineering and now she's in third year, and she's in the Golden Key Society. And I just thought, it's amazing that someone who started off so badly with such a poor kind of education could bring herself up to this level."* This black girl, says Jennifer, got into university through a quota.

In this event Jennifer's stereotypes are confronted by a real living person. Her monster evaporates in the light of day. Her preconceptions crumble in the face of concrete experience. But, I would argue, this is a 'soft' stereotype. It is one which she inherited from her parents, and as such it has no particular emotional hold on her. Which is not to say that this is merely a cognitive, rational re-adjustment of her views. It has some energy for her, and she sits and cries. She goes through a significant change. She is pulled up short. It has just come upon her and found her present views inadequate. At the same time, this is not a case of a full move to empathy. She has not put herself in the shoes of her black neighbour. She says things like 'that's shocking', 'it's amazing' and 'it's not her fault'. Jennifer sympathizes rather than empathizes, she feels 'for' rather than 'with' her interviewee.

There is something else that's curious in Jennifer's experience, and that is that she appears not to take into account the effect of apartheid on the life-chances of a black student. When she says 'it's not her fault', or speaks of 'someone who started off so badly', she speaks of a lack rather than a deliberate discrimination and holding back. Here is a liberal approach that is shocked at inequality, but the answer to inequality is legal and social equality, not structural change in a fundamentally unjust society.

The group has been discussing whether criminals are monsters. There have been a number of participants who say, no, criminals are not monsters. Jennifer intervenes in the conversation in a very strong way. *"All criminals are monsters, there's no way that someone, in their right mind, will commit a crime. If you give them a chance to think through it, why – there's got to be some sort of mental imbalance if someone has committed a crime. If someone's been raped, someone's been murdered, someone's hi-jacked, there has got to be something in their mind that just isn't right, you know? They are normal people but they've got mental imbalances."* People who rape, murder and hijack are monsters, they have a mental imbalance, their mind just isn't right.

Here is the Other in a very powerful sense. This is a much more powerful and angry stereotype. It has a very different kind of energy from her views on affirmative action. And, despite her experience of the course, it has remained unmoved. What is the nature of the monster for Jennifer? Committing a crime is, for her, something inconceivable. There's only one way to explain it, and that is via 'mental imbalance'. But there is a contradiction for Jennifer. 'They are normal people but they have mental imbalances'. It is as if mental imbalance is something that gets added to normality to produce criminality. "These others are like me, so why can't they act the way I do?".

So, a weaker tolerant response on affirmative action, and a stronger angrier response on crime. How do these two different responses sit alongside each other? Is there a necessary uniformity across the parts of a personality? Or has Jennifer had a traumatic experience, been mugged or attacked, which anchors this anger?

She goes to explain her view by calling on religious reasons. *"And I think all of us are born with that sort of nature. Kind of the nature to have criminal tendencies, but it's about controlling it. You don't always have to (give in to it) ..... (it's) ridiculous how we can kind of actually(?) blame everything on how we were brought up. I am a Christian and I listened to a preacher .... .. and she said you need to 're-parent' yourself. You can't rely on the way you have been brought up."*

Here the earlier contradiction appears again, but in a different form. Here criminality is inconceivable. "... all of us are born with that sort of nature .. but it's about controlling it". All people are capable of crime, but normal people are able to control these urges, they need to take responsibility for themselves and their behaviour. There is also a hint of empathy here. Or is this a rhetorical device to underline 'it's ridiculous how we can kind of actually blame everything on how we were brought up'? There is more anger in the word, 'ridiculous'.

But then curiously she backs away from full-blown anger and from a call for punishment. The anger is tempered. *"The Bible says, or God says, 'Vengeance is mine' and I think ultimately um death and life choices are not ours. You can do as much as you can with the human justice system. So you kind of punish, but I don't think you can decide death and we all have to pay for our acts."* This fragment ends on the ambiguous note, 'we all have to pay for our acts'. It is not clear what she means here; that criminals must carry responsibility for their acts? Or that we, as judges, will pay if we kill criminals?

In summary, then, a most curious mixture arising out of Jennifer's experience of the course: (1) the threat of affirmative action for her, and for all whites, is suspended by an intense experience which amazes by its situation of injustice; a sense of understanding and sympathy follows; she has gone through a changing experience - *"I suddenly realized, you know, what it was"*. This is close to the process of being pulled up short described by Kerdeman. It is not in a Freudian sense a meeting with the Other. She has not started out in terror or disgust and shifted to empathy. She has found herself discomfited, a secure world built on middle class religious foundations has been shaken.

This is in strong contrast with her second reaction. Here there is (2) a strong statement of the Other - *"there's no way that someone, in their right mind, will commit a crime"*, people must take responsibility for their own acts - again muted by conceding to a higher authority in judgment - *"God says 'Vengeance is mine'"*.

