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THE QUESTION OF LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

BLAIR KOEFOED

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, The University of Auckland, 2003
This thesis is an investigation into learning to read and write. It is also an investigation into how learning to read and write is investigated.

THE PRESENTING PROBLEM
Despite literacy being highly valued by every member of a modern society and the immense personal and social effort directed towards bringing it within the grasp of all, its universal occurrence, it remains an elusive goal.

INVESTIGATING LITERACY
As with many other valued human endeavours, science, with its refined and disciplined way of looking, is enlisted to help improve the achievement of ends, and research is designed and undertaken with the aim of increasing our control over its manifestation in the world. Yet it is the claim of this thesis that by leaving uninvestigated the nature of learning to read and write itself the gains will never be complete.

PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS
To open different lines of investigation, into things themselves, questioning must free itself of socially driven exigencies and the patterns of the established disciplines of thought and become self-reflexive. Self-referential questioning is traditionally and essentially philosophical and insight is sought from three well known modern representatives of the field.

- Heidegger offers reflections on the importance of how questioning is undertaken, and, with his discussions on the nature of truth and how with 'revealing' comes 'concealing' hints at the darker side of literacy as an activity that 'opens' the world.
- Wittgenstein's intense thought on language/world relationships potentially clarifies the dissension so characteristic of literacy acquisition research and provides a construct of language that would allow misrepresentations of literacy to occur.
- Foucault's historical analyses provide concepts useful when considering the origins of literacy, and 'power' becomes a better explanation for the literacy fervour than the production of finer human beings.

THE FINAL QUESTION
Finally their amalgamated insights are used to discuss the phenomenon of illiteracy as it is portrayed in a recent novel by Bernard Schlink, The Reader. In this study of post-war Germany, the way literacy is deeply entwined into our social structures becomes clear, but more crucially we learn this about illiteracy - the highly destructive, exaggerated, and excessive reaction to its occurrence has no ready explanation.
This study is to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. The topic is the "...to contribute to the body of knowledge..."

(a verbal quote from Marie Clay when asked 'what is the purpose of a PhD?')

question of learning to read and write. The general requirement of work at this level is, broadly speaking, to contribute to the body of knowledge that is available on the selected topic, as given by the traditions and standards of research or scholarship of the arbitrating body that mandates or validates this study, the University network and in particular the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

At times however there must be a place for a deeper question, the question of what this means - what it means to contribute to the body of knowledge on or about something, in this case learning to read and write. What is it to have knowledge of learning to read and write? The phrasing of the title The question of learning to read and write in all its awkwardness tries to hold open this possibility of this deeper question, and it means that this study has two strands of thought. It is not just about learning to read and write, about literacy; it is also about philosophy.

Philosophy

With the question, 'what does it mean to contribute to the body of knowledge' the discussion has become philosophical, because only this
discipline has traditionally tried to answer questions like this – to ask questions about itself.

To explore this three twentieth century philosophers were chosen both for their similarities and their differences - Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault - with a special section for an earlier thinker, Frederich Nieschze, within the chapters on Foucault. Each is a major figure in modern thought, respected for his originality, and each a ‘social’ philosopher in that the social construction of knowledge, and the relationships within the knowledge/world/language amalgam is a major theme in their works - an important feature given the social nature of literacy. Asking questions of knowledge in very different ways they present a vast and varied territory to traverse, but this increases the richness and breadth of the possibilities and means that where there is convergence there could be something of import. Each philosopher has a dedicated chapter. The chapter on Foucault is broken into three bites partly because it is his work that, on first encounter, most engages specifically with a social enterprises similar to learning to read and write.

The aim of these readings is to provide clear and relatively uncontroversial interpretations of these complex, much-discussed thinkers, with an eye on what might be useful with respect to literacy acquisition. The interpretations are demonstrably based upon quoted excerpts as much as practicable with two or three of each philosophers' major works identified in the text and drawn upon heavily. The interpretation sought is one that is structured around the actual words of the author, contemplated in themselves and with their evident semantic and syntactic import, rather than the responed words and extracted abstractions at one remove or further from the authoring process.
Thus in Chapters 2 and 3, on Heidegger and Wittgenstein, there is very little reference to any secondary commentary. This is deliberate, for a number of reasons:

- The original works themselves are rich and complex, needing and deserving of much attention. Engaging with the primary work would always seem to be the preferred first step.
- Working across two such virtuoso thinkers at once, the aim was to accurately yet broadly capture the major and more well-established themes of their thought.
- The primary sources have proved themselves and their authors over time and across many institutions whereas the secondary sources have not.
- Secondary sources both good and bad are often as complex as the work they are commenting on, and can involve one in fruitlessly complex dead-ends.
- Deciding which of the many secondary sources to use is itself an exercise of interpretation.

In the case of Foucault it is a little different. There is more reference to secondary sources and extensive use has been made of two commentators. As mentioned earlier, his work lends itself very readily to a topic like learning to read and write, so the discussion around his writings is much longer and more detailed. Commentators assist attempts to come to grips with the huge range and variability of his corpus. Certain issues, particularly those around history, are foregrounded in Foucault, partly because of his willingness to address real-world topics and thus put the ‘theories’ to the test. He becomes contentious at these points and commentators are useful. Finally, Foucault still seems to be standing in wait for a decision as to the importance of his place in the philosophy hall of fame. Commentators provide some back line support.

Over and above the dedicated chapters, there are various points where the ideas of the philosophers so far discussed are gathered together.
and compared, and to some extent blended together or squared off, in an attempt to provide a broad strong blended philosophical base with the potential to give foundational impetus and support to our reconsidering our thoughts about learning to read and write.

**Literacy**

The chapters on the philosophers are preceded by two chapters dedicated to interpretive descriptions of literacy learning. These chapters *Reviewing the Field* and *Literacy Visions Research Realities* are to set the scene. A series of 'snapshots' with running comment, they construct interpretations around some field study objects gathered in - pieces of text, a letter, a presidential speech and the usual array of books, and their covers - and some of the ideas of some prominent people. They are not intended to be a critique so much as a set of facts that the later more abstract concepts of the philosophers can be explained through and measured against or will exploit

An essay called *Literate Beings and Being Illiterate; a meditation on learning to read and write*, looking closely and critically at the problematic notion of illiteracy concludes the thesis. Bernard Schlink's *The Reader* spreads out before its readers a drama with all the full thick themes of life and death, love and hate, loyalty, treachery and weapons of mass destruction, yet pivoted on the fulcrum of a lighter theme, literacy - or rather illiteracy - and it is argued that an examination of the concept of illiteracy has much to offer the question of learning to read and write.

It is from Heidegger that the argument regarding the 'concealing' nature of literacy, manifested as illiteracy, can be extrapolated. Illiteracy is both concealed and concealing. Wittgenstein, by persistently examining many instances of language-in-real-use as opposed to language-in-assumed--
use assembles a portrait of the petty deceits of language, with its suppressed features of cognitive slippage and conceptual errancy. Words hide their origins behind their surface similarities, and try to say more than they can. These deceits are a natural breeding place for shallow thinking, self-deception and believable lying, or, in Foucault’s terms, such falsehoods as the myth of historical continuity or the myth of the forward progress of history.

These are the kind of falsehoods surrounding literacy throughout The Reader and the upshot is an illiteracy that makes no sense. Literacy when looked at in itself is merely a socially learned skill that requires regulating linguistic responses to the input of visual information, and both useful and complex as this skill is, it does not warrant its opposite, illiteracy. Illiteracy might be better understood if we can look through Foucaultian/Nietzschean lenses at reading and writing, viewing them as historically evolved social technologies that have at least some lowly origins marked by jealousies, greed, pride and self-concern. The appeal of modern literacy education may reside in the way that learning to read and write extensively disciplines the higher functioning of the nervous system, binding the movement of the eyes, calling on an expanded awareness of the sounds of speech, forcing the isolation and control of language by received and ritualised patterns, and through the sheer complexity of the processing involved absorb unto itself all the attentional capacity an individual has available for dealing with the world. These disciplinary aspects of literacy functioning may help explain its universal insistence. They help explain why illiteracy has become the modern leprosy and the post-modern madness.
Acknowledgments

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I wish to acknowledge the faith and leadership of Jim Marshall and the silent mentoring of Marie Clay.

Warmest thanks to Peter Peyer for permission to use two of his works – the witty Double Feature, with its transposed syntax from a bygone era, the language game of the advertising of the matinee, and The Owl, looking all the world like a cloaked German philosopher.

Note: Referencing has been kept as simple as possible to keep information flowing through the text. This should create more linear transparent prose and avoid the confusion that comes from breaking into the text with lists of names or dates, or having to flick up and down or to and fro.
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**CHAPTER ONE**

**REVIEWING THE FIELD**

*Introduction*

The field of interest selected for this study is literacy learning. We begin this study with a survey of the field to gain some understanding of its nature, its shape and form. This is a review of a selection of both the literature and the context in which it works. Our aim in this chapter, and the next, is to put together a set of statements that accurately describe literacy teaching and its issues.
The Field of Literacy Learning

For a statement about literacy that without much controversy can be taken in a lay sense as true, and thus function to set this study alight on its journey, we have chosen this; being able to read and write is considered by almost everyone to be an essential aspect of being a proper and fulfilled member of a modern industrial or post-industrial community.

Consider these statements for instance:

Of all the revolutions of the twentieth century—in transportation, industry, information technology, telecommunications—the greatest has been the massive spread of literacy. No other societal change has been as widespread in its effects or as life enhancing in its benefits as literacy. At the beginning of this century, some 12% of the world's population was literate. At the end of the century, according to UNESCO (1997b), 77% are literate. Although well short of universal literacy, it represents an enormous advance with profound repercussions for the enrichment of every aspect of human life. ... Literacy is the supreme amplifier of human abilities, opening windows for economic, cultural, and spiritual development. ... the health of the basic institutions of society depends centrally on the universality of reading and writing. A literate populace is the bulwark of a just and democratic way of life.

To produce a literate populace, then, capable of functioning at a sufficient level to enhance individual growth and to meet changing societal needs is the literacy challenge. It implies increasing the numbers of those who are literate and raising the standards of literacy amongst those with basic literacy skills. (p. xii)

This is a cluster of broad strong assertive statements about the value of literacy to human culture, from individuals up through groups, societies and finally encompassing the entire race. Unstintingly and unconditionally positive, they can be found in a recent (1999) and reputable text, Accepting the Literacy Challenge, published by a large educational publishing house, (Scholastic Australia) and comprising a series of essays by international and Australian leaders in the field who have made major contributions to the success of literacy instruction' (page xxxv). The range of contributors is wide - students, professors, senior lecturers, teachers, senior research fellows, academics, school principals, psychologists, special education teachers, consultants, and extending the credentialing a little, the following titles or positions (a
small selection but taken from the higher end) are represented:

- Professor Emeritus, University of Auckland
- Past President International Reading Association
- Dame of the British Empire
- Distinguished Professor, City University of New York
- President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading
- Vice President of the Learning and Instruction Division of the American Research Association
- Associate Professor in Education, University of New South Wales
- Past president of the NSW Institute of Educational Research
- Professor Emeritus, Harvard Graduate School
- Pro-Vice Chancellor, research, University of Western Sydney
- Past president Australian Reading Association
- Director of NSW Children's Literacy and ESL Research Node
- Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology

The editors, and writers of the introduction, are Alan Watson and Loretta R. Giorcelli - Watson is Associate Professor in Education at the University of New South Wales and Giorcelli a visiting Professor of Special Education to San Francisco State University.

Not all texts about literacy or literacy learning make a case for its value or its contribution to society;

...SOME DO....

- Reading the Writing on the Wall; debates, challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading.
  Tom Nicholson
- Understanding Reading.
  Frank Smith
- Children's Reading Problems.
  Peter Bryant and Lynette Bradley
- Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
  Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns and Peg Griffin, Editors
- Education: The Practice of Freedom
  Paulo Freire
There will be many reasons for this, not the least of which literacy researchers are not necessarily social scientists, and although it is interesting when authors attempt it, the practice has not become standardised.

Here, in the introduction to *Accepting the Literacy Challenge*, where the dynamic that has been set up is that of 'challenge,' these assertions about literacy seem to be important in setting the stage, making it clear that the 'challenge' is worth it, in fact a moral imperative, because literacy is so valuable. They are an exhortation, setting out in detail what the prize to be won is and what the importance of winning is. Like a pep talk.

Watson and Giorcelli's lofty and well-articulated claims may be easier to think about when we separate them out, and reshape, as I have below (see page 5), adding a brief 'off the cuff' comment. They seem a mixed, almost messy, bunch; plausible statements, loose claims, ill-defined propositions and unprovable statements - all totally unaccompanied by evidence and argument. These are not the kind of claims
one would expect from any of the book's chapters. On the other hand, they may not be that far from the kinds of claims one might expect from anyone.

**Watson and Giorcelli's claims for Literacy**

A) Question: Of the five twentieth century revolutions listed below, which is the greatest?

- transportation,
- industry,
- information technology,
- telecommunications
- the massive spread of literacy

Answer: number 5, the massive spread of literacy.

*What does 'greatest' mean and how, even if it is useful, do you compare such different things?*

B) Literacy has more widespread effects than any other societal change.

*How would you judge, and is it a productive comparison?*

C) Literacy has more life enhancing effects than any other social change.

* Ditto

D) The UNESCO figure of an increase since the beginning of the century of 55% in the world’s rate of literacy represents 1) an enormous advance 2) with profound repercussions for the enrichment of every aspect of human life.

*Anything with 'enormous', 'profound', 'enrichment of every aspect' in one sentence has to be an overstatement!*

E) Literacy is the supreme amplifier of human abilities.

*Compared to what - second order amplifiers like music or dance? Interesting to think about this - literacy as a central cultural good.*

F) Literacy opens windows for 1) economic development 2) cultural development and 3) spiritual development.

*This does sound more familiar - not quite sure how it works.*

G) The health of the basic institutions of society depends centrally on the universality of reading and writing.

*Democracy only works if everyone is equally 'misinformed' a cynic would say.*

H) A literate populace is the bulwark of a just and democratic way of life.

*Yes, a common claim that I agree with.*
To some extent, and this may explain why the claims sound as they do, there is almost a universal agreement in favour of literacy, and this gives it a type of 'silent unanimity'. It is not as if one hears about the streets or through the media criticisms of literacy in the same way one might hear criticisms of taxes. So completely agreed upon by all, it need not be talked of, only done. With such pervasive complicit assent, there has been no call in discourse for strong, well-argued dialectic, and so no one has put the time and intelligence into developing one. There is no firm tradition, no heritage, and it is like, for instance, trying to explain the importance of oral language. When there is some attempt to justify literacy, all that is available on the whole is over-rich, under-proved rhetoric.

**Investing in Literacy**

This unanimity has effects. It creates the ground for implicit group contracts that swell and lead to public action and public works. Responsibility for achieving literacy melts away from individuals towards groups and communities, and down into the inbox of some 'public collective', such as a state ministry, federal department, district council or local body office. Even when much smaller splinter groups, from religious or minority, cultural or ethnically based groups - down to home schooling by parents themselves - challenge the educative role of the public collective it is still the public collectives which tend to set the pace and define the outcome.

With this imputation of deep value to literacy comes the investment of human resources, which at every level is considerable. This is probably another of those incontestable observations about literacy. A mass compulsory education system for young children is, despite the comparative simplicity and smallness of the children and relative low cost of the materials involved, a very complex and expensive construct, with the establishment and maintenance of tens to thousands of purpose built buildings in all inhabited parts of the country, the recruitment and training of people to staff these buildings, the continuous supplying of material resources such as
books and pens and paper and computers, and the development and production of policy, curricula, resources and programmes, assessment technologies, special education services, and so on. Here are some New Zealand figures:

**Summary of Prospective Financial Statements [New Zealand Ministry of Education]**

For the year ending 30 June 2004, the Ministry expects:

* To earn $1,171.0 million in revenue from the Crown and $11.8 million from other purchasers of the services it will supply under the ten departmental output classes detailed in the Statements of Objectives in this Report. It expects to incur expenses of $1,182.8 million in providing these services.
* To receive a capital injection of $60.1 million from the Crown which, together with the expected net cash flows of $292.8 million from operating activities, will fund all of the $338.8 million to be used to provide additional school property.

(from www.minedu.govt.nz)

On another level there is the personal investments of time and money, of intellect and emotion from children, parents and caregivers, teachers, education officers, psychologists, teacher educators, community leaders, voluntary workers, civil servants, financial benefactors and politicians. The task of literacy education frequently absorbs dedication and commitment.

**The Success of Literacy Instruction**

Literacy is highly valued and is the recipient of much public and private effort. Yet, for all, this universal literacy remains elusive.

Watson and Giorcelli;

But literacy progress is not to be presumed. High levels of literacy are not attained or maintained without strenuous effort. Literacy is not picked up spontaneously but requires specific and systematic teaching. ... (p. xiii)
Literacy is hard won. Tom Nicholson, Associate Professor, School of Education, The University of Auckland, in his book *Reading the Writing on the Wall: debates, challenges, and opportunities in the teaching of reading*, Dunmore Press, 2000, Palmerston North, in the opening lines of his introduction talks about finding better methods of teaching (after trying to excite our interest in the field);

Who said reading is boring? It has everything. It has controversy, intrigue, amazing discoveries, public concern, media attention, political hype, optimism and frustration. ... In this book we discuss some redbutton issues: Have reading standards gone down? Does reading have to be political? Does reading have a future? What is the best way to teach reading? Can we achieve success for all? (p. 7)

Finding a better method of teaching reading – with whole language or phonics – is of interest not only to those who research reading, but also to the general public. Statistics on reading achievement in the United States, England, Australia and New Zealand all indicate that a sizeable number of children are not learning to read as well as they should. (p. 8)

Nicholson's prose is rough and tumble, full of colloquial terms and catchphrases, like the title of the book *Reading the Writing on the Wall*, and he does not write to some 'abstract attentive-teacher-other' as a projected audience. The first sentence is this,

*Who says reading is boring?*

He is referring to the subject area 'reading', not the actual performance of reading real text, and for a first line it has a journalistic edge as perhaps on television a host might say 'who says you can't paint your bathroom lime!' or 'who says you can't make ice-cream from onions! Aggressive and defensive at the same time, it brings into spotlight the thing it denies, namely the inherent boring-ness of reading. *Who says reading is boring?* - enough people for him to feel it needs counteracting. A little more boringness and a little less controversy in reading research might not have been a bad thing.
However, despite this style, there is something being said here about the inner resistance of reading to opening itself up for study and/or acquisition. Oral language seems built to be learned, but not so reading. This resistance is baffling so we undertake research into questions such as; What is the best way to teach reading?

Literacy is highly valued, and this 'first fact of faith' leads via the second fact of heavy investment to this; we do not do as well as we would like in teaching it - and it is this third fact of literacy that fuels a myriad of discussions on standards, policies, or pedagogies, class sizes, teacher pupil ratios and whether or not to have the school fair. No one seems happy with the state of affairs. Nicholson's book, with its clear histories and accurate overviews of many topics, takes us from where there is not enough argument to where there is a super- abundance of argument, and while we cannot discuss particularly convincingly the placement of literacy in our busy world, we can very happily have a discussion on the difference between 'p' and 'b'.

**Public Collectives for Literacy - the Ministry letter**

As such an active and dominant player in the literacy stakes, the Ministry of Education must be an excellent site from which to continue to investigate the forms of literacy acquisition. Because it must perform, out there in the world, its actions will guide us to more detailed descriptions of what the problems are for learning to read and write.

