Studies in the
Postmodern Theory of Education

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General Editor
Vol. 404

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In the Wake of History

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of history remains a motif of our times. Signifying both a crisis in historical ways of knowing and our location on the threshold of a new social order, the end of history is perhaps the only description of the “postmodern condition” upon which influential commentators agree (Vattimo, 1991). While neoliberal conservatives celebrated the end of history—perhaps prematurely, after the collapse of Soviet Communism—in the inevitable global acceptance of the ideologies of free-market liberalism and democratic capitalism (see Fukuyama, 1992), those whom we might call “methodological postmodernists” (e.g., Barthes, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault) invoked the end of history throughout the latter half of the twentieth century as a symbol of a crisis of confidence in the discourse of modernity and its realist epistemologies.

This loss of faith in the adequacy of representation is a defining feature of fin-de-siècle postmodern thought, and has been perceived by many positivist and empiricist historians as a threat to the discipline of history, with its professed desire to recover and reconstruct “the truth” of the past. Postmodernism has been described by a number of historians and social critics as an attack on historical reason and the epistemological foundations of history as a discipline; they assert that postmodernism is willfully obscurantist and politically paralyzing, has little to do with the practice of actual historians, and has little to offer serious historiography (Evans, 1997; McCullagh, 2004; Zagorin, 1999). These defenders of the project of empiricist history, as well as some postmodernists, argue that if we accept postmodern social theory, historical research and writing become untenable. This concern with the status of historical truth parallels widespread anxieties about the postmodern social condition of contemporary life, in which we have to rethink our stories amidst complex social conditions that throw into question any grand narratives that attempt to transport us towards a millennial ending or cocoon us within a singular catholic metanarrative.
Since the early 1990s a growing body of work has considered the implications of postmodernism for education. Likewise, there has emerged a significant historiographical literature—produced slightly later, due to the slow adoption of postmodern thought within the discipline—that addresses the postmodern critique of historical representation. This literature includes survey and synoptic texts (see, for example, C. G. Brown, 2005 and Thompson, 2004) as well as sometimes polemic works produced by the most vocal advocates of postmodern history, including the highly influential *Rethinking History* (Jenkins, 1991) which occupies an important place on many reading lists, possibly due to its seminal status and accessibility. There is also a small but significant reactive genre that seeks to protect the discipline against an “invasion” of postmodern social theory (Evans, 1997; McCullagh, 2004; Windschuttle, 1996). However, although many of these texts explore in detail the influence of postmodernism on history, their focus is almost unanimously on history as a discipline, not History as curriculum. It is fair to say that that while Berkhofer finishes his significant *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (1995) with a call for the reflexive writing and teaching of history, the only notable examples from the opposite side of the debate are Jenkins’s *Rethinking History* (1991) and Windschuttle’s *The Killing of History* (1996). Yet, both of these texts limit their concern to the teaching of History in the academy; neither addresses in any substantive way the problem of History in the school curriculum, thus almost entirely neglecting the concerns of the majority of curricularists.

Works that do address the implications of postmodern social theory for History and Social Studies education are quite limited in scope and number. While the discipline of history was slow to engage postmodern thought, the arena of History and Social Studies curriculum has been even less receptive than its “parent” discipline. The only text that devotes a substantial amount of space to the problem of postmodernism is *Social Studies—The Next Generation: Researching in the Postmodern* (Segall, Heilman, & Cherryholmes, 2006). This deliberately provocative collection partially thematizes postmodernism and its implications for social education, and it may be unique in devoting more than a single chapter to such concerns. Peter Seixas’s chapter “Schweigen! die Kinder! Or Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?” in the edited collection *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History* (2000) is another rare engagement that seriously examines the implications of postmodernism for the teaching of school History. This is not to deny the significant and substantive recent work that explores the development of historical consciousness from perspectives marked by the “narrative turn” in psychology (Straub, 2005). However, this literature rarely, if ever, acknowledges a link to postmodern
theorizing, claiming its scientificity and legitimacy through a less politically oriented sociocultural theory—Gergen’s (2009, p. 13) acknowledgment of the influences of postmodernism on social constructionism is a significant exception. In addressing this dearth of direct engagement with postmodern thought by deliberating over the implications of postmodern social theory for History as curriculum—a disciplinary domain that has demonstrated resistance to theory in general, and skepticism towards poststructuralism in particular—it is hoped that this book will open new possibilities for rethinking History curriculum. But before we can engage seriously with end-of-history discourse and its implications for History as curriculum, it is necessary to understand what is meant by “history.”