**Nina: "Nazism – you'd never do that, but you would. It's unfortunate, but it's human nature."**

This is a white woman student with parents who are or have been both academics. She is in the same group as Jennifer, but differs quite sharply in her views on the nature of criminals and punishment. One suspects that she may have been pushed further in her views by her opposition to Jennifer. In her family, a number of the issues in the course have already been debated. She is clearly familiar with the arguments, and takes a consistently tolerant, sociological and intellectual (even cerebral) stand on these issues. In her case it is difficult to see any substantive change.

What struck her most about the course? The salary paid to Michael Eisner, CEO of Disney. *"And that really shocked me. It was something like \$7,000 an hour. And then ... that staggered me. ...I mean, if he gave a few days' salary to some of the factories, the factory workers, it would make a big difference, I think that the inequality is a bit shocking. I mean, I was always aware of it, but not to this degree."* Contrary to Jennifer's liberalism, here we have the beginnings of a much more

radical approach. Nina is proposing a redistribution of wealth from owners to workers. This is a point of energy for Nina, she is busy constructing her own monster here. She is 'shocked', 'staggered' – much more than when she talks (below) about criminals. It is a mixture of outrage at greed ("I can't imagine what anyone would do with that amount of money", she says), and at the gross injustice and inequality.

Can one get finality on sociological issues? One student has been saying the inability to reach closure is frustrating. Nina disagrees. "... it also shows that there are lot of different possibilities, and so you have to do enough research to make sure that you have a firm viewpoint. Or enough research to convince yourself that you actually aren't confused."

Are criminals monsters? Some students are saying, yes, they are. Nina strongly disagrees. She starts with the case of Hannibal Lecter (from the film, *The Silence of the Lambs*). Even for him there was an explanation of why he committed these crimes. "*It was in some East European country during the Second World War, the soldiers were starving and they ate the children. And I think there is no unexplainable crime. ... But I think there is always psychological damage involved.*" At another point, one student argues that political leaders are monsters because they set the example for ordinary people to be corrupt. Nina says "*I don't think you can call them monsters though, because it's human nature. Once one gets into power, they land up being corrupted. But I don't think that's because they are bad people. ... They are just greedy, but everyone is greedy. It's human nature.*" Further on she goes the whole way. Everybody has the capacity to be a monster. "... *I think it's very easy for people without a lot of money to say that other people are greedy and corrupt, but given those opportunities – it's the same with a lot of other things. People say they would never do it, Nazism – you'd never do that, but you would. It's unfortunate, but it's human nature.*" Again a radicalism, this time in the form of a strong structural approach, i.e. people are made what they are by society, they are shaped in ways that are beyond their control.

What is the nature of criminality then, for Nina? She presents a less heated view than Jennifer's. There is 'psychological damage' involved, yes, but there is always a cause that one can trace back, everyone is tempted or corrupted by circumstance, 'it's human nature'. This is not a case of essential evil, mental imbalance (as in Jennifer's case) or depravity (as in Roland's).

Does all of this mean that people should not be punished, that they do not carry responsibility for their deeds? No, says Nina, drawing on a philosophy course she did, and staying consistent with her principles "*if you do something wrong, you are obviously capable of doing wrong and you should, I'm not going to say punished for that, but you should be removed otherwise you will just*

*do it again ... so it's not really so much punishment like torture or putting to death, but it's removing you from society...*". Capital punishment is flawed because a great many innocent people have been put to death. The answer then, for some, is rehabilitation.

Nina, then, comes to university from an academically oriented family. Many of the issues discussed in sociology are old hat. She has a sophisticated take on issues, and often sounds more like a senior student than a first year. Has she changed? There is very little evidence of this. Her family has pre-empted her academic work. More interestingly, has she really encountered the alien, when she says that everyone has the capacity to be a Nazi? Or is this an extension of what she has found in books? Has she felt the temptation of cruelty or corruption when she says "it's human nature"? Who does Nina pit herself against? Who is her Other? Possibly those who condemn others: "*... I think it's very easy for people without a lot of money to say that other people are greedy and corrupt, but given those opportunities ...*". She positions herself as the one who does not judge against those who make very easy judgements.

**Linda: "And the world just unravels in front of you"**

This is a face-to-face interview with an older (29 years old) 'Coloured' woman whom I will call Linda. She has been a community worker, an activist, an actress. Her family is strongly political. Her mother is also a community worker, mayoress of a town, a writer. She is much concerned about 'Coloured' identity. She is in one of my tutorial groups, but has not participated very actively. I introduce the topic, saying I want to pursue 'the bits that struck you', 'the kind of things that perked you up, got your eyebrows raised'. She responds enthusiastically and with energy.