We will adopt a case study approach around a letter sent by the Ministry of Education to every principal and teacher of years 1 to 4 in the country. It was to accompany the release of the latest Ministry handbook *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4*. The intent is that every teacher teaching that age group in every school in New Zealand with children that age, every literacy curriculum leader, every literacy specialist within the wider education system, and every literacy teacher trainer, have
access to his or her own individual free copy. Its wide distribution somewhat guaranteed, this accompanying letter from the Ministry urges its wide deployment, and it uses a similar line of argument to Watson and Giorcelli; 'talk up' the importance and value of literacy as much as you can so people are better sensitised to the issues and better motivated to act.

Representing the official 'view of the moment' on literacy teaching, it begins with introducing the handbook, and expressing pleasure in sending it because it is 'important'; and testimony to this importance is the Ministry's consideration that each teacher must have the use of a copy (but not a copy of their own because the book presumably remains the property of the Ministry) and will fund this to occur.

The third paragraph, on effective teaching, gives the handbook's title a particular meaning that it does not, at least on the surface, actually have. *Effective Literacy*
Practice, if the words are listened to, does not refer to teaching. Consider cricket practice. There is one frequent meaning as 'after school I went to cricket practice', and one less common such as 'it is not good cricket practice to spit on the ball'. 'Effective' can be added to both but in neither case do we get what the Ministry wants to signal which is that 'effective' is to refer to teaching or, in the case of cricket coaching, practices. It should more accurately read Effective Literacy Instructional Practice, and it appears that within the profession itself a code or 'ingroup' language has grown around the current concerns, allowing shorthand to develop.

In Curriculum Update, Issue 50 July 2002, on the Te Kete Ipurangi - the online learning centre (also a Ministry website) we read that it had been intended for the title of this handbook to follow in the footsteps of its predecessor, Reading in Junior Classes, and be called Literacy in Junior Classes - indicating an inclusion of writing in the handbook. The shift to the current title is just one of the many shifts in the Ministry's recent material towards an emphasis on the concept of 'effective practice', which in turn, as we shall see from the letter further down, is an emphasis on 'teaching', and by implication the teacher. Trying to amalgamate the two titles has produced the confusion discussed above.

Graphtextual Messages

The letter does state the importance of literacy, and it does this in two places. In the text of the letter there is the professionally worded firm swift claim that success in education and throughout one's life is (causally) related to being equipped with literacy skills and strategies. Then, in the 'textgraphic', bottom left, (Fig 2.) there is another message, with no author or subject, and written across flax weaving and a small scale relief map of New Zealand that talks in more political terms of FULFILMENT, leaping the fences of background and situation, and being of benefit to the surrounding society.

It may be literacy or it may be education being spoken of and the sentiments
would fit both, literacy being in the odd position of being both a precursor to and a sub-category of, education.

With its tone of early New Zealand social-welfare-ism, it sounds like one of Clarence Beeby's speeches for Peter Fraser, the country's first Labour Prime Minister. Beeby was Director of Education in New Zealand for 20 years, from 1940 to 1960, and according to Noeline Alcorn, in her biography To the Fullest Extent of His Powers, had the valuable gift of being able 'to express key ideas succinctly, with clarity and elegance.' Beeby is quoted in other current Ministry documents such as in the 'Setting the Scene' introduction to Education Priorities for New Zealand (www.minedu.govt.nz) and by Howard Fancy, the current secretary for Education in the Foreword to Picking Up The Pace, a booklet published by the Ministry as part of SEMO - Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara. His place as the verbal architect of New Zealand's vision of education in the middle of the century is secure and the following passage is, as Alcorn suggests, probably the most quoted in New Zealand education;

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, what ever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted, and to the fullest extent of his powers. p. 99

Only in the subtextual conditions created by textgraphics could such messages find themselves a place in a letter like this.

Here literacy has added to its role of self-fulfilment two others - a benefit to
society and a means of escaping one's heritage - a role as an escape from background and situation. 'Situation' is partly code for social class or ethnic group, as is 'background', and both would be strongly correlated with race.

There are several of these text graphics used as footers to Ministry letters. Here is another.

![Figure 3. Textgraphic two]

Figure 3 has its own text about education and life-long learning, another of the Ministry's themes although not of the prominence of others that we will discuss. In both textgraphics diversity is well represented, in its Maori, Pasifika and Asian graphics, motifs, symbols and representations, and careful consideration of gender and literacy contexts. It is in abundance. These seem to be images selected to warmly and positively represent diversity, and to recognise, acknowledge and employ the semiotics of a range of cultures. But in fact all this use of the images and symbols of diversity is relegated off-text. Diversity is represented all over the letter, and in particular in the textgraphic imagery, except in the print itself, with two notable exceptions.

Text graphics:
The two colour (Pakeha and Maori) flax weaving backdrop, with symbols of question, mathematics, or eye, and perhaps tapa cloth symbol, and the baskets. The open hand palm upwards with an open Clematis (perhaps) flower. A brown-skinned man casually attired, reading a picture book with a smiling young boy. A fair-haired professional woman, with white blouse and jacket, researching in a library (though the books behind would suggest they are in the picture book section of the library), with two older girls or possibly teacher colleagues or student teachers, one possibly Asian.

Letterhead:
The three coloured roof-triangles and two corrugated lines of the sea that are motifs of the Ministry.
At the top right and in the text graphic *Te Tabubu o te Matauranga* is written in smaller, lower case, italicised, lighter coloured letters underneath the heavier, uppercase larger MINISTRY OF EDUCATION.

Apart from this, 1) the prose of the letter is without pause educated, teacher-professional, technical-ese English, and 2) the prose of the textgraphic early colonial, political rhetoric. This is part of a general confusion over diversity.

**The Ministry of Education’s Mission Statement**

It is the relationship between *achievement, diversity and disparity* that is so crucial here and that in the Ministry’s writings becomes very complex, convoluted, and confused.

There are too many different and barely compatible political messages the Ministry wants to project.

The two phrases, one about improving *achievement* and the other about tackling the problem of *disparity*, can be found in the Ministry’s Mission statement, Figure 4 below. They can also be found very clearly stated in the Chief Executive’s Introduction to the Ministry’s 40 page *Statement of Intent - 2003 to 2008*.

And we read them earlier on the two textgraphics used at the foot of the Ministry’s letters. There is some variance;

- Raise achievement and reduce disparity
- Raise achievement and reducing disparity
- Raising achievement and reducing disparity.

Both documents dutifully but without much coherence or attention to logic reel off the Ministry themes, eg, 'achieve their full potential' or 'expectations rise each year' and '(e)ducational achievement levels of all students must continue to increase' (how can this be? when do they stop rising?). In the Fancy letter there is reference to life-long learning, and to 'acquiring skills, knowledge and attitudes' because they will get you
'good jobs' (this is not reducing disparity) and allow you to participate in the wider life of the community.

Figure 4. Mission Statement

But achievement and disparity are not logically entailed with each other. Raising achievement does not necessarily reduce disparity and reducing disparity does not necessarily mean raised achievement, but they are partly entailed in that doing something to one can effect a change in the other, eg lowering the achievement of the top students would reduce disparity.
Both phrases, one about achievement and the other about disparity, are needed.

Achievement is a non-relative term, disparity a relative term - an individual can raise his or her achievement but to reduce disparity something has to happen to the whole group. The two terms probably appeal to different political groups; achievement being an individual's own gain regardless of the rest whereas disparity will offend the socialist within us.

Diversity and disparity are linked in a different way. In the textgraphics, we see how the links are forged between the graphic (the picture images), and the textual (the words), so it becomes very obvious that the diversities one reads about in the body of the letter are the ones reflected in the colourful graphics, and are culturally based.

In the handbook itself, where it is up to the words almost completely, the relationship is spelled out; in the text of Effective Literacy Practice:
There is an ongoing search, internationally, for ways of delivering education that will result in more equitable outcome for all students in schools. The work of New Zealand educators has made a significant contribution to this activity. The results of both international and local studies focus attention on educators' responsibilities towards all students and on the possibilities for improving all students learning.

The focus is of particular significance for New Zealand given the increasing diversity of students in New Zealand classrooms and associated disparities in literacy achievement. Research has shown that some groups of students have not been well served by the conventional literacy practices in our schools (even though these practices have placed New Zealand in the top bracket of literacy achievement in international surveys). The patterns have been well documented: Maori children, Pasifika children, children whose home language is not English, and children in low-decile schools achieve, on average, at a lower level that other children. Initial disparities tend to increase during subsequent years at school. (pp 9-10)

Diversity and disparity; two associated terms, close phonologically and both cousins to the word difference, but lying compressed in the difference between them lies a great deal of social consequence arising from completely opposing notions of the division of wealth. Diversity is benign, disparity is not. When does diversity become disparity? For the Ministry, when the diversity is in (literacy) achievement. Diversity of height is fine. Diversity in art prowess may be bearable. But when a diversity of achievement a) in something considered crucial, such as in literacy b) corresponds to a politically relevant diversity such as ethnic group, or perhaps gender, it is disparity - what the current (2003) Minister for Education, Trevor Mallard calls in his paper *Education Priorities for New Zealand; a summary* (www.minedu.govt.nz), 'systematic underachievement'.

**Gender**

One diversity/disparity not referred to in text of the letter is gender - for instance, gender cannot be included in the observation of 'increasing diversity of students in New Zealand classrooms'. Nor is gender mentioned in the passage from *Effective Literacy Practices* where the social patterning is discernible in the distribution of disparities around such variables such as decile rating of the school attended or
English as a secondary language. Yet it is a very obvious feature, particularly when there are gender/race correlations, in graphic and photographic material.

For instance, consider the cover of the handbook (Fig. 5). Centrally featured is a professionally dressed female, white blouse, lightly made up, with a young girl who could almost be her daughter in a mimicked 'pose with pens'. Teacher and pupil. To the left is the brown-skinned, not-playing-sport-but-reading-a-book male doing shared reading with a book whose characters are 'publisher's beige' - neither white nor brown nor black and not strongly gender defined. A row of children, three girls but the boy in front, sit from left to right (bottom left) each representing a different nationality (the fuller version of this photograph has another child, a Maori boy as part of the group). The cartoon characters seem to have a mobile sexuality, and of course no surface ethnicity.

**Literacy Development Officers**

The publication of *Effective Literacy Practices* is only one of a host of initiatives aimed at learning to read and write. Here are some paragraphs from the *Education Gazette*, Volume 82, Number 13, 21 July 2003, www.edgazette.govt.nz describing the creation of LDOs, Literacy Development Officers, who will join the 1) Literacy Advisers,
2) Resource Teachers of Literacy, 3) Literacy Leadership Facilitators, and 4) Reading Recovery Tutors (see TKI Literacy, Professional advice and support) as members of the Literacy Professional Advice and Support Group.

Literacy effectiveness informers

The Ministry of Education is appointing literacy development officers (LDOs) to assist schools examine the effectiveness of their literacy programmes and make informed, evidence-based decisions focused on improving literacy achievement for all students.

As announced in this year's Budget, 15 literacy development officers will be appointed to work from regional offices around the country, complementing the work of other professionals working in the literacy arena.

The LDOs will work with up to 200 identified primary schools each year, assisting them to analyse literacy data and review their literacy goals and plans.

They will assist where necessary to clarify expectations, guide decisions on the types of support needed to improve and sustain literacy achievement and ensure that effective classroom literacy practices are prioritised.

Results from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) published earlier this year revealed that while New Zealand has some of the top students in the world in terms of reading comprehension, there is a wide gap between high and low achievers.

New Zealand also had one of the biggest gaps in achievement between boys and girls.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy manager Anne Alkema says while many schools are already implementing effective literacy programmes there is currently no way of ensuring that schools are attending to the literacy needs of all students, especially those groups of students identified as underachieving.

It is expected that the LDO initiative will be particularly beneficial for Maori, Pasifika and non-English speaking background (NESB) students, many of whom require more intensive support...

There is direct reference to the influential Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and its findings regarding gender differentials - note however that gender differentials are not be part of the brief of the Literacy Development...
Officers, at least not in this description. There is also a general acknowledgement of the philosophy of evidence-based planning and it is clear that the LDOs are very specifically following the same theoretical pathway as the Ministry letter writers - ensuring, this time in person, that literacy practices are 'carefully examined' and 'informed, evidence-based decisions' are made to improve classroom literacy practices in order to benefit all students.

**Seeing the Pattern**

The Ministry is there to make things happen in the community. Being the avenue along which all the investment money travels it has to be responsible for both the 'strenuous effort' and the 'specific and systematic teaching' Watson and Giorcelli mention. Upon its reluctant shoulders falls Nicholson's issue of what is the best way to teach reading and writing. This page from TKI below (see Fig. 6) captures the major themes of the current initiative.

![Figure 6. Effective Literacy Practice](image)
A 'Literacy and Numeracy Strategy' department has been created. Literacy, given a loose definition in terms of 'language forms', is targeted through 'effective practice', or, if we read more closely, classroom practice, and an army of assorted specialists. A set of dimensions have been described and captured in the honeycomb graphic. The mission has been set to raise achievement and lower disparity, and material like the handbook produced.

Yet no amount of administrative structure will cover bad logic. Teachers are told that there is an increasing diversity in the classroom, which makes it especially important that we focus on improving the effectiveness of our literacy teaching practice. By implication, diversity is a threat to achieving high standards. To counter that threat, we have to teach better. But only certain kinds of diversity are a threat to high educational outcomes - the diversities of culture and race - and what is being resolutely unsaid is that the diversity encountered in any one class of children is not matched with a diversity of subject areas or literacies (language forms) for them to achieve in. It is a strange logic, and only makes sense if we read 'increase diversity' to mean an increase in the range or number of children from backgrounds that are not English speaking or, for want of a better word, middle class English speaking, and thus who lower achievement levels on language dependent tests.

Research into Literacy

In the very middle of the Ministry letter that we have been using as a case study, we find the statement which reveals, the keystone that distributes the weight and allows the archway to stand.

This book identifies and describes features of literacy practice that are clearly linked by research to improved outcomes for students.

'Research' is the authority, the place where the proof is that these instructional features work. This is why it should be believed and actioned.
One is not shown the proof - this would be too complex perhaps. It must be taken on faith and the faith is carried, encapsulated, and reformed as knowledge in the word 'research'. In a quick decisive act of credentialing, the letter places its entire claim truth on the authority of a type of investigation named 'research', and with the evocation of this single word, the matter is considered concluded. The confidence with which it is presented by the authors of the letter testifies to its ability to communicate to its readership unequivocal messages of truth, and right and good.

For reference, here is The Oxford Pocket Dictionary definition of 'research', short and tart as it is, page 765, 1978 edition; "Endeavour to discover new or collate old facts etc. by critical study; careful search"

Similarly in the passage from the handbook above, we read, "research has shown..." and the phrase does the same work, stand in for proof. When we utter statements about the value and importance of literacy proof is not required, but when we begin to discuss aspects of teaching and learning literacy, proof becomes very important and it's the kind of proof that research, with its critical study and careful search can provide.

In the Gazette selection above the word 'research' is not used quite in this way but the activities associated with it are. With the same belief that more instructional effectiveness is needed, the LDOs will direct schools to do their own research, gathering their own literacy data, analysing it and using it to review their goals and plans.

And finally it is there on the website with the honeycomb structure having the dimensions of practice chained around its edge below the carefully worded statement;

The evidence from national and international studies suggests that quality literacy teaching has the following features. (see above).

This then leaves us the task of inquiring more into research for the next chapter.
Introduction

Literacy is an almost unequivocal social good, yet despite effort, barriers such as diversity seem to make the goal of universal literacy hard to achieve. Diversity of achievement, which of systemic becomes disparity, is to be overcome by more effective teaching (except, it seems, in the case of gender). Research, the directing of human intelligence towards gathering more information about a phenomenon is all too often why greater gains in literacy achievement are not forthcoming and how we can turn this around. However, non-commentators earlier indicated that reading must be won from the world and cannot be taken for granted. Let us continue to investigate research.
RESEARCHING RESEARCH

Reading Problems

While 'research' is evoked rather glibly in curriculum statements or government publications, as we have seen, it is treated much more seriously in academic discourses, and we can now turn our attention to this. It is doubly ironic that it is in the more glib references to research that the results are taken more seriously and with more commitment. It is in the more self-conscious academic texts that conclusions become highly conditional or impossible to find.

Peter Bryant and Lynette Bradley, in 1985, when at Department of Psychology at the University of Oxford (Bryant a Professor and Bradley a Senior Research Officer) published *Children's Reading Problems* (Blackwell, 1985) a book almost entirely devoted to the intricacies of research methodologies. They begin with some very interesting justifications for literacy (scanned from the text, above and below). Firstly, their description of why reading is so important is more directly to do with success at school, in being able to profit from education and the accumulation of knowledge. This is literacy giving access to other subject areas. Then they suggest two new and very important ideas - 1) that reading could restructure thinking itself, and, 2) that it opens the possibility of a 'meta-awareness' of language.
What is the problem?

Of all the things that children have to learn when they get to school reading and writing are the most basic, the most central and the most essential. Practically everything else that they do there will be permeated by these two skills. Hardy a lesson can be understood, hardly a project finished unless the children can read the books in front of them and write about what they have done. They must read and write or their time at school will be largely wasted.

It is hard to overestimate the sheer pervasiveness of these skills. It is not just that they are needed in every school subject. They may also have a profound effect on the way children think about things and on their acquaintance with their own language. Books set out lines of reasoning with a coherence that must be quite rare in the conversations which young children hear. It is possible that the experience of reading other people's arguments will help children to form their own more logically and effectively. It is quite possible, too, that by dint of reading the child learns things about her own language which she had never realized before. We know that young children have only the haziest notions of linguistic units like words, phrases and sentences. But with the help of spaces and punctuation, words and sentences become quite explicit in print. Here, too, the child may come to understand an important part of her world through the experience of reading.¹

¹ We do not yet know all of the consequences of learning to read and write, but they must be profound. Examine what

Their claims are both more circumscribed than those earlier, because they do not talk in the lofty ideas of succeeding in life or amplifying human possibilities, and at the same time more profound, because they talk about the changing depth and structure of thinking itself. Bradley and Bryant are impressed with the literate mind.

Then, when it comes to discussing reading failure, we do not read about diversity along class, racial, ethnic or cultural fracture lines as we did earlier. We read about the large number of children we have in our class who find the task of learning to read a 'fearsome business.' The diversity they talk about is in three areas, intelligence, linguistic ability, and world experience. From their perspective, it is to be expected that these generally 'handicapped' children of lower intelligence, limited linguistic ability and/or 'woefully' incomplete knowledge of the world would add the

Our efforts to help them are limited by the structure of their handicap. We are responsible for teaching them to be able to communicate as well as possible with us and we should make sure that we understand them in their own terms.
blemished gem of illiteracy to their tarnished achievements. This diversity is immutable, it seems, even though one might expect that at least 'knowledge of the world' would be a reversible variable. Alas, no leaping the fences of situation and background for these children and the power of effective teaching to offset the inequalities of diversity is not even a twinkle in anyone's eye. Help them by all means but do not expect miracles.

On the other hand there are those children whose difficulty in learning to read has no explanation - loved and encouraged, smart, lively, alert and intelligent, nurtured by doting parents and coaxed by excellent teachers, and the recipients of highly skilled instruction they nonetheless fall inexplicably further and further behind. These are the children, the 'backward readers', that demand and deserve our attention, so far short of their potential they fall.

The three pages above are in some respects surprisingly 'unscientific', using adjectives like 'fearsome', and 'woefully', and 'uncomfortably', and making broad unsubstantiated generalisations like, 'Many of these children have fallen behind on every front'. To the ears of those of us who teach there is a degree of social fatalism regarding those who might be expected to fail at reading, and as researchers they seem to favour the intellectual quest over the moral or social justice one, which would be to...
help the 'woeful' children. Researchers and educationalists, one imagines, would have different priorities at this point.

