CITIZENSHIP, EDUCATION AND POSTMODERNITY

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In late 1989 Western leaders lauded the political changes in East Germany as a vindication of the democratic principles of liberty and parliamentary government, while the televised placard of a Stuttgart demonstrator ironically proclaimed 'Deutschmark uber alles'. In the subsequent reunification, the chief benefits seemed to the television producers at least to be access to the department stores of Berlin. Has the value of democracy come to lie in consumerism?

In asserting the need for citizenship education, the British Education Secretary lamented the destructive influences of present society on young people resulting from the availability of drugs and the 'more lurid aspects of the media', observing that 'Young people are nowadays subject to greater negative influences and pressures than perhaps at any other time in our recent history'. (McGregor, 1990) Is this merely alarmist prediction justifying political policy, or does it correctly identify a social crisis?

In the 1988 US Presidential election only half of those eligible cast a vote, so that President Bush gained office with the votes of only 26% of Americans. Seventy million had not even registered. A similar trend to lower voting proportions has been observed across Western Europe. (Heater, 1990, p. 289) Is the legitimacy of representative government under threat?

Events such as these are increasingly cited as evidence of important new developments in the political culture of the Western world. While crisis rhetoric always warrants a degree of scepticism, the events described above are representative enough to justify further consideration. They point to trends in consumerism, mass culture and a decline of traditional institutions which are said to herald a major cultural reorientation, the end of an era from modern to postmodern society.

This paper explores these so-called postmodern developments and their significance in a range of social and cultural spheres, and specifically in politics, for if such a major reorientation is underway, important questions are raised about how educational agencies should respond. In no area of education are the implications greater, or, to some, more threatening, than in political education and its currently popular focus on the idea of citizenship and citizenship education.

A Postmodern Society

The disparate elements of contemporary cultural change have been given a range of labels. Gibbins (1989) cites postindustrialism, postmaterialism, postFordism, disorganised capitalism, and the information society as pointers
to aspects of the changes in question, but their cultural elements have come to be known as postmodernism, a term Gibbins calls a 'macrotheoretical paradigm'. (p. 14). Hassan (1985, p. 119) describes it as 'a number of related cultural tendencies, a constellation of values, a repertoire of procedures and attitudes'. Huyssen (1986, p. 181) refers to 'a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices, and discourse formations which distinguishes a postmodern set of assumptions, experiences, and propositions from that of a preceding period'. For Jameson (1984, p.17), it is 'a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm'. But just what is this phenomenon? What are the features of the postmodern?

Among the most conspicuous manifestations of the postmodernist tendency are those of architecture, where it is characterised by 'fiction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos'. (Harvey, 1989, p. 98) Modernist architecture in the international style is rejected as elitist and authoritarian in its formalism, and is held responsible for the destruction of the neighbourhood culture of the traditional city. (Jameson, 1984). In contrast, the postmodernist style is populist, trading in nostalgic allusion, sentimentality, and the willing adoption of the signs of mass consumer culture. Venturi, an author of one statement of the postmodernist architectural position significantly entitled Learning from Las Vegas (Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour, 1972), has lauded the style of Disneyland as being nearer to what people want than what architects have generally given them. (Harvey, 1989, p. 60)

This rejection of the values by which high culture has been thought superior to mass culture is part of the more general move in postmodernist art. Jameson's assessment is contemptuous:

The postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and science-fiction of fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply 'quote', as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance. (Jameson, 1984, p. 51)

Such negative views are not however universally agreed. Other commentators see in the acceptance of mass cultural forms not a submission to barbarism, but a critique of the forms themselves that is at once celebratory and ironic. For Hutcheon, the postmodernist style 'takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement' (Hutcheon, 1989. p. 1) which works to de-naturalise general conventions and specific forms of representation by 'using and ironically abusing them'. (p. 8) We should at least initially resist the temptation to dismiss postmodernism as mindless conformism and lack of taste; to do so would be to assume just that superior judgmental authority which postmodernism questions.

However, art and architecture are unlikely candidates as major influences on politics and education. Their importance lies in their early and relatively conspicuous manifestation of trends which have parallels in other social spheres of more conventional significance. Four will be discussed here: the diffusion of information, the production of knowledge, the sense of identity, and the nature of politics itself.