She speaks about her community work, that it made her feel that she had no framework, no 'intellectual basis'. She felt frustrated. I push her to elaborate on the words she uses. She responds, "*I just found myself struggling more because I couldn't put my finger on what it was that I needed to focus on – and coming to the university and doing sociology, archeology, anthropology and drama put it all into perspective*"; "*... I felt like I couldn't go any further, intellectually I couldn't go further because I didn't ... and I was grasping at straws, I would read books and I couldn't put them into context with anything because I didn't have a grounding, and then I realized that I need to come to university*"; "*... I couldn't argue, I couldn't debate, I couldn't write ... When I wrote a report, I struggled, because I couldn't substantiate ...*".

Coming to university made a significant difference. It did many of the things she wanted it to. And things start to change for her, connections are made, things fit into broader historical and theoretical perspectives. She says: "*... I mean, (sociology) is not only a subject, it's something*

*which you can apply every day in your life. You open newspapers. You read articles. I mean the articles may not say that this is Weber or whatever, but if you know the thing you can apply it, and the world just unravels in front of you", "... I am excited about learning ... and I don't get depressed any more because I am realizing that if you educate yourself you can make the difference ... You can change it as you go along".*

Here is an experience of empowerment for Linda. Things that were confusing and random start falling into place. They make sense in a theoretical perspective. This is a strong experience of system-relating and of coherence. But more than that, she sees the implications for action which seemed to be blocked before. "You can change it as you go along".

On development "Just seeing the knock-on effect of negative development was amazing for me, because it also put into perspective, it put into perspective the stuff that I had read in the last few years on slave society ..."; "history is another angle on this matter of perspective: "... because I am so passionate about what is happening in the townships and personally I needed to understand what has happened in the past that made me see the things that are happening now, and that aspect of (the textbook) *Poverty and Development* put it into perspective for me. You know, this ball starting rolling four or five hundred years ago."

Linda is driven by apartheid as the Other, as the evil one. This is what she is 'passionate' about. She has in this fragment seen through the essence of evil, seen that it has a historical root, that it can be grappled with. This is the sense of empowerment which flows from system-relating.

Being at university gave her a lot of confidence. She tells this story. "I put up my hand (in one of the lectures) and said "Um, I'm sorry, I don't like the use of the word, coloured, in class", and he was like "But, but, but, you know, we use it all the time". And I said, "Then, no, you should change it, this is the place where you change words. A university changes words." And then afterwards he was so scared. Every time he used the word, coloured, then he searched me out. (Laughter) So this is what university has done for me. It's made me put up my hand and say "Listen" and you don't have to be aggressive about it."; And then again later, "Ja, (university) gave me confidence .."

Here is the fruit of the confidence that academic authority gives to Linda, here is the substantiation that she was looking for. She is able to challenge a senior academic in a public arena, ironically challenging the source of her own confidence. Academia gives here 'voice' is a most powerful way.

Sociological theory was one of the things that struck home: *"I was passionate, I was obsessed about that. The first thing I would do when I came home was just read – everything, sociology text books ..."*

She finds a different identity, particularly coloured identity, at university, she moves away from the values of the acting world, and embraces those of community work and political activism: *"... I went into acting. I discovered that actors are very selfish, self-absorbed"; "I literally rebelled, drank, went clubbing ... And then I think coming to university was the culmination of me finding my space in Cape Town .."*. In her community she has a programme teaching children about their cultural history and origins. *"They need to understand why they lack pride. And in understanding why they lack pride, it just covers the historical aspects of it, the psychological aspects of it, the geographical aspect of it, because our forefathers didn't come from here – they were brought here..."*

In teaching children, Linda is teaching herself. She is showing them and herself the opportunities for action against racial prejudice and discrimination. The world of acting was, in a sense, an expression of melancholy and self-negation, a cul de sac. Political action gives her direction, optimism and the capacity to act on the world, to penetrate the Other which is apartheid. It gives her through theoretical diagnosis, the power to treat the disease. She has found a way to battle the Other. This is close to Fanon's notion of a fighting culture. She experiences the same enlivenment and cathartic engagement as the Algerian peasants did. At the same time, battling the Other is something quite different from meeting the Other. This second task is far and away the more challenging one.

At university she comes across students who do not share her 'enlightened' and theorized views. By sketching her differences with them, she further delineates her own opinions. *"But it frustrated me that nobody else had shared this enthusiasm.."; "And I'll come home and call my mom, and say 'What the hell are the students doing at UCT? They are wasting my time.'" She tells the story of meeting a third year woman student in the cafeteria who criticizes her for 'wasting your time reading the newspaper'. "I don't know if I was disgusted or shocked, I mean, your third year!"*

Linda here finds a new Other in her academic discourse. She finds herself somewhere between disgust and shock. For her, political apathy is very close to racial oppression.

In brief, coming to university (from acting) for Linda means the movement from pessimistic stasis to optimistic and theorized action. This is Fanon's fighting culture, the opportunity to battle the

Other, which, I argue, is very different and not quite as difficult as meeting the Other. This is a very particular and striking case of empowerment.