History as Unreliable Signifier

An untutored reader could be excused for thinking that assertions of the end of history are the equivalent of proclamations of the end of the world; of course, occasionally they have been just that (see my preface). Confusion arises in part because of a linguistic condition in English in which the sign history has a number of competing referents. Those who have investigated the etymology of the word have argued that it is derived from either the Greek word ἱστορία, meaning “witness,” or the Greek word ἱστορία, meaning “to investigate” (see Ashcroft, 2001; Le Goff, 1992). No English speaker who has thought about the issue can ignore the presence of the word story within history, leading to conclusions that history is properly the story of the past. In standard English, when we speak of history we are referring to knowledge about “the past” in the form of: (1) the academic discipline taught in universities and practiced by professional scholars; (2) the school subject, which typically has an ambivalent relationship to the academic discipline; or (3) the record of past events in particular human societies, the oeuvre of a particular author/historian, or the archives of a “civilization” that purport to retell the past as it was. Yet, we might also be referring to the past itself; the aggregate of everything that has ever happened; or just our own set of life experiences (i.e., when we talk of a “personal history”). The distinction between what actually happened in the past and our knowledge of what happened—or what Stanford (1994) calls “history-as-event” and “history-as-account,” respectively—is generally accepted in the discipline. This distinction is evident in the work of positivists and postmodernists alike. The difference in their views usually comes down to what this distinction is taken to mean. For the positivist historian it means there is a past that can be recovered through careful research and analysis and
subsequently re-presented, or retold, as histories, even if the history that is reconstructed is influenced by the concerns of the present or modified by the historian’s interpretive choices (E. H. Carr, 1990). In contrast, in much postmodern and poststructuralist critique it is taken to mean that there is a profound distinction between the sign (history text) and its referent (past event), such that one cannot say with any firm reliability that one is commensurate with the other. Indeed, postmodern and poststructuralist theory points to the complete unrecoverability of the referent. From this later position, history may be framed as a narrative that attempts to reconstruct, through a denial of its own historicity and the removal of all trace of its perspectivalism, a radically uncertain past (Ermarth, 1992; LaCapra, 2004).

Attempting to make the complicated concept of the end of history more comprehensible, Jenkins (1995) distinguishes between “uppercase History”—the belief that the procession of events we refer to as “history” has some inherent meaning or significance, or that human societies are evolving towards some optimal endpoint (a proposition shared by Hegel, Marx, Kojève, and Fukuyama, among others)—and “lowercase history”—the actual practices of studying and writing historical narratives, the work of the professional historian. The origin of the professional approach is often attributed to the German historian Leopold von Ranke, but some have argued that Herodotus and Thucydides set the templates for the discipline (Curthoys & Docker, 2006). Jenkins’s framework allows him to clearly distinguish which his history he is arguing is coming to what end, and that framework is present when I examine the end of history in contemporary theory and its implications for History curriculum (though my use of upper- and lowercase conventions follows Anna Clark rather than Keith Jenkins; see my “Note on Capitalization”). However, even using Jenkins’s distinction, the multiple meanings of history present a particular problem for any work that seeks to discuss the subject. Those multiple referents have been one of the stumbling blocks in the defense of the discipline, where all too often debate has deteriorated into polemics as authors slip between referents and at times stop making sense of what really is at stake.

This unreliability of the signifier history manifests itself in debates over the status of History/history by making the end of history itself a floating signifier whose meaning shifts depending on the discursive tradition drawn upon. The singularity of focus suggested by the idea of rethinking History curriculum after the end of history obscures the complexity and multiplicity at the heart of such a project, because there is not just one end of history but many. Navigating through the celebrations, lamentations, invocations, and proclamations that arise in and around end-of-history discourse, I argue that the empiricists’ claims that History/history is being “murdered” by postmodern and poststruc-
turalist approaches to studying the past are at best inaccurate. Claims that postmodernism is “killing history” arise out of a particular conception of history as a discipline, and are very likely the result of a “strong grammar” within the historiographic field that works to protect the borders of the discipline against the kind of “invasion”—from literary and cultural studies—lamented by the critics. It is this “strong grammar” that often leaves historians describing their practice as if historiography was an unchanging art. Thus, any challenge to this grammar is taken as an assault on the whole enterprise of history as a discipline.

Claims that history is under siege also emerge from a misunderstanding of the poststructural and postmodern position in contemporary theory, a position in which, far from being left without history, we are left with (almost) nothing but history, albeit in a “weak” form, stripped of its “metaphysical buttressing” (Roberts, 1995, p. 9). What this suggests is that postmodernism—at least in some of its poststructuralist forms—is a movement that extends the gaze of historians so that nothing escapes it, not even themselves. As such, history is hardly at an end under this kind of regime, but it is transformed, forced into reflexivity as it is pushed to its logical conclusion where everything and everyone is historicized. As a result of appropriating the gaze of the historiographer, histories—as interpretations of the past—come to be viewed as somewhat unreliable representations. Resultantly, a hermeneutic position emerges in which histories are understood as historical products themselves, to some degree “prejudiced” or conditioned by the period in which they were written, and constituted within the “horizon” or limits of the cultural paradigms of their authors. Understanding history as an “unreliable signifier” foregrounds the crisis of representation and legitimation that Lyotard (1979) associates with “the postmodern condition” of incredulity towards metanarratives—those “master narratives” that might be described as ahistorical representations masquerading as histories, which claim the status of universal truth while failing to acknowledge their own historical origins.

**Theorizing the Postmodern**

Much of this book is devoted to exploring the various meanings of the end of history that are mobilized in contemporary theory. In the section that follows I provide a brief summary of the understanding of postmodernism and its central concerns. Of course, this definitional discussion is not neutral, and inevitably it moves in a reductive direction that is arguably at odds with postmodern thought itself. Nonetheless, presenting some of the main claims made
about postmodernism is necessary before moving on to the details of the project that guides this book.

Postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define. Understood as an elusive and sometimes incoherent phenomenon, postmodernist thought emerged in the academy during the late twentieth century as an apocalyptic discourse intent on demolishing once carefully elaborated certainties via an extended and multifaceted polemic against foundationalism, essentialism, and universalism. Inheriting the terminal impulses of Nietzsche and Heidegger that claimed God and philosophy in turn, postmodernism has had a range of influences and antecedents. In some ways it seems to rehearse aspects of the philosophy of the ancient Greek school of skeptics, and from a different perspective, to push to their radical conclusions the philosophical arguments of the American pragmatists. Of course, it would be neither very postmodern nor historically accurate to suggest that the skeptics and the pragmatists are direct progenitors of postmodernism, despite Eco’s amusing assertion that soon even Homer will be claimed as a postmodernist (Southgate, 2003). However, there are parallels in some of their philosophies, and in the work of the contemporary American philosopher Richard Rorty these ideas find a common home.

Used as an epithet for the “cultural condition” of late capitalism and the present “status of knowledge” in postindustrial societies, postmodernism appears as a cipher whose meaning must be indefinitely suspended (Lyotard, 1979). During the period of its more self-conscious impact on the humanities, an attempt was made to define postmodernism as both a mode of theorizing about societies and a period in social thought. This distinction developed into a common understanding that there are two main forms of postmodernism, the methodological and the historical (Cahoone, 1996; Denzin, 1994). Some scholars argue that methodological and historical postmodernism are intertwined, and thus postmodernism is best understood as constituted by “neo-liberal forms of governmentality . . . the emerging postindustrial society in the West structured by the so-called new information economy . . . [and a] crisis of cultural authority” (de Alba, Gonzalez-Gaudiano, Lankshear, & Peters, 2000, p. 128). Because I am at least partially sympathetic to this argument, I will first attend to postmodernism as a historical epoch and style to set the context for my exploration of postmodernism as a methodological discourse.

**Historical Postmodernism**

As a historical claim, postmodernism is typically mobilized to signify that the cultural organization of modernity has undergone fundamental change, and
that a radical break with past social trends has taken place. Other scholars use the term to mark significant social and cultural transformations while still articulating a closer continuity with the modern, and even go so far as to suggest that the postmodernization of culture does not transcend modernity as a historical epoch, but instead constitutes a significant challenge to modernity as an intellectual enterprise. Understanding postmodernism as a historical claim thus involves exploring “the postmodern” (or “postmodernity”) as both a particular cultural style and a unique social condition (Best & Kellner, 1997; Lyon, 1999).

A historical style in art and architecture that is dominated by anachronism, collage, allegory, and pastiche, postmodernism has been associated with “the end of art,” a thesis that proposes that we have reached a condition in which the metanarrative of art history is over, so art no longer can be defined by its place in a historical or developmental progression. This leaves postmodern (or perhaps more accurately, posthistorical) artists free to produce art in any form they please. In its postmodern manifestation, this often means the artist rehearses and remixes older forms (indicating that the telos of art’s history has been reached), or renders the everyday as art (problematizing any axiological foundations from which to view art). Posthistorical art is therefore characterized by the lack of stylistic unity (Connor, 1997; Danto, 1997).

Similarly, as a historical movement in literature, postmodernism has been associated with tendencies towards self-conscious irony and disruption in the form of fabulism, metafiction, and surfiction, forms of fiction that draw attention to themselves as fiction (Chabot, 1988). Postmodernism in literary studies has been associated with the idea of “the death of the author” (Barthes, 1968/1977), marking the impossibility of restricting meaning to the author’s intentions, and the denial of univocal authorship as a result of the inevitability of textual repetition (intertextuality), an idea shared by earlier formalist theories. The “death of the author” also has been associated with the poststructural recognition that “author-ity” is always an artifact of a discursive regime rather than a simple fact of writing (Foucault, 1969/1994). Whether such trends in art and literature actually represent a new style that breaks with the modern, and whether they are in their current manifestation dependent upon or independent of postmodernism as a social condition, remain subjects of debate. However taken as expressions of “the postmodern,” these artistic and literary movements suggest the overlapping of postmodernism as style and social condition.

Some scholars have argued that as a historical social condition, postmodernism is the result of a transformation from nineteenth-century industrial society to late twentieth-century information society in which the distortions of time
and space resulting from new technologies for travel, telecommunications, and information transfer have come to shape the contemporary scene. Commentators have also described this particular reorganization of the social as a shift from the politics of production to an obsession with consumption, in which it is the factor, the principle, held to determine definitions of value, the construction of identities, and even shape the global ecumene. As such, tellingly, it is the invisible hand, or the Gucci-gloved fist, that animates the political impulses, the material imperatives, and the social forms of the Second Coming of Capitalism—of capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation. (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000, p. 294, emphasis in the original)

Frederic Jameson (1991) agrees, depicting postmodernism as the historically specific logic of late (consumer-focused multinational) capitalism in which value is determined by the vagaries of the market, where consumption is the primary motivator. Within this milieu multinational capitalism has reworked the social and economic relationship between production and consumption in such a way as to make consumption the underlying principle of the information society and the driving force of the global knowledge economy. Stated another way, “postmodern culture replicates, reproduces, and reinforces the logic of consumer capitalism” (S. Shapiro, 1995, p. 192).

