

CHAPTER 7

LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE, LITERACY

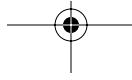
Stability, Territory, and Transformation

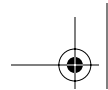
Paul Dowling
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You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English. (Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1)

Oddly, Professor Higgins' boast maps neatly onto Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) schema for the forms of capital. Given an adequate supply of economic capital, Eliza might exchange it for embodied cultural capital in the form of a phonetic education. In turn, this would give her access to the elite networks of association that are represented at the ambassador's garden party—social capital—or, alternatively, might be re-exchanged for economic capital in the form of a lady's maid's or shop assistant's wage. Eliza's problem, of course, is that she has no access to the requisite economic capital. The nature of her current cultural capital—kerbstone English—seems destined to fix her permanently at the bottom of the social ladder; until,

Culture and Learning: Access and Opportunity in the Classroom, pages 137–162
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that is, Higgins' colleague, Colonel Pickering, in response to Eliza's own initiative, steps in with an offer to subsidize her schooling.

At this point in the play, Shaw is concerned with dialect, which Ruqaiya Hasan (1973) describes as a variety of language that is specific to a time (i.e., in the development of a language) or geographical region or social class. In the first section of this chapter I shall consider this kind of language variety with some reference to all three of these categories. Hasan distinguishes dialect from two other dimensions of linguistic variation, code and register. These dimensions concern, respectively, orientations to meaning that are related to differences in the forms of social relations that generate them and to varieties of language that are specific to particular fields of language use. In the second and third sections of the chapter I shall address issues that are more closely associated with, respectively, code and register than with dialect. However, as I am concerned with sociology rather than with (socio)linguistics as such, I shall not confine myself to Hasan's carefully defined dimensions, but I will be more concerned with meanings than with forms of expression and will pay particular attention to Basil Bernstein's work as it relates to language and social class.¹ In the third section I will introduce, very briefly, two potential areas of transformation in the field of literacy and will offer a prediction.

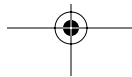


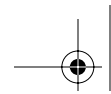
LINGUISTIC CHANGE: SOCIAL STABILITY?

Shaw's character, Henry Higgins, is a professor of phonetics. His ability to recognize delicate distinctions between spoken sounds enables him not only to recognize social class in speech, but also geographical locations. He correctly identifies Eliza's origins in Lisson Grove, one bystander as hailing from Selsey, another from Hoxton, and the career of the "gentleman" who subsequently turns out to be Colonel Pickering as "Cheltenham, Harrow, Cambridge and India":

You can spot an Irishman or a Yorkshireman by his brogue. I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets. (Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1)

Contemporary non-fictional linguists are not always as confident. Pickering's accent is likely to be a variety of Received Pronunciation (RP). Although not representing a complete uniformity (Wells, 1982)—there is no such thing (Milroy, 2001)—Peter Trudgill (2002) goes as far as to assert that "[i]t is impossible ... to tell where an RP speaker comes from" (p. 173). On the other hand, the close association of RP and the network of English public schools clearly establish it as the accent of high socioeco-



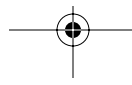


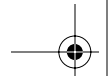
conomic status (ses) groups in England. The general principle relating the social and geographical dimensions of dialect is that the higher the socioeconomic status of the speaker, the lower the accuracy with which their geographical origins can be pinpointed. Associating RP with “people at the top of the social scale” Trudgill illustrates the situation as follows:

Thus, an unskilled manual worker might be recognizable by anybody having the appropriate sort of linguistic knowledge as coming from Bristol, a non-manual worker as coming from the West Country, a middle-class professional person as coming from the south of England, and an upper-middle class RP speaker as coming simply from England, even if all of them had their origins in Bristol. Equally, a typical middle-class person from Birmingham will obviously have an accent, which is phonetically and phonologically different from that of a middle-class person from Bristol, but the differences between the accents of two working-class speakers from the same places will be even greater. (Trudgill, 2002, p. 173)

After her transformation, Shaw’s Eliza claims that “the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how shes treated.” (Act 3). But it is, of course, naïve—other than in the context of the play’s plot—to detach the one from the other. Citing Howard Giles’ research, Trudgill notes that RP tends to be associated with competence, confidence, education and reliability as well as being regarded as the most aesthetically pleasing of British accents. If Trudgill’s estimation that only 3 per cent of the British population speaks RP is good, then the market value of this particular brand of cultural capital would seem to be clear and we might reasonably conclude that here is one mechanism that will tend to operate so as to stabilize the privileged position of a dominant minority group. It is, furthermore, a mechanism that is established and maintained within schooling.²

Giles’ research was carried out in the 1970s and there have certainly been changes since then. As Trudgill observes, non-RP is becoming far more common in the BBC and regional accents are no longer discriminated against in the way that they once were. The highly localized accents of the lowest socioeconomic status (ses) groups are still stigmatized. However, the general trend towards fewer but more distinctive dialects, each covering a comparatively large area (Milroy, 2002; Trudgill, 2002) may be leading to the eventual eradication of highly localized varieties and, with their demise, the weakening of this form of dialect as a cultural mechanism of social reproduction. Further pressure on these highly localized varieties may be generated by advancing global communication in what Castells (1996, 1997) refers to as the “networked society,” particularly given the fact that English—the dominant language of the internet—is already distin-





guished by the outnumbering of its native speakers by non-native speakers with an estimated ratio of 3:4 (Trudgill, 2002).³

It is worth mentioning the particular case of what William Labov refers to as “the exclusion of African Americans.” Labov finds that whilst there is a very considerable range of African American speech forms and whilst “there are a large number of upper middle class African Americans whose speech is effectively identical with that of their white counterparts” (Labov, 2001, p. 507), there are very few whose speech can be identified with the local “white” dialect. Labov claims that this situation is unique to the United States and is a result of the “large and increasing residential segregation of African Americans in the Northern Cities” (Labov, 2001, p. 507).⁴

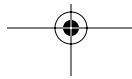
Explicit in the extract from *Pygmalion* at the head of this chapter is the notion that English does not vary simply in terms of location or social class, but can be measured on an absolute scale with the speech of lady’s maids, shop assistants and, presumably, linguists coming out on top. There is here an implicit reference to a ‘correct’ dialect of English. Furthermore, Professor Higgins enjoins Eliza to:

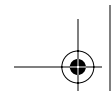
Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible (Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1)

And this not only establishes a direct association between spoken and written English (which tend to differ in a number of important respects—see, for example, Halliday, 1994), but also suggests a timeless quality to the “correct” form that might perplex the reader of Shaw’s play who has also read Shakespeare (one of two recognizably “correct” spellings), Milton and The Bible (in any of its instantiations). The concept of “correctness” in language is an effect of “standardization” (Milroy, 2001) which process has generated Standard English (SE), predominant in writing and in schooling throughout the English-speaking world and in the teaching of English as a second language (Trudgill, op cit).⁵ SE is associated with higher ses groups as a prestige form thus establishing a more broadly-based association with these groups, correctness and educational success than can be achieved by RP.