**Karen – “I knew that at some point I was buying into the stereotype”**

Karen presents herself as quite enlightened in a racial sense, free of racial stereotypes. (She uses the word, stereotype, quite a lot.) Her mother had a job which involved purposeful affirmative action for ex-political prisoners. She is in the same focus group as Roland, the following interview, in which issues of rape, and gangs are very prominent. As a resident of Johannesburg, she sees herself as quite knowledgeable about crime. What are the issues which make an impact on her?

First, the section in the course on crime and deviance: she used to think that rape is ‘something that the black person does to the white person’ but she now sees that this is a product of ‘racist ideologies’. *“I think for me it did quite shock me. I think it’s because I always pride myself on being someone who does not believe in stereotypical things ... I always pride myself on that fact that I always look deeper”,* but she finds that in fact she was subscribing to precisely these stereotypes. *“And so I think it did really kind of shock me and I was like ‘Well, that’s something that I actually bought into once in a while’. You do kind of buy into it.”*

Karen is pulled up short here. She suddenly sees herself in an unflattering light. Her image of herself which she used to ‘pride myself in’ is deflated. She is caught unawares by contradictory evidence and she needs to rethink, ‘it did really kind of shock me’.

Karen is also pulled up short by the notion of rape between men in prison. *“Why would guys want to do that in prison? I mean, that’s so not a male thing to do.”* And the explanation for this behaviour is that *“rape in prisons is about power, and about authority. ... rape is not a sexual act.”* *It’s about ‘overcoming’ and ‘overpowering’ the other person. I think a lot of people think it’s homosexual and it’s so not.”* The phrase ‘a lot of people’ suggests a view that she herself used to hold.

This is a different response now to the issue of rape among men. Curiously, this has similarities to Roland’s (the next interviewee) response. She is disturbed by homosexuality among men, rather than by the violence of it, but takes refuge in the notion that ‘rape is not a sexual act’. Like Roland the anxiety is not resolved but avoided. She can change her attitude by reframing this kind of rape is being about power, not sexuality.

This change brings her into conflict with older people she meets. They participate in these racial stereotypes, they say things like "Oh, it's so typical", but cannot tolerate opposing views.

On gangs in South Africa, "... everybody thinks that drug-related gangs are Nigerian, they're not. A lot of drug-related gangs are normal white South African..". She catches herself, "Well, not normal ... but white South African individuals".

On UCT campus she differentiates herself from a range of 'people who had just come straight out of matric', who still buy into stereotypes, who come from very sheltered lives, who haven't really been taught to think, or are offended by critique of Disney. "You are not brought up to challenge your stereotypes." The course has "made me actually sit and think about it in a different way .. for me it's no longer become a situation of just hearing about the stereotypes. It's become about finding the solutions to it and really understanding what the situation involves". Here too she overlaps with Roland. She differentiates herself from other students who haven't really been taught to think. She does not ridicule them like Roland does, but 'they' are people who 'buy into stereotypes'.

Has Karen changed? Has she been surprised? Yes, she says. Thinking herself racially tolerant and enlightened, she is shocked to find that she has indeed been prejudiced. On racial issues she sees that she has 'bought into' the stereotypes. On crime she is surprised by the incidence of rape between male prisoners, not as a sexual act, but one of power. This is not a major crisis of identity. She has not been reduced to tears. Nor has she been caught in emotions of disgust or anger. But she does know that her views have shifted. She has suffered deflation of her image of herself. This she bolsters by contrasting herself with older people, with unspecified 'a lot of people' and with those other students on campus 'who haven't been taught to think'.

**Roland: "... it's always disgusted me. ...I've always condemned such things"**

Roland is a young white student from the suburb of Pinelands. He presents himself as leading quite a sheltered life, particularly at preparatory school. The population at his high school is more racially mixed, but nothing out of the ordinary. He sees now that things might have been deceptively simple. He is caught up in a conversation where rape and gangs feature prominently. Karen, in the previous interview, is to some extent his counterpoint.

On the issue of rape among men in prison, Roland starts his explanation in a curiously contradictory fashion. He's never thought about something which has always disgusted him. "It's never really crossed my mind all that much because it's always disgusted me ...I've always

*condemned such things.*" But he is surprised that rape is not a matter of depravity, it's not out of the ordinary. On the contrary, it's expected, it's institutionalized, "*it's actually very ordinary*".

Roland starts with a strong emotional response, 'it's always disgusted me', but the energy-bubble of disgust is popped by the thought that it's not about 'depravity', 'it's actually very ordinary'. Roland's monster-image comes up against a perfectly ordinary explanation. It is not necessary to be disgusted. This is not a case of individualized pathology. It is part of a bigger pattern. 'It's institutionalized'. A similar move happens in the next fragment.