The information revolution is among the most pervasive forms of social change experienced by the present generation. Luke and White (1985) trace its most rapid rise in the US from the mid-1950s, with particularly rapid growth in education, computerization, technical services and mass media. By the mid-
1970s information workers (including computer manufacturing, telecommunications, mass media, advertising, publishing, accounting) comprised more than half the US workforce. Similar growth has been shown world wide, including Australia. (Lamberton, 1990)

The impact of this growth is evident in every aspect of life, typified by the effect of computerisation and its incorporation of hitherto distinctive activities in a common process and form.

Working in a factory, playing with one's children, planning one's leisure activities, following developments in macro-economics, creating works of musical or pictorial art... all these diverse activities are now capable of being carried out with the same methods of operation, by following the same logical processes, by making use of the same sort of abstract coding. (Chesnaux, 1987, p. 27)

The characteristic organizational form of this process is a flatter, less hierarchical though not necessarily less centralized structure, and less formal systems of control; fragmentation, decentralization, and proliferating networks are its modus operandi. These developments in information processing create new possibilities and problems in the fields of privacy, control, organisational structure, surveillance, and planning. These are 'the organizing concepts of a post-modern administrative control apparatus, a social practice in a society that is semiotic at the cultural-consumption level, informational-production level, and at the communicative regulative or power level'. (Wexler, 1987, p. 157) With such clear political potential, no notion of education for citizenship could ignore them.

Not only have the means of knowledge production and dissemination changed: so also, it is argued, have the forms and criteria of knowledge itself. Postmodernism is seen as having an epistemological effect of profound importance for the way in which knowledge is implicated in society. Callinicos counts French poststructuralism as one of the intellectual trends which defines postmodernism, citing Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze as sharing a project of 'subverting the notions of truth, meaning and subjectivity held to be the defining features of Western metaphysics'. (Callinicos, 1990, p. 100) But it is the work of Lyotard which is most often taken as the clearest statement of postmodernist approaches to knowledge.

In his study The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge Lyotard (1984) argues that the twentieth century has seen the 'game rules' of science, literature and the arts transformed, such that their epistemological foundations in a unified metaphysics become obsolete. In Lyotard's view, modern thought since the enlightenment has legitimated itself in terms of 'metanarratives' such as 'the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth'. (p. xxiii) These grand narratives have sought to ground knowledge in some fundamental unity; scientific knowledge was most powerful when it connected into a single explanatory system the disparate discourses of our experience of the world. If, as Lyotard argues, these discourses are seen as finite, locally determined language games, each with specific pragmatic criteria of appropriateness or valency, then combining them into a unified whole becomes an impossible dream. 'The decision makers, however, attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their elements are commensurable and that the whole is determinable'. (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv)

In the case of the major social narrative of democracy, this totalizing logic lies in placing 'humanity as the hero of liberty' in the position of the main protagonist, the subject of history, a concept which constructs a legitimating
consensus among 'the people'. However, the 'people' is a term in a metanarrative which subverts the democratic ideal, a self-defeating contradiction in that it obliterates the reality of division and difference which is the dynamic of the events being described. Lyotard's example comes from education, where 'The State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the "people", under the name of the "nation", in order to point them down the path of progress'. (p. 32) For Lyotard, the dangerous search for the grand narrative has failed, and the world is turning to alternatives. Postmodernism, which he defines as 'incredulity to metanarratives' (p. xxiv), sets the criteria which a revised knowledge must meet.

If life is increasingly characterized by a pervasive informationalism, with its universalising but fragmenting organisational forms, and by views of knowledge which dissolve history's grand narratives, what are the consequences for the personal experience of the everyday world? Harvey (1989, p. 53) sees the validity of the concept of postmodernism as depending on 'a particular way of experiencing, interpreting, and being in the world'. The importance of postmodernity lies not in the objective forms of media, technology, or information, but in how they are appropriated into new modes of experience and expression that they shape identity.

For postmodernism, fragmentation and instability of discourses is mirrored in personality, and schizophrenia displaces alienation as the analytical metaphor. Jameson points out that if personal identity is found in the 'unification of the past and future with the present before me', and if this unification requires a consensual narrative and stability of meaning, then it is impossible in a postmodern world: like the schizophrenic, we are 'reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time'. (Jameson, 1984, 72) Harvey (1989, p.54) concludes 'The immediacy of events, the sensationalism of the spectacle (political, scientific, military, as well as those of entertainment), become the stuff of which consciousness is forged'.