As a logic of consumption, the cultural style and social condition of postmodernism are brought together. This is perhaps clearest in the writings of the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard has been described by Douglas Kellner as a postmodern McLuhan, and aspects of his work can be read as an update of Debord’s theorization of contemporary society as spectacle (D. Kellner, 1989). Although marked by eclecticism, Baudrillard’s analyses of contemporary culture are based most strongly on “classical exchange theory as a theory of social determination” (Gane, 2000, p. 35). He has argued that within postmodern society, the social value of “objects” is created by differentiating consumer items from each other (Baudrillard, 1988). This differentiation results in part from contemporary society’s capacity to reproduce “the code” (i.e., create copies of an unrecoverable original) and “brand” the replicas (as “identifiable” and “identical”). Subsequently, consumer goods come to have both a value determined by the market (made up of their “use value” and “exchange value”) and a “sign value” determined by the social status they confer upon, or the “identity” they make possible for, the consumer (McLaren & Leonardo, 1998).

Like the postmodern art of Andy Warhol, new technologies make possible the endless replication of the object/sign/style, and therefore the construction of “indiscernible counterparts” for everyone (who can afford them). The expression “indiscernible counterparts,” which comes from art theory, suggests
the impossibility of determining the difference between, for example, a shovel used to dig dirt, and a shovel created as a work of art. Here we take it further: The demarcation between copy and original has imploded. As a consequence of the mass production of consumer objects and social signs, “indiscernible counterparts” are produced that replicate an unrecoverable original, now lost amongst clones. Thus, theorists who argue for historical postmodernism as a description of the present moment in Western societies depict “the contemporary” as a society dominated by a capitalist logic of style and consumption in which “sentimentality and history become less pertinent because an almost perfect replica of the object can be (re)produced... [and] people become functions of consumer society as they are motivated to purchase more and more objects in order to feel part of the social milieu” (McLaren & Leonardo, 1998, p. 218).

Baudrillard believes they do this because consumer objects carry a “sign value” that is “consumed” in the act of exchange, conferring status on the consumer. This conflation of object/style/status reinforces the logic of capitalism via a marking of the individual by the list of what they consume, and therefore lends weight to the suggestion from some quarters that “postmodernist rhetoric has been profitably capitalized on by neoliberalism in order to update its longed-for project of cultural hegemony” (Hopenhayn, 1993, p. 98). Trapped within a matrix of market ideology, the argument advanced here is that the individual plays the consumption status game whether he/she wants to or not, and typically without any conscious awareness of his/her complicity in “the game.”

Baudrillard (1983) couples his analysis of the dominance of the object with a vision of society in which the broadcast media have come to rule our lives and reality appears to have “imploded,” with the result that it has become impossible for us to determine the difference between the real world and its “hyperreal” televisual simulation. This is perhaps best exemplified by the first Gulf War (1991), which Baudrillard argued “would not” and “did not” take place. According to Paul Patton in his introduction to Baudrillard’s infamous text The Gulf War Did Not Take Place (1995), “the Gulf War was instant history in the sense that the selected images which were broadcast worldwide provoked immediate responses and then became frozen into the accepted story of the war: high-tech weapons, ecological disaster, the liberation of Kuwait” (Patton, 1995, p. 3). Baudrillard argues that the “war” in the Persian Gulf was both a media-driven “virtual war” (p. 30) and “an ultra-modern process of electrocution” (p. 61), but not an actual war because no Iraqi who took part had “a chance of fighting,” and no American who took part “a chance of being beaten” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 61). Thus, despite the claim that during this
campaign "the amount of high explosives unleashed during the first month of the conflict exceeded that of the entire allied air offensive during WW II" (Patton, 1995, pp. 1–2), Baudrillard denies that a real war took place. For Baudrillard, what did happen was the analogue of the film Capricorn One (1978), "in which the flight of a manned rocket to Mars, which only took place in a desert studio, was relayed to all the television stations in the world" (p. 61).

It is not that Baudrillard is denying history when he asserts that the Gulf War did not happen. The theory of hyperreality is no dupe for alleged "Holocaust deniers" such as David Irving who are said to engage in "massive falsification of historical evidence, manipulation of facts, and denial of truth" (Evans, 2002, p. 10), and deliberate "misrepresentation, mistranslation, misleading phrasing, and imperfectly varnished deceit" (Guttenplan, 2001, p. 223). Baudrillard acknowledges that the United States and its military partners dropped bombs on Iraq and killed thousands of people, but he is not writing "history." Baudrillard’s “high risk writing strategy, courting equally the dangers of contradiction by the facts and self-refutation,” is designed to be "less a representation of reality than its transfiguration" (Patton, 1995, p. 6), less history than a challenge to the instantaneous history of the media report. Patton argues that Baudrillard’s essays can be understood as a response to the media’s first-draft version of history, as well as a challenge to the manner in which the events have been portrayed and an interrogation of the nature of war as a televisual simulation and media event. As Best and Kellner (2001) suggest, during the Gulf War “images and representations of the war, disseminated by government and media outlets, replaced the events of the war itself, providing a hyperreal experience of the war as a media spectacle” (p. 74). In the postmodern world of hyperreal simulation, Baudrillard (1992) argues that events have gone on strike, and all we are left with is their indiscernible media simulacra. It is this criticism of the process by which representation comes to be indiscernible from reality in media society, rather than a refutation that something actually took place, that is the intended meaning of Baudrillard’s Gulf War denial.