But diversity for researchers Bryant and Bradley is a perfectly good and acceptable reason why some do not succeed very well, even though as we have seen at least one of the variables through which diversity is able to be realised, that of knowing about the world, is amenable to instruction. It is when the only diversity is that of literacy achievement itself that they become interested. For the New Zealand Ministry, diversity is not a reason to fail because 'research has shown' that effective teaching will offset initial short falls.

In the New Zealand Ministry of Education material, this diversity was represented in a number of ways. Things were said with words, and other things were illustrated with visual images. We can apply this kind of analysis here as well, though this time we are seeing in the cover illustration not merely a version of an idealised instructional setting but an entire world view in which literacy has a major role. The choice of this image as a cover imports an ideal vision of reading that acts as the book's 'vanishing point', and for this reason it is very worth exploring.

**Literacy and Humanity**

Although entitled *Children's Reading Problems*, the cover shows an individual without problems, if we are interpreting the relaxed casual sitting position and look of contemplative absorption correctly. The image is identified on the back cover as:

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*Detail of A Young Boy Reading* by Foppa is reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection. Cover design by Martin Miller. (Back cover)

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... and the whole cover is shown to give the proportionate size of the image, about a third of the surface area, (see fig 7 below)

Note however in the four websites I visited;

- *The Web Gallery of Art*, http://gallery.euroweb.hu,
- the work is never referred to as *A Young Boy Reading* but is consistently called *The Young Cicero Reading*.

A search for *A Young Boy Reading* was unsuccessful. Because we do not know why the fresco has, or has had, these two names the matter must rest except to point out how different the two designations are. A young boy could be, perhaps, under ten years of age, whereas 'the young Cicero' could be early manhood. It is not so easy to tell from the image. Most importantly, such a title as *A Young Boy Reading* would greatly diminish the purpose and point of the piece, and would close down this discussion.
On the other hand, there are many reasons why Foppa would portray Cicero, and they are all very pertinent to our interpretation of the image, and we will pick up on this below.

The Wallace Collection, which holds the fresco, is housed at Hertford House, and is, according to the website homepage,

both a national museum and the finest private collection of art ever assembled by one family. It was bequeathed to the nation by Lady Wallace, widow of Sir Richard Wallace, in 1897, and opened to the public just three years later ... Among its treasures are one of the best collections of French 18th-century pictures, porcelain and furniture in the world, a remarkable array of 17th-century paintings and a superb armoury.

A fuller search of the website will not reveal any mention of Vincenzo Foppa, 1427/30 - 1515/6, as one of its treasures, even when one reaches the Italian Paintings, Drawings and Watercolours page. Foppa, a painter of the Early Renaissance, does not rank with Titian, Canaletto or Andrea del Sarto. The eLibrary, quoting the Columbia Encyclopaedia, Seventh Edition states that he painted exclusively religious subjects, and in the collection of thirteen works available for viewing in the Web Gallery of Art, eleven are very strictly religious, in the sense that The Adoration of Kings, St Stephen the Martyr, and Madonna and Child with St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist are religious. However the other two, Cicero and Portrait of Francesco Brivio are not. Most of his frescos have been destroyed, and The Young Cicero Reading is the only surviving fresco from the Palazzo Mediceo, having been cut from the wall c.1863. The Cicero work stands out not only in its non-secular theme but also in its clean fresh lines and simple imagery.

Cicero, the famous Roman statesman and lawyer was a very significant figure in the Renaissance, symbolic of its assertion of classical values in opposition to the encrusted, unchanging, ever inward-looking scholasticism of the previous fifteen centuries. The young Cicero, studying, would have been a exemplar of the new freedom and freshness, the new recognition of law, the new respect for the art of
language, its grammar and its logic, and the making available and comprehensible in Latin the writings of the Greek philosophers (most of Plato's Dialogues were unknown through the Aristotelian-dominated Medieval period). He was also the finest example of the Roman contribution to culture in prose, in oratory, in the considerations of grammar and logic in dialectic, and a primary source of the non-secular values that, where they did not replace Christianity, certainly gave it a more human face. In *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* by Charles G. Nauert Jnr, Cambridge University Press, we read, page 12, that Cicero was the Roman author most admired by the Renaissance humanists, and that it was from his *Pro Archaia* that the term 'studia humanitatis ac litterarum' was derived, which came to mean the subject boys must study to reach their human potential, that is, the liberal arts. In *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, edited by Jill Kraye, Cambridge University Press 1966, we read in Chapter 1, *The origins of humanism* by Nicholas Man;  

Humanism is that concern with the legacy of antiquity - and in particular but not exclusively with its literary legacy - which characterises the work of scholars from the ninth century onwards. It involves above all the rediscovery of Greek and Roman texts, the restoration and interpretation of them and the ideas they contain. (p. 2)  

And he mentions on page 12 how Cicero was of particular importance.  
That the literary heritage has been given pride of place in this historical movement is something that anyone interested in the question of learning to read and write would have to see as most important. It will have been many tens of thousands of years since the concept of being human and having language fused. Historically, Eurocentrically, the Renaissance could be said to be the point at which being human and being literate fused, and from henceforth it would be impossible to consider human culture without the written word – and it is this historical problematic in which we still dwell, striving to find a solution to a state of being that may be out of reach for
some who might still deserve a part in the daily drama of human playing.

We read on the Detroit Institute of Arts website, www.dia.org, this about Early Renaissance art:

**European Art: The Early Renaissance in Italy**
The early 15th century witnessed the emergence of the Renaissance, a rebirth of the arts of antiquity, centred in the city of Florence. Artists revived ancient forms, borrowed subjects from Roman history and mythology, and emulated classical artistic principles, including harmonious proportion, realistic expression, and rational postures. A new awareness of the dignity of the individual prompted an increasingly naturalistic representation of the human figure.

*The Young Cicero Reading* manages to exemplify most of these features - Foppa has chosen Cicero from the Roman classical period, and presented him not as an ideal but as a young man sitting perhaps as a young man would sit, and so on.

There is a clean rationalism to the classical lines of the architecture in the background. We can understand the non-religious subject matter, Cicero, and the seemingly naturalistic pose (the pose is, in fact, quite hard to maintain) as thoroughly humanist, with Cicero carrying out his studies away from his desk, his book in his right hand with thumb and fingers spread to form a cradle (the book must stay open itself), the other hand thumb and fingers apart on his thigh, looking at his text just as a Madonna might look at her child, the book replacing in shadow form the saviour as a source of enlightenment. His books are spread around a little carelessly, one open, some in a pile, one leaning, one under the desk. He looks easy at the task, confident not fearsome, and we are given a sense of worldliness, almost precociousness, the opposite of Bryant and Bradley's woefully incomplete knowledge of the world. We are not given the impression of a strenuous effort but we are given the sense of the enhancement of a fine mind. The facial expression is not just one of 'symbolic' reading, but has a realism and intelligence in that he does actually seem to be looking at the book, and seems to express inner confident thought. This reader has the presence and attire of wealth and standing, secure in the knowledge that he has at his disposal the objects (the manuscripts, which cannot be cheap) the space and the
time for this higher intellectual, moral, spiritual or aesthetic (but not functional or pragmatic) purpose. Reading is thus portrayed as an elite activity, for the few and the wealthier classes, which it most probably was. Humanism signalled an increased interest in the nobility, dignity, beauty and capability of the human, but not of every human.

The image on the cover of Children's Reading Problems is beginning to properly contribute to the text. The image of this young reader is a portrayal idealising literacy and literacy learning as a central feature in a broader philosophy of learning and culture. It is an image one historical period, the Early Renaissance, has constructed as an imagined scene within another, Classical Rome, and in doing so laid out some very specific notions of what it might mean to be literate. The transition was towards a literacy that meant a man of letters, with a classical education including Latin for certain and Greek if you're clever, well read in the canon (including Cicero for certain but not the Bible which was a mark of scholasticism), all of which added up to shaping a human being of refined sensibilities, intellectual superiority and developed moral character.

This is an extended and adult version, if you like, of the Bryant and Bradley sense of what it is to be literate; that being literate is about being able to fulfil an educational potential, where being able to 'read well' turns into being 'well-read', that it has an impact on how you think, on your lines of reasoning, and on what you understand about language and are able to do with it, to explain, to convince or to write poetry. We can see more extended parallels with Bryant and Bradley, if we take the liberty to deconstruct their language a little into more politically revealing correlates. Their words are in inverted commas and my quick reinterpretation in Italics...

Lit...
"who are intelligent, quick and alert," - well nourished, well dressed, healthy, clean, in a stimulating and well resourced environment, verbal, responsive to adults, precocious, have their own bedroom, have their own bed, feisty, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)...

"who have with all the advantages of parental help and encouragement "- parents or paid caregivers such as nannies, with the resources of time and money, mother not working, do ballet, piano lessons and art classes, have no large motor skills and cannot throw or hit a ball, have social knowledge and connections, cultural capital, social confidence, perhaps privilege, small families, own three cars, a computer/TV/Playstation, many books ... 

“enjoy the devoted and skilled attention from their teachers” - private Tutors, fee-paying schools where the resources were there for teachers not to be overworked, classrooms not too crowded, teacher pupil ratios suitable for individual attention, with children whose heritage it was to be successful, teacher’s pet, never go outside to play with a ball, get other children into trouble ...

The similarities show up more consistently when we select some key words which characterise the values and attributes of humanism, as shown in the illustration and also characterise the nature of literacy for Bradley and Bryant;

- natural,
- cultured,
- worldly,
- open-minded,
- advantaged,
- intelligent,
- liberal,
verbal,
literate (both of literacy and literature).

So, in summary, this transplanted Italian fresco, with its image of a humanised boyish Cicero set at his reading in a neo-classical renaissance patio brings into the text of Bradley and Bryant a host of finely interconnected historical meanings and interpretations, currents and flows of ideas across historical time, that we might not have otherwise had.

The Humanist/Renaissance movement, summoned up by the fresco, infuses the text of Bryant and Bradley with some significant subtextual historical interpretations.

**Back to Methodology**

The more accepted contribution of Bryant and Bradley to the body of knowledge does not lie in the choice of illustration for the cover of their book, or their theories as to why literacy is important; and the way that they sort backward readers out from any other slow reader is as unsatisfactory as it looks. Rather it is with the methodical clarity that they work through some of the problems of literacy research, particularly when trying to find 'causes', ie of reading backwardness.

How does one find convincing evidence about the reasons for children's reading difficulties?

In the end everything in our book turns on this question. We will have to get the evidence right, and one of our main points will be that, on the whole, people do not have it right in the past.

People have often used quite inadequate evidence to support their ideas about the causes of reading problems, and it has taken a great deal of time for the rest of us to realise how misleading these ideas are. (p. 11)

Their claim is that the results of any research cannot be evaluated without knowing a great deal about the methodology of research, leading to the questions such as who is compared to whom, whether there is a control group, or random sample, what kind of
statistical analysis is applied to the figures, has regression to the mean been accounted for, and so on.

**Three** important methodological issues form a leitmotiv through the book. **One** is the issue of correlation versus causation. When two 'things' are always found together it is overpoweringly difficult not to project some physical or causal link between them - to give an absurd example, if the consumption of peas for breakfast was always followed by stomach cramps at dinner time then it is natural to hypothesise that peas somehow *cause* stomach cramps. But correlations can be as high as 100%, with two variables *always* occurring in tandem, with an increase in one always being observed alongside an increase in the another and vice versa, yet logically (a la Hume) still no causation can be attributed. This is a problem because without causation control is limited. Causation is sought because as Bryant and Bradley state earlier, knowing something is a cause gives one a great deal of control in trying to effect some change.

However perhaps they overstate their case in asserting that, 'the question of causes must lie at the heart of any solution to the problem of backwardness in reading'. It is possible to imagine being able to effect a change in a course of events without knowing what caused the course of events in the first place, eg, one can prevent a pot plant from dying by moving it to a different position without knowing what was causing it to die in the first place. In fact one reportedly successful early literacy intervention, Reading Recovery, developed in New Zealand in the late 1970s by Marie Clay for six year olds, and now widespread in all English speaking countries, seems to deliberately overlook the aetiology of a child's difficulties in its selection and instructional procedures. In New Zealand, Reading Recovery has had the financial support of the Ministry of Education for a number of years and the Ministry's yearly monitoring data indicates that consistently between 85% and 90% of the children, originally selected on no other criteria than that they were the lowest literacy achievers in their class, are in less than six months returned to the levels of their
classmates. Yet there is no reference to 'causes' in any published description of the intervention, or in either of Clay's publications, *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, which contains the assessment procedures used with the children, and *Reading Recovery; a guidebook for teachers in training*, the manual teachers use to guide their teaching. Reading Recovery seems to concentrate instead on the careful and ongoing diagnosis of current levels of skill and on the tuition techniques that will bring about shifts in performance.

A second issue is this; when there are two highly correlated variables, how do you know the direction of the causation, i.e., which one caused which - consequence or cause? The example Bryant and Bradley use is the very high interpretability between poor performance on the verbal part of an intelligence test and backwardness in reading. Replicated many times it has become widely accepted that backward readers have low 'verbal intelligence'. But this does not permit the statement to be made that it is these difficulties with speaking that are causing the reading difficulties. It could, just as feasibly, be the other way round. The question is, are the backward readers lagging in their verbal development because they are not doing enough reading, or, do they not do enough reading because their language is too weak.

A third issue concerns research design when investigating developmentally displayed phenomena like reading. If you try to match two individuals with different achievement levels simply on age then you will not have taken account of the different experiences each individual will have had because of their different skill level. An eight year old reading at a twelve year old level has had very different experiences, and opportunities, with language than an eight year old reading at a five year old level. The alternative to age-match design is reading-level match design, where an eight year old reading at a six year old level is matched with a six year old reading at a six year old level. Because they are both at the same reading level, any differences between them cannot be attributed to, or seen as a consequence of, reading ability.

As these three examples show, investigating learning to read (and write) is not
straightforward. It is not easy to look at events in the world and simply read off what is happening with literacy learning. It is too implicated in human social intercourse, caught up and set to work in their affairs for it to give up the nature of its existence so readily.

**Keith Stanovich**

A key player in the unfolding of the complexity of literacy learning is Keith Stanovich. In 1986, the year following the publication of *Children's Reading Problems*, the *Reading Research Quarterly* published Keith Stanovich's *Matthew Effects in Reading; some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of reading*, an exceptionally comprehensive and successful review of a wide range of seemingly conflicting research around children having reading difficulties. Matthew effects are the overall tendency in groups of literacy learners for the gap between the good readers and the poor readers to be ever widening. The rich get richer while the poor, even that that they have is taken away. This is Stanovich's most often cited publication, and the term 'the Matthew Effect' has entered the vocabulary of most teachers of early literacy.

**The Gospel According To St Matthew:**

"For unto every one that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Among the many very important refinements and distinctions in the paper are those where he tackles causation. The notion of unidirectional causation, so powerful in the physical sciences, seems too tightly restrictive for the life sciences where the notion of self-regulation is a paramount requirement of a life form. Recognising the inadequacy of both a unidirectional and continuous notion of causation, he proposes;

*reciprocal causation* - where causation could operate back and forth, eg, more reading means a wider oral vocabulary, and a wider vocabulary means one can read more
developmentally limited relationships - where the period in which one thing may effect another is limited eg when a duckling hatches the period in which it is susceptible to imprinting is finite.

Stanovich also discusses the 'reading-level match' design in his paper, revealing as he does so some of the extended family of connected issues and, in his referencing where different sets of researchers are named, the wide scope of researching in the field. In one sense this, the work of Bryant and Bradley, and Stanovich, can all be said to represent the ongoing advance of knowledge in the field of literacy acquisition research. As research designs improve, and sophisticated and powerful methodologies become increasingly an integral part of social science, our theories increase in explanatory power. But there is an alternative explanation.

Firstly, it can be used as evidence that the area being researched is very complex in itself, as it manifests itself in the world, in physical human activity and in symbolic activity. This is most probably true. But alongside this, it could mean that the phenomenon being observed, literacy learning, is poorly conceptualised and/or
that the tools we are using are inadequate.

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reading level, their performance should not differ on any other reading-related
cognitive task (see Fletcher, 1981). However, Bryant and Goswami (1986) have
pointed to the ambiguity inherent in null findings obtained with a reading-level
match. That is, all processes—like eye movements—that are basically epiphe-
omena of the efficiency of reading will display precisely the pattern predicted by
the developmental lag model. However, unlike the lag model, in which it is as-
sumed that reading level is determined by the lagging cognitive processes, an al-
ternative explanation in terms of the consequences of reading posits that the
operation of the process is determined by the reading level.

made that a science will be no better than the quality of the understandings it
begins with, and that if it is the case that a science is working with defective initial
understandings then to contribute to the body of knowledge may mean something
different from just another research project.

Bradley and Bryant wrote Children's Reading Problems in 1985. At the bottom of
page three above they said,

All this is uncontroversial. Everyone who has anything to
do with the problem wants to find a way of eradicating it.
Nearly everyone agrees on the importance of wedding theory
to practice. Virtually all the research on the problem has been
concerned in one way or another with the question of its
causes. Yet for a very long time we have been nowhere near
solving it. Now things are changing quickly. We think that a
solution is very close — so close, in fact, that we can already
discern its shape and many of its details too. Why this has
happened, and also why it took so long to happen, is an
intriguing story.

However they were wrong in this prediction. Nicholson, writing fifteen years later,
points to the sizeable number of children who still cannot learn to read, and the need for better instructional methods. He describes the field as one full of controversy and public concern. Our analysis of the New Zealand Ministry of Education showed a great deal of overt faith in research but a great deal of covert confusion over handling the issues of diversity and disparity - a confusion that was also evident in Bryant and Bradley's own work.

**Proving the Point; The Case of Reading Recovery**

Clay's Reading Recovery project, that between its introduction to the United States in 1984 and the end of the 2000/2001 school year had served more than a million children in that country alone, is a clear case where it seems difficult to prove conclusively, to everyone’s satisfaction, whether it works or does not work (see www.readingrecovery.org). Arising out of Clay's observations of children learning to read and write in New Zealand classrooms, it straddles the under-explored territory between the academically-driven theoretical models based on the manipulations of clinical or experimental research and the naturalistic observations of classroom teaching and more importantly, observations of sequences and progressions of productive learning - which may explain why it is difficult for the discourse to evaluate. It has a relatively minor place in the overall panorama of school-based learning to read and write, occupying at most 0.5 years out of a compulsory school attendance span of 10 years, yet despite having attracted the attention of a hugely disproportionate number of research projects a consensus regarding its efficacy is not on the horizon. Here are two recent and inter-related discussions.

a) *International* - in May, 2002, a highly critical Internet Letter, entitled *Evidence-Based Research on Reading Recovery*, signed by 32, in their own words 'researchers who study reading development and interventions with struggling readers' was sent to members of the US Congress and to the wider educational community. Signatories included four New Zealand academics (all from Massey University);
- Professor James Chapman
- Professor Bill Tumner
- Keith Greaney,
- Jane Prochnow.

The New Zealand signatories had asked that a special section on New Zealand be included in the letter, specifically identifying the problems with Reading Recovery in its land of origin. There were four strong claims - that Reading Recovery was not successful with its target population, was not cost effective, did not use standard measures and was not receptive to new evidence.

In response to the Internet letter, most reasonably called *Response Letter: A Broader View of the Evidence; Reading Recovery as an Example*, was placed on the Internet, this time with 200 signatures from the worldwide academic community. The Reading Recovery Council of North America published a booklet, *What Evidence Says About Reading Recovery*, which includes both letters (available on www.readingrecovery.org). In this reply, each of the claims of the Internet letter was addressed, as expected, and there were five New Zealanders this time;

- Emeritus Professor, University of Canterbury, Warwick Elley;
- Libby Limbrick, Principal Lecturer, Auckland College of Education;
- Harold Shepherd, Senior Lecturer, Massey University;
- John Smith, Head of Department, Department of Education, Dunedin College of Education,
- Michael Townsend, Associate Professor, University of Auckland.