THE WORK OF WILLIAM LABOV

In his studies of pronunciation in Philadelphia and new York speech communities Labov (2001) has found evidence of a general recognition of and explicit adherence to the prestige forms which was contradicted by the speech forms actually observed, that is to say, people from lower ses groups





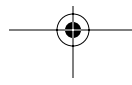
tended to represent their own speech as closer to the higher ses norms than it actually was. Furthermore, Labov finds widespread evidence of an almost universal conservatism in respect of attitudes to linguistic change:

Communities differ in the extent to which they stigmatize the newer forms of language, but I have never yet met anyone who greeted them with applause. Some older citizens welcome the new music and dances, the new electronic devices and computers. But no one has ever been heard to say, "It's wonderful the way young people talk today. It's so much better than the way we talked when I was a kid." (Labov, 2001, p. 6)

Yet language does change and people do speak in stigmatized forms that are associated with lower ses groups, despite their apparent adherence to norms that would suggest to the contrary. Furthermore, the evidence is that the origins of much linguistic change are generally to be found in precisely those groups and speech forms that appear to be most widely stigmatized. Wells (1994) for example, illustrates some of the influence of London cockney dialect on RP. But the originators of linguistic changes are not necessarily the leaders in diffusing these changes. In his major work of quantitative linguistics, *Principles of Linguistic Change*, Labov concludes that whilst linguistic changes do indeed originate in the speech of the lowest ses groups, these changes are developed and diffused by a different group:

This inquiry has established that the leaders of linguistic change in urban society are able and energetic, non-conformist women who absorb and maintain lower class linguistic forms in their youth and maintain them in their upwardly mobile trajectory in later years. They are the main instruments of the diffusion of change throughout the urban area, since they have a wider range of contacts than others. Prominent among their friends and neighbors, their own speech patterns become a model for others to follow. Furthermore, their resistance to normative community pressures precludes any tendency to recede from the linguistic patterns established in their youth. (Labov, 2001, p. 509)

Labov's method of enquiry involves the delineation of linguistic changes in progress so as to identify the groups whose speech is at the most advanced stage in these changes. This leads him to the group of non-conformist, upwardly mobile women that is described in the above extract. These women defy the general and widely reported finding that women tend to be more conservative than men in their use of standard forms but more progressive than men in adopting new forms (Labov, 2001; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1998, Ladegaard, 2000) by being less conforming in respect of both standard and new forms.



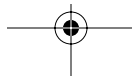


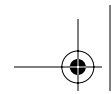
Labov clearly declares that “the principal aim of this investigation is to understand the evolution of language, and not the evolution of society” (Labov, 2001, p. 59). Indeed, his central finding is more suggestive of social stability than transformation. Whilst a major source of linguistic change is in the lowest ses groups—“change from below”—this is little comfort to the originators of these changes. They tend to “fall slightly behind as change gathers momentum and becomes characteristic of the community as a whole” and “[t]he retreat of working class men from female-dominated change is just one aspect of this process” (Labov, 2001, p. 510). It would appear that the nature of speech class markers change and, to some extent, move upwards in ses terms, but the majority of speakers do not change their class location. Cultural markers of social class such as speech dialects have been observed to function as principles of recognition of academic ability within schools. Where an early attribution of low ability based on such principles has resulted in differential treatment generating a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (see, for example, Rist, 1970).

For at least some of those who are upwardly mobile, Labov’s findings would seem to suggest that they are not simply assimilated by the more dominant groups but that they carry some of their linguistic cultural capital with them and that the dominant linguistic cultural forms tend to accommodate to this. We might speculate, however, that these individuals achieve their limited upward mobility—they are centrally located in Labov’s model of social hierarchy⁶—in spite of rather than because of their cultural non-conformism to the privileged forms.

Labov offers two opposing interpretations of sociolinguistic structure. The “consensual model” views control of the standard language as a basic form of symbolic capital and the failure of working class people to use it derives from their lack of exposure to it. He contrasts this with the “competitive model” which proposes that the different variants of language carry full value as symbolic capital in the social networks to which they are specific. The consensual model, in proposing a lack of exposure to standard linguistic forms, is certainly questionable given the widespread use of these forms in the mass media. Further, the general finding that it is interpersonal communication and not the mass media that influence linguistic change (Labov, 2001; Trudgill, 2002) itself seems to lend greater validity to the competitive or difference model. Milroy & Milroy (1992) argue that:

Just as there is strong institutional pressure to use varieties approximating to the standard in formal situations, effective sanctions are in force in nonstandard domains also. For example, in Belfast, New York City, and (no doubt) elsewhere—young men are ridiculed by their peers if they use middle-class forms. (Milroy & Milroy, 1992, p. 4)



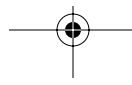
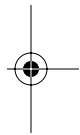
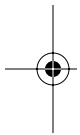


In a survey of the linguistic attitudes and behavior of rural and urban adolescents in Denmark, Ladegaard (2000) found that a majority of boys and girls expressed positive attitudes towards the retention of local dialects (although they gave different reasons) and Labov notes that evidence of style shifting by upper middle class youth might be interpreted as evidence for competing norms, although he finds little evidence that this strategy is adopted by working class speakers.⁷

Milroy & Milroy (1992) differentiate between strong network ties that constitute consensus at the micro-level and weak ties that constitute relations between what we might regard as competing consensual contexts and that facilitate linguistic change. They suggest that Labov's leaders of linguistic change are precisely those individuals who are most likely to be interconnected via a high proportion of weak ties.⁸ Labov (2001) recognizes some potential complementary value in the social network approach, but points out that there is no evidence that the relationships of the leaders of linguistic change that extend beyond their immediate locality are weaker than those within the locality.