He is also caught by the notion (from lectures) that a woman might rape a man, or a woman. "*It takes the idea of rape out of a sexual context.*" In this example I presented to students in a lecture the possibility that rape flows from damaged male identity. By this logic women (with damaged female identity) might also 'rape' by taking out their frustration on children. Here again the frightening part of rape is removed. 'It takes it out of sexual context.' Is there something about male homosexuality that frightens Roland? He has come up against the Other but found a way to avoid it.

On gangs, he was unaware of this arena of activity, but then suddenly discovers it right under his nose. "*And that's why I found it really interesting, cuz it's like "Wow, something totally different". But it's on my back door and I don't know anything about it.*" "... *I realized what some of the guys in my school were talking about when they were acting a certain way ... They were trying to emulate the gangs, or maybe they were in the gangs*". "*So, you know, it suddenly brings to light what's going on.*"

He also comes across (science) students who are not interested in 'big issues', in philosophical questions. They protest to him, "*That has no impact on my life. That's just up in the air, silly stuff. Give me concrete stuff.*" He is critical of their lack of interest. Again, like Linda, he defines his own position by contrast with people that he disagrees with. And like Linda there is a budding identity and a budding prejudice here. Roland defines himself over an against science students. He treats them with some condescension, holds them up for ridicule and laughter among the other members of the group.

In short, two interesting things happen to Roland. His strong disgust-reaction to rape among men in prison (a powerful Other) turns out to be unnecessary. 'It's not a matter of depravity.' The monster is actually quite ordinary. He is also caught by the lecturer's example taking rape out of a sexual context, and making it a consequence of damaged identity. Both moves serve to lessen

the emotional load of his response. He will, one suspects, be less severe, less punitive, less angry – although it is not clear to what extent.

On the other hand, something that was very ordinary in his previous school experience has turned out to be interesting and unusual. What he thought was mere schoolboy banter turns out to have been gang language. A connection has been made into the broader society which he was quite unaware of, and this revelation has some energy. “*Wow, something totally different!*”

University of Cape Town

## Chapter 5: Conclusion – Transformations And Instruments

This dissertation started by addressing two issues. The first concerned the nature of the shifts in the perceptions and identities of students in a first year sociology course. Here I pursued a number of detailed aspects: points of energy, the discursive framework, forms of transformation and metaphors for the Other. The second issue concerned the experiences associated with achieving these transformations. What have we learned about these two issues through the use of Gadamer's hermeneutics, through an excavation of a word like 'eye-opener'?

Let us consider the nature of transformation, or in Gadamerian terms, meeting the alien, being pulled up short, returning life to its original difficulty, perplexity. Here there are a number of points to be made.

First, it has been important for my analysis of interviews to go beyond Gadamer and Kerdeman and to distinguish meeting the alien from meeting the Other. Meeting the alien is Kerdeman's notion of being pulled up short, illustrated by Gadamer's use of the biblical story of the prodigal son. In Jungian terms it is a process of puncturing hubris and inflation, grandiosity, pretensions to omnipotence. It is the story of Icarus flying too high. And we have seen strong examples of this in the interviews with Jennifer (in her shift concerning affirmative action), Katherine (in her shift with regard to Muslim female circumcision), and Karen (in her realization that she had been 'buying into' racial stereotypes).

Meeting the Other, by contrast, as spelled out by Stuart Hall, is the reclamation of a projection. This projection occurs when secret fears or forbidden desires are externalized on to another person or thing. Responses to the Other are emotionally charged and present in both negative and positive forms. Symptoms of the Other might then be disgust, anger, terror, outrage or, on the other hand, admiration, worship, desire. Re-integration of the Other occurs when the individual recognizes the attributes of the Other as intra-psychic and acknowledges the mechanism of projection. In many ways this is a more dramatic and rarer change.

There are in the interviews many examples of the *presence* of the Other, the experience of the energy of the Other. But re-integrating the Other is quite rare and more difficult. In the interviews, Roland comes close to this meeting in re-orienting himself with regard to prison rape, which he had always found 'disgusting' but then realized it was not really a case of 'depravity'. Karen does something very similar in her reframing of rape as a power-issue rather than one of sex. There are tantalizing signs in the course evaluations where one student says "It made me empathize with (some) rapists and understand where deviant people are coming from". Another says "I had

not realized that a criminal can be anybody and that criminals need my support and care". It is difficult to say from these latter two fragments how dramatic the change was. But in the end, I do not think any of the interviews show a full re-integration of a projection.

So, meeting the alien, experiencing the energy of the Other, and meeting or re-integrating the Other – there were, in addition, two more ways in which participants engaged with the Other. In Fanonian terms, Linda struggled against the Other, or put more precisely, she moved from a position of depressive stasis to one of highly energized political activism in which she was mobilizing 'Coloured' culture to fight the after-effects of apartheid. This is very close to Fanon's narrative of an oppressed peasant culture, *les damnés de la terre*, which is consumed by self-hate, intracommunal violence and fantastical fears. Through political mobilization there is a transformation to creative and healing optimism (Fanon, 1968).