Reading Recovery was developed in the late nineteen seventies and yet over a million children later and several millions of dollars later there is still this debate over its efficacy at this level. This is the nature of the field.

b) *National*; in 1998 the then New Zealand Government convened a 20 person *Literacy Taskforce* charged with the task of advising the Ministry on how to achieve
the Government's goal;

"By 2005 every child turning nine will be able to read, write and do maths for success."

The Taskforce was lead by Libby Limbrick. To provide this broader group with 'advice from a range of theoretical and academic perspectives' (see page 1, website) the Ministry of Education created a 9 or 10 strong **Literacy Experts Group** from Tertiary institutions around New Zealand. Professors Tumner and Chapman were members of that group which and in their Group Report to the Ministry it is stated in the first of three statements (and this must include Tumner and Chapman's views):

We recommend continued Government funding of Reading Recovery as a national systematic programme, provided that further New Zealand research is carried out to determine whether it is as effective as it could be. (p. 2)

In its final report, The Taskforce summarised Reading Recovery beginning with this statement;

Reading Recovery is internationally recognised as one of the most successful acceleration and intervention programmes to support children making limited progress in reading. The Literacy Taskforce acknowledged the strengths of Reading Recovery and agreed that it must remain an essential feature of New Zealand's education system. p. 10

Claim and rebuttal. Counterclaim. How do we weigh these up? There are a number of contenders to be the answer this question, ranging from the very simple such as count the signatories to the very large such as undertake a large scale research project to investigate how to assess the success of Literacy Interventions - which, apart from the irony of a research project to investigate why research projects fail, would be almost certain to show that there is a deep seated incommensurability to the diversity of views represented. There are forces at work within literacy learning research that could perhaps very usefully thought about.
PART TWO

THE SCIENCE OF SCIENCE

The President, The Professor And The National Foundation;
(a three part investigation of the role of 'science' in learning to read and write)

Introduction

Turning now to the United States of America, the issue we have been discussing, research, steps out in slightly different garb. Literacy learning in the US has been known for a longstanding 'debate' that despite everyone's best attempts still stands as a register of all that follows, the debate between whole language and phonics. Chapter 4 of Nicolson's book describes it well.

As the decades pass the U.S. education scene has no difficulty finding new concepts to problematise with its old neurosis - not that 'science' is a new concept, but one might not have suspected it was so in need of a home.

THE PRESIDENT: George Bush

President (in October 2003) George Bush, a man of vision if not literacy, heads our closing section in the chapter, as we use his very wide-sweeping education Bill, No Child Left Behind to continue exploring the themes that mark current literacy practice.
Here, we observe how Bush singlehandedly lifts the epistemological problems of literacy research (what is science?) into the middle of a nation's political consciousness, opening a question of vast interest in an arena of the most minimal of discourse facilitation skills.

Our argument in these two chapters has built around these three precepts - we can call them the **Social Laws of Literacy**:

1. literacy is highly desirable and valued
2. a great deal of human energy is invested in literacy learning and
3. we fall short of our hopes and aspirations for achievement

One more can be added. The failings of our literacy transmission practices look dismal in the light of laws one and two, and the result is this fourth law, which states

4. *research* and *science* will become more and more important, both as words and as activities, because they seem hold the secret to improved achievement.

Lines corresponding to each law are easily found in Bush's address. The slogan, *no child left behind*, like the New Zealand one, *raising achievement, reducing disparity*, or 'By 2005 every child turning nine will be able to read, write and do maths for success' embeds in a statement about children an intent for teacher/programme change and in effect each is saying (in as much as political statements can say anything) given laws one and two, law three is unacceptable - hence law 4.

Here, abridged for relevancy, are some excerpts from Bush's speech, found on the Whitehouse website, announcing the signing of the Landmark Education Bill commonly known as 'No Child Left Behind'. The text in bold has been added to highlight the essential piece regarding 'scientifically-based'. Enjoy.
Office of the Press Secretary

January 8, 2002

President Signs Landmark Education Bill Hamilton High School Hamilton, Ohio

In Focus: Education Fact Sheet on the No Child Left Behind Act

We've got large challenges here in America. There's no greater challenge than to make sure that every child — and all of us on this stage mean every child, not just a few children — (applause) — every single child, regardless of where they live, how they're raised, the income level of their family, every child receive a first-class education in America. And we owe the children of America a good education. And today begins a new era, a new time in public education in our country. As of this hour, America's schools will be on a new path of reform, and a new path of results.

Our schools will have higher expectations. We believe every child can learn. Our schools will have greater resources to help meet those goals.

First principle is accountability. Every school has a job to do. And that's to teach the basics and teach them well. If we want to make sure no child is left behind, every child must learn to read. And every child must learn to add and subtract. (Applause.) So in return for federal dollars, we are asking states to design accountability systems to show parents and teachers whether or not children can read and write and add and subtract in grades three through eight.

The fundamental principle of this bill is that every child can learn, we expect every child to learn, and you must show us whether or every child is learning. (Applause.) I read a quote one time from a young lady in New York. She said, "I don't ever remember taking an exam. They just kept passing me along. I ended up dropping out in the 7th grade. I basically felt nobody cared."

The story of children being just shuffled through the system is one of the saddest stories of America. Let's just move them through. It's so much easier to move a child through than trying to figure out how to solve a child's problems. The first step to making sure that a child is not shuffled through is to test that child as to whether or not he or she can read and write, or add and subtract.

And a fourth principle is that we're going to spend more money, more resources, but they'll be directed at methods that work. Not feel-good methods, not sound-good methods, but methods that actually work. Particularly when it comes to reading. We're going to spend more on our schools, and we're going to spend it more wisely.

If we've learned anything over the last generations, money alone doesn't make a good school. It certainly helps. But as John mentioned, we've spent billions of dollars with lousy results. So now it's time to spend billions of dollars and get good results. (Applause.)

As John mentioned, too many of our kids can't read. You know, a huge percentage of children in poverty can't read at grade level. That's not right in America. We're going to win the war overseas, and we need to win the war against illiteracy here at home, as well. And so this bill — (applause) — so this bill focuses on reading. It sets a grand goal for the country. Our children will be reading by the third grade.

That's not an impossible goal. It's a goal we must meet if we want every child to succeed. And so, therefore, we tripled the amount of federal funding for scientifically-based early reading programs. We've got money in there to make sure teachers know how to teach what works. We've got money in there to help promote proven methods of instruction.

It's a great symbol of what is possible in Washington when good people come together to do what's right. But it's just the beginning of change. And now it's up to you, the local citizens of our great land, the compassionate, decent citizens of America, to stand up and demand high standards, and to demand that no child — not one single child in America — is left behind.

Thank you for letting us come. May God bless. (Applause.)
In a general sense, trying to cut a path through the tangled mass of 'literacy-education-America' or for trying to sort on the basis of some quality aspect all the different programmes is admirable. The homespun definition for scientifically proven, ie, 'what works' will appeal politically, simply because it seems to simplify a complexity that seems to be an obfuscation.

But within the US scene to call something 'scientifically proven' does not necessarily mean that a piece of research is judged against an objective set of impartial standards by an impartial group. Rather the question has to asked within the context of the debate (see Nicholson, above). Furthermore, the offer of Federal funding cannot be seen as merely a neutral gesture, as it will influence school decisions enormously, acting simultaneously as censorship and promotion.

Finally, there is a great deal of commercial money at stake with a decision like this because so much of the American educational material is commercially produced. In addition, this is without even considering how you decide what is 'scientific'.

As used by Bush, it is 'science' as a word, in a performative capacity that effortlessly emits its unmistakable aroma of truth irrespective of the real relationship it might have with facts in the world. In other words it becomes enough to merely say 'this is a scientifically researched programme', and all critique is dismissed.

It is the Professor who really knows about science.
THE PROFESSOR; Keith Stanovich

From the subtitle of his book *Progress In Understanding Reading: scientific foundations and new frontiers* onwards, that Stanovich knows and enjoys *science* immensely is very evident (no pun intended). The 'Understanding Reading' phrase in the title is homage to Frank Smith, whose 1971 edition of *Understanding Reading* was as Stanovich says in Chapter 1;

... Terribly exciting to two young cognitive psychologists still feeling the excitement of the cognitive revolution in psychology. p. 5

Only a young scientist could be so and say so. The addition of 'Scientific Foundations' in the subtitle is homage to science, and Stanovich seems as committed to science as possible. Not the least doubt shows up in writings. For Stanovich, science is the activity, not the word.

What is science for Stanovich? It is a set of attitudes - rigour, objectivity, tolerance for conflict, and response to evidence (see page xvi). It is the scientific method, the experimental method, is no more complicated than when one first learned it at school. To generalise, it goes something like this; pick a concept, and make a hypothesis, then carefully design some measurable, progressive event to happen in the world that results in the negation or corroboration of that hypothesis, record the results faithfully, analyse mathematically and then discuss. It is a way of reporting - the reporting of a piece of research is a key feature of its public verifiability and has a certain pattern and style -see below, an abbreviated Automatic Contextual Facilitation in Readers of Three Ages, which would in real life be tattooed with inserted Figures and Tables to present the always required quantifiable information that we have captured. It recognises no other authority. It is a historically-honed style of careful logic and chronological order, minimal description and factual density, carefully and cleverly carved from the ongoing proceedings of the world by the major headings - method, results, discussion.
Abbreviated - AUTOMATIC CONTEXTUAL FACILITATION IN READERS OF THREE AGES, from Progress In Understanding Reading

METHOD

Subjects
Forty-eight fourth graders recruited from three middle classes with WRAT score of 4.56... etc... elementary and perhaps

Stimuli and Apparatus
Sixty-eight sentences were constructed. The deleted words were... A sentence context was... The slides were projected onto a...

Procedure -
Subjects were individually tested over the period of x days. Three tasks were given to the children... two practices / take home tasks

Task 1
... subjects were instructed... a total of six random orderings... all subjects saw the set of words

RESULTS

Of the sixty-two experiment trials presented to each subject, 2.3% were dropped from the data analysis. Across all trials responses that took longer than 2000 msec,

Task 1
The analysis revealed a high between-subject factor $F(2, 141) = 54.56$, $p<.001$

DISCUSSION

The comparison of the congruous-context and no-context conditions of the task indicated that subjects of all three ages utilised... is consistent with other experimental research... semantic-context effect

Working from what looks like naive realism, Stanovich is a thorough modernist, believing along with common sense that there is a steady increase of scientific knowledge over time that will eventually lead to the betterment of all humans everywhere. His science, because it is so straightforward, shines surely and brightly through his work as an integral feature of the working of his intelligence.

For Stanovich science is at the heart of professionalism in education;

Equally important as the research itself is the example it provides of a model that is in opposition to the personal attacks and rhetorical posturing that seem to dominate discourse in educational studies. The field of reading education needs this model badly if is ever to attain the level of professionalism that will make it immune from ill-informed political attacks by opponents of public education. Preface p. xii

However in the context of this discussion, and the debate over ownership of science, it is important to note that pure and concentrated as his concept of science is, it is only one part, a subcategory of the larger discourse of what it is to be a science. Biology,
physics, geology and astronomy are all sciences. It is a legitimate and creative language act, called *synecdoche*, to take a complex entity and begin to name it after one of its parts (*car* becomes *wheels*) but it can disadvantage when trying to apply for Federal funding reserved for that which is scientifically based.

Stanovich's science is of the laboratory, and characterised by the rule of the experiment, overseen by the mathematical analysis of results, and under the complete hegemony of evidence. This does at times seem to be the only science he thinks worthy of the name and if he occasionally falls into this conception then how much more likely that Bush would as well. Nevertheless, one might argue that proper science is a more humble knowledge than this, humble before the facts, thus no scientist would deny another scientist the use of the term, and science has to include biology and geology with their more descriptive and classificatory approach to the world.

On page, 402 he notes how 'old-fashioned' his views on science are considered to be, particularly with respect to the Kuhnian notion of a paradigm. Relativism, frameworks, incommensurability -these are all considered by him to be 'half-baked' (p.402). He may be correct, but he has become caught in a double bind, for by restricting the use of 'scientific' then he has systematically denied himself access to the broader principles of science as he moves into other argumentations. The further away from the material he knows the more his arguments seem to become based on personal belief than the evidence. When dealing with experimental studies he is very principled, assessing what they show very carefully, fair with the material, aiming to be balanced and with wide coverage. But when outside of clinical science he abandons many of these principles, and asserts without evidence something like, 'Nothing has retarded the cumulative growth of knowledge in...' (see below).
THE CONNECTING THREAD: SCIENCE

Although I have dichotomized my research projects in this essay, I really do not think of them this way. The projects, to me, are all similar in a mundane way: they are interesting problems about the reading process that were amenable to scientific test. And the latter point is really the common thread. I believe in letting scientific evidence answer questions about the nature of the reading process. Nothing has retarded the cumulative growth of knowledge in the psychology of reading more than the failure to deal with problems in a scientific manner. Education has suffered because its dominant model for adjudicating disputes is political (with corresponding factions and interest groups) rather than scientific. Education's well-known susceptibility to the "authority syndrome" stems from its tacit endorsement of a personalistic view of knowledge acquisition: the belief that knowledge resides within particular individuals who then dispense it to others. Such a conception is completely antithetical

... to that of science. p. 401

As the insert above indicates, he insists that there is nothing but sheer transparency between evidence and question. By denying this crucial middle layer of interpretation he prevents the identification of the errors that can occur in this transition as well and he effectively vetos any attempts to find more scientific-like protocols for other areas of human investigation that are not inherently amenable to this method.

There is much to critique in this passage above - or at least to work through. However, Stanovich has provided very valuable insight into this notion of 'science'.
AND THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION; The National Right to Read Foundation

When listing the positions held by some of the contributors to Watson and Giorcelli's book *Accepting the Literacy Challenge*, there was one called *President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading*. That one organisation should call itself this would indicate that it considers there to be others that are 'non-scientific' studies, or 'less than' scientific.

It is the National Right to Read Foundation, with its heavy-handed deliberate pun on 'right', advertising for the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading their journal, *Scientific Studies of Reading*. Joanna P. Williams, editor, as we see above, plans to include

- empirical research
- a variety of methodologies
- varieties of types of data analysis
- carefully
- competently
- justifiable conclusions

a list most unremarkable, perhaps, in terms of degree of 'scientific-ness'.

But as it transpires when we read the *About Us*, it is not being scientific but being phonic-based that is the issue. The place of this foundation in the great debate
is barely disguised and the 'science' issue is merely being used to assist a greater purpose. Of the many different confusions one may chose to own, is phonics to be preferred because it is more able to be scientifically researched, or because scientific research, which is unbiased, has proven it to be more effective?

With its old fashioned designation of being a 'Society for the Study etc', its amateurish and clichéd prose, exaggerated claims (For centuries...), reference to the 'phonics brigade,' and its witless quotes ('Someone recently said, The tracks of NRRF are everywhere') they may quite easily be seen as yet another zealous group of literacy volunteers, and one might be lulled into a stance of mild dismaissal until its political connections emerge. Nevertheless, it shows, if nothing else, how subtle the take over of language can be.

**How the word 'scientific' is used in the NRRF literature:**

A. Give it no meaning, but just use it because you know that it is right and true.

B. 'Scientific' is used here as a simple adjective unconnected to anything else - there is no surrounding argument, nor even redundancy or corroboration that would indicate
that most of the NRRF users themselves know what the meaning is.

C. It could be argued that the word has a 'performative' role rather than be used for any meaning it would carry, functioning like a password to a club, or a social signal perhaps.
D. In the normal way adjectives work, one knows the meaning of the adjective in advance of its being used and then when it is used it adds a new quality to the discussion. However, here it is as if the word 'scientific' is initially used on faith and eventually one will only know what 'scientific' means by adding up all the instances.

* *

**Summary**

Over the last two chapters we have travelled through a number of different regions of literacy learning discourse and four Social Laws of Literacy learning have been postulated.

Literacy learning is 1) highly valued, 2) heavily invested in, 3) underperforming and 4) committed to research. A fifth law would be that research is not able to deliver all that is asked of it.

What we have tried to show is that when it comes to thinking about learning to read and write, and to contribute to this field of knowledge, there is not a single strong agreed pool to which one can usefully add, nor a consensus on how that field of knowledge should be contributed to and that there is room for, and perhaps some gain in, asking other questions.

Learning to read and write, what is the question?
CHAPTER THREE

TO QUESTION

Introduction

It seems that there is a place for an investigation that is not simply a research question that answers this or that about the topic but one which steps back, so to speak, and keeping what is available in view, asks a question of a different order. It is a question about questions and the origins of research.
Finding a Research Question

Nothing in the previous discussion should imply that there have not been great strides in our understanding of how literacy is acquired. In particular, there is a fair degree of consensus regarding the nature of the reading process - possibly less about the writing process, as that seems harder to define. Nor is it implied that the field is paralysed by inadequate definitions.

But it should also be clear that there is a fair degree of contention about the teaching of literacy and it is far from clear why literacy learning matters so much. We are not certain of its true social function, or functions, and what to use to evaluate it and how to evaluate it. Behind this is the very messy question regarding what kind of human being we envisage as being-literate, and this leads to issues of how one identifies children with reading problems.

Research, as Nicholson indicates, begins with questions, and this short chapter is about questions. He gives us several that would suffice as research topics - have reading standards gone down? What is the best way to teach reading? Can we achieve success for all?

Without a question, a study, such as this being undertaken on reading and writing, would not get underway. A question must be posed so a research proposal can be written and this question then becomes from its position on the research throne the overseeing arbitrator of all that comes after. It is a guiding metapresence to the whole study, casting coherence and alignment across the unruly surfaces of living and more pertinently, thinking. To be of value, in order to contribute, a study needs to have come out of an established, recognised, researched and published general area of investigation, or body of knowledge - that is, it must have a reasonably well-practiced language. It must ask the questions the body of knowledge understands, makes possible or has set itself. Those who preceded your entry into this field will have defined much of this.
Note that we are using the term 'question' broadly here, to cover a family of terms in which it probably has some pre-eminent place. These 'questions' may not necessarily be syntactically phrased as questions -- they may be expressed as issues, topics, concerns, inquiries, themes; or ideas, beliefs or values. They may be statements about ordinary things or events that seem to be 'givens' yet become problems through being looked at with a view to finding out more, i.e., questioned. The object of thought for this study is anything being attended to within literacy learning as it takes place.

**Questions have Histories**

Although it seems that the questions are to come from 'outside', as it were, looking in and asking about the field of knowledge, questions are themselves deeply embedded in a field. In one sense questions are well on the way to being answers. For instance, here are three possible research questions.

1) **Would children find it easier to learn to read if they were taught all their letter sounds before seeing their first books?**
2) **Which regions of the human brain are most functionally relevant to having difficulty learning to read and write?**
3) **Why do disadvantaged groups not achieve higher standards of literacy?**

Each of these very traditional and plausible questions identifies a research area that would contribute to the body of knowledge on how to teach reading.

But they are very different. Each question is redolent with assumptions and traditions that pose the problems of literacy learning and teaching in different ways. Each question is at technically a low level, easy, and of a kind one might encounter in a layman's text, written perhaps by a journalist, yet if each is read carefully and thoughtfully it is possible – in fact necessary, for full comprehension – to call to mind the whole discourse or intersection of discourses it belongs to. This in turn cues us
into vast, complexly self-absorbed, self-generating, intra-defining and self-assertive regions of vocabulary, concepts, methodology, reasoning, and authority; and equipment and sources of funding and institutional involvement. What one might call discourses. And so on. All this has rich and finely detailed history and cultural perspective.