Perhaps because so much of what is said to constitute the postmodern is either "recycled modernity" or renovation within the ruins of modernity, the notion of a postmodern style and a postmodern era is explicitly rejected by commentators who argue that the claims for a distinctive postmodern artistic aesthetic are contradictory and unconvincing, and that much of the scholarship supporting "the postmodern" as a break with industrial capitalism "grossly exaggerate[s] the extent of the changes involved, and fail[s] to theorize them properly" (Callinicos, 1989, p. 135). Yet, as a critic of postmodernism
who has gone to great pains to argue against any suggestion that the latter half of the twentieth century saw a radical break with the past, Callinicos concedes that the term *postmodern* is usefully understood as a floating signifier utilized by “a socially mobile intelligentsia in a climate dominated by the retreat of the Western labour movement and the ‘overconsumptionist’ dynamic of capitalism in the Reagan-Thatcher era . . . to articulate its political disillusionment and its aspiration to a consumption-oriented lifestyle” (Callinicos, 1989, pp. 170-171). Callinicos’s criticism of postmodernism as a historical social condition—and of those he believes to be advocating this thesis (such as Baudrillard and Lyotard)—hinges on a specific rejection of the idea that capitalism has mutated into a form that has left industrialization behind. He is evidently prepared to concede that postmodernism may be used as a sign to demarcate a particular sociohistorically located intellectual trend, but this trend still must be understood to be underpinned by industrial capital. Resultantly, he argues that postmodernism is more an intellectual orientation than a definable aesthetic. It should be acknowledged that Callinicos was writing several years before the advent of the public Internet, and almost two decades after his critique, postmodernism as signifier is still afloat and is being utilized by a generation of scholars who were still at school during the Reagan-Thatcher era. It may be that only time will tell whose stance on postmodernism as a historical phenomenon (or otherwise) proves correct, but at this moment, postmodernism no longer seems to be a passing fad, as some of its early critics predicted.

It is important to note that despite the fact that the emergence of postmodernism as an intellectual orientation appears to have coincided with the arrival of so-called postmodernity, it would be a mistake to conflate the two. Arguably, it is not synchronicities, dependencies, or overlaps in their development that connect postmodernity and postmodernism, but instead a set of resemblances. Certainly the pathways to postmodernism and postmodernity have been many and varied, and any genealogy of postmodern thought is inevitably partial. Thus, it is probably unproductive and only partly accurate, as well as ironically self-defeating, to define methodological postmodernism as the intellectual orientation of academics fashioned by postmodernity. Nothing is simple when it comes to defining any aspect of postmodernism.

### Methodological Postmodernism

As a methodological position, postmodernism is neither a systematic theory nor a singular or unified discourse. It may seem to the observer that postmod-
ernism is used as a label for such a wide range of ideas that it is empty of any meaning (Rosenau, 1992). Perhaps best described as a continuum of critique that shares cynicism about claims to truth in the human and social sciences, postmodernism is often depicted as a minefield of conflicting concepts, marked by a pervasive nihilism that resists any tendency to totalize. A range of concepts have been proposed as postmodern philosophies, including:

- the death of the subject, the repudiation of depth models of reality, the rejection of grand narratives or universal explanations of history, the illusion of the transparency of language, the impossibility of any final meaning, the effects of power on the objects it represents, the failure of pure reason to understand the world, the de-centering of the Western logos and with it the dethroning of the “first world,” the end of a belief in progress as a natural and neutral panacea, and a celebration of difference and multiplicity. (P. Slattery, 1997, p. 3)

This is some list. Certainly there has been some agreement that postmodernism typically “takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement”; invested in the trope of irony, it “manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge” (Hutcheon, 1989, pp. 1–2). Connor asserts that “post-modernism as method is basically a revolt against the rationality of modernism, a deliberate attack on the foundation character of much modernist thought” (1997, p. 322). Working with a poststructural understanding of the rational, we might argue that postmodernism is simply a different form of rationality to “modernist reason,” rather than the jettisoning or rejection of reason and rationality altogether (see Foucault, 1983/1994). To think otherwise is to accept that methodological postmodernism is simply a particular form of irrationality, either devoid of its own logic or constituted by the supplanting of logic by a valorization of aesthetics and experience. However, it is only subscription to the modernist binary of “logic” versus “rhetoric” that sustains the claim that postmodernism is a form of irrationality. In contrast, considering postmodernism as a form of reasoning reveals that methodologically its rhetorical logic challenges realism (arguing that there is no unmediated access to the world, and that what counts as “reality” is constructed in the process of attempting to know the world); rejects essentialism (claiming there is no universal human nature that is consistent across cultural landscapes and historical epochs); and disrupts foundationalism (asserting that there can be no statements of value or claims to truth that will be universally acceptable, because they are typically intelligible only within the sociohistorically specific disciplinary rules that have made them possible, or within the discursively established ethos that have given them credibility). These three signature postmodern philosophies are often defined by the
motifs of the end of history, the death of the subject, and the death of the author, respectively (Parkes, Gore, & Elsworth, 2010).