The move towards taking greater account of competition or, as I would prefer, agonism within the social that is suggested by the approach that Milroy & Milroy adopt is certainly more consistent with a sociological enquiry into the production and reproduction of social inequality. However, the focus of attention in this section of the chapter has been on dialect in terms of speech sounds and (implicitly) lexical and grammatical choices. These differences facilitate the generation of social class and geographical markers, which might contribute to the pool of principles of recognition whereby access to educational and other opportunities is unequally socially distributed. However, this does not mark out language as such from a host of other potential markers including dress, table manners etc (Rist, 1970). Indeed, thirty years ago, Labov (1972) argued that what was important in language use—logical argument, for example, was untouched by social class; he continues to maintain much the same position:

At one point in the development of sociolinguistics, it was not uncommon for scholars to suggest that the social and linguistic aspects of a language were coextensive in the sense that each linguistic element had a social aspect or evaluation. Yet the actual situation seems to be quite the reverse. For the most part, linguistic structure and social structure are isolated domains, which do not bear upon each other. ... those sound changes with clear structural consequences—mergers—are almost entirely without social evaluation. The force of social evaluation, positive or negative, is generally brought to bear only upon the superficial aspects of language: the lexicon and phonetics. (Labov, 2001, p. 28)





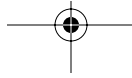
His target in the first sentence is presumably the same as that in the earlier paper stated, again, more implicitly than explicitly, Basil Bernstein. In the earlier publication Labov (1972) analysed the speech of two African Americans, a working class youth and a young middle class man. Labov concluded that whilst the dialects were clearly distinct, class-specific varieties of African American English, the working class youth's speech was fluent, concise and logical, whereas the middle class speaker was hesitant and verbose. This paper has frequently been cited in refutation of Bernstein's early work on sociolinguistics. In a sharp critique of Labov's paper, however, Bernstein (1996) reveals not only the inadequacy of the analysis, but also the fact that the two samples of speech were obtained under very different conditions which would certainly have contributed to their distinct characters. Indeed, Bernstein is able to reinterpret the data in a manner that clearly supports his own thesis on the relationship between social class and orientation to modes of meaning. This thesis along with other work that is concerned more with meaning than mode of expression will be considered in the next section.⁹

CLASS AND DISCURSIVE TERRITORIES

Milroy & Milroy (1992) turn to the ethnographically based social theory of Thomas Højrup as an appropriate sociological partner to their linguistics. Højrup has generated the concept of "life-mode" in order to describe the economically grounded differentiation of culture. He marks out three life-modes for Denmark in the latter half of the twentieth century these relate to: the self-employed; the routine wage earner; and the success-oriented wage earner. He argues that:

one can hardly even claim that [people in different life modes] speak the same language, considering that linguistic expressions referring to aspects of everyday life that pertain to the life-modes have entirely different meanings in the different modes. The difficulties encountered with the concept of "work," "family," "freedom" etc have ... shown that even such important everyday concepts are used by different segments of the population to express drastically different cultural ideas [T]hese differences in usage derive from the fundamental differences in the organization of everyday life among life-modes. (Højrup, 1983, p. 31)

Following the Foucauldian influence on some sociological language we might now refer to these socioculturally territorialized "languages" (or perhaps, repertoires of registers) as discourses. Semantic incommensurability of this nature has quite clear implications for access to educational discourse, which we might expect to be more consistent with that of one life-

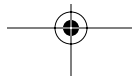


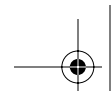


mode than those of the others. The charting of the discursive terrain for a whole society is clearly an immense undertaking. However, work has been carried out revealing what we might refer to as discursive disjunctions between domestic routine and pedagogic contexts. Valerie Walkerdine, for example, has distinguished between “instrumental discourse” and “pedagogic discourse” in analysing “mother-initiated exchanges” between mothers and young children:

Instrumental referred to tasks in which the main focus and goal of the task was a practical accomplishment and in which numbers were an incidental feature of the task, for example in cake-making, in which the number two might feature in relation to the number of eggs needed and so on. In the pedagogic tasks numbers featured in quite a different way: that is, numbers were the explicit focus of the task. (Walkerdine, 1988, p. 81)

Some of my own work (for example, Dowling, 1998) describes the ways in which school mathematics texts recontextualize domestic and other non-mathematical practices to constitute what I refer to as “public domain” text. For example, baking a cake is recontextualized as an exercise in calculating the circumference of the baking tin in order to measure the correct amount of baking paper with which to line it. Now four key points must be made here. Firstly, cake baking rarely proceeds in such a mathematical way—we tear off a strip of baking paper from the roll and, if it’s not enough, we tear off another strip. Secondly, an analysis of school mathematics textbooks reveals that they recontextualize such non-mathematical practices in two quite distinct ways. In one mode, the task is presented as if it were genuinely concerned with the non-mathematical practice and not with mathematics itself. Here, the implication is that schooling potentially optimizes participation non-school practices, such as cooking, which are thereby mythologized. I refer to this mode as the “myth of participation.” In the second mode, there is no pretence that the theme is concerned with the recontextualized setting which is quickly left behind as the mathematical content is foregrounded. This mode entails a different myth; that mathematics can usefully describe something other than itself—the “myth of reference.” Thirdly, the two modes are distributed such that “lower ability” students are supplied with the participation myth and are thereby, in no mean degree, fed a diet of caricatures of their own domestic lives. “Higher ability” students receive the reference myth, which, whilst redescribing the non-mathematical practices, nevertheless provides potential access to what I refer to as the “esoteric domain” of mathematics. Finally, my analysis of school textbooks indicates that the principles of recognition of “ability” are closely aligned with social class markers. Thus it can be argued that these books tend to operate as devices for the translation of social class into mathematical ability in a manner corresponding to the way in which Ray





Rist's kindergarten teacher's practices translated ses-related markers such as linguistic characteristics into academic potential.