The different reasons for each different question being posed at all are to some extent evident. A reader, if he or she thought about it, would have strong suspicions as to who is interested in that particular question, and why, and the environment that would contextualise the studies. There are different sets of social and political agendas summoned up in each case and, for instance, funding would be sought from different sources.

Question 1 looks like an educationalist’s question. Whoever posed this question would have to be aware of a range of classroom practices, have some knowledge of current information processing theories of the reading process, and some sense of developmental sequences. It is a question of pedagogies, and manipulation of the materials available in the class and the results would influence what we do as teachers.

Question 2 is a medical question, seeking differences in literacy achievement in the actual physical composition of the brain. In a completely different causal field, it seeks the links between behaviors and physiology. One would have to have a background in anatomy and the physiology of the brain, and possibly psychology and ontogenesis. There is a different faith involved.

Question 3 is a socio-political question, interested in the material aspects of wealth distribution, the sharing out across the community of the goods. To do a literature review on this question could involve searching into the social bases of language learning and human development, delving into Marxist theory, the history of schooling perhaps, descriptions of social divisions on class or ethnic grounds and how language is used to both unite and divide social groups. It may look at restricted language development and its impact on learning to read and write as in Bryant and
Bradley, and suggest enrichment programmes to enculturate the children to the middle class.

In fact each is a question of diversity but with different, historically constructed, diversities, with different-angled cuts on the pie. Historically speaking, learning to read and write has been frequently practised and thus questioned, thought about and investigated in a number of particular ways for a range of particular reasons. Topics of interest have arisen, some discarded, and others split off, developed, financed and researched. Methods of teaching have been established, books been published, specialized discourses evolved to advance discussion and heighten understanding, and so on. As we saw earlier, research methodologies have been developed, debated and refined, gained, lost and regained political favour and departments at universities, and Ministries of Education resourced, and industries small and large of all kinds have been created over time that serve the greater purpose of learning to read and write.

As well, if we look from a distance at the activity itself – it is a very rough unity of psychology, technologies, equipment, and practices, locations and social significances – continues to evolve, partly on the basis of this questioning attention. Surrounding industries such as schooling or book publishing both feed and are fed by the fields of literacy acquisition activity.

In the same inter-causal way the issues that we study are not merely over and above the activity of learning to read and write but double back and contribute to it, becoming part of it, and helping shape and form its social place, how it is conceptualised and how it is practised. The histories of the studies of learning to read and write have concreted themselves in the institutions of practice and become firmly realized both in the daily work of teachers, in the curricula and textbooks that support this work, in the architecture of educational institutions; and most critically perhaps in the inter-supportive network of mutually co-defining words and meanings that give a language its essentially political nature and support its endless potential for ideological creativity. A deeper 'history' of any particular question to do with learning to read
and write would take us back further, into areas of perhaps anthropology and primate evolution; a wider 'history' into sociology and political economy.

So, to get any 'question' off the ground a history must have happened such that there is anything to ask about and to provide an answer for. It is a busy complex changing subconscient history that draws us into thinking about the history of ideas themselves, the history of science, the history of *this* science (literacy acquisition -- if it is best characterised as a science -- or if that even matters). Then there is the final filtering of all this through the personal history of the individual who comes to ask the question. Without necessarily ascribing causal pathways, or being reductionist or deterministic, individuals have their social backgrounds and heritages, intellectual affections and abilities, groups whose esteem they seek, part-way careers to pursue further, needs and weaknesses and conditioned responses, heroes and idols and their own entirely unique pedagogical history of encounters and opportunities -- down to gender and place in family. This must include at least their education history as well as their interests and experiences, values, beliefs, skills and intentions.

**To Question is to Work**

A research question might look like the beginning, the start of a study. It is not. Nonetheless, the formulation of a question is a formidable and involved task; the question has to be in an acceptable, comprehensible, pursuable form, expressible in words understood by the group for whom it will constitute knowledge. This all takes work. A question that is to contribute to knowledge does not spring fully formed into the world. A body of knowledge does not merely appear, fully formed, into the world. A body of knowledge has a complex history, an ontogenesis and a genealogy, emerging gradually and always in a state of flux, leaving behind what it formally was and heading towards what is about to become.

It would be overwhelmingly impossible to reconstruct in full the historical detail of any question. It has not even been established that it would be useful. Yet it is
possible to claim that in terms of conceptual activity, much of a certain sort of the work has been completed once the question has been tabled, and that a question is quite late in the chain of events leading to an investigation. Therefore instead of immediately forging forward to start solving the problem we have set ourselves we might travel in a completely different direction. That is, we might stop, think into the question so as to be more focussed and then travel backwards to what might be called the 'pre-question'. The question is in this way seen as part of the process, not outside it. This is the direction this study will attempt.

For this study, a move from the question to the answer would be a move too swift.

**Finding A Question - the place of the pre-question**

A place to pause emerges. Located in this pause, just before the decision to settle on a question, is a 'halo' question about the asking of questions, a question-in-suspense, neither asked nor not asked. It is the place where the question remains inherently questionable, and such a place is important to us if we wish to call into question literacy acquisition research. It is not a matter of just discarding some questions and asking others. It is a matter of being questioning.

To try to capture this, the title of our study into literacy learning has been put as a question transparently phrased as a question, with the word 'question' overtly in the title. A second order question has ostensibly been mooted, in a self-conscious way, namely, 'the question of learning to read and write.'

No thematically directed question, no focus, is specifically identified within the title, merely the posing of the question of the phenomena itself (in as much as this is possible). Within the suspense of the question and its deliberate non-formulation there may be discovery.
The Philosophical

This is a form of questioning that can be appropriately described as philosophical. The focus of this investigation has very broadly become this; what has philosophical thinking got to offer the field.

This is not an evaluation of current or past practices or knowledge. We are not saying here that there are or there are not indicators to show a 'crisis' in the area of learning to read and write, or that it is going well and needs this explained. Nor is there an implicit criticism of the many studies guided by the current distribution of knowledges and disciplines across literacy acquisition. It is simpler than that. Questioning has been thought about, and simultaneously a line of thinking identified to pursue with regard to learning to read and write.

Terminology

As this study begins, a note about my choice of vocabulary. The thesis title quite deliberately uses 'read and write,' to try to get as close as possible to the base phenomenon, with terms as non-technical and non-latinate as possible.

I will also use a number of other terms, displaying the question of learning to read and write under a range of different lights. These other phrases and terms are not strictly synonymous. The intent is partly to make the text less dreary; but also to deliberately exploit the shades and nuances of connotation in the words literacy, reading, writing, learning, educating, acquiring, becoming, and emerging. Literacy learning to read and write literacy acquisition, emerging literacy, becoming literate – all have closely allied meanings and uses. Each term used exclusively would create an alignment with one set of interpretations and this in itself would then need to have a whole set of explanations and justifications. Being loose enables me to draw upon on an impressionistic richness just beyond the reach of language property rights and
subdivisions. As we see further down, this aim fits with how this study intends to proceed with its main question.
CHAPTER FOUR

QUESTIONING BEING(S)

Introduction
The more obvious research questions asked within literacy acquisition research have themselves been brought back into question – into a questioning mode or space – in order to push further into the question of learning to read and write, and this study has now become philosophical. The work of Martin Heidegger will expand upon what philosophy can do. Four areas are looked at - what is philosophy, openness and freedom, meditative thinking and questioning.
Philosophy: Martin Heidegger (and philosophy and thinking)

Philosophy is one of the few autonomous creative possibilities and at times necessities of man's historical existence. (p. 9)

Philosophical as used here is trying to capture the unique and essential quality of a form of thinking that is self-constrained, and that retains full and original permission to think, i.e. to question.

This quotation is from Heidegger's An Introduction to Metaphysics, published in German in 1953. I am using here the 1959 Yale English edition, with the translation by R. Manheim. If what is sought is a place from which to question, Heidegger, in this statement, gives it to us.

So much depends on the term 'autonomous'. Why autonomous? Because it can be argued that philosophy allows a seeking for knowledge that does not have to keep within the rules or patterns of thought from anywhere else, only from its own lights. Natural sciences, social or human sciences, mathematics, all have characteristic patterns of logic, historically established patterns of scholarship and rigour, methods, concerns, and ongoing issues of the day. A philosophical stance is 'creative' in two senses; a) in the sense of being continuously re-creative, moving thought in innovative, new and refreshing ways, and, b) in the sense of getting back to the origins, and being the thought that lay at the creation of these patterns. It can present a creative angle on other disciplines, always urging a re-consideration or a re-justification of even the most essential features. This would mean being able to question rather than simply obey the different traditions that have come to make up any knowledge discipline.

He says that philosophy is "at times" (p. 9) a historical necessity. This is implying that at certain points in time philosophising cannot or must not be avoided. If it is the form of thought that is truly creative then its occurrence at
some point is a necessary condition of all knowledge forms and in an originating sense lies within its current patterns of practice.

At the beginning of *What is A Thing?* Heidegger relates a story told by Plato in the *Theaetetus* about Thales. Walking along he was so preoccupied with the heavens and so inattentive to what was in front of his very eyes that he fell into a well, much to the amusement of a 'good-looking and whimsical maid'. Such is philosophy, for to ask what a thing is will make every genuine housemaid laugh (see page 3). Apart from the slight on housemaids, the inherent difference between commonsense and philosophy is the point of the story, an issue that Heidegger was at some pains to point out. Then he says;

> We shall do well to remember occasionally that by strolling we can fall into a well whereby we may not reach the ground for quite some time. (p. 3)

According to Robert Solomon, in his broadly encompassing *From Rationalism to Existentialism; the existentialists and their nineteenth century backgrounds*, the problem with common sense for Heidegger is that it represents prejudice, unfounded beliefs, trapped in the context of their time (page 189, *From Rationalism to Existentialism*).

On the next page of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* we read more about philosophy, and historical existence;

> Roughly speaking, philosophy always aims at the first and last grounds of the essent, with particular emphasis on man himself and on the meaning and goals of human being-there. (p. 10)

The 'essent' is anything that can be said to be and refers to all beings, all that 'is'. Philosophy seeks to explain the conditions that make the essent possible and it does this with particular reference to one outstanding essent, that being called human being. The *goals and meaning* of human being give indications of the ground of all other beings.
A few lines down we read this about how philosophy works:

... Philosophy can never directly supply the energies and create the opportunities and methods that bring about a historical change; for one thing it is always the concern of the few. Which few?
The creators, those who initiate profound transformations. It spreads out only indirectly, by devious paths that can never be laid out in advance, until at last, at some future date, it sinks to the level of a commonplace; but by then it has long been forgotten as original philosophy. (p. 10)

Philosophy, according to Heidegger, lies close to the original heart of historical change, of profound transformations. It creates opportunities and creates methods, working beneath the surface or behind the scenes or at the beginnings, finding rather than following paths, supplying logic or possibility to something other than itself. This other then takes this nascent method and actualises the potential, eventually turning or taming it into something more regular, habitual, useable, useful and systematised. Language, literacy, music, or physics - philosophy supplies the original way of seeing, the seed, an idea, the thought – the way of thought then blossoms, fulfilling all the creative possibilities of the idea as it takes up its place in the worlds of people, sunlight and rain.

Heidegger talks of 'the few'. Creative acts would have to be few because they are acts of great potential and with far-reaching or profound implications. These go on to be actualised, put into action, in many various ways. The bulk, the many, is the exploration and fulfilment of the many lines of possibility made possible in that original, originating act.

He goes on to say:

What philosophy essentially can and must be is this: a thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of the knowledge that sets the norms and hierarchies, of the knowledge in which and by which a people fulfils itself historically and culturally, the knowledge that kindles and necessitates all inquiries and thereby threatens all values. (p. 10)

Heidegger talks of philosophy as a kind of thinking:
* a kind of thinking that 'opens' -- with its connotations in English of perhaps like a shop opening for business for the first time, a new theatre or bridge or park is opened to take up its function; or perhaps opening a blind to let light into the room:

* a kind of thinking that 'breaks the paths', which we might think of as perhaps like cutting a path though a thick forest to create an opening or breaking in new ground, so things can now begin to happen; and this creative thinking transmutes into a fundamental but, in my reading of this passage, ambiguous knowledge. It is the knowledge upon which a cultural intellectual and spiritual history is built, eg, in sciences, technology, art or religion, morality and myth -- anything that describes historically discernible human activity. But it is ambiguous because it both draws from its creative thinking origins and drains its originating sources dry at the same time. Although in the statement above it looks as though it is the knowledge that threatens all values I think it is instead the underlying thinking that threatens, that is, calls back into question, all values. This is because values are themselves given form by a knowledge that has been given its perspectives, ie its ways of looking, from thinking and that whatever is thought can be re-thought, thought again and thought anew--and thought differently.

Referring again to Robert Solomon, Heidegger often referred to his own endeavour as 'thinking' (Denken), to distinguish it from traditional philosophy, and from the commonplace or common sense. Solomon states;

> By this general term, he wishes to stress the unprejudiced and broad scope of his philosophy. Thinking, for Heidegger, is the search for unprejudiced truth, specifically unprejudiced truth about Being. ... This sort of thinking about Being has yet to be accomplished, in fact:

> The most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking age is that we are still not thinking.  p.191

We will have occasion to explore in more depth this notion of thinking below.
Openness and Freedom; Existence

The notions of 'openness' and 'freedom' are central to Heidegger's thought and are played out in his portrayal of 'truth' and how it works. He discusses these essentially interconnected concepts in the essay "On the Essence of Truth", a publication of a lecture on the subject, with some revisions, delivered in 1930 and again in 1932; the translation I am using is by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick and can be found in a text introduced by Werner Brock called Existence and Being. He begins with the traditional view that truth is commonly and most fundamentally conceived of as the preserve of the proposition and is its agreement with the thing - the German word translated as agreement is Übereinstimmung and we read on page 364 in the footnotes that it;

... can be translated in any number of ways ... likeness ... agreement ... accord, accordance, conformity, concurrence, assimilation....

As he investigates what makes this agreement possible we arrive at the more essential concept of openness. Pursuing what might be called a phenomenological explanation he puts forward the proposal that it is only within an 'openness' that a thing is able to be accessible or available as what it is and thus be able to be spoken of. He says;

The thing must ... come across the open towards us and at the same time stand fast in itself as the thing and manifest itself as a constant. This manifestation of the thing ... is accomplished in the open, within the realm of the Overt (das Offene).... All behaviour is "overt" (lit. "stands open": offenständig) to what-is, and all "overt" relationship is behaviour. Man's "openness" varies with the nature of what-is and the mode of behaviour. All working and carrying out tasks, all transaction and calculation, sustains itself in the open, an overt region within which what-is can expressly take up its stand as and how it is what it is, and thus become capable of expression. ...

The statement derives its rightness from the overtness of behaviour, for it is only through this that anything manifest can become the criterion for the approximation implicit in the representative statement. (pp. 300 – 302)
This is like the openness above that is opened in some way by thinking of some original kind -- for Heidegger this openness of beings was

"... experienced in the early stages of Western thought as "that which is present" and has long been termed "that which is" (das Seiende). p. 301"

It is the openness in which human commerce takes place and in which all things or beings take up their place, as it were. Saying that things 'take up a stand' captures how they emerge as objects that in some way are not merely put, placed or positioned but stand 'op-posed', as something other than perception and in themselves. This openness is like the medium or dimension which all behaviour, activity, needs available to have the space in which to occur. It is a pre-condition of its occurring, a condition of its being able to be. Propositional knowledge exploits this opening space across which a thing can be given context to be what it is and thus take up a form, thereby becoming capable of representation.

Yet this is itself founded on another base, that of *freedom*. Building on the notion of criterion, he goes on to say;

"... on what basis does it become inwardly possible for overt behaviour to postulate a criterion -- a possibility which alone invests propositional rightness with sufficient status to achieve, in any measure, the essence of truth? ... Only because this postulate (Vorgeben) has already freed itself (sich freigegeben hat) and become open to a manifestation operating in this openness -- a manifestation which is binding on all representation whatsoever. ... The overt character of behaviour in the sense that it makes rightness a possibility, is grounded in freedom The essence of truth is freedom. pp. 302-303"

The Manifest (das Offenbare), to which a representative statement approximates in its rightness, is that which obviously "is" all the time and has some manifest form of behaviour. The freedom to reveal something overt lets whatever "is" at the moment be what it is Freedom reveals itself as the "letting-be" of what-is. p. 305

This freedom Heidegger calls 'letting-be', not in the sense of neglect or disinterestedness but in the sense of being an essential part of the conditions of
possibility of overtness or manifest-ness. Walter Biemel, who was a student of Heidegger says it well in *Martin Heidegger: an illustrated study;*

So far, freedom has been exhibited as man's overtness (*Offenstandigkeit*). Standing in the realm of the open he is able to subject himself to what is manifest and shows itself in it, and to bind or commit himself to it. With this binding, their takes place a letting-be (*Sein-lassen*). Again, this is an expression which can be easily misunderstood, because in common usage it (*lassen, letting*) carries the sense of disregarding, of omission and indifference. For Heidegger, "letting be" means "to consent or yield (*zieh einlassen*) to what-is" (p.306). Letting-be is not just any activity of man, but is that by virtue of which he becomes *Da-sien*, an entity that is defined by its relationship to the open. "Letting-be ... means participating in the open and its openness, within which every entity enters and stands" (p.506).  p. 84-85

This 'freedom' is, through being this 'letting-be', an 'ex-posing', in the sense of the placing (posing) of an out there (ex). This is like saying that Dasein (there-being) ex-sists (is-out-there). 'Exsistence' is given this special meaning and written as 'ex-sistence'.

The English term "manifestation" loses the connection with 'openness' that the German retains with das *Offenbare,* but does evoke through the root word *manus,* Latin for hand, notions of manipulation, ie, activity, engagement with the world. The binding of the representative statement can only occur within a freedom that is pre-given because only that which is free in advance can be then restricted or bound by a criterion.

This would be the freedom out from which things can always be thought anew. Why would there be a need to think anew? Because;

The manifest character of what-is-in-totality is not identical with the sum of known actualities. On the contrary, it is just where few actualities are known or where they are known hardly at all by science or only very roughly, that the manifest character of what-is-in-totality can operate far more essentially than where the Known ... can no longer resist the activity of knowing, because the technical control of things seems limitless in its scope. It is precisely this proliferation of knowledge, this desire to know everything, that causes the manifest character of what-is to sink into the apparent void of indifference or worse still, oblivion. pp. 311-312
In the existent freedom of Da-sein there is accomplished a dissimulation of what-is in
totality and therein lies the concealment (Verborgenheit). p. 312

Although man is all the time related to what-is he almost always acquiesces in this or that
particular manifestation of it. He is still in the region of what he can touch and control, even
when the ultimates are in question. p. 315

From these passages we can become more aware of the possibilities
inherent in the concepts of ‘openness’ and ‘freedom.’ Forces that lie at the
heart of the originating processes of knowledge, they nonetheless trail off
into a kind of forgetfulness or concealing. Their gradual emergence
coincides with their fading into invisibility. Within this concealing:

... It leaves historical man to rely on his own resources in the realm of the practicable.
Abandoned thus, humanity builds up its “world” out of whatever intentions and needs happen
to be the most immediate, filling it our with projects and plans. From these in turn man,
having forgotten what-is-in-totality, adopts his measures. He insists (bebart) on them and
continually provides himself with new ones, without giving a thought to the reasons for taking
measures or the nature of measurement. Despite his advance towards new measures and goals
he mistakes their genuineness. He is the more mistaken the more exclusively he takes himself
as the measure of all things. pp. 315-316

Heidegger is continuously urging a kind of thinking that does not merely
measure the measurable, nor obediently concur with already concluded
norms or hierarchies. There is a thinking that has pre-set the pace already,
as it were, originating, inspiring and catalysing the inquiries and activities
in the first place. It is a thinking validated by the ‘freedom’ at the centre of
all thinking as it makes an effort to uncover these norms and hierarchies
and re-think about or on them.
Meditative Thinking

The kind of thinking we have been talking about is very similar to what Heidegger, in one of his later writings calls 'meditative' thinking. In 1959, Heidegger published Gelassenheit, translated into English by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund as Discourse on Thinking. There are two essays in the volume, and it is in the first, a publicly delivered Memorial Address in honour of the German composer Conradin Kreutzer, that he describes 'meditative' and 'calculative' thinking:

There are, then, two kinds of thinking, each justified and needed in its own way: calculative thinking and meditative thinking. p. 46

This calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is. (p. 46)

The nature of calculative thinking is clear enough from this. It is the thinking which can take root once some ground, some set of rules and some patterns have been established or laid open; it is the thinking that in this case, the case of Europe in the late 1950s, fuelled what we might call modern technology and its breakneck speed of progress;

The world now appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, ... Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry ... Soon the procurement of energies will no longer be tied to certain countries and continents...What we know now as the technology of film and television, of transportation and especially air transportation, and as medical and nutritional technology is only a crude start.... technological advance will move faster and faster and can never be stopped. (pp. 50-51)
This calculative thinking is a product of the knowledge described above, travelling on the rails laid as the territory was broken in and opened up. It is mathematical in that there is a certain formulaic quality to its application.