In practice, methodological postmodernists—whom Breisach (2003) refers to controversially, but rather usefully, as poststructuralist postmodernists—typically refuse to accept that there are any transcultural, transhistorical, or transcendent grounds for interpretation. In exploring the postmodern challenge to history and the genealogy of various forms of postmodernism, Breisach actually differentiates between two types of postmodernism: structural postmodernism (which he associates with the period 1945 to 1965) and poststructural postmodernism (which came to prominence in the late 1960s). The defining feature of structural postmodernism—which is not to be confused with structuralism, per se—was the “retention of a knowable world of objectively given structures and forces” (Breisach, 2003, p. 22). Common to both forms of postmodernism, according to Breisach’s analysis, is a belief that humanity will enter a period of history that is beyond modernity, called the posthistoire. According to Breisach’s schema, poststructuralist postmodernists (such as Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard, and Deleuze) are identified by their rejection of the privileged status of modernist theory, and thus enter into forms of postmodernism. In contrast, structural postmodernists (such as Cournot, Kojeve, and Fukuyama) can be identified by their belief that we are about to enter a period of quietude—the final stage of history—having realized a world based on a balance of “recognition” and “equality,” and thus they profess visions of postmodernity (or more correctly, posthistoire) as the stage beyond modernization.

Poststructuralism, which has come to be associated more closely with postmodern social theory than any other single philosophy, was widely used as a label for those critiques of modernity and Enlightenment philosophy that became the signature of continental philosophies prominent during the late 1960s. Originally a French form of methodological postmodernism, poststructuralism emerged partly as a result of the political disillusionment that followed the student and worker strikes of 1968, and partly as a reaction to the scientific pretensions of structuralist thought. Structuralism, which was the dominant social theory at the time, cast “human behaviour as rule-governed transformations of meaningless elements” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. xix). Among the poststructuralists, Barthes led the shift away from the search for deep structures that were believed to prefigure meaning towards the concentration on the problem of representation. Foucault’s work also demonstrates something of this shift.

As a thorough critique of “modern theories rooted in humanist assumptions and Enlightenment rationalist discourses” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 27),
poststructuralism is often characterized by a respect for that which might be described as specific, local, different, and peculiar, and by a rejection of theories that propose universal, foundational, or essential norms of human social and cultural life. Where explanations are provided, they are given tentatively, cautiously, and reluctantly, as descriptions from the author’s own praxis or position or as a set of self-proclaimed fictions, rather than as totalizing discourses that claim universal applicability or truth claims that articulate the discovery of some deep meaning concealed from consciousness. What is rejected by many poststructural postmodernists is the transcendental self, the disembodied, rational hero-norm of the Enlightenment who masquerades as ahistorical, asexual, acultural, and classless while simultaneously masking a (socially constructed) white masculine subjectivity. In place of the metaphysical or transcendental subject, methodological or poststructuralist postmodernists propose decentered, fragmented, material subjects, producers, and products of the discursive practices of their unique historical circumstances. Not only do these postmodern subjects lack an underlying ahistorical unity, they also are split or fragmented within themselves as a consequence of their participation in contradictory discourses and practices.

In attempting to encapsulate methodological postmodernism, some scholars draw upon an often quoted distinction between ludic, spectral, or skeptical postmodernism and resistance, critical, oppositional, or affirmative postmodernism. When this distinction is accepted, the scholarly work of poststructuralists and deconstructionists is categorized as either (1) a self-indulgent form of aesthetic free play that ignores politics, and might even lend support to the status quo, or (2) a material intervention that goes beyond a textual theory of difference, recognizing the shaping effect of the social and historical context (Ebert, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003; Rosenau, 1992). However, the distinction between skeptical and affirmative postmodernism actually may be “conceptually misleading and historically false” (de Alba, et al., 2000, p. 129). If resistance postmodernism is characterized by the notion that texts are material practices that embody conflicting social relations—which could very well be an axiom of some poststructuralist works, particularly Foucault’s—then I’m not sure that ludic and resistance postmodernism aren’t just two different ways of reading postmodernism, or two different uses of postmodern theory, rather than discrete forms. Arguing that discourse is constitutive of social relations (after Foucault), or that there is no outside text (after Derrida), does not mean there is no world outside of language (and therefore no real political struggles). Rather, it means there is no unmediated access to reality, and that discourse is constitutive—as far as our perspective on things is concerned—rather than unproblematically descriptive, of “what is”
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Postmodernism is thus not an extreme form of idealism that denies the world, though it does reflect a degree of Kantian subjectivism. Nor is postmodernism the opposite of modernism, though it remains skeptical about the particular form of reasoning that underpins a great deal of modernist thought. Postmodernism doesn’t have to mean denying a critical project, but it does mean remaining cautious of any claims to truth.

Methodological Postmodernism and the Problem of Historical Representation

Postmodernism’s challenge to the epistemological foundations of history as a discipline has been considerable, taking the form of academic publications that might be described as favorable, fair, and fearful. Much of the literature sounds either celebratory (by postmodernists) or mournful (by positivists). The main issues have centered on the role narrative construction plays in historical inquiry. For the contemporary historian, one of the central problems that postmodern social theory presents has been described as a crisis of representation. In principle, this means that poststructuralists as methodological postmodernists typically reject the idea that our representations unproblematically correspond with reality; instead, they take the position that reality is never known outside of our systems of representation, so our representations can be said to shape, write, constitute, or inscribe our “reality” rather than mirror it.