The significance of this lies in its threat to the possibilities of a discourse of morality and concerted political action, for both require some recognition of common interests and values derived from shared past experience, as well as a desirable future sufficiently general as to have a broad appeal.

With the development of mass consumption and mass systems of information, social styles and cultural practices become mixed into an indefinite medley of tastes and outlooks. With this fragmentation of culture there also goes a fragmentation of sensibilities, a mixing of lifestyles and the erosion of any sense of a cogent political project or coherent political programme, as the lives of individuals become increasingly merely a collection of discontinuous happenings. (Turner, 1989, p. 212)

The moral response to these circumstances will vary. Some commentators point to potential nihilism on the grounds that 'a coherent system of values ... presupposes a relatively coherent community as the underlying social fabric of moral systems and ethical arguments', observing that contemporary society lacks the necessary 'underlying communal reality of values'. (Stauth and Turner, 1988, p. 509) Others see narcissism as the typical outcome, where 'image systems, value codes, knowledge bases, and information networks' ground an inner directed consumption focussed on 'personal fulfillment, physical fitness, self-actualization, and spiritual awakening'. (Luke and White, 1985, p. 35)

However, these negative assessments are countered by others. For there are positive possibilities in the differentiation and proliferation of contacts and experience flowing from the diversification of social worlds which constitute
the postmodern experience. Hall (1989, p. 129) notes that each of these worlds has 'its own codes of behaviour, its "scenes" and "economies", and ... "pleasures"', and for those who have access to them they do provide space in which to assert some choice and control over everyday life, and 'to "play" with its more expressive dimensions. This "pluralisation" of social life expands the positionalities and identities available to ordinary people (at least in the industrialised world) in their everyday working, social, familial and sexual lives'.

Information, knowledge and identity are concepts at the heart of politics, and the changes reviewed are pervasively political. As a result, a list of the characteristics of postmodern political culture reads like a summary of the above discussion (Gibbins, 1989):

˘ an affluent 'postmaterialist' middle class has created new alliances around environmental, peace and feminist issues, and new forms of political expression in symbolic and life style politics;

˘ the problematic of postmodernism is how order, meaning, legitimacy and morality can exist once absolutism, objectivity, certainty, commensurability, unity and the integrated self are deconstructed, and replaced by relativity, pluralism, fragmentation and polyculturalism;

˘ postmodernism signifies discontinuity among economy, society and polity; an information and consumer economy coincides with heightened conflict between public and private spheres, growing distrust of government, and realignments of party and class allegiances;

˘ an eclectic and amorphous culture of plurality and mixed lifestyles is combined with an emphasis on leisure and consumption, and freedom, spontaneity and gratification take precedence over discipline, authority and predictability;

˘ postmodernism points to the absence of unity and identity in contemporary culture, and to fragmentation and centrifugal changes in attitudes and beliefs;

˘ the emerging character of contemporary political culture is pluralistic, anarchic, disorganised, rhetorical, stylized, and ironic.

Gibbins warns that this construction can be exaggerated, but there are signs that the trend is to

a world full of 'designer cultures' created for the needs of groups, presented by media persons, film and pop stars, advertisers, sportsmen, evangelists and millionaires, to fill the cultural void left by the collapse of cultural traditions. Political culture in a postmodern world may become more like a script and less an inherited narrative for life. Irrespective of ideological and party allegiances, the politics of postmaterialism and postmodernism have and will intrude into and shape political behaviour and institutions in the contemporary world. (Gibbins, 1989, p. 24)

The educational significance of these developments is clear: to the extent that postmodernism challenges conventional assumptions about knowledge, morality, subjectivity, it raises fundamental questions about essential elements of modern educational thought. Mass education in its recent forms has been a modernist project par excellence, with its stress on rationality, individual autonomy and the unified self, national histories, hierarchical organisation, and progress; the challenge of the postmodernist perspective to this view of education is increasingly voiced. (Giroux, 1990; Luke and Luke,
The postmodernist move is also educationally significant in that there is a generational element to the debate. Curriculum problems in particular can be seen as the struggle by an adult establishment, whether intellectual, political or moral, to impose a coherent world view on the young. The rejection of education by many youth has concerned educators on all sides the technocrats because of its dysfunctionality, the left because of doubts that it can be read as resistance based on a viable critical alternative. A feature of postmodernist styles is that they are the styles of life of the young: cinema, television, MTV, fashion, rock music, dance cultural forms which are the expressive channels of a generation. Educators ignore this life world at their peril.