*Meditative* thinking, on the other hand, contemplates the meaning "that reigns in everything that is," (p. 46) and which is quite deliberately non-calculative. It seems to be a species of the thinking we read about above, the thinking that opens and breaks, and it bears close resemblance to philosophy. As there is an increase in calculative thinking, human society is in what Heidegger calls (on page 45) a *flight from thinking*. Later on (page 48) he describes a loss of *autochthony*, a word that is footnoted in the text like this;

*The German Bodenständigkeit is translated rootedness or autochthony depending on a literal or a more figurative connotation. (Tr.) (p. 49)*

What is *autochthony*? Literally meaning 'of the very land' or 'from the land alone,' its more ordinary meaning was 'indigenous' or 'aboriginal,' and in Greek classical times it was something to be proud of as it indicated a sense of belonging and well-fitted ownership. When a people have for a very long time occupied or inhabited a territory, there must be this cumulative build-up of associations and interactions in their transmitted cultural memory, in their history and the folklore and in the very language itself that is as if you have been there forever, or that your ancestors literally grew out of the ground itself. Sets of hills, the plains and the rivers and the qualities of the terrain and of the climate and the vegetation; the quality and cast of the light, and shadow, all go together and are part of your consciousness about where you belong. It is a place where you fluently and with little conscious effort know your way about, free from subconscious threat and imbued with a deep familiarity because you know already what is behind and underneath and beyond. This is functionally like 'home'; or like a the roots of a tree that have grown down into the dark soils and silently with seemingly no effort both firmly anchor and
nourish tree, allowing it to get on with blossoming and bearing fruit. Ceaseless wandering means no familiarity, no roots, because it breaks into the many contiguous re-encounters within the same or similar context that are needed for a sense of being settled to descend and belonging to build up.

Heidegger felt autochtony was under threat as calculative thinking continues to dominate with its restlessly intentional and product oriented nature. The progress of science and technology is an unstoppable force, and our ability to adapt, accommodate and understand is not keeping pace. Humankind was left behind, lost and paralysed because it had no means to restore autochtony in the face of the modern world. This requires meditative thinking that could revive our conceptions of homeliness and that could retrieve our sense of well placement, affirm our control and enable us to make decisions.

Meditative thinking seems to be "behind," "below" and "around" calculative thinking, an earlier truer form of thought, essential and necessary to all human being even when reduced to; as near the end of the address we read (hear);

Yet anyone can follow the path of meditative thinking in his own manner and within his own limits. Why? Because man is a thinking, that is, a mediating being. Thus meditative thinking need by no means be "high-flown." It is enough if we dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now: here on this patch of home ground: now, in the present hour of history. (p. 47)

Thus we must ask now: even if the old rootedness is being lost in this age, may not a new ground and foundation be granted again to man, a foundation and ground out of which man's nature and all his works can flourish in a new way even in an atomic age? What could the ground and foundation be for the new autochthony? Perhaps the answer we are looking for lies at hand: so near that we all too easily overlook it. For the way to what is near is always the longest and thus the hardest for us humans. This way is the way of meditative thinking. Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas. Meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all. (p. 53)
The modern age is marked by this loss, being carried away by calculative thinking. Meditative thinking is that through which restoration maybe considered.

He describes a meditative approach to the technological revolution as needing a special relationship to develop between human beings, which he labels *a comportment* or “releasement toward things.” This releasement is both an acceptance and a holding back that acknowledges the utility but refuses the domination because there is:

within all technical processes a meaning, not invented or made by us, which lays claim to what man does and leaves undone. We do not know the significance of the uncanny increasing dominance of atomic technology. *The meaning pervading technology hides itself.* But if we explicitly and continuously heed the fact that such hidden meaning touches us everywhere in the world of technology, we stand at once within the realm of that which hides itself from us, and hides itself just in approaching us. That which shows itself and at the same time withdraws is the essential trait of what we call the mystery. I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, *openness to the mystery.* (p. 55)

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery go together and have the promise that they can enable us to ‘endure in the world of technology without being imperilled by it’. They also ‘give us a vision of a new autochthony which someday even might be fit to recapture the old and now rapidly disappearing autochthony in a changed form’. (p. 55) This then is Heidegger describing a case of historical necessity, brought about by the particular brand of thoughtfulness experienced there and then, in Europe in the late 1950s, and to a great extent now in the 21st Century. We are not necessarily restricted to this epoch.

We read earlier how he saw philosophy as having historical necessity 'at times' and it is clear that he considered his time as one of those times. However this does not mean that at other times eg, now, decades after Heidegger spoke these words, ‘meditative’ thinking as such may not be shifted into a thinking given a different cloak; a cloak appropriate to the nature of the current events and contemporary questions of the time.
Writing from where he does enables him to exploit the crisis-dynamic, the drama, urgency and tensions of the post-war period, and to reminisce about a past period when man was not so remote from meditative thinking. Yet this is, I think, Heidegger exemplifying 'the present hour of history' from within the period from which he spoke. The past period of rootedness is not, I am sure, able to be localised as the late nineteenth early twentieth century. And for us now, right now in our present hour, it is more likely to be the profuse information technology that has to be dealt with; and possibly the ebb and marginalisation of any urgency and tension that will produce whatever rootlessness we experience - and might label as post-modern. It is rootlessness nonetheless.

Meditative thinking as a form of philosophical thinking is at all times necessary and is at all times the essential component of thinking itself as a human activity. Rather than calculate more and more on some potentially infinite expansive plane of possibilities, with an open-ended set of questions of economic efficiency or novelty, a more meditative approach can reflect upon what the enterprise itself is or is doing; in fuller, more self-aware historical and cultural perspectives.

A similar duality is that between authentic discourse (Recl) and unauthentic prattle (Geread). Solomon notes (see page 239) that both involve making statements but only the former is an expression of thinking.

**Heidegger, and Questioning**

In her book, *Heidegger's Philosophy: a guide to his basic thought*, Magda King writes, in Part One, called *What is the Question. Introductory:*

The main body of Sein und Zeit is preceded by two expository chapters in which Heidegger explains the question of being as it is to be raised and worked out in this fundamental inquiry. Everything that belongs to Heidegger's question, its motive and aim, the method of the investigation and the conclusions at which it will arrive, is set out in these two chapters... (p. 1)
She then begins *Exposition 1. A formal statement of the question*

*Sein und Zeit* is an inquiry into the meaning of being (*Sinn von Sein*). To this short formulation of his theme, Heidegger frequently adds the word *überhaupt*, which is difficult to translate precisely; the meaning of being *as such or in general* is only an approximate statement of the full theme (*Sinn von Sein überhaupt*). ... he often reduces it to a simple, informal question, as, for example: "*was beisst 'Sein'-""

Almost literally translated, the phrase means: what is called "being"? Freely paraphrased, it might be rendered as: what do we mean by "to be"?

From these various formulations, the core of Heidegger's question emerges with an apparent, not to say misleading, clarity and simplicity. (p. 5)

**Being and Time, Sein und Zeit**, one of his earliest works, published in 1927, is in answer to one question - *what is the meaning of being?* The idea of the question is most important for Heidegger.

He says;

> Every inquiry is a seeking [suchen]. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought. (p. 24)

> In investigative questions- that is, in questions, which are specifically theoretical-, what is asked about is determined and conceptualised. (p. 24)

I interpret this as Heidegger pointing out how any question has been guided - determined and conceptualised - by some thought in advance. A question or inquiry does not come from out of an empty space. In its shaped formulation there are assumptions or assertions or beliefs or conceptions that are not being called into question by the question. This we have discussed in several different forms earlier.

For Heidegger the questioning stops at one place -- it can go no further back than asking directly about being (some translators write it as Being). Here are the first lines of *Being and Time*, beginning with a quote from Plato's *Sophistes*

> 'For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression 'being'. We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed.'

> Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'?
The thinking that breaks the paths described above is ultimately a thinking about being in some sense. And it is in asking questions about being we will, for Heidegger, approach the core metaphysical foundations of the culture he sees himself belonging to, namely that of Western or European thought. In Being and Time it is not far into the book that the study of being needs to begin with the study of that being for whom being presents itself as a question;

Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own Being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about—namely, Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "Dasein". If we are to formulate our question explicitly and transparently, we must first give a proper explication of an entity (Dasein), with regard to its Being. (p. 27)

That being is human being, characterised as Dasein, literally "there-being," in order to fix our attention on how as an entity it is in a class of its own for many reasons not the least of which is the fact it has questioning built into its hard drive. For us in our study we are guided here, as we were above, into including thinking about what it is to be human as part of questioning more intensely about literacy acquisition.

In An Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger poses the question of the meaning of Being in this form; 'Why are there beings rather than nothing? He then attends directly to the questioning process.

Our question is the question of all authentic questions, ie, of all self-questioning questions, and whether consciously or not it is necessarily implicit in every question. No questioning and accordingly no single scientific "problem" can be fully intelligible if it does not include, ie, ask, the question of all questions. (p. 6)
The question of all questions is so named because it is how that question is played out historically that has grounded all Western inquiry from the period of the early Greeks. This is the core theme of An Introduction to Metaphysics. It is an intense and unremitting attempt to reveal how original interpretations of being were born, suggestively appropriated, mutated, decayed, submerged and lost as Western thought, and thus social activity, took its historical course.

For the immediate purposes of this study, the interpretation I give to this statement is this:

- All authentic questions always ask and have an answer to the question of questions somewhere within them. That is, within every inquiry about anything the question of being has been implicitly tackled already, an ontological line taken, an interpretation of a metaphysical kind adopted, whether consciously or not.

- By becoming self-questioning, this act of metaphysical determination curled up within any question can be more clearly discerned and thought about. A self-questioning question, that dwells on why and how and the conditions of its being able to be asked becomes more able to recognise how as a question it has been shaped. The fact that they are questions asked by a being able to question is not overlooked in the rush to get to the answer. The 'question-ness' is itself allowed space, as is the entity that is able to question, the entity of human being.

- The most self-questioning question of all is the question of being. There is nothing left to question over and above being, which must also allow for the possibility of being questioned (this being an intended pun).

- And as it is through a question that all these mechanisms grind into action; questioning when it is authentic and not merely a "verbal formula" is "a fundamental human force", page 6, An Introduction to Metaphysics (both quotes).
Eventually it will only be by returning to the ultimate, most fundamental self-questioning question, the 'question of being' itself - which is neither accidentally about being nor accidentally a question-that we will be able to bring this ontological foundationing to the surface as explicitly as is possible. It is the question 'first in rank' (page 6, An Introduction to Metaphysics). There is no further place to question into, as far as Heidegger is concerned.

**Heidegger, and the question of learning to read and write, in brief**

1) Philosophy

Philosophy, according to Heidegger will by its very nature be limited in terms of what it can 'do' to assist other disciplines. Its main benefit must be in the openness it can suggest, a background implicature of alternatives, and it will have this quality because its inspiration was there from the start.

All social or human sciences face the problem of having human beings as their subject. For instance, the persistent unpredictability of the behaviour of humans, in theory determined by biochemistry but in practice not so, or the constant insinuation of ethical issues (can humans treat each other as experimental subjects? is a control group in human sciences fundamentally unethical?) interfering with the pure experimental design. The redesignation of 'human being', or the Greek 'rational animal', into Dasein is quite radical and would seem to have many as yet unexplored possibilities. The meaning and goals of human being-there would seem a very useful concept to explore if one wanted to add any rigour at all to descriptions of the uses and values of literacy. As we saw with Bryant and Bradley, implicit unexposed conceptions of humans will influence a whole interpretation.

The issue of philosophy versus common sense is suggestive, for it seems possible that it is common sense that creates division and argument at the interface of research and the public.
2) Openness and Freedom

It is more oblique, perhaps, but it seems as thought the notion of 'letting-be' has relevance to thinking about literacy acquisition research - and research in general. The kind of revealing that Heidegger talks of applies well to the world as it is, but to be applicable to the clinical or experimental aspect of scientific research the 'concealing' nature of the essence of truth needs more consideration, and how 'openness', aletbeia must be wrested from the letbe - hiddeness, concealment, coveredness, veiledness - to use Magda King's words, page 141 in Heidegger's Philosophy.

It must be true that literacy learning is too close - and the result is that the descriptions of its value and use are too serious, like trying to describe something that is the size of a mountain yet pressed right up against your nose. There is no perspective available, and no place to gain an overview, because literacy literally towers up impossibly high in front of our eyes (or so it seems), an almost incomprehensibly sophisticated cultural artefact with the power to shrink space and slow time yet learnable by five year olds. As is the case of Watson and Giorcelli in Chapter One one ends up overwhelmed, reduced to lame superlatives such as 'greatest' and 'supreme'. Literacy is indeed worthy of superlatives (if one can find suitable parallels with which it can be compared), but the readiness to be awe-struck needs analysis. It is not in the interests of openness.

3) Meditative Thinking

That much of the general research into literacy acquisition fits into the category of 'calculative' thinking seems clear. Our energetic quest for knowledges on how to teach reading and writing is almost completely product oriented, fuelled by a very urgent yet not well-considered political/social need. It could be claimed that surface
questions are asked repetitively, and 'researched' in the shallows of confused concepts and ill-defined understandings, and make very little difference - thus 'making a difference' then becomes the highest end. The noisy and overt insistence on quality research is a hushed, covert flight from thinking. Perhaps a hint of busy fear can be read into the overproduction of self description such as we saw in the material produced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Thinking is crowded out by the clamour and given no nourishment by values such as efficiency or value for money. The meaning that reigns within learning to read and write is bypassed, and research is treated mechanically, as if merely method will produce results and as if truth is its inevitable consequence.

The loss of *autochtony*, or 'rootedness' emerges. Literacy 'fits' into human being very well it seems and one ought to feel 'at home' with it, partly because of its intimate relationship with language, called by Heidegger 'the house of Being' (see Solomon p. 190), and partly because of its unique additional qualities including a complex intellectual technology and huge capacity for information storage. In the analysis of *Dasein*, literacy is a major component of the culture-added *da*, 'there'. A beginning reader or writer ought to feel a sense of belonging to the task, of ownership, power and good fit as he or she works at solving a problem that was, by and large, designed for them to solve; or, to use a metaphor of Frank Smith in *Understanding Reading*, (page 215, fourth edition) a sense that literacy is a 'club' to which he or she has automatic right of entry. An emerging reader and writer should intuit the accessibility and potential belongingness of literacy, a skill that requires just those exact talents with eye and mouth and language that they happen to have. Being literate in a literate culture is homeliness, an embedded connectivity in a textured landscape of script, text and word- being literate is a firm connectedness in singular way with all humanity. This is how it should be. Yet as we read earlier, 'diversity' makes this difficult.

It is as if there are two literacies - the one that is genuine, that has to be undertaken by each learner as they of their own accord 'lock horns' with the
intricacies of the task, and take on the complex coordination of eyes and brain that is reading; and the one that is taught, at its worst a misshapen theoretical artifice, with hugely exaggerated minor and completely ignored major components. The controversy around the teaching of reading and writing could be partly attributed to this loss of autochtony, the unsettled insecure feelings experienced by theorists and practitioners increasing their argumentativeness, decreasing their desires to cooperate, and leaving the field very vulnerable to the opportunistic machinations of the politician. The event of literacy is not treated as if it is human, as if it belongs to us. Rather it is seen as the 'other', an alien activity, practised by aliens and taught by aliens - and for many young learners that is exactly what it is.

Literacy is fundamentally 'modern human', so representative for what it means to be human being now, a new metaphor of how we fulfil ourselves historically and culturally - in fact this is probably a mistake, but an interesting one. There is some truth in this given the chronology of events, explored so well (as are many other key issues) by Harvey Graff in *The Labyrinths of Literacy; reflections on past and present*:

> The chronology is devastatingly simple: *Homo sapiens* as a species is about one million years old; writing dates from approximately 5000 B.C., so is about five thousand years old (.5 percent of humanity's existence); Western literacy from about 600 B.C., making it roughly twenty-six hundred years old (.26 percent of the species' life); and printing from the 1450s, now aged a mere 450 years. ... It assists us in placing literacy and the primacy with which we hold it in a larger proper context. p. 26

And for Graff, with his strong historical background, literacy is shrouded in a powerful myth:

> For until quite recently, scholarly and popular conceptions of the value of the skills of reading and writing have almost universally followed normative assumptions and expectations of vague but powerful concomitants and effects presumed to accompany changes in the diffusion of literacy. For the last two centuries, they have been inextricably and inseparably linked with post-Enlightenment, 'liberal' social theories and contemporary expectations regarding the role of literacy and schooling in socioeconomic development social order and individual progress. This set of conjunctions - in theory, thought
perception, and expectation - is enormously important. The implications are far too numerous to recount in this brief chapter. Yet they constitute what I have come to call a 'literacy myth', ... p. 16

If the present teaches us nothing else, we must heed the lesson that the presumed places of literacy and schooling are neither sacrosanct nor well understood... p. 16

Literacy, I have come to believe, is profoundly misunderstood. p. 17

And there are many more pieces of text one could pluck from Graff in the same vein. What seems so interesting with Graff is that despite very good scholarship and informed argument he has had seemingly almost no effect on certain sectors of the literacy learning enterprise, George Bush and the New Zealand Ministry of Education to name two. One powerful explanation will be that science, its discoveries and truths and theories, are to be a-historical - Physics and the History of Physics may never meet - and this must again be a dilemma for literacy learning research, but there must innumerable such firewalls criss-crossing the field

4) Questioning

There would always have to be a limit on the extent that a discipline can question itself without disintegrating, and being a discipline at all indicates that there are a certain number of 'unquestionables' - those defining attributes or fundamental features that mark the discipline out from others, or from nothing at all.

On the other hand, 'questioning' is the basis of all research, and it might be the case that when there is too much calculative thinking, the questions become routine. Perhaps the nature of a research field such as literacy learning must be better understood and articulated if penetrative questions are to be developed. Inheriting a fertile research area, inherently interesting, culturally significant, yet also politically 'hot', publicly visible, and personally relevant to every person, literacy learning research has to be much more attentive than it is to the dangers of serving too many masters and sacrificing its integrity. It must become more self
conscious and critically self-aware. Questioning its research questions, although seeming to be a meta-level analysis, would help in this. Developing a schema of sensitivity that would assess research projects on parameters such as origins or genesis might help, alongside a more reflective approach to different directions of research, and a commitment to rapprochement rather than competitiveness.