In an ethnographic study, Shirley Brice Heath (1986) has described differences in the uses of questions to their children by parents in domestic settings. Her observations took place in the homes of a working class African American community in the U.S., in the classrooms that the children attended, and in the homes of teachers from these classrooms. Heath found that language use in the working class homes differed from that in the teachers' homes in that it did not prepare children to handle the modes of questioning used in the classroom, thus:

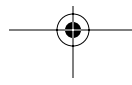
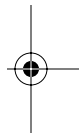
First, they had not learned how to respond to utterances, which were interrogative in form, but directive in pragmatic function (e.g., "Why don't you use the one on the back shelf?" = "Get the one on the back shelf"). Second, [...] questions, which expected students to feed back information already known to the teacher, were outside [their] general experience. Third, they had little or no experience with questions, which asked for display of specific skills and content information acquired primarily from a familiarity with books and ways of talking about books (e.g., "Can you find Tim's name?" "Who will come help Tim find his way home?"). In short, school questions were unfamiliar in their frequency, purposes, and types, and in the domains of knowledge and skills display they assumed on the part of students. (Heath, 1986, p. 125)

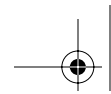
This is consistent with Ruqaiya Hasan's contention that:

in the everyday register repertoire of the dominating classes, there are some discourse types, which are much closer to the social domains, introduced in the pedagogic system. This prepares children from the dominating classes to receive the discourses of educational knowledge with much greater readiness. In addition to this, the semantic orientation of the dominant classes is congruent with the required semantic orientation for the (re-) production of "exotic," uncommon sense knowledge. The discourses of education, thus, present little or no threat to the habitual ways of meaning and saying which children from the dominant classes bring to the school. (Hasan, 1999, pp. 72–73)

Heath recruited the products of her ethnographic study in an intervention phase designed both the help the students acquire experience of the particular forms of questioning used in schools and to help teachers to develop their own pedagogic practices. This phase of the work is highly redolent of Basil Bernstein's aphorism:

If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher. (Bernstein, 1974, p. 199)





This is from an essay entitled “A critique of the concept of compensatory education” which appeared as chapter 10 of Bernstein’s seminal work, *Class, codes and control, volume 1: Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*, the first edition of which was published in 1971. Bernstein’s work in general—and this volume in particular—is amongst the most influential in the sociology of education and generated a good deal of controversy in the nineteen seventies.¹⁰ In the paragraph following that in which the above extract appears, Bernstein suggests that:

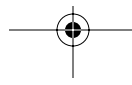
It is an accepted educational principle that we should work with what the child can offer: why don’t we practice it? The introduction of the child to the universalistic meanings of public forms of thought is not compensatory education—it is education. (Bernstein, 1974, p. 199)

The expression “universalistic meanings” is crucially sententious in Bernstein’s sociolinguistic work and in its subsequent ramifications, as I shall discuss later. In an earlier chapter in his book, Bernstein argues that:

we might be able to distinguish between two orders of meaning. One we would call universalistic, the other particularistic. Universalistic meanings are those in which principles and operations are made linguistically explicit, whereas particularistic orders of meaning are meanings in which principles and operation are relatively linguistically implicit. If orders of meaning are universalistic, then the meanings are less tied to a given context. The meta-languages of public forms of thought as these apply to objects and persons realize meanings of a universalistic type. (Bernstein, 1974, p. 175)

Bernstein refers to the culturally acquired orientations towards speech variants realizing universalistic and particularistic meanings as, respectively, elaborated and restricted codes. Bernstein introduces various examples of these speech variants, some taken from empirical work conducted by him or colleagues and some that seem to be imaginary. One example “constructed” by a colleague, Peter Hawkins, “as a result of his analysis of the speech of middle-class and working-class five-year old children” (Bernstein, 1974, p. 178) involves two short stories. The children in Hawkins’ research had been shown a series of pictures showing, firstly, boys playing football, then the ball going through a window, a woman looking out of the window and, finally, a man making “an ominous gesture” (Bernstein, 1974, p. 178). The two stories are as follows:

1. Three boys are playing football and one boy kicks the ball and it goes through the window the ball breaks the window and the boys are looking at it and a man comes out and shouts at them so they run away and then that lady looks out of her window and she tells the boys off.





2. They're playing football and he kicks it and it goes through there it breaks the window and they're looking at it and he comes out and shouts at them because they've broken it so they run away and then she looks out and she tells them off. (Bernstein, 1974, p. 178)

The use of “constructed” or imaginary illustrations is quite common in Bernstein’s work and this sometimes raises problems as I shall argue later. It is not entirely clear why he chooses not to introduce two stories, which were actually produced by children participating in the research. Nevertheless, these stories do adequately illustrate his categories. Essentially, whereas the second story makes frequent direct references to the pictures, the first does so only once (“that lady”). Bernstein argues that the reader of the first story does not need to have access to the pictures because the meanings are made explicit and are universalistic, whereas the reader of the second story does need the pictures because meanings are implicit and particularistic. I shall return to these stories later. For the moment, though, I want to outline—in very general terms—Bernstein’s argument in relation to social class, codes and schooling.

Firstly, and although the relationship is not simple or by any means determinate, Bernstein claims that the tendency is for primary socialization in working class families to privilege restricted codes and therefore orientation to particularistic meanings and for that in middle class families to provide greater access to elaborated codes and therefore orientation to universalistic meanings; as Bernstein summarizes: “One of the effects of the class system is to limit access to elaborated codes” (Bernstein, 1974, p. 176).¹¹ Secondly, Bernstein argues that the potential for change in the principles of a practice and of reflexivity in respect of the bases of socialization is greater in the case of elaborated than restricted codes:

Elaborated codes are less tied to a given or local structure and thus contain the potentiality of change in principles. In the case of elaborated codes the speech can be freed from its evoking social structure and it can take on autonomy. A university is a place organized around talk. Restricted codes are more tied to a local social structure and have a reduced potential for change in principles. Where codes are elaborated, the socialized has more access to the grounds of his [sic] own socialization, and so can enter into a reflexive relationship to the social order he has taken over. Where codes are restricted, the socialized has less access to the grounds of his socialization and thus reflexivity may be limited in range. (Bernstein, 1974, p. 176)

Thirdly, because schooling is oriented towards the “universalistic meanings of public forms of thought,” schools that are not adequately geared to the introduction of these universalistic meanings to children having lim-



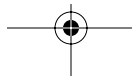
ited access to elaborated codes are likely to induce failure in these children, thus:

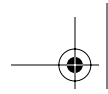
What is made available for learning through elaborated and restricted codes is radically different. Social and intellectual orientations, motivational imperative and forms of social control, rebellion and innovation are different. Thus the relative backwardness of many working-class children who live in areas of high population density or in rural areas may well be a culturally induced backwardness transmitted by the linguistic process. Such children's low performance on verbal IQ tests, their difficulty with "abstract" concepts, their failures within the language area, their general inability to profit from the school, all may result from the limitations of a restricted code. (Bernstein, 1974, p. 151)

Now it is necessary to point out that Bernstein's theory is highly complex and develops within each of his major books—all of which are collections of papers originally written separately—and between them (Bernstein, 1971a, 1974, 1977, 1990, 1996, 2000). I have, of necessity, had to simplify here. It is also important to mention that there is a great deal of empirical work that is associated with this early sociolinguistic theory and with his later work.¹² Nevertheless, it is possible to raise some critical issues on the basis of what I have been able to introduce here that do, I believe, have more general validity.

Firstly, referring back to the two stories about the footballers, not only is it unclear that most readers of the first story would need access to the pictures (or descriptions of them) in order to make sense of the story, but the first story is perhaps better described as vague rather than universalistic. It is not clear how we might interpret it unless we have further information about the context of its telling: it is a report of an experience, an interpretation of a scene, an academic example, etc? Imagine overhearing just this amount of a conversation; what would one conclude was going on? Bernstein is able to refer to the first story as more universalistic than the second only because he has fetishized specifically linguistic markers of context of which there are more in the second story than the first. The teller of the first story can produce such a vague utterance only because their audience shares the immediate context. On overhearing the second story, I would suggest, one would actually have more clues to enable one to make sense of the situation. This is not to deny the kind of distinction that Bernstein is making; it is a crucial one, as I shall argue later. However, it is to challenge his interpretation of the nature of the difference.

In their work with American teenagers from upper and middle class backgrounds, Gee, Allen & Clinton (2001) find that, indeed, teenagers do use different styles of language to "fashion themselves" with respect to quite distinct worlds:





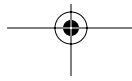
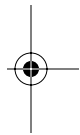
The working class teens ... use language to fashion their identities in a way that is closely attached to a world of “everyday” (“lifeworld”) social and dialogic interaction The upper middle class teens ... use language to construct their identities in a way that detaches itself from “everyday” social interaction and orients more towards their personal biographical trajectories through an “achievement space” defined by the (deeply aligned) norms of their families, schools, and powerful institutions in our society. In addition, the upper middle class teens often seem to use the abstract language of rational argumentation to “cloak” (o[r] “defer”) their quite personal interests and fears, while the working class teens much more commonly use a personalized narrative language to encode their values, interests, and themes. (Gee et al., 2001, p. 177)

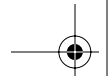
As the authors recognize, it would be easy to apply the labels of elaborated and restricted code to these two forms. However, they argue that this would be to fail to recognize that each style is highly dependent upon interpretive frames that are generated by their specific and material life conditions. Furthermore, they claim that neither group seems able to reflect consistently or critically about society; neither group, in other words, seems able to generate the kind of reflexivity for which Bernstein sees potential in elaborated codes.¹³

Put another way, Bernstein’s suggestion that “a university is a place organized around talk” is stunningly asociological in its apparent ignoring of the structures of social relations that enable meaning to be attributed to university talk as discourses and as strategies in the establishing, maintenance and dismantling of the alliances and oppositions that constitute these relations.¹⁴ As Pierre Bourdieu (1991) has argued, the power of language comes from outside of it and Bernstein was handed the authorizing skeptron of an academic chair rather early in his career.¹⁵

Nevertheless, as I have said, the kind of distinction that Bernstein is catching at in his elaborated/restricted code schema is potentially of great importance. In the latter part of his career he generated a related form of analysis that was concerned with the modality of practices or what by this time he was referring to as “discourse” (Bernstein, 1999).¹⁶ I do not have the space to describe this work in detail and will confine myself to a brief critical reflection on certain key elements. Bernstein first makes a distinction between “vertical” and “horizontal” discourses:

Briefly, a vertical discourse takes the form of a coherent, explicit, and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organized, as in the sciences, or it takes the form of a series of specialized languages with specific modes of interrogation and specialized criteria for the production and circulation of texts, as in the social sciences and humanities. (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159)





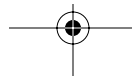
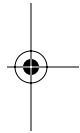
A horizontal discourse entails a set of strategies, which are local, segmentally organized, context specific and dependent, for maximizing encounters with persons and habitats. (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159)

The resonance with elaborated and restricted codes is apparent. As is the case with the earlier work, there is also a clear (but not always explicit) reference to class in terms of intellectual and manual labor. Here, the analogue of “elaborated code”—vertical discourse—has two modes which are indicated in the first of the extracts above and which are subsequently referred to as hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures. Whilst there are some difficulties with the analysis, the potential for linking cultural difference to schooling is clear. For example, Gemma Moss describes the temporal segmentalizing of children’s “informal literacies” relating to their engagement with media texts. Referring to texts such as *Home and Away*, and *World Wrestling Federation*, Moss reports that:

At particular moments, particular texts or genres become the object of intense social interest and activity for particular groups of readers. Readership networks form and reform around them, in the sites the research documented, for different lengths of time and involving different, often shifting portions of the potential audience. As part of this process, the competencies required of the text’s readers are established and (temporarily) maintained. Informal literacies therefore arise precisely where there is a social necessity for display of expertise or familiarity. With the demise of the context for such a display, the competencies go, too. (Moss, 2000, p. 51)

Attempts within media studies to recruit such horizontal discourses into formal school settings which privilege vertical discourses would tend to privilege middle class children who, in Moss’s research, recognized the hierarchical nature of the curriculum and measured themselves against it as opposed to the working class children who “[i]n making judgments about particular texts ... were much more likely to react simply in terms of their own immediate preferences.” (Moss, 2000, p. 60) This finding is also consistent with that of James Gee et al referred to earlier.