Citizenship and Education

Education for citizenship raises these issues in important ways, for while recent analyses of citizenship question its coherence and unity, the conventional concept of citizenship in educational discussion is a soft target for a postmodernist critique. Barbalet (1988) points out that the existence of civil, political and social elements to citizenship has created logical tensions and social conflicts in the concept's application, as when the civil rights of property and contract, rights against the state, conflict with the social rights to state guaranteed minimum standards of living and interventions like consumer protection. Turner also argues that citizenship is in a contingent and contradictory relationship with its capitalist context, and that consequently there can be no assumptions of a 'historical logic or unfolding process' in its past or future. (Turner, 1986, p. 64)

However, educational uses of the idea of citizenship have told a different story, emphasizing the progressive rise of democratic institutions based on a rational acceptance of the contractual relationship between the individual and the nation. This version of the citizenship narrative has been identified in many studies of educational policy and the curriculum (Ahier, 1988; Gilbert, 1984; Heater, 1990; Tapper and Salter, 1978), and is still a powerful argument in attempts to promote citizenship education. The illustration to be discussed here is Heater's major recent study, which, while recognising the contingent and conflictual in the development of citizenship, still locates the concept in a timeless, transcendent and idealist world.

To Heater, 'citizens' need to understand that their role entails status, loyalty, duties and rights 'not primarily in relation to another human being, but in relation to an abstract concept, the state'. (Heater, 1990, p. 2) He carefully traces the idea and practice of citizenship from its origins in the Greek city state through its manifestations in the age of revolutions, nineteenth century nationalism, liberalism and socialism, to its consolidation in the modern nation state. This grand narrative, notwithstanding its diverse episodes and tenuous continuity, is held together by the abstract essentialism of the idea of citizenship, a concept whose power derives from 'identity and virtue'. (p.182)

Identity is based on social reciprocity and common interests, which may themselves be based on a sense of tradition, ethnicity or way of life, and heightened by systems of beliefs, ceremonies and symbols. Citizenship is one amongst many identities an individual will feel, but it is distinguished by being necessary for moral maturity, and by its potential to moderate the divisiveness of other identity feelings f gender, religion, race, class and nation: 'the attitudes and behaviour expected of citizens involves (sic) the disciplining of emotions by rationality ... citizenship helps to tame the divisive passions of other identities'. (Heater, 1990, p. 184) The concept is
rescued from diversity by being given a privileged status on the grounds of its contribution to morality and order, though where this priority comes from is not made clear.

History, along with nationality and fraternity, plays a special role in citizenship identity: as a repository of facts about the past and a provider of myths, history is 'a society's collective memory'. (p. 184) Equally, the cultural togetherness of nationality and the collaborative sense of purpose in fraternity bind people to a common identity.

However, Heater acknowledges that this commonness is threatened and that 'what universality the concept might have had is being rapidly weakened by a series of tensions. Incompatible pairs of definitions are each displaying some increase in power. As they tug towards their opposite poles, so any hope of salvaging, let alone strengthening the concept as a whole, seems to fade into unreality'. (p. 283) The trends Heater identifies are the division between an emphasis on individual freedom and social duties and obligations; the antithesis between the private and the public citizen; the difficulties of incorporating a complex society into a coherent relationship with a unitary polity; and the conflicting demands of state and world citizenship. (p. 284)

The consequences of these tensions in the United Kingdom are the decline of the Butskellite consensus, continuing ethnic division, a collapse of civic morality, the trend to market solutions rather than political means of reconciling differences, and the New Right rejection of the very concept of social citizenship. Heater laments these developments, as his analysis clearly springs from a strong commitment to the idea of citizenship as a means to human dignity. His progressivist reading of history leads him to retain a belief in the ideal, and to seek a response to its decline.

In his view, to rescue citizenship we need to liberate ourselves from the 'obsession' of the nation-state, for just as nationalism emerged as social and demographic mobility made local loyalty seem obsolete, similar trends now threaten nationalism itself. We have seen 'so much more mobility, communication and education as to render identity entirely determined by the nation-state similarly obsolete'. (Heater, 1990, p. 323) Heater's response is to continue to posit identity and virtue as the essence of citizenship, but to apply them at various geographical levels, from the local through the national and continental to the world, to acknowledge the tension in the nation state and its challenge from both local and cosmopolitan tendencies. This will be achieved through the transfer of national powers to provincial and supranational organisations, both governmental and non-governmental.