Finally, there is the case of catharsis through the unburdening of emotional baggage, a therapeutic *anamnesis*, a revealing of long-hidden Others from behind curtains of shame and guilt (Edinger, 1972). This would appear to be what happened to Katherine "*suddenly going back to childhood memories I didn't want to go to*", but given the available evidence it is not clear.

What were the metaphors used to represent the various Others? In what form, clothed in which garb, did Others appear, in their double identity of threat and dangerous attraction? And what does this say about personal identity? For Jennifer, violent criminals suffered from a 'mental imbalance'. They are effectively insane, not the same as 'we' are, beyond the pale of understanding. For Roland, rape among prison inmates is a case of 'depravity', hints of sexual boundlessness and orgy, which he finds disgusting. For Nina, there is the greed of the corporate executive, Michael Eisner, who gets paid an obscenely large salary. And this is quite close to Katherine's outrage at the injustice of the endorsements paid to Michael Jordan. Both of them are struck by the lop-sided comparison with workers' salaries. For Nina, too, there is the interesting Other of people who are too easily judgmental. "... I think it's very easy for people without a lot of money to say that other people are greedy and corrupt, but given those opportunities ...". Nina presents herself as the person who does not judge.

Then we have a number of interviewees who come up against Others in the form of their parents and erstwhile school teachers, and also on campus, amongst other students: science students who dislike "up in the air, silly stuff" (Roland), commerce lecturers who require effectively nothing more than lists in their assignments (Roland), career-stricken students who are excessively "materialistic" (in the 1980's there were riot-police on campus) (Katherine), students who want to keep shopping and 'don't want my world rocked' (Katherine), students who find it a waste of time

to read newspapers, and are politically unmotivated (Linda), and students who “ are prepared to just take what the lecturer says” for exam purposes (Nina) . The ‘new’ social student then presents herself as politically aware, able to be critical of the university and its lecturers, and moved by ideas and morality.

How do these transformations relate to academic skills? Cognitive skills and approaches pursued in the sociological imagination have often hidden emotional parallels that go with them. There is an Aladdin's cave of riches waiting to be discovered there. Put differently, learning new ways of argument are also frequently new ways of self-understanding. What is an ‘eye-opener’ is also often an ‘I-opener’. When students say that ‘this course was an eye-opener’, they are saying much more than that they simply came to new insights. While we can and do measure cognitive skills through the setting of assignments and exams, emotional aspects can be accessed through qualitative instruments of research like course evaluations, interviews and focus group discussions. Thus, aspects of the sociological imagination like relativizing and de-absolutizing correspond directly with the psychological /philosophical principles of meeting the alien and meeting the Other. These aspects have further parallels in religion.

Third, meeting the alien and meeting the Other are partial, fragmentary, contradictory and situationally bound processes. What happens in one part of an individual psyche or personality or in one situation does not necessarily generalize through to other parts or to other situations. Jennifer’s meeting the alien in the area of affirmative action did not have equivalent ripples through into meeting the Other in the area of crime.

Fourth, re-integrating the alien or the Other in one discourse does not stop the creation of new aliens and Others in another discourse. The position of becoming a social science student, for example, throws up new Others. These new Others are presented as uninformed, politically quiescent, morally passive, materialistic, instrumentally driven and so on.

Let us turn to the second question asked above. What are the mechanisms which have been effective in bringing about these transformations? Or, to put this more precisely, which aspects of a sociology first year course do students report to have made an impact on them?

At a first level, and inasmuch as these are questions of general causation, they are almost impossible to answer. What becomes apparent from the interviews and the focus group discussions is that student responses vary hugely, both in their particular aspects, but more especially in their combinations of reactions. As soon as a researcher starts to dig a little into the meanings of the word, ‘eye-opener’, for instance, the variations and perspectives multiply.

Looking at the six case-studies which I have summarized and condensed, each displays a particularity which overlaps very little with the others. And this variety, I would expect, would unravel further and further as one delves deeper.

This unpredictability has interesting implications for how one thinks about student 'voice', and lecturers' power over students. For, in hermeneutic terms, the meeting of horizons (between what students know and what they come up against) is always a creative act, there is always interpretation involved. In Stuart Hall's terms, every reader of an encoded text, decodes and re-encodes it in a very particular way (Hall, 1973). Discourse analysts might say that the range of varieties of re-encoding is limited by the repertoire of available discourses. But who is to say how wide that repertoire might be? In the end, active interpretation is an ontological condition of existence. Interpreters cannot escape having their own voice.