From the perspective of postmodernism, our representations of the world constitute reality as we know it. That is not to say that representations actually form the world itself, as some critics of methodological postmodernism have suggested, but they do predispose us to view and engage with the world in certain ways. Like the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, this leaves us not in the position of denying that a world exists outside our own mind, but in a state where although we can believe there is something we might call reality, we cannot know the true nature of that reality. This is where postmodernism meets pragmatism. Whereas pragmatism argues that the truth value of a map (of reality) hinges on its usefulness (to navigate that otherwise unknowable reality), the postmodern position is marked by a rejection of “naïve realism [which] holds that objects in the real world conform or correspond precisely to our representation and our understanding of them” (Munslow, 2003, p. 56), manifesting a “profound distrust of the idea that referential language works through mirroring or mapping reality” (Potter, 1996, p. 68). While postmod-
ern social theory accepts the arbitrariness of the sign, it inverts our common-sense perspective that signs reflect things in the world and replaces it with the view that our understanding of things in the world is constituted by the socio-historical sign systems we have inherited, appropriated, and evolved in the course of our sociolinguistic “development.” In this view, the world—as we know it—is constituted by the sign, rather than the (existence of the) sign being dependent on the world.

It is highly unlikely that any historian other than a hagiographer would be inclined towards the sympathetic logic of romanticism, and it would be setting up the discipline of history as a straw man to suggest that most historians endorse anything like naïve realism. Yet, many historians do subscribe to other forms of realism. For example, there are historians who subscribe to an empirical-analytic philosophy that suggests it might be possible to “discover explanations that reflect the rational structure of nature through empirical research, the inference of its meaning and the representation of its findings as the truthful descriptive statement” (Munslow, 2003, pp. 40–41). There are also historians who seek to discover general laws operating behind the machinery of history. In both cases it is the will to know, expressed as a conceit that we can come to understand and accurately represent what happened in the past, which brings positivist and empiricist historians into conflict with poststructuralists. Methodological postmodernists of all persuasions typically deny the capacity of language to act as a transparent mode of representation; they argue that there is no unmediated access to the past, and that when attempting to write histories, all we are left with is partial traces of the past that are open to multiple, conflicting, situated interpretations and explanations.

As this brief overview indicates, although methodological postmodernism has challenged the foundations of much historical work, the implications of the problem of historical representation have been largely neglected in the field of curriculum, with only a few exceptions (see Brickley, 1994; Segall, Heilman, & Cherryholmes, 2006; Seixas, 2000). One of the ways I will attempt to address the problem of postmodernism for History as curriculum is through an examination of the “culture wars” and their impact on History curriculum.

**History and the Culture Wars**

Taking seriously Ivor Goodson’s argument that “social histories of school subject[s] need to be undertaken in national and local milieux” (1992, p. 25),
this book reserves as the main context for its deliberations and ruminations the mandatory secondary school History curriculum in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Specifically, it explores the central problematic of this book—History curriculum after the end of history—in relation to changes to the compulsory junior secondary History curriculum in NSW during the period defined by two important temporal markers, Australia’s bicentennial (whose significance I discuss in chapter 4) and the millennium (whose significance for postmodern theory I discussed in the preface). Although in some sense it might be possible to discuss the central problematic in purely philosophic and theoretic terms, Goodson’s work makes clear that attempts to study school subjects as abstract categories, or universal structures, divorces them from the wider social, political, and cultural assemblages and relations that provide them with form and meaning. Thus, while conceptual issues are given primacy in this study, the case studies I will examine do more than simply anchor the discussion; they function as a case through which deliberations in terms of the problematic are situated to render them meaningful, purposeful, and intelligible.

Mandating for the first time the study of Australian history, the 1992 NSW Years 7–10 History Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1992) was a watershed curriculum document. Responding to the social conscience of the times, the syllabus did more than simply ensure coverage of Australian history; it incorporated “social histories” about, and from the perspective of, women and Australia’s Indigenous peoples, and it framed them as legitimate alternatives to hegemonic, Eurocentric, patriarchal master narratives of the nation, challenging conceptions of history as a grand story. The social meliorist changes to the NSW History curriculum of the early 1990s set the syllabus on a collision course with politically conservative historians and socially conservative politicians, and it became an important site of struggle in a series of heated and highly public “history wars.” At the core of these skirmishes over history was a concern that the historical consciousness of the nation’s youth was being hijacked by left-wing radicals intent on installing a “black armband” (mournful, shameful, and somber) view of the nation’s past, a view associated with political correctness, revisionist historiography, and postmodernism. The conservatives’ position was championed by Prime Minister John Howard, who was keen to see schools dispense with the black armband history promoted during the term of his predecessor. Of particular concern was the representation of frontier life during the pre-federation period. A shift in the language that traditionally had described British colonization as “settlement” to an unprecedented acknowledgment of the Aboriginal perspective on colonization as “invasion” generated a great deal of angst among the conservative intelli-
gentsia in NSW, Queensland, and Victoria, where similar curricular changes occurred (Davison, 2000; S. Macintyre & Clark, 2003). It was this angst that led to more recent reactionary proposals for a national “shared narrative” approach to History curriculum (Melleuish, 2006), driving the movement towards a national curriculum.