While such a move seems ambitious in the present context of national power, it retains the conventional view of the nature of citizenship itself. The privileged position granted to citizenship over other identities remains, but this is to be attached to multi-layered loyalties, which must themselves be combined. 'The truly good citizen, then, is he who perceives this sense of multiple identity most lucidly and who strives most ardently in his public life to achieve the closest concordance possible between the policies and goals of the several civic levels of which he is a member'. (Heater, 1990, p. 326)

Heater then, while acknowledging that a changing context has made traditional forms of citizenship obsolete, can find no alternative but to return to the same concept at a higher level, a more abstract, totalising ideal than the one it replaced. His commitment to the ideal can be sustained only by repairing it in even more transcendental form. In the context of postmodernity, Heater's reprieve for abstract citizenship fails, for it is grounded in the same ideals which the postmodernist critique undermines – a unified subjectivity which finds itself in a grand narrative of history and which is lived through a
hierarchical organizational form.

If Heater's optimistic analysis offers no new solutions, it does at least suggest a response. Other explorations of citizenship in the postmodern age are less sanguine, an important example being Wexler's recent assessment, which, while raising similar aspects of the challenge to citizenship, among others, sees their impact to be much more fundamentally damaging, and the prospects of recovering traditional forms of identity and virtue to be bleak.

For Wexler, the threats to citizenship arise in a consumerism of the image, and in the loss of individual moral autonomy in the face of the media's fragmented rendition of the world. Baudrillard's work (Poster, 1988) is an important source of this analysis. Baudrillard points to the increasing dominance of consumption over production in the everyday life of the West, and the role of advertising and the media, especially television, in constituting consumer objects as a system of signs, in which people find meaning and an illusory sense of self-determination in the act of consumption.

In relating such views to production and consumption, Wexler argues that commodification and communication have produced a situation where goods are valued for what they mean as much as for what they 'are' or what they are 'used' for. Advertising and product image themselves become goods consumed for their own sake and are no longer simply representations of 'real' products. This means that signs and codes become part of the fundamental dynamic of society, with the result that 'Citizenship is like being a fan, who votes favorably for media products by purchasing them, extolling their virtues, or wearing their iconic packaging on one's bill cap or tee shirt.' (Wexler quoting Luke (1986-7, p. 72)

The decline in postmodernist culture of independent universal standards of judgment deprives the individual of autonomy by dissolving the ground for a unified self. As there is no longer an autonomous moral discourse, individuals can no longer centre their actions in a stable morality. Individual identity is decentred, diffused and fragmented. Since societies are equally fragmented, the base for the individual-society contractual relation (on which citizenship has been said to depend), no longer exists. Echoing Jameson (1984), the capacity of the individual mind to locate itself in history is lost.

The mass media and its images, especially television, now construct the network for social relations, but this makes these relations much less stable than before; Wexler quotes Baudrillard's (1983) metaphor of society as 'a random gravitational field, magnetised by the constant circulations and the thousands of tactical combinations which electrify them', and his view that 'the rational sociality of the contract ...gives way to the sociality of contact'. (p. 83).

There is much that is recognisable in this, and Wexler appears to accept the analysis. Telepolitics and news, mass audience soaps, consumerism, the production of demand through the manipulation and consumption of images, increasingly fragmented occupational structures and work patterns - these are conspicuous and inescapable features of the information and consumer societies.

But Wexler believes the postmodernist analysis overlooks important concomitants of the developments it portrays. In particular, Wexler takes up the implications of the semiotic society for individual identity, since 'identity dynamics, like knowledge, are different in the semiotic society', and if citizenship is to survive as a meaningful term, 'it will have to be recreated within this new social, class, and psychological reality'. (p. 171)

In the absence of collective memory of traditions, in conditions of simultaneous demand for orderly, serial practice f the administered world of
modern corporatism and flexible response to destabilizing sign circulation, the burden of identity labor falls toward the personal, narrative construction of a fictitious self order. Socialization is desocialized, deregulated, and like the more visible institutional apparatuses of the phase of industrial welfarism in decline, self-constructive practices are reprivatized. (Wexler, 1990, p. 172)

The 'reality' is that the fragmentation of the self has different consequences depending on whether one is located in the first class of the new middle class, or the 'other' (under) class. Neither class is motivated by a desire to act (or to be a 'class for itself'), and neither has any longer a collective memory of traditions. However, in terms of identity dynamics, the first class is engaged in identity bolstering by drawing cultural resources from the environment to construct an orderly life. The cultural capital of the first class becomes a source of power for their dealings with the semiotic society. They use the communicative artifacts of television, but as the first class are cultural creators and rationalisers, these resources are put to service, and do not dominate - 'television is not its first life'. (p. 172)