Bernstein is at his most productive when pointing to key points of differentiation that might and indeed has motivated and enlightened empirical research. Unfortunately, he has tended in much of his own writing to push forward with theoretically driven analysis to the point at which he is making essentially empirical claims but without anything that will stand as substantive empirical evidence. A clear case in point is his “analysis” of vertical discourse. There are a number of difficulties with the result and I shall here restrict myself to just one question: in describing the sciences as hierarchical knowledge structures and the social sciences as horizontal knowledge structures, precisely what is Bernstein pointing at, where does the



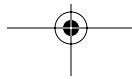


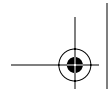
hierarchy or horizontality reside? Is it in the day-to-day working practices of practitioners, or in the structure of learned journals, in the lexicon of specialized terms, in the activities of research funding agencies, in models of apprenticeship of new practitioners? I could continue. Having some experience of higher education in both the natural and social sciences, my suspicion is that any discipline will exhibit variations in terms of horizontality and hierarchizing as we shift attention between these and other contexts.¹⁷

In my own work I make use of a concept that I have explicitly associated with the elaborated/restricted code schema and which clearly resonates with vertical and horizontal discourse. The distinction is that my concept refers to strategic action rather than to some postulated essential characteristic of knowledge. I have, in the past, used an anecdote from Mike Cooley's research (as far as I know, not imaginary) to illustrate the concept and I shall repeat this here.

At one aircraft company they engaged a team of four mathematicians, all of PhD level, to attempt to define in a programme a method of drawing the afterburner of a large jet engine. This was an extremely complex shape, which they attempted to define by using Coon's Patch Surface Definitions. They spent some two years dealing with this problem and could not find a satisfactory solution. When, however, they went to the experimental workshop of the aircraft factory, they found that a skilled sheet metal worker, together with a draughtsman had actually succeeded in drawing and making one of these. One of the mathematicians observed: "They may have succeeded in making it but they didn't understand how they did it" (Cooley, 1985, p. 171).

The mathematician is deploying a strategy that is privileging a mode of practice that maximizes the availability of its principles of generation within discourse over a mode that generates serial—or, perhaps, segmental—instances. What is being achieved, here, is a territorialization of intellectual as distinct from manual labour. I refer to this strategic action—or, rather, the action implied in privileging principled "understanding"—as an action of "high discursive saturation" (DS^+). Opposing this are actions of "low discursive saturation" (DS^-). I have earlier noted that my analysis of school mathematics textbooks (Dowling, 1996, 1998, 2001a) has revealed a tendency for "lower ability" students to be distributed content that privileges the public domain—that is, practice, such as domestic shopping, that is not specialized to the discipline. It is also the case that textbooks directed at "high ability" students not only privilege the esoteric domain of school mathematics, but they are also dominated by DS^+ generalizing action which makes mathematical principles explicitly available. The discursive saturation of books directed to "low ability" students is weakened not only by the absence of mathematical organizing principles, but also by the



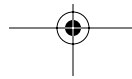
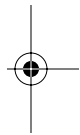


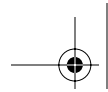
recontextualizing of such principles as algorithms that tend to be high on localizing context-specificity and therefore low on generalizability.

I have found similar differentiation within other kinds of pedagogic text (Dowling & Brown, 2000) and Brown (1999, 2000; see also the brief methodological discussion in Brown & Dowling, 1998) has described the ways in which the working class and middle class parents in his complex and highly original empirical study showed a tendency to deploy, respectively, localising and generalizing strategies in their recontextualizing of school discourse.

In this section I have given particular attention to Bernstein's conceptualizations of speech codes and discourse. In each case they are suggestive of potentially productive lines of research and, indeed, have motivated highly productive research such as that which I have cited. The principal difficulty with his work generally is that it moves too quickly from sharp but often-superficial observation to highly abstract theoretical categories that subsequently become reified as empirical statements. In the case of the speech code theory, whilst there is substantial empirical work that reveals a social class distribution of elaborated and restricted codes, there is no adequate theory of social class that would motivate Bernstein's code definitions. Labov and other sociolinguists use alternative theories of language that are also capable of discriminating between ses groups defined, operationally, in a not dissimilar manner. Bernstein's categories may be more appealing to the sociologist, but they are not, in the final instance, more adequately grounded. Codes are culturally specific, acquired and embodied dispositions that are activated by evoking contexts. The same description could be applied to habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990) or indeed dialect or register, with somewhat different interpretations or emphasis being placed on the term "activated" in each case. The distinction is that habitus, dialect and register present us with arenas for the kind of ethnographic work suggested by the approaches of a number of the authors cited here; code, horizontal and vertical discourse etc present us with a theatrical, laboratorised world. Sociological theory is clearly needed if we are to avoid naïve empiricism. I would propose, however, that such theory should constitute a method of enquiry rather than a collection of substantive statements about the social or the psychological. Some initial steps towards such a theory are offered in Dowling(2001b).

Literacy is clearly an important issue in relation to language, social class and education; I have no space to do it justice. What I shall do, by way of a conclusion to the chapter, is to outline two brief cases pointing at potential transformation and loosely relating, respectively, to the focuses of the first and second sections of this chapter and end with a prediction.





LITERACY AND TRANSFORMATION?

It is doubtless desirable that the poor should be generally instructed in reading, if it were only for the best of purposes—that they may read the Scriptures. As to writing and arithmetic, it may be apprehended that such a degree of knowledge would produce in them a disrelish for the laborious occupations of life. (A “Justice of the Peace” in 1807, quoted by Williams, 1961)

The JP was speaking a little over a hundred years before the publication of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. Another century on and when “reading” now means gaining potential access to all the evils of the internet there are perhaps some who would exclude even this from the education of the “lower orders.” Gunther Kress, though, sees scope for a shift in emphasis from “reading” to “writing”:

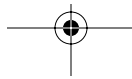
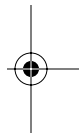
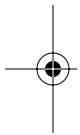
Present theories are theories of competent use in which individuals are sustained and constrained by the force of convention. Apt new theories will be theories of the transformative and innovative action by individuals. (Kress, 1997, p. 48)

Oddly, perhaps, Labov’s phonetic innovators and Bernstein’s maximally-potential transformers of principles are located at opposite poles of their respective sociolinguistic scales, so that the transformation of form and content appears to be initiated in low and high ses groups respectively, although Labov’s phonetic innovations are eventually installed as conventions at the top, whereas Bernstein’s unthinkable seem never to circulate beyond the speakers of elaborated varieties.