At a second level, it does seem as if students did respond to the broad debunking, relativizing and system-relating currents in the sociological imagination. I have shown above how, for example, *system-relating* shows itself in (new) experiences for students of social embeddedness and seeing new explanations (see p.37 above). I have shown also how *debunking* breaks down into independent thinking, critical thinking and challenges to everyday thinking in student experience; and finally how *relativizing* connects into the move away from absolute truth, and the move towards empathy for them. What the precise points of connection are is more difficult to pin down. I have discussed some examples used in lectures and in the course reading of each of the above principles. Now and again in course evaluations and in the interviews it is possible to make concrete connections. Nina, for example, says that she was shocked at Michael Eisner's salary, and Katherine at Michael Jordan's endorsements, both cases from the readings. Jennifer, for her part, on her own initiative, interviewed a black woman student. She constructed her own experience. In the final course evaluation a large proportion of students in the class mentioned Crime and Deviance as the section of the course which made an impact – but which part, which examples, theories, arguments? I do not think it is possible to show causal connections here.

In the end, this result should not be surprising. A qualitative and ethnographic approach is not designed to tap into matters of cause and effect, to compare pre- and post-test benchmarks. What we have are fruitful impressions and suggestive connections mixed in with a multitude of situational and individual particularities. And in pedagogy maybe this is sufficient. Experienced lecturers experiment with new approaches, and new strategies. Some of these experiments 'work' in the sense that students 'respond positively' i.e. when they come to fill in course evaluation questionnaires after 12 weeks of the course they have good or perhaps just interesting things to say about the course. Other experiments do not work. Teachers over time develop a

sense of what are generative approaches, and what are not, but the exact connections remain something of a black box. Ethnographic studies of the kind performed in this dissertation add considerable colour and richness to the black box, sharpen sensitivities and empathies, tune the ear to finer listening. That is what the generative question of the title of this dissertation means. Clifford Geertz says

The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said (Geertz, 1973:30).

And these are advantages not to be sneezed at. This is what hermeneutics is.

Does this study then have implications for teaching despite the disclaimers and complexities that I have mentioned above? There are two main things to say here. The first is that the affective background to teaching and learning that I have been investigating here is very dependent on students' opportunities for engaging on a personal level with the curriculum. Making that personal connection takes a great deal of thought, particularly when the 'connection' involves 500 individuals. And it takes careful attention to continuing communication. Such communication happened in this first year course in a number of different places: in small tutorial groups where tutors could pay more detailed attention; from a mid-term course evaluation which had suggestive comments; from brief response notes collected during lectures testing student opinion; tapping into student reaction to assignments and exercises, and using some of these responses to formulate assignment topics which spoke to immediate enthusiasms and energies.

The second implication of this research, to repeat a point made earlier, is that it is a fundamental critique of Outcomes-Based Education and OBE's commitment to pre-planned results which can be specified at the beginning of a course in statements like "At the end of this course students will be able to ...". One of the main conclusions of this study has been to underline the unpredictability of outcomes.

Does that mean that teaching cannot be assessed, that teaching becomes a quasi-mystical activity which is beyond analysis and judgment? I do not think so. Just as there are still criteria for validating qualitative research after positivism, so too are there criteria for assessing teaching which commits itself to hermeneutic standards. So, for example, good teachers must have 'thick knowledge' of their students, their practice must be generative of new ideas and of self-knowledge, they should pursue ontological authenticity and educative authenticity and so on.

There are also the standards set by the notion of *phronesis*, for example, that good teaching should be a process of sensitive communication with students (continuous assessment being one form), and curriculum content should connect with the personal concerns of students. All of these are criteria which can be articulated and assessed. There is nothing mystical about hermeneutic teaching.

University of Cape Town

## Bibliography

- Allen, R. (1984) *The Dialogues of Plato*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.
- Angen, M. (2000) "Pearls, Pith and Provocation: Evaluating Interpretive Inquiry: Reviewing the Validity Debate and Opening the Dialogue." *Qualitative Health Research*, **10**, 378-395.
- Bauman, Z (1990) *Thinking Sociologically*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Bensusan, D & Y Shalem (1994) "The Crooked Path of Pedagogy" in Flanagan, Hemson, Muller & Taylor (eds) *Vintage Kenton: A Kenton Education Association Commemoration*.
- Bernstein, R (1983) *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*. London. Blackwell.
- Berger, P. (1966) *Invitation to Sociology - a Humanistic Perspective.*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Clifford, J. (2001) "On Ethnographic Allegory." In *The New Social Theory Reader: Contemporary Debates* Seidman, S. and Alexander, J. (Eds.) Routledge. London.
- Denzin, N. (1994) "The Art and Politics of Interpretation." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*(Eds, Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y.) Sage, London, New Delhi, pp. 500-515.
- Edinger, E. (1972) *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the Psyche*, Shambhala, Boston & London.
- Elliott, A (1992) *Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition: Self and Society from Freud to Kristeva*. Oxford. Blackwell.
- Fanon, F. (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press Inc., New York.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making Social Science Matter: why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1989) *Truth and Method*, Sheed & Ward Ltd., London.
- Gallagher, S. (1992) *Hermeneutics and Education*, SUNY Press, Albany.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York.
- Gibson, NC (2003) *Fanon: the Postcolonial Imagination*. Cambridge. Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Graaff, J. (2004) "Progress In Teaching Sociology: From Cognitive Skills To Hermeneutics And Phronesis." *Society in Transition*, **35**, 287-301.
- Graaff, J., Reed, Y. and Shay, S. (2004) "Validating Academic Assessment : A Hermeneutical Perspective." *Journal of Education*.
- Guba EG & YS Lincoln "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research" in Denzin N & YS Lincoln (eds) (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London. Sage Publications.
- Guggenbuhl-Craig, A (1971) *Power in the Helping Professions*. Putnam, Connecticut. Spring Publications.