The other class however finds in television an imaginary solidarity. The ego of this class draws its strength from being bound with the commodified family of television's stars, living out Gibbins' scenario mentioned earlier. While television is soporific in its effect on instrumental thought and collective memory, it also generates through its 'fractured juxtapositions' a stimulating image-energy. 'The other class gives its attention in exchange for solidarity, while the first class collects and rationalizes communicative artifacts in narrative self-reconstruction' (Wexler, 1990, p. 173) In neither case is there the base for solidary citizen action.

This discussion may be overstated in the significance it attributes to television; its reliance on a speculative psycho-analytic argument is unclear; and Wexler does not adequately consider the mass audience's appropriating responses to and use of television. However, in raising the effect of the semiotic society on class dynamics and identity, Wexler raises a crucial point for citizenship and the polity. The decline of class politics and shifting party allegiances are accelerated in such a context, and the prospects for local community identity decline. The serial and undifferentiated representation of events across local, national and global spheres weakens the chance of loyalty to any of them.

Wexler then takes up the implications of his thesis for the idea of citizenship, implications which lie chiefly in the need to develop a 'social psychology of identity work' as the framework within which a new phase of citizenship might develop. However, while for Wexler the women's movement offers some encouraging example, he is not optimistic about the more general prospect, since it is not clear how collective identities can be constructed in the face of class division and the different positions of the two classes with respect to the means of production of or participation in the semiotic society.

While calling for a new form of citizenship based on collective identity appropriate to the new circumstances, Wexler stops short of any concrete recommendation for educational policy. Instead, he warns that in the semiotic society the very idea of citizenship can easily be coopted into the superficial and diffused network of relations of contact, rather than the identity that might result from the solidarity of contract. His conclusion is a pessimistic assessment of the chances.

Citizenship, education and postmodernity

The positions of Heater and Wexler are nicely balanced in their responses to
the postmodern challenge: the one seeking a return to an expanded application of the classical idea; the other convinced of the need for some new basis for citizenship which is as yet unclear. Neither view offers a way ahead.

Heater argues that changes in contemporary society are threatening the basis of citizenship, but sees the possibility of repair in a reinstatement of the principles he identifies in the history of the concept. However, the postmodernist analysis of these changes posits a more fundamental impact which rules out a recovery of the grand narrative. To return to the arguments of Turner (1986) and Barbalet (1988), what Heater and others wish to suture as a totalizing concept of citizenship with its systemically and chronologically ordered civil, political and social components and a unified moral base, is more accurately seen as a disconnected series of struggles whose outcomes were not predetermined by some morally logical inevitability, but which were contingent upon changing power balances among varying protagonists in different sites at different times. This progressivist view of history has figured strongly in the school curriculum, but it is untenable. (Gilbert, 1984) There is simply no evidence that the rights won in these struggles depended on the continuous development of abstract ideals of national identity and virtue with which modern intellectuals seek to cement the narrative (which is not to suggest that the narrative was not used as one weapon in these struggles).

From this perspective, the fragmentation of the postmodern perspective will seem less of a threat to the democratic rights of citizenship, since these rights are no longer based on such unified conceptions of the elements in the individual-society relation. Heater’s fears of the loss of these ideas are therefore overdrawn. However, to see citizenship rights as contingent is also to acknowledge their frailty. New forms of repression arise, as in the totalitarian potential of the information society. There are no guarantees in such a situation, and if Wexler’s pessimistic scenario is correct, the fears return that the postmodern condition will not be concerned or able to sustain even those rights already won. Here the problem is not one of the fact of diversity and fragmentation, but the nature of it. Is the semiotic society so narcotizing and fragmenting that people will cease to recognise established rights or the possibility of new ones?