Arguably, popular innovation in literacy has been invisible to the school to the extent that the authoring technologies of the school, principally the pen, have been strongly classified—to use Bernstein’s term—from popular authoring technologies, which have been dominated by speech and body hexis. It may well be that this is now changing. I shall give one example.

Japanese is written using Chinese characters—kanji—and two sets of around fifty phonetic symbols—kana—and use is also made of the English alphabet—romaji. You need to know rather more than two thousand kanji in order to be able to cope with a newspaper, but there are fifty thousand plus available altogether. Japanese children spend many years in school learning kanji; they need to acquire recognition principles to be able to read and realization principles to be able to write.

However, the advent of the word-processing software—available not only on computers as such, but also mobile phones that are widely used for texting and email¹⁸—effectively dispenses with the need for realization principles in terms of the production of kanji. Information is input using romaji or kana. The software then converts words into kanji automatically. The





author may, however, decide that they want an alternative kanji; pressing the space bar (or the relevant key on the phone) will bring up a menu of the possible kanji that might be read as the sound that has been input. The menu may run to over a hundred available kanji in some cases.¹⁹ Two results appear to be emerging. Firstly, a reduction in the need for principles of realization of kanji, potentially leading to a situation in which handwriting is dominated by kana and romaji. Secondly, the potential use of a far wider range of kanji in electronically generated writing and the consequent need for an expansion in principles of recognition in reading. It seems at least plausible that this “language change from below”—in the sense of from the popular to the official—will, like Labov’s phonetic innovations, eventually effect a transformation of the curriculum and ramify into official registers. It is, however, highly unlikely to corrode the strength of neither the official/popular classification nor its implications for the stability of socioeconomic inequality.

The second potential for innovation comes from precisely the group identified by Bernstein as most likely to reflect on and produce transformation in knowledge, the academics. The call for a form of critical literacy education that interrogates the social and/or ideological basis of language use is now widespread. Advocates include Norman Fairclough, thus:

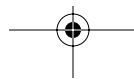
Power relations are relations of struggle ... power is not simply exercised, it is also fought over, and fought over in discourse, and ... the interdiscursive articulation of different genres and discourses is (amongst other things) a strategy of power struggle—a way in which power struggle is internalized in discourse (it is quite differently internalized in material activities) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, pp. 62–63).

We use the term “genre” for the sort of language (and other semiosis) tied to a particular social activity, such as interview; “discourse” for the sort of language used to construct some aspect of reality from a particular perspective, for example the liberal discourse of politics ... (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 63)

But:

There are no definitive lists of genres, discourses, or any of the other categories I have distinguished for analysts to refer to, and no automatic procedures for deciding what genres etc. are operative in a given text. Intertextual analysis is an interpretive art which depends upon the analyst’s judgement and experience (Fairclough, 1995, p. 77)²⁰

The problem, then, is that genre and discourse are used in order to reveal the play of power in texts, yet what constitutes a specific genre or discourse is underwritten only by “the analyst’s judgement and experience”



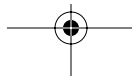
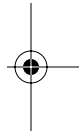


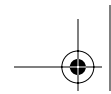
or, put another way, by the academic skeptron of the professorial chair and, incidentally, by the all too frequent installation of the term “dialectic” as an alibi for a lack of theory or evidence.²¹ Ultimately, then, these and, in my estimation, most of the other advocates of critical literacy—including Freire (1996), perhaps the grandfather of the movement—are effecting the transformation of a descriptive theory into a prescriptive literacy.

Of course, these authors might not dispute this conclusion, but merely affirm the righteousness of their own politics. By and large, however, these political games are played out in the academic literature—Fairclough certainly makes no claim to have made his “metalanguage” widely accessible—so that as, perhaps unwittingly, predicted by Bernstein, their discourse remains confined to the university talk. The complexity and sharp definition of Bernstein’s codes and discourses provokes productive opposition as well as alliance. Fairclough would, by means of his own analytic register, install an academic culture populated with people like Cooley’s mathematicians, but whose discourse is saturated with the principles whereby the locations of suffering are to be prescribed. The double bind, furthermore, is that to the extent that the university talk becomes popularized, which is to say, rendered as a public domain recontextualizing of itself, it must lose its potential to apprentice readers to the generative esoteric domain discourse (Dowling, 1998); to deterritorialise is to do precisely that.

Despite being generally of the opinion that the future is inhospitable to both empirically and theoretically oriented research, I promised a prediction. It is certainly the case that public schooling has, throughout its brief existence, been recruited by members of dominant classes in the maintenance and enhancement of their privileged position and the work discussed here has revealed some of the part played by language in this process. It is also the case that it has provided a meritocratic alibi for lower ses entrepreneurs seeking economic asylum in upward social mobility. The school, I have argued elsewhere (Dowling, 2001c), forms part of an ideal middle class career from nursery to postgraduate employment. This is a very extended apprenticeship. Yet as Zygmunt Bauman has described the current situation:

In this world, not only have jobs-for-life disappeared, but trades and professions which have acquired the confusing habit of appearing from nowhere and vanishing without notice can hardly be lived as Weberian “vocations”—and to rub salt into the wound, the demand for the skills needed to practise such professions seldom lasts as long as the time needed to acquire them. Jobs are no longer protected, and most certainly no better than that the stability of places where they are practised; whenever the word “rationalization” is pronounced, one knows for sure that the disappearance of further jobs and places is in the pipeline (Bauman, 1996, pp. 24–25).





It may take a leap of the imagination to envisage a world in which an airline pilot can be trained alongside a subway driver and both may retrain as general medical practitioners in a similar amount of time, but the payoff for fifteen-year apprenticeships is clearly on the wane. Social activity in continuing to constitute oppositions and alliances will ensure that social inequalities will persist—although not necessarily in the form of social classes which are, ultimately, grounded in the family.²² It is also likely that language will continue to be recruited and to be constitutive in this agonism. What is unclear is precisely how long the school can remain open as a participant in all of this. Ultimately, it was through her own forming of strategic alliances that Eliza was installed in her florist's shop;²³ Higgins' schooling—though perhaps not Pickering's economic capital—was merely the discourse of the day.

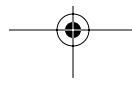
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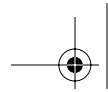
I am grateful to Andrew Brown and Jeff Vass for invaluable discussion and for productive comments on a draft of this paper. I must also record my immense indebtedness to Basil Bernstein who, despite of—perhaps, in no small part, because of—our intellectual differences remains a, now sadly posthumous, mentor.