An emphasis on meaning rather than truth would seem to be essential in the human sciences - or at least that should be the first interpretation. 'What does this mean?' should precede 'is this true?' and experimental techniques and styles of discourse must be developed that recognise this need to be developed. This would circumvent the 'debates' that divide the field, confuse teachers, fatten the pockets of publishers and provide election fodder to politicians. But this is a matter dealt with very well in the writings of the next philosopher we look at, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

*Endnotes*

We have begun on this path of re-questioning learning to read and write not merely because;
- the current knowledge about literacy learning is confused or inadequate or dysfunctional,
- the field is in crisis or about to crumble
- no one has ever asked them before.

It is not that some people do not claim these things. And these claims may be true - there is evidence to that effect. But this would be to travel in the wrong direction. For instance we need to hold open the possibility that such claims of
crisis can come from within the accumulated knowledge itself; that is, they are not necessarily external judgments but may be necessarily integral to the way we hold the knowledge we hold. Some fields of human endeavour may depend for their ongoing survival on the maintenance of crisis, if not the illusion of such.

We will raise several sets of questions as we track the three thinkers. They will be of various kinds. It may be that there are some questions that have not been asked before that should have been. But there will be others that are surprising in how many times they have been asked before. Some have been asked but not heard. Some are asked but inauthentically, as a pose or a diversion, or a habit.

Our questioning here attempts, if it can, to arise originally from nothing else than the asking of questions in itself. Strange as this sounds, it seems to be the only way to avoid being drawn into the very game one is trying to step out from - that is, how do you know that you are not merely hitting the ball back? Which means that reflections on current knowledge are open, not trying to prove a point or make a case or increase division or take a stance. That is not the role of philosophy.
CHAPTER FIVE

MEANING IS USE

Introduction

In this chapter we look further into how to question or ask about something. The insights from Heidegger regarding philosophy hint at new possibilities in how the question of learning to read and write may be apprehended. We can expand these possibilities by turning to Wittgenstein.
We will begin our discussion with *Philosophical Investigations*, one of Wittgenstein's major works, published in 1953. The text used here is a translation by G.E.M. Anscombe, in an English only paperback version from Basil Blackwell, Oxford, and 1974 edition. To keep the language of Wittgenstein exact and to make more available the methodologies embedded in his style I will make heavy use of quotations rather than paraphrasing or exploiting commentators. From the first, commentators have recognised the intimacy between Wittgenstein's style and content. Here is Stanley Cavell, in his essay *Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*:

...the surface difficulties one has in approaching the writings of Wittgenstein. His literary style has achieved both high praise and widespread alarm. Why does he write that way? Why doesn't he just say what he means, and draw instead of insinuate conclusions. ... The first thing to be said in accounting for his style is that he *writes*: he does not report, he does not write up results. Nobody would forge a style so personal who had not wanted to find the right expression for his thought. ...Wittgenstein chose confession and recast his dialogue. It contains what serious confessions must: the full acknowledgement of temptation... and that is why there is virtually nothing in the *Investigations* which we should ordinarily call reasoning... Either the suggestion penetrates past assessment and becomes part of the sensibility from which assessment proceeds, or it is philosophically useless. p. 182-184

There will not be very much commentary on literacy as we try to build a firm continuous interpretation of Wittgenstein

From the book's preface:

The thoughts which I publish in what follows are the precipitate of philosophical investigations which have occupied me for the last sixteen years. ... It was my intention at first to bring all this together in a book ... the essential thing was that the thoughts should proceed from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks.
After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realised that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination. --- And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in very direction. ...

I make [my remarks] public with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another---but, of course, it is not likely.

I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.

I should have liked to produce a good book. This has not come about, but the time is past in which I could improve it.

CAMBRIDGE
January 1945. (p. viii)

There are echoes of Heidegger in these lines, in the allusion to the 'darkness' of the times and in the reference to a certain kind of thinking that takes 'trouble' and is not the ordinary kind of 'unthinking' thinking. It is a hint at least of the timeliness of time, of the positioning power of history so characteristic of Heidegger. There is also a reluctant epistemological consistency drawn between the nature of the matter under study and the form on the publication itself, so that layout and style of the text is intimately interconnected with the subject and its demands in thought.

Some way into Philosophical Investigations, there are some direct reflections on philosophy. An early paragraph, paragraph 11, introduces the theme that philosophy, in its more intent aim to look closely at things, which means looking at them as presented, will have a particular confrontation with confusing information. If you look very specifically, you will need to first see the obvious, but the obvious may not be all that is required to understand;

Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their application is not presented to us so clearly. Especially when we are doing philosophy! (p. 6e)
Then, in later paragraphs we read an expansion of this:

116. When philosophers use a word — "knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition", "name" — and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? —

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

(p. 48e)

What is philosophy for Wittgenstein? What kind of thinking is it? The work is titled *Philosophical Investigations*. That could mean that he is himself undertaking his own philosophical investigations; or alternatively it could mean that he is commenting on what is called 'philosophical' investigations. It could, as titles often do, carry several meanings, punning, equivocating or simply working simultaneously from different discourses or different levels. He calls his published thoughts 'the precipitate of philosophical investigations which have occupied me for the last sixteen years' (p. vii). He seems to be 'doing' philosophy while trying at the same time to redefine it.

Let us look at what he does do, and then discuss more of his direct comments on philosophy. This will make it clearer what he thinks philosophy is and lead into how it might contribute to the question or issue of learning to read and write.

**Wittgenstein does philosophy**

Like Heidegger with *Being and Time*, Wittgenstein begins with a quote from the canon; not Plato this time, but Augustine. In a passage from his *Confessions* Augustine recalls, so he imagines, how he learned to speak; here is the translation that is given as a footnote in *Philosophical Investigations*, with the original Latin being in the body of the work;

"When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point
it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires." (p. 2e)

He says of Augustine's passage;

1. ... These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names. --In this picture we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word. If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself. p 2e

He then goes on through the book to repeatedly explore this complex idea...

Do all words have meanings? Do all words signify something? He sets up hundreds of thought experiments, often where people are involved in certain activities and these activities incorporate language. For instance in the first example of the book he describes going to a shopkeeper with a slip marked "five red apples", and how the shopkeeper opens the drawer with the apples in, of all colours, then looks up the word "red" and finds a colour sample next to it, then counts up to five as he takes an apple of the indicated colour out the drawer, until he reaches five. Here we see language in action ... the shopkeeper acted in a certain way. Wittgenstein says about every word having a meaning:

However, what is the meaning of the word "five"? --No such thing was in question here, only how the word five is used. p 3e
It is how the word is used that is the point here. Words are to be found embedded in activities and this must be taken into account when one tries to understand them.

He goes on in section 2 to present an imaginary example of very simplified language use, that of a builder and his assistant; an example he comes back to several times.

2. That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions. Nevertheless, one can also say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours.

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones; there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; --B brings the stone which he has learned to bring at such and such a call. ---Conceive of this as a complete language. p 5e

In this instance indeed we might say that the words do stand for objects but it is a very limited or primitive language. He says;

3. Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe." p 5e

So, descriptions or definitions can over-reach themselves, dubiously extrapolating from one well observed part of a word’s field of uses to other less carefully understood parts or even to the dimly comprehended whole.

**Games, Children, Learning and Language**

At this point, in this same section, he introduces the notion of 'game', but here only as an example of a word with a number of different uses;
It is as if someone were to say: "A game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules..."—and we replied: You seem to be thinking of board games, but there are others. You can make your definition correct by expressly restricting it to those games. (p. 3e)

Presumably he could have used here any term that shows a wide variety of uses (and most do). However 'game' proves particularly useful when later he seeks a metaphor for how language works—which he does a page or so further on as we shall see.

In section 5 he expands a little on how the use a language is put to is essentially bound up in the conditions within which it is learned; a line of thought that leads very naturally to thinking about children. Learning a language is not merely having an explanation of what names to attach to what objects. He says in the last paragraph of section 5, and in section 6:

5. A child uses such primitive forms of language when it learns to talk. Here the teaching of language is not explanation, but training.

6. We could imagine that the language of §2 was the whole language of A and B; even the whole language of a tribe. The children are brought up to perform these actions, to use these words as they do so, and to react in this way to the words of others.... With different training the same ostensive teaching of these words would have effected a quite different understanding. (pp. 4e-5e)

Learning a language, it seems, is learning what to do, how to respond, what is meant. In section 7 'language-games' are introduced and it is worth giving the whole quotation here to appreciate the wash and flow of his ideas.

7. In the practice of the use of language (2) [ie builder A and assistant B] one party calls out the words, the other acts on them. In instruction in the language the following process will occur: the learner names the objects; that is he utters the word when the teacher points to the stone. —And there will be this still simpler exercise: the pupil repeats the words after the teacher—both of these being processes resembling language.
We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game.

And the processes of naming stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of much of the use of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses.

I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game". (p. 5e)

How does this work?

a) He resurrects the stone builder and assistant and their primitive language system.

b) He then imagines how this language would be learned, ie the instruction, and there are two types of instruction posed; 1) a more complex task of naming the objects as they are pointed to, to a more simple task 2) merely repeating the word after the teacher (note the builder has become teacher).

Both these learning processes are further examples of language in use in a context with a purpose, and in activity b2 above the words do not now necessarily signify something.

c) This has parallels with children and language learning (which is where he began with the Augustine passage) and the games they play as part of this. In the first mention of the term 'language-games' (see paragraph three in section 7 above), he states that the process of how the builder and assistant are using words is exactly the same as children playing a language-learning game.... the builder and his assistant could be playing a children's language-learning game of, say, 'name-and-fetch' (my term, not Wittgenstein's). This 'name-and-fetch', characterises both 1) the children's language-learning game, which is both a game and language-learning and 2) the stone builder's primitive language, which is neither a game nor language-learning; but this common characteristic seems to allow the term 'game' to slip into a metaphor for the stone builder's language, which he calls a 'language-game'.
'Game' now has the two meanings--when something either is a game (as with children) or when something is merely game-like (such as the stone builder's language use).

d) In the next paragraph (paragraph 4) he returns to the two processes that are examples of language-learning but are not necessarily games, viz. naming the stones and repeating words after someone. But, like 'name-and-fetch' above, they have so much in common with children's games, as he points out again in the second sentence of the paragraph, that they too might be called 'language-games'.

Out of the juxtaposed and interfused descriptions of primitive language use, language learning, children's language learning, and children's language-learning games (and possibly the earlier use of the term 'game' in section 3., used to explain something entirely different, namely how a part can be used to define its whole) the concept of a language-game arises.

We can distinguish the following:

1. games (literal)

2. children's games (literal)

3. children's language-learning games (literal)

4. the primitive language of the stone builder's 'language-game' which resembles children's language-learning games (metaphor)

5. two processes of learning this primitive language ...
   a) by naming
b) or by repeating

... both literally called 'language-games' if made into games, but otherwise metaphor.

**A Pathway of Thought**

If we try to trace a 'logical' pathway it seems to be from, A) what games are, B) to a descriptive and meandering exploration of the field of interconnections with how children play games, how many of their games include language, and how these particular games are part of, or are similar to, learning to be a competent and mature language speaker C) to the first sub-conclusion that all language learning is game-like, then to D) the second, dominant, conclusion that primitive language use is also game-like. So, the figurative use of 'game' emerges from the literal use of 'game', travels via the areas of children's games and language learning to eventually reach and become applicable to mature though primitive language uses.

It need not have taken this path. Wittgenstein could have said that the primitive language is game-like by making a direct assertion. Metaphors often work this way, and frequently rely on the jolt of dissimilarity and surprise. The association is made between concepts normally completely incompatible or categorically very distant from each other in the ordinary flow of discourse, eg. 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' (fortune cannot ever have slings and arrows), or, 'take up arms against a sea of troubles' (a sea is always made of water, or at least liquid, not troubles). This would have been much simpler. But by transitioning through instances where language use is a game, and not merely game-like, to arrive at the proposal that language is also game-like gives the metaphor more than just metaphorical implication.

**Learning**

And also the highly active concept of learning is, I propose, given an important
place on the stage of contemplation and explanation.

It is possibly relevant and certainly interesting to recall that for six years Wittgenstein was an elementary or primary school teacher in lower Austria, between 1920 and 1926, just before and just after the publication of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1922. This period of his life is described at length in chapter three of William Warren Bartley III's biography of Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein*. Philosophers may typically draw on whatever they like from their experiences and knowledge but it seems that working with and around young children would increase opportunities to observe and develop theories about children's games and learning and language use. Later in his book Bartley elaborates the influence of Karl Bühler's educational theories on Wittgenstein. Bühler was professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna and at the Vienna Pedagogical Institute and chief theoretician at the school-reform movement and Bartley lists these similarities between his ideas and the later Wittgenstein:

... (1) their opposition to psychological and logical atomism; (2) in the place of atomism, a contextualism or configurationalism; (3) a radical linguistic conventionalism built up in opposition to essentialist doctrines; (4) the idea of 'imageless thought'. (p. 108)

It certainly has impact directly on our question of learning to read and write. The question is framed around *learning* to read and write, and not around reading and writing as such. It deliberately draws 'learning' into the discussion of what is learned. It should also be possible to analyse the concepts of reading and writing without reference to how they are learned. The period of learning, or the fact that learning is required could be a mere extra, necessary but adding nothing from itself to the final form. Yet Wittgenstein as he works consistently against essentialism raises the place of learning in the explanation of things.

Wittgenstein's discussion shows, I think, a) that by returning to the learning of something, ie, language, something critical and essential is revealed
about that thing that is not obvious when one just views competent users and  
b) that the nature of this learning is different from what might be expected.  
This is a shift or broadening of focus that is potentially of some significance.  
The learning of or about something loses its easily assumed place as a mere 
conduit, as Augustine would have it, and the finished world, as it looks at any  
one time is deceptive, not revealing features of its construction. For Augustine  
all the child had to do was learn the pre-existing and inherent meaning of 
words and how they referred to a pre-existing world; for Wittgenstein the  
meaning does not pre-exist the use the word has in some actual activity and the 
child must participate or engage with the activity to learn the rules and 
patterns of its use. This suggests more active engagement by the child, much  
more learning work to be done, both socially/cognitively by the child and in the 
range of experiences needed to master usage.  

Very importantly, the acts of learning do not separate off cleanly from 
the instances of competent usage. The learning itself remains the active 
ingredient even when it seems to be many years later that one uses the word.  
The learned-ness of something learned becomes central to understanding what 
it is. However, this may not be obvious.  

**Language-games**  
e) The final sentence, as we have read, introduces 'language games';  

> I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language game". (p. 5e)  

'Language-game' applies to the 'whole', both what is said and the accompanying or 
enveloping context of actions in which it has its operational significance and 
communicative power. There is a profound inseparability it seems; each gives the 
other life, shape and form. And the recurring claim, as Wittgenstein goes on to
present in analogy after analogy, in description after description, seems to include at least these;

a) that in different language-games the 'same' words will have different uses, uses learned alongside the learning of the game itself and all 'woven' into the various and varied action-systems where they have their original place or meaning-bestowing grounding, and,

b) that in any one language-game all the items called 'words' will not by virtue of sharing this single name have a single function.

To understand a word one must go and look at its occurrence in a particular action matrix that will itself be part of a whole called a 'language-game'.

Here are some of the analogies Wittgenstein uses, the first around the word 'lever';

6. ... "I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever."—Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing. (p. 5e)

To restate; the part has a seeming independence, giving the appearance of having a life and meaning of its own. Yet when scrutinised we see that it requires the whole to be a something. Without the whole, it may be anything, or nothing. Here is an analogy using the word 'tool';

11. Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, nails and screws—-The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.) Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their application is not presented to us so clearly. Especially when we are doing philosophy! (p. 6e)

The meaning of this is clear, showing the important explanatory role of action, or action-system. Here is an analogy with 'handle';
It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder it brakes; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro. (p. 76)

The handles all look similar, on the surface, but when more closely examined in the context of actual use and activity, there are differences.

The major question then arises: is there no similarity below the application of the term at all? Can one not hold to the idea that while superficial definitions will crack under scrutiny, we can nonetheless construct more sophisticated definitions that will from a greater depth cover all the varied uses of a word? For instance, is not a 'language-game' itself something, with a meaning that covers all its applications?

**Language-games, and the essence of language and the essence of game**

The issue amounts to a discussion of whether there are such things as 'essences' or not. The definition of 'essence' given by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* is:

...the indispensable quality or element identifying a thing or determining its character; fundamental nature or inherent characteristics. (p. 400)

Wittgenstein seems to be saying that under closer scrutiny such essences are much harder to pin down; or at least they do not necessarily have the characteristics or the ontological status one might imagine at first glance.

In the next paragraphs, 'language' itself becomes a vehicle for making its own use more transparent. This move, as earlier with 'game', has a certain reflexive irony about it and shows the associative rather than merely logical links.
characteristic of Wittgenstein's style and flow of ideas in *Philosophical Investigations*. He is not content to use only random and usefully independent examples, like 'slabs' and 'blocks'; or (later on in the book) 'red' (section 57 and 58) or 'sensations' (sections 243 and following). Having invented this term 'language-game' to try to better describe how language functions, the term itself, in both its parts ('language', and 'game'), is used as a kind of second tier example of how unsatisfactory essentialism can be.

We see emerging from the range of discussions on simplified or primitive languages a sense that there is no uniform entity that can be called 'language'; and this is because language is part of human activities in the world which are themselves endlessly variable. In section 18, Wittgenstein likens language to a very old city:

18. ... Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight streets and uniform houses.

A city is a living form that grows and changes while retaining its older forms as well. Cities grow according to the purposes and needs of the people, shaped by many forces that change over time, often clumsily, often retaining features whose purposes are long forgotten and have become just lived with. Language is like this and thus has this mixture of old and new, carrying its history within. However, it is not a single fixed thing, with one set of qualities throughout its whole being.

19. It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle. --Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others. ——And to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. p 8e

It is possible to imagine a very simple language for a specific purpose, that functions well, performs its allotted task and therefore for all its simplicity cannot be considered incomplete. But to do this requires one to also imagine some living
activity, such as battles and how they are carried out with orders and reports. This is to imagine a living being doing something, getting on with its life. A battle is a whole realm of events, actions, interactions, equipment of certain sorts. To pull up this language one has to imagine an aspect of living, not just a thing called ‘language’ that exists disembodied and is purely performed between points of sheer consciousness. It is to imagine a form life has taken on. One meaning of ‘form of life’ must be similar to when one speaks of, say, forms of love -- Platonic, sexual, paternal and so on. The term ‘form of life’ is to remind us that it is within the affairs of living we find language and not as a thing-in-itself.

There are many aspects of human living; humans have many forms or patterns of behaviour that include language in their performance. Several pages later Wittgenstein describes language as this multiplicity of functionings spread across and deriving meaning from human activity rather than a single independent entity with one function;

23. But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? -- There are countless kinds; countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols", "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of, as we may say, come into existence and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a rough picture of this from the changes in mathematics.)

Here the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.

Review the multiplicity of language games in the following examples, and in others:

- Giving orders, and obeying them--
- Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements--
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)--
- Reporting an event--
- Speculating about an event--
- Forming and testing a hypothesis--
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams--
- Making up a story; and reading it--
- Play-acting--
- Singing catches--
- Guessing riddles--
Making a joke; telling it--
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic--
Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.
--It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are
used, the multiplicity of the kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the
structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) pp 11e-12e

This technique of going to the phenomena itself, i.e. events within the world,
and testing with many concrete examples, produces this repeated assertion -- that
multiplicity defeats unitary definitions. The phrase is used again ... a form of life....
The next section adds further meaning to this phrase;

25. It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity.
And this means: "they do not think, and that is why they do not talk." But--they simply do not
talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language--if we except the most primitive forms of
language. --Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural
history as walking, eating, drinking, playing. p 12e

And much later in the text, in Part II, page 223e, he says;

If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.