The answer to this question will depend on which of a variety of responses one adopts with respect to the postmodernist position. One such response is that the protagonists of postmodernism exaggerate its novelty in their choice of issues and exemplars, and that what they have omitted has a different set of implications. For instance, the postmodernists overlook the institutionalisation of the semiotic society’s practices and therefore exaggerate their differences from more conventional analyses of power. An example is the analysis of television, on which Wexler (p. 169) quotes Kroker and Cook (1986, p. 270)

Our general theorisation is, therefore, that TV is the real world of postmodern culture which has entertainment as its ideology, the spectacle as the emblematic sign of the commodity-form, life-style advertising as its popular psychology, pure, empty seriarity as the bond which unites the simulacrum of the audience, electronic images as its most dynamic, and only, form of social cohesion, elite politics as its ideological formula, the buying and selling of abstracted attention as the locus of its marketplace rationale, cynicism as its dominant cultural sign, and the diffusion of a network of relational power as its real product.

Living through television fragments and displaces the real; experience is diffused by the seriality and lack of differentiation in the representation of the world as images. However, the passage also shows that television is a powerful institution which is both centralised and centralising, and is a far
cry from being a 'random field'. One consequence of this is that the medium is not beyond control, and can be, as it is in many countries, subject to legal and legislative constraint and development. In this respect it becomes a matter for conventional political activity.

Associated with this is the postmodernist tendency to read off changed social relations from new cultural conditions, ignoring the specificity of the social and its development in particular contexts and institutions, many of which show few signs of casting off their modernist forms (school, property, the law). The celebration of change and novelty ignores the persistence of language, ethnic and other traditional ties on which solidarity can be sustained and developed, not least through ethnic and other minority media channels. The focus on the information society is very much a first world and middle class focus, and needs to be balanced by recognition that, at least for the present, large sections of the world's peoples remain dominated by modern industrial social formations, and continue to draw inspiration from longstanding cultural traditions.

Further, it has yet to be demonstrated that new forms of political activity will replace the old. For instance, while the green and women's movements have made significant impacts on Western societies through community based activism, they have also worked quite conventionally through parliamentary institutions, and might well be content to do so if more responsive electoral systems could be established in the two party states. While telepolitics have undoubtedly changed the political process, elements such as the party and electoral systems, the bureaucracy, and corporate government are still central to it. In this sense therefore conventional approaches to politics and political action remain important. There are sufficient instances of continuity in political, social and economic relations to show that the postmodern world is not as new as some would suggest.

A second response to the threat of postmodernism would argue that postmodernism itself contains contradictions which are both oppressive in their distracting fragmentation, but also democratic in their deconstruction of hierarchical institutional forms, the penetration of the elite/popular cultural distinction, and in the critique of convention emanating from the self-parodic style. Wexler does not consider the argument that the postmodernist style can be critical in its self-ironizing, antihierarchical and deconstructing tendencies. Yet popular television and film are in themselves no less contradictory and open to subversion than other forms, and while there may be few examples of these forms having eschewed realist narrative and transparent conventions of representation (Hutcheon, 1989), the potential exists.

Readings of popular texts informed by a postmodernist perspective, such as Morris' (1988) discussion of Crocodile Dundee, show the polysemous and potentially parodic significance of the self-ironizing style, in this case challenging dominant and prejudicial images of Aborigines and the working class. On the other hand, the economic pressures of commercial cinema ensure that on other issues, such as land rights and nuclear arms, and on balance the film as a whole, meaning is structured so as to confirm an American culture and a capitalist interest. In this respect again, the postmodern medium shows itself to be another site of contradiction and struggle, where the economic power of world capitalism and its dominant culture ultimately determine the balance.

Elsewhere, Luke and White (1985) point out that phenomena such as computerization and cable television can be used to facilitate the establishment of decentralized, democratic communities. While in conventional capitalist societies forms of ownership and control will restrict this
development, it cannot be ruled out as a possibility for some. The postmodern world is not and can never be a pure form, and the control of the production of the images of the semiotic society are as much a part of the struggle for power as are other forms of power.

The point here is that the more extreme versions of the postmodern scenario gloss over competing tendencies and neglect its own contradictions; political action and citizenship are still necessary parts of this world. However, Wexler's pessimism cannot easily be dismissed, and any attempt to specify an effective education for citizenship must respond to Wexler's depiction of the semiotic society, for while it may not be an unambiguous fait accompli it is an increasing possibility.

Given the argument above about the means by which modern civil, political and social rights have been achieved, there can be no single response which will be effective for all. Rather than seek a common symbol of local, national or world community as an embodiment of virtue, the focus must be on rights as entitlements, the most concrete and experiential manifestation of the achievements of past struggles. These entitlements will include civil and political rights, but also the social rights of material standards of living, which become central needs in the consumer society. Since improving material welfare is a political project, civil and political rights are necessary, a combination clearly illustrated in the opening anecdote of East German resistance.