- Guthrie, W. (1975) *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hall, S (1973) *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. \*\*\*
- Hall, S. (1992) "The West and the Rest." In *Formations of Modernity*(Ed, Gieben, H.) Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell and The Open University., Cambridge, pp. 275-332.
- Hall, S. (2001) "The Spectacle of the Other." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*(Ed, Hall, S.) Sage Publications in association with the Open University, London.
- Hammersley, M. (1994) "Introducing Ethnography" In *Researching Language and literacy in social context*.(Eds, Graddol, J., Maybin, J. and Stierer, B.) Open University Press/Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Holway, W (2001) "Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity" in Wetherell et al. (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. London. Sage Publications.
- How, A. (1995) *The Habermas-Gadamer debate and the nature of the social : back to bedrock*, Avebury, Aldershot, Hants.
- Huberman AM & MB Miles (1994) "Data Management and Analysis Methods" in Denzin N & YS Lincoln (eds) (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London. Sage Publications.
- Jardine, D. (1992) "Reflections on Education, Hermeneutics, and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics as a Restoring of Life to Its Original Difficulty." In *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*(Eds, Pinar, W. and Reynolds, W.) Teacher's College, New York.
- Jung, C. (2001) *Modern Man in search of a soul.*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Kerdeman, D. (1998) "Hermeneutics and Education: Understanding, Control and Agency." *Educational Theory*, **48**, 241-266.
- Kerdeman, D. (2003) "Pulled Up Short: Challenging Self-Understanding as a Focus of Teaching and Learning." *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, **37**, 293-308.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1999) "Critical Classroom Analysis." *TESOL Quarterly*, **33**.
- Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (1996) "Rethinking the Focus Group in Media and Communications Research." *Journal of Communications*, **46**, 79-98.
- McNay, L. (1994) *Foucault: a critical introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Morgan, D. and Spanish, M. (1984) "Focus Groups: a new tool for qualitative research." *Qualitative Sociology*, **7**, 253-269.
- Mills, Wright C (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Muller, J. (2000) Chapter 3: What Knowledge is of the Most Worth for the Millennial Citizen? In *Reclaiming Knowledge: Social Theory, Curriculum and Educational Theory*(Ed, Muller, J.) Routledge Falmer, Lond and New York.
- Nixon, S. (1997) "Exhibiting Masculinity." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*.(Ed, Hall, S.) Sage Publications Inc., London, pp. 223-290.

- Noel, J (200\*) "On the Varieties of Phronesis." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 31(3):272-291.
- Ortner, S. (1999) 'Introduction' In *The Fate of 'Culture': Geertz and Beyond*(Ed, Ortner, S.)  
University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 1-13.
- Pickering, M (2001) *Stereotypes*. New York. Palgrave.
- Rorty, R (1980) *The Mirror of Nature* Oxford. Basil Blackwell
- Shorey, P. (1933) *What Plato Said*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London.
- Storr, A. (1973) *Jung*, Fontana/Collins, London.
- Samuels, A; B Shorter, F Plaut (1986) *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*. London.  
Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Schwandt, TA (1994) "Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry" in Denzin N &  
YS Lincoln (eds) (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London. Sage Publications.
- Stewart, P. (2003) "Introducing social theory to first year sociology students *phronetically*."  
*Society in Transition*, **34**, 149-158.
- Strebel, A. (1994) "Focus Groups in Aids Research:." *Journal of Community and Health  
Sciences*, **2**, 59-69.
- Taylor, C (2002) *The Gadamer Century*.
- Thesen, L (2004) "Who owns the Image? Word, image and authority in the lecture." Unpublished  
mimeo.
- Thompson, JB (1990) *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Cambridge. Polity Press.
- Van Gennep, A (1960) *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press.
- Warnke, G. (1987) *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Weinsheimer, J. (1985) *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: a Reading of Truth and Method.*, Yale  
University Press, New Haven & London.
- Wilkinson, S. (1998) "Focus groups in feminist research: power, interaction, and the co-  
construction of meaning." *Women's Studies International Forum*, **21**, 111-125.