NOTES

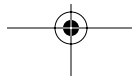
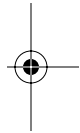
1. The distinction between meaning or content and form of expression is being used only to signal an emphasis and not to establish the essential differentiation which some authors cited in this chapter—Labov, in particular—might tend to maintain.
2. Not everything is positive, though, Trudgill notes, again referring to Giles: “On the other hand, RP speakers scored low on traits like friendliness, companionability and sincerity, and messages couched in RP also proved to be less persuasive than the same messages in local accents. (Notice also that there is a long history in American science-fiction and horror films for sinister, menacing characters to be given RP accents.)” (Trudgill, 2002, p. 176).
3. Tagliamonte & Hudson mention the speedy global diffusion of the lexical collocation, *be like* (“she turns to me and *I'm like* what am I gonna do about it?”), amongst younger people and suggest that this “might be a very good linguistic indicator of the types of developments and changes we might expect from the putative ongoing globalization of English.” (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999, p. 168).
4. Ash & Myhill (cited by Milroy & Milroy, 1992) claim that whilst the speech of African Americans and “whites” having little contact with each other differed markedly, those in each category having considerable contact with the other were very close to each other. It is not clear, however, that this is

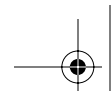




inconsistent with Labov's own findings which concern not a general similarity, but specifically localized varieties associated most closely with the groups of lowest ses.

5. Trudgill (op cit) describes SE as a dialect without an associated accent. Whilst native RP speakers are likely to speak SE, only a very small minority of SE speakers will be native RP speakers.
6. Labov employs a compound index of socioeconomic status consisting of three six-category indices: educational, occupation, and residence value. A single value was assigned to all members of a household.
7. The common occurrence of hyperadaptive forms or hypercorrection (Bourdieu, 1991; Trudgill, 2000) might well be taken as evidence of a lack of socialization of, for example, lower ses speakers into middle class dialects, but it does not obviously challenge the 'competitive' model.
8. Paolillo (2001) reports evidence of a definite relationship between tie strength and linguistic variation in the context of Internet Relay Chat. This would suggest that the nature of the 'speech community' will need to be rethought in the context of contemporary developments in global-level communication; see also note 4 above.
9. Smith (1992) provides an interesting reflection on the speech of Japanese women in positions of authority that clearly problematizes any hard distinction between meaning and mode of expression. Japanese speech is strongly gendered with women tending to make far greater use of "polite" forms than men thus tending to place them in the subordinate position in interactions with men. Smith suggests that this poses potential problems for women in managerial positions. She analysed recorded TV dramas involving women in non-traditional roles and concluded that, rather than adopting masculine forms, senior women handled the situation by "empowering their own speech" (Smith, 1992, p. 79) by, for example, using forms conventionally used by women talking to their children. It is, of course, questionable whether one might reasonably generalise from the speech used in TV dramas to natural speech situations, especially as the evidence suggests that it is interpersonal interaction and not the media that influence linguistic change (see above). This is not necessarily to deny that TV speech might be influenced by popular trends. Note also Cameron's (2000) findings on the tendency towards the imposed feminization of the speech of telephone call centre operators—male and female.
10. See Atkinson's (1985) introduction to Bernstein's sociolinguistics.
11. Collins (2000) also raises the question of the gendering of coding orientations.
12. For example, see Adlam, 1977 and Bernstein (Ed.), 1973 as well as the references in Bernstein's own writing.
13. Cheshire describes differentiation in narratives recounted in peer groups by young teenagers. She concludes that "for the boys the telling was the more salient aspect of a narrative whereas for the girls it was the tale" (Cheshire, 2000, p. 258). Like Gee et al she grounds the differentiation in a social base, in this case in the gendered patterning of peer relations.
14. From his introduction of the categories "classification" and "framing" (Bernstein, 1971b) and his subsequent work on pedagogic discourse (Bern-





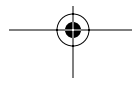
stein, 1986, 1990, 1996) Bernstein certainly addresses the question of power in educational transmission. However, the focus has, by this time, shifted substantially away from sociolinguistics and from my immediate area of concern. I have, elsewhere (Dowling, 1999) produced a critique of some of this work and, in particular, called into question Bernstein's reliance on classification and framing.

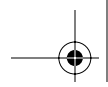
15. Even so, he should have known better as he was a master player of the power game himself. Here is part of one of his footnoted references to me: "[Dowling] shows successfully how the texts constructed for these "ability levels" incorporate, differentially fictional contexts and activities drawn from the Public Domain in the classification and framing of mathematical problems ..." (Bernstein, 1999, p. 170). In my work I have successively rejected and, upon occasion (Dowling, 1999) explicitly critiqued the concept of 'framing'; a fact of which he was certainly aware. Here I am, nevertheless, being installed as a faithful Bernsteinian.
16. An earlier version of this paper appeared in Bernstein, 1996. His use of the term "discourse" in the work is somewhat unorthodox. This term generally demarcates a linguistic territory (though not always, see, for example, Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The reference to tying one's shoelaces or going to the lavatory (his examples) as (horizontal) "discourses" is not, in my view, entirely helpful.
17. It also seems likely that had Bernstein read rather more carefully the item by Latour & Woolgar (1979) that he cites—incorrectly referenced by Bernstein who omits the second author—he might have been somewhat more circumspect in his generalizations about the natural sciences.
18. See Takase (2000) for a more extended discussion of these developments. See also Street (1999) for an interesting case of semiotic innovation in the use of pagers or "beepers" by American youth.
19. The syllable "shi" (し) produces one-hundred-and-sixty-seven alternatives on my Japanese mobile phone.
20. Although this extract is from an earlier text, I can find nothing in the later text that would contradict it nor any principles whereby specific genres are to be identified.
21. Naturally, neither Marx nor Hegel—for both of whom the concept was productively theorized—are to be indicted by this.
22. See Haraway (1991) for an alternative vision of politics in the postmodern.
23. See Shaw's sequel to the play available as above.



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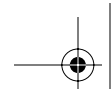
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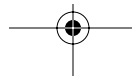
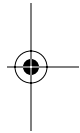


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