In the absence of evidence that the consumer society has led to a restriction of these rights, we should not exaggerate the negative effects of consumerism on citizenship. Material consumption must be reduced for reasons of global justice and environment, but consumerism in itself is not a threat to citizenship, as the politics of consumer pressure groups and protection demonstrate. The experience of poverty can be barbarizing but it will also generate more positive forms of discontent if alternatives are known. Here the media collage of world experience has a radical potential in disseminating knowledge of alternatives and entitlements elsewhere, a most potent force in recent events in Eastern Europe.

On balance, the reality of contemporary citizenship is contingent on other power relationships played out in class, race, gender and international politics. We cannot rely on grand historical narratives to unite these discourses, but can take some heart from the fact that citizenship once experienced will not be lightly foregone, and new rights which are seen to exist elsewhere can become benchmarks for evaluating the present. Neither of these points requires a grand narrative to be understood, nor do they need an identity beyond that of the recognition of shared humanity. There is nothing in the form of the semiotic society that makes this process impossible.

In other words, the continuance of citizenship rights rests on the continuing struggle for control over power in the semiotic society. Since much of this power is increasingly symbolic, a new arena is opened up for political struggle. From mass uprisings in Rumania to local environmental conflicts in capitalist states, resistance movements have shown themselves capable of operating in this arena. Culture then becomes both a site and a means of political struggle. While the political cannot be reduced to the cultural, political struggle over the means and substance of cultural expression is crucial to power relations. Feminist politics is a powerful demonstration of this, in which the struggle of women 'over the gendered meanings, representations, and ideologies in popular cultural forms is nothing less than a struggle to understand and hopefully transform the historical contradictions of becoming feminine within the contexts of conflicting sets of power relations'. (Roman, Christian-Smith and Ellsworth, 1988, p. 4)
As mentioned earlier, the political importance of the cultural lies in its increasing dominance as the mode of existence in the semiotic society, but for educators it also has a special significance for the clients of schooling: the cultural sphere is the sphere of the young. For instance, Willis argues that what organization and protest has been generated by youth has drawn from 'an enormous reservoir of informal passion and energy and a sensuous hunger for access to and control of usable symbolic materials, their means of production and reproduction, as well as cultural assets and spaces necessary for their exercise'. (Willis, 1990, p. 144) The 'proto-communities' that result from the serial and random contacts of popular culture do have the capacity to identify the influences that shape their private powers and those of others, a consciousness of a common culture as an arena of choice and control. 'The possibility of connecting with these, and interconnecting them is the promise of the politics of the future'. (p. 147)

However, if cultural politics is to figure importantly in the idea of citizenship, then its connections with other spheres and their corresponding forms of citizenship must be realized, for rights of access to cultural expression require also the civil, political and social rights of traditional citizenship. However, these in turn cannot be applied separately from particular kinds of economic organisation. Both corporate capitalism and state socialism are too singular, closed and hierarchical to foster such a range of rights. Political action must be applied in the economic sphere as in the past, and participation in economic life should be seen as an important part of citizenship, more so than the traditional focus on parliamentary politics would allow.

While the features of postmodern society will require an extension of the concept of citizenship into the spheres of cultural expression and economic production, this expansion does not need to posit some overarching unity at a higher level. Rather what is needed is a focus on entitlements in the various discourses of everyday life, and while the articulation of these will lead to a transfer of concerns from one to the other, no essential unity is claimed.

A citizenship education which promotes this view of rights would not be distracted by national symbols of flag or parliament, but would focus on concrete principles of rights and the practices of political action. It would not succumb to self-interested political calls for loyalty to the symbols of hierarchical economic or political power, nor to the abstract ideals of a past golden age, however well intentioned. Both these options would require that the pleasures and stimulations of postmodern society be sacrificed in deference to someone else's story, a prospect that today's youth are unlikely to accept. In fact, cultural powers of expression are the most accessible to youth, and play an important role in their understanding of self and others. The incorporation of cultural politics into the concept of citizenship would not only address matters of importance to the young, it would also illustrate the significance of citizenship in the dominant mode of experience of postmodernity.

Notes

1. In this paper the terms 'postmodern' and 'postmodernity' will be used in the periodizing sense, while 'postmodernism' and 'postmodernist' will refer to the forms, styles and protagonists of this newly proclaimed perspective.

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