This Australian case is by no means unique; similar conflicts have occurred over History education in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (see Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1998; Phillips, 1998; G. H. Richardson, 2002). These parallel conflicts have been referred to as history and culture wars. At their heart is a concern over national culture, and the cultural literacy of the citizenry. The importance of school History as a battlefield in these history and culture wars should not be underestimated. History curriculum operates as an apparatus for the social re/production of national identities, but what is at stake in each of these history wars is not only national identity, but also our conceivable future. If this volume may be understood as foregrounding the exploration of History curriculum after “the end of history,” then it is useful to understand one of its main subtexts as a concern with theorizing a postmodern curricular response to the history wars. Lundgren (1991) argues—from the standpoint of reproduction theory—that the problem of representation is the central problem of curriculum theory; if this is so, then the practical question arising for History curriculum amidst the history wars must be, how should History curriculum (re)present history after “the end of history”? There is no easy answer to this question. However, by exploring History curriculum as an important site of conflict in the culture wars particularly through the lens of poststructuralist and postcolonial theory, I will attempt to open new possibilities for History as curriculum that have been overlooked in the struggle for critical and effective histories.

Reading This Book

In this chapter I have outlined the social and theoretical contexts for this study, defined the study’s central problematic, and located my project within internationally resonant debates over History education.

Chapter 2 provides an orientation to the project. I begin by briefly mapping the curriculum field, paying particular attention to the critical-reconceptualist trajectory in curriculum theory and the significance for curriculum history of recasting curriculum as text and discourse. I locate my project within what has been called the “New Curriculum History,” then set out the terms of the book’s deliberation, analysis, and critique, casting poststructural
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19 discourse analysis as an important approach to curriculum inquiry within the
New Curriculum History.

In chapter 3 I explore the way in which end-of-history discourse is mobilized in contemporary theory. My explorations begin with a close reading of the works of the economist and political scientist Francis Fukuyama. Representative of a contemporary neoliberal vision of history, it is probably impossible today to discuss the idea of the end of history without referring to his controversial and conservative thesis that triumphantly announces that modernity’s goal of “the recognition of human freedom” is not a fantasy, but has been realized with the collapse of Soviet Communism, symbolic of the defeat of all viable alternatives to political and economic liberalism. Fukuyama’s thesis is read with and against the writings of the French postmodern social theorists who assert that both history and its end are logographic illusions; and remain skeptical of a Eurocentric historicism that projects history as a grand story of human progress and universalizes the cultural mythologies of the West.

In chapter 4 I explore how the end of history as the rejection of history as a singular, universally shared, and all-encompassing “grand story” has manifested within school History curriculum. The focal point for my study is the social meliorist changes to the curriculum, and the cultural politics surrounding those changes, in NSW, Australia, from the bicentennial of the nation in 1988 to the millennium. I situate this case in relation to similar conflicts and culture wars over History education in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In these nations, History curriculum changes, with their emphasis on new and revisionist social histories, are read as promoting a “critical pedagogy of counter-memory.” Following the political backlash against the socially critical curriculum changes in late twentieth-century History education, I conclude by exploring some of the limitations of counter-memory as critical history, arguing that the interjection of counter-narratives into the curriculum is a necessary but insufficient response to the problem of historical representation.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the missed opportunities for “critical practice” that are evident in the case studies of attempts at radical History curriculum reform. Synthesizing insights into the “nature of history” derived from the writings of contemporary philosophers of history, I argue that what remains uncontested in the struggle for critical histories are the representational practices of history itself. Integrating models of historiography and history pedagogy inside a frame provided by Ashcroft’s (2001) analysis of the modes of action by which postcolonial subjects resist interpellation and inscription within dominant representations of the historic past, I argue that if
History curriculum is to be a critical/transformative enterprise, it must attend to the problem of historical representation. I conclude this chapter by proposing a way beyond “counter-memory” as critical history.

I bring the book to a close in chapter 6 by returning once again to the central problematic of the study. Drawing inspiration from the metaphor of curriculum ghosts and visions (see Doll & Gough, 2002), I explore History/history (after the end of history) as both ghost and vision—as stories of the past that haunt us, and narratives that we might use to conjure new futures for ourselves and others. Finally, I attempt to sketch some of the ethical and political implications of a History curriculum that places historical representation as its center, recognizing the productive power of the historical imagination to both haunt and inspire, to subjugate and set free.
Based on nearly a decade of scholarship, this is a highly focused book on the implications of postmodernism for the construction and assessment of theory and practice in educational administration. Current ideas of practice are deconstructed, from the notions of sound research to the use of national standards in the preparation of educational leaders along with ways of exa Based on nearly a decade of scholarship, this is a highly focused book on the implications of postmodernism for the construction and assessment of theory and practice in educational administration. This book is designed for college and university programs engaged in the preparation of educational leaders for elementary/secondary schools and college administrative positions. More. Get A Copy. Postmodernism, by the nature of the movement itself, is not easy to define. To understand postmodernism in the context of adult learning, it may be beneficial to first understand that the postmodern movement is much larger than adult learning. It is inclusive of a wide variety of disciplines and areas of study including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, technology, and education (Klages, 2003). Because postmodernism is as much a philosophical movement as