There are several strands to this comparison with animals. First there is the
reference to the connection between 'thinking' and language'. One argument that
Wittgenstein makes repeatedly is that language has many uses and the capture of
language by one of its uses, namely logic, i.e. thinking, is to be exposed as such, as a
capture. When one looks more closely at language its many, many other, uses are
revealed. Once this is appreciated then the error in imagining that language can be
simply separated out from the species wherein it has its functional existence and
implanted as a whole in completely different species becomes obvious. All the
different kinds of behaviour or patterns of activity within which talking occurs have
to be transplanted as well -- chatting, recounting, questioning gossiping, arguing,
explaining, whispering, eavesdropping, lecturing, orating -- and it then becomes a much bigger enterprise of imagination, in the end threatening the very way in which 'animal' is used.

Language dovetails so intricately and intimately with the forms of behaviour a species engages in that it cannot be lifted off and considered to have application when not interlocked with this activity of living. Language cannot be teased out from the life habits of one species and then intrusively inserted into the comings and goings of another. Forms of life, forms of living, underwrite language.

If a lion could talk we would not understand its talk because it is a different form of life, or has different forms of living. As we understand more about language acquisition we understand the central role of shared living environments between the learner and the expert. The functions of language, its vocabulary and its syntax, and all its different applications are learned by countless encounters within many of shared activity systems with other humans. This is how different cultures develop and perpetuate themselves, and humans can find it difficult enough to understand each other across the barriers of linguistic and cultural difference. How much more so with a completely different species. Unless the lion had shared all this, its language would be incomprehensible.

More on Forms of Life

We can go deeper into the meaning of 'form of life' by relating it to the expression 'life-form'. There are many life-forms -- many shapes, sizes, outer coverings and inner organ organisation, ways of reproducing and ways of feeding, modes of movement, social habits, self-protection and so on. Biological schema and tables try to organise this proliferation and explain its ontogenesis, from mammals and trees to molluscs, mosses and bacteria. Any life form is a particular manifestation of a livingness and its form is its distinguishing particular combination of characteristics that we might associate with being alive. These can be specified
at a number of different levels, and will be different for instance if one is talking about mammals or fish, or animals and plants, or parasites or viruses. But each living thing deals with the act of being alive in its own way, with its own particular schedules and patterns of nutrition and reproduction, unique combination of body parts, organs, limbs, or cellular structure, and metabolic and biochemical specifications. This all adds up to living life in a particular way with particular activities. It is called ‘natural history’ of a species.

When imagining the language-game, which we have seen is the language and the action sequences into which it is woven, between the builder and his assistant one is imagining an aspect of the life of being human, of human natural history. The picture needs to be built in detail. We can first of all think of the ‘whole’ that forms the context for this activity of building. We imagine the passing of certain objects -- blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams -- of certain size and kind, identified by words just as they are because of the relationship, the significance, they have with the participants as they live, that is in terms of shelters or buildings of certain kinds that can be built with them. Each of the terms - blocks, pillars, slabs and beams -- has its place defined by usage taken up within human life style and way of living. By human is meant this particular creature without fur or feathers, scales or a tough outer skin, with these imperatives for shelter, hence the building occurs; and then with this kind of hand formation and this kind of perceptive abilities to tell one substance from another in just that way, and muscular development in this way that allows these to be passed from one person to another, for building to occur. Then the fact of spoken language, of sounds of a kind of variability and volume permitted by the capacity of the larynx and tongue and all other body parts that contribute to human sound production, all this is itself made possible in this distinctively human way -- the participants are able to handle these objects in this way within this communicative configuration because of the positions of their arms and legs, and their eyes and ears and mouths; they can pass the objects to each other while talking and looking and listening. And so on.
To fully imagine language one is imagining a life form. A life form is a very dense complex many layered matting of inter-related interacting actions and things. Language is fully embedded in all this and draws upon its immersion to be effective. Its power lies in the past and current relationships it has formed and continues to form with the concurrent actions. But these are easily submerged. They are 'hidden' behind the scenes as it were, performing their vastly supportive but necessarily not cognised speechless task as they constantly nourish the great complex mechanism of communicative speech. One way the structure can be glimpsed is by searching deep within developmental sequences lost back within childhood subconsciousness.

So, what would one imagine a talking ant to look like? What would it do? How would it do it? Does it have a mouth -- or doesn't that actually matter? What would an ant colony look like if ants could talk?

Or a lion. A lion is not going to say 'slab', or 'pillar'. It does not build its shelter. A lion might say 'run' but it is interesting to ponder to what extent would 'we' understand 'run'? All that 'run' means, all its uses, cannot be replicated with a lion. It cannot mean the same thing, i.e. cannot have the same uses because for a lion it would be fixed in with all that a lion is and does including that that a human is not and doesn't do. About the sharpness of teeth, about the smell of a deer? Would we be able to understand that? We can imagine what we would say if we were a lion, but can we imagine what a lion would say from within its own form being as a lion? Language learning is enveloped in shared activities with others that build upon similar species characteristics; and these must include the vocal equipment and hearing sensibility that is built into human physiology. How would a lion have acquired language; and still remained a lion? What would a pride of talking lions look like? Would we still want to call them lions? That is, given the changes that would be required in their physiology and in their life activities, i.e. they would no longer hunt or mate or interact in the way they do now, would we perhaps want to give them a new name?
To imagine language is to imagine the activities, the forms of life, in which it has its due function. Because language is so in with the behaviours of the living thing -- what it does in the world and how it does it -- to imagine a language is to conjure up the living thing in all its activities as well. It is like a way of living, not a way merely of thinking. When one imagines a language one should not be imagining bodiless creatures indulging in some kind of pure communicating. Despite its seeming detachment language is an embedded-in-life activity.

But, Wittgenstein would no doubt also say, they do talk 'like animals talk'. That is, it is not the philosopher’s role to govern the use of words.

**Games**

This leaves us with the deep impression of a multiplicity of uses of language-games as part of a form of life with respect to language. But we still have 'game' to consider, for there could be an underlying unity with all these varieties of language that entitles them to all be considered game-like. Several pages further on, Wittgenstein gives 'game' the same treatment he gave language and I quote this at length partly to yet again to re-visit his method as he intensely and persuasively practises it - section 66 is classic late Wittgenstein - and partly because to re-read within original setting concepts that have been so frequently discussed is an opportunity to think through them again from an original source.

65. Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations. -

-For someone might object against me: "you take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the general form of propositions and of language."

And this is true. -- Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, --but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this
relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language". I will try to explain this.

66. Consider for example the proceedings we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? --Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'" --but look and see whether there is anything common to all. --For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! --Look for example at board games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games: here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained but much is lost. --Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristics have disappeared! In addition, we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way: can see how similarities crop up and disappear.

And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

67. I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than "family resemblances") for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. --And I shall say: 'games' form a family. ... . pp 31e-32e

Above we saw how language could not be pinned down; here we see that 'games' likewise elude a core definition. The new metaphor of 'family resemblances' is introduced as a way of thinking about how a term may be used. And if we went on reading Wittgenstein we would find 'family resemblances' unpicked and analysed.

Wittgenstein the Philosopher

How might we describe all this? Puzzling, tussling, exploring, re-visiting, trying out, questioning, Philosophical Investigations, bites and nags its way through subsets
and supersets of problems. Wittgenstein is trying to sort and solve, explain, how language works, thus how propositions work and therefore knowledge and truth itself. For him, philosophy is about this becoming aware that something is amiss; then working on this problem, that which is amiss. He says;

A philosophical problem has the form: "I don't know my way about". (p. 49e)

With a philosophical problem, one does not know which way to turn. It is not the same as just not knowing something. In that case one can set about finding out. However philosophical problems become immobilizing because the questioning starts to threaten the whole knowledge enterprise, the structure of knowledge and thus philosophy itself. It is a self-referential questioning, which makes it so completely puzzling; tormenting, in Wittgenstein's own words. He says;

133. The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question. (p. 51e)

In a number of paragraphs Wittgenstein describes how philosophy should work;

125. It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a ... discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view....
   It throws light on our concept of meaning something. ...

126. Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. --Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.
   One might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible before all discoveries and inventions.

127. The work of a philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.

128. If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree with them.
The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him.—And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. p 50e

The messages here place philosophy ‘behind’ our view of or knowledge of the world. The activity of bringing to notice that which is hidden by virtue of its simplicity and familiarity has promise. It may be striking and powerful, have some impact, perhaps contribute to a body of knowledge. It might be useful to investigate contradictions not by discovering more facts, but to take a closer look. Perhaps there is a place to re-view the ‘philosophy’ that has lain behind all the inventions and discoveries within a body of knowledge such as that which surrounds learning to read and write. A philosophical approach which permits itself to get lost and then work out where the reminders lie could be useful.

What he has given us in Philosophical Investigations are some insights into the workings of language and its incorporation into human activities, and he has provided some language we can use as indicators of what may be causing confusions. The concept of 'language-game' gives certain expectations for how we might understand literacy acquisition. With regard to learning to read and write we may expect there to be no one description or definition, no single phenomenon that without dispute or for all time one could say "that is what it is--that right there is literacy learning--that is what is meant". We would have to look and see. Instead there may be circumstances and situations and occasions to be taken into account; and common and usual and uncommon and flexible and creative and responsive uses of the term: and from our position all this must be accepted as the case. The question "what is literacy learning?" may be best reacted to by describing sets of family resemblances, some close, some distant, some hard to trace and some feuding.

We have a method of investigation that emphasises the validity to be found in exploring a range of particulars rather than the need to fix upon a universal. Our
attention is drawn to how meanings of many sorts are established, maintained and learned in words through uses or life activities. Particularisation, change and difference may be expected; we are prepared to be suspicious of explanations that seem too abstract or distant from usage, or of sectors taking ownership of terms that have broader based origins.

In a much later section, section 432, we read:

432. Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life? --In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there? --Or is the use its life? p 128e

It will be in the ways the term literacy acquisition is and has been used as we go about our business of living that we must look at to explore the phenomenon -- as a term used without the assumption that it implies a single unchanging entity.

Business of living is form of life. We have this question now; in what forms of life is learning to read and write to be found?

End of Part One
Part Two

Wittgenstein and Literacy Acquisition

Wittgenstein and the Question of Learning to Read and Write

The deeper potential for the key analyses of Wittgenstein to cast a glow of explanatory light across the discourse of literacy learning at several levels of its organisation seems enormous. We will only hint at the possibilities here.

A. The Origins of Language

In his recent book *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* Michael Tomasello describes a very Wittgenstein-ian scene - First Linguistic Constructions -

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**THE CULTURAL ORIGINS OF HUMAN COGNITION**

quition of relatively large-scale linguistic constructions; second is the process by which large-scale linguistic constructions are learned; and third is the role of large-scale linguistic constructions in children's cognitive development in general.

First Linguistic Constructions

Children talk about events and states of affairs in the world. Even when they use the name of an object as a one-word utterance, "Ball," they are almost always asking someone either to get them the ball or to attend to the ball. Simply naming objects for no other purpose except to name them is a language game that some children play, but this is typically only some children in some Western middle-class homes and concerns only basic-level objects; no children anywhere simply name actions ("Look Putting") or relationships ("Look Off!"). We should approach early language, therefore, with an eye to the entire events and states of affairs involved—complex scenes of experience with one or more participants in their spatio-temporal settings—because this is what children talk about. As they develop, they do this with holophrases, verb island constructions, abstract constructions, and narratives.

Holophrases

By the time children begin acquiring the linguistic conventions of their communities at around one year of age, they have already been communicating with others gastrically and vocally for some months—both imperatively to request things of others and declaratively to point things out to them ( Bates, 1979). Children of all cultures thus learn and use their earliest linguistic symbols both declaratively and imperatively, and they soon learn to ask for things interrogatively as well—each being accomplished with a distinctive intonational pattern (Bruner, 1983). Across all the languages of the world the scenes of experience that children talk about most often are such things as (Brown, 1975):

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**LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTIONS AND EVENT COGNITION**

- the presence-absence recurrence of people, objects, and events (hi, bye, gone, more, again, another, stop, away);
- the exchange-possession of objects with other people (give, have, share my, mine, Mommy's);
- the movement-location of people and objects (come, go, up, down, in, out, on, off, here, there, outside, bring, take, Where go?);
- the states and changes of states of objects and people (open, close, fall, break, fix, wet, pretty, little, big);
- the physical and mental activities of people (eat, kick, ride, draw, hug, kiss, throw, roll, want, need, look, do, make, see).

It is important to note that virtually all of these events and states are either intentional or causal events themselves, or else the endpoints or results or movements of a causal or intentional act that the child is attempting to get the adult to pay attention to or bring about through intentional action (Slobin, 1985)—the point being that from the beginning children talk about scenes of experience structured by their species-unique understanding of the intentional-causal structure of events and states of affairs in the world.

The child’s major symbolic vehicle at this early stage is what is often called a holophrase: a single-unit linguistic expression intended as an entire speech act (e.g., “More,” used to mean “I want more juice”). The holophrases with which children begin to talk about events represent many different kinds of linguistic structures in different languages. Thus, in English, most beginning language learners use a number of so-called relational words such as More, Gene, Up, Down, On, and Off, presumably because adults use these words in salient ways to talk about salient events (Bloom, Tinker, and Margulis, 1995). In Korean and Mandarin Chinese, in contrast, young children learn fully adult verbs for these same events from the beginning—because this is what is most salient in adult speech to them (Koppenik and Chui, 1995). In both cases, to learn to talk about the event more fully, the child must fill in some missing linguistic elements such as the participants involved, for example, from simply “Off” to “Shirt off” or “Take shirt off” or “You take my shirt off.” In addition, however, most children begin language acquisition...
It is building upon the minute, second by second, word/object/world-hand/eye/voice single word interchanges that become so familiar from Wittgenstein's language game scenarios, with the holophrase neatly taking up its particular place in the progressive development toward more sophisticated language forms. It has the neatness of fit between the learning of language and the use of language caught in one explanatory mechanism.

For Tomasello the whole mechanism rests on one genetically based biological difference - the advanced ability of humans to recognise each other as conspecifics, members of the same species or form of life. He sums it up in Chapter 3, called JOINT ATTENTION AND CULTURAL LEARNING, where he states

The conclusion from our comparison of human and nonhuman primates is that the understanding of conspecifics as intentional beings like the self is a uniquely human cognitive competency that accounts, either directly on its own or indirectly though cultural processes, for many of the unique features of human cognition. p. 56

This is, we suggest, the same competency that enables language games or forms of life to work, and one of the key features is the development of joint attention, which is always perspectival because it always occurs in a situation of intent, i.e., it is never a purely philosophical situation. Joint attention calls the learner directly up and into what the expert sees as the import of the event, and language is laid down while this interplay of shared focus is held as a captive by their fixed, dual stare.

The mechanism for cultural

Cumulative Cultural Evolution and the Ratchet Effect

Some cultural traditions accumulate the modifications made by different individuals over time so that they become more complex, and a wider range of adaptive functions is encompassed — what may be called cumulative cultural evolution or the “ratchet effect” (see Figure 2.2). For example, the way human beings have used objects as hammers has evolved significantly over human history. This is evidenced in the artifactual record by various hammer-like tools that gradually widened their functional sphere as they were modified again and again to meet novel exigencies, going from simple stones, to composite tools composed of a stone tied to a stick, to various types of modern metal hammers and even mechanical hammers (some with nail-removing functions as well; Basalla, 1988). Although we do not have such a detailed artifactual record, it is presumably the case that some cultural conventions and rituals (e.g., human languages and religious rituals) have become more complex over time as well, as they were modified to meet novel communicative and social needs. This process may be more characteristic of some human cultures than others, or of some types of activities than others, but all cultures would seem to have at least some artifacts produced by the ratchet effect. There do not seem to be any behaviors of other animal species, including chimpanzees, that show cumulative cultural evolution (Boesch and Tomasello, 1998).
It is building upon the minute, second by second, word/object/world - hand/eye/voice single word interchanges that become so familiar from Wittgenstein's language game scenarios, with the holophrase neatly taking up its particular place in the progressive development toward more sophisticated language forms. It has the neatness of fit between the learning of language and the use of language caught in one explanatory mechanism.

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The mechanism for cultural
the Ratchet Effect, which explains how a culture develops, and how it becomes a depository of useful human artefacts across human history. A chance discovery, an invention or any other cultural object or process can be caught as a cultural feature for ongoing transmission from generation to generation, with one very important upshot being that each generation can both enjoy the benefits bestowed by the skill or knowledge and continue improvements and refinements where the preceding left off.

Certain of these concepts have great applicability to learning to read and write. With probably not accidental allusions to Wittgenstein, Tomasello uses the example of the evolution of the hammer to exemplify his case but the Ratchet Effect would explain human language evolution, as well as that of monetary systems and science, very well. It accommodates the city analogy of Wittgenstein’s nicely, drawing upon the same principal of growth over time held embalmed in the current practices. For literacy researchers such as Clay, the concept of ‘attention’ has a central explanatory role, as evidenced by such ready indicators such as the ten references to attention based concepts in the index (page 358) in *Becoming Literate: the construction of inner control* (1991) or the twenty references in the index of her more recent book *Change over Time in Children’s Literacy Development* (2001) ‘Joint’ attention must be a most important concept for theories of teaching literacy.

The Ratchet Effect underscores the historical nature of language. The intentional, perspectival, nature of our initial encounters with language must serve to deepen our understanding of what difference and diversity actually mean - how then, when learning to read, all this work must be performed cognitively, as the process does not allow for the perception of anything except the print.

B. The Complexity of the Field

As a set of in-the-world-occurring events, learning to read and write is what might be called very busy cultural intersections. Firstly, as events of language they are
superimposed across all meaningful life interactions - anything that can be said or
done or seen or played with can be spoken of therefore written about or read about.
Language is like an overlay of one form of living across many others. That is at the
level of the child, or learner. Secondly there is the social placement and perspective
of everyone who is interested in the issue, has a 'say' in the event, and contributes in
some small or large way to the discourse. If one lists, say, those with vested interests
of some kind in a child's literacy learning, and at the same time tries to imagine what
reading and writing means to that person qua their 'interest' - where 'interest' means
at the very least a combination of recalled, constructed, remembered, imagined
experiences, then some notion of the complexity begins to emerge. For instance,
each of the following is a vaguely focussed social location that will have a view of
literacy learning bequeathed from the influence of the multitude of relevant life
experiences;

- Child
- Parent
- Teacher
- School - Principal

Then around these institutionally co-located individuals the others can be spread,
divided for the sake of convenience into perhaps;

- Family (aunts, brothers, extended family)
- Education (special education teachers, remedial teachers, literacy consultants,
  Ministry officers)
- Academic (researchers, teacher trainers, writers, University personnel)
- Commercial (book sellers, publishers, programme marketeers)
- Media (journalists)
- Political (local and national politicians)
- Society (which is everybody else, since the general public will also have a 'view')
Across all these different settings ones tries to imagine the way, say, the word 'reading' will be being used, and how important it is that we move away from our first response, which is an 'essentialist' one, assuming everyone means the same thing when they say the same thing. It would seem as though such essentialist thinking could be at the root of many debates, disagreements, and divisions.

**A Comparison**

It is not infrequent for theorists to give their definitions of reading. We read the New Zealand Ministry of Education definition of literacy earlier.

Literacy is the ability to use and understand those language forms required by society and valued by individuals and communities. TKI

To give more refined or thoroughly conceived examples here are two very clear and thoughtful definitions of literacy by two people who are both very well-respected in the field.

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**Definition One**

**What is Reading?**

I define reading as a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced. My definition states that within the directional constraints of the printer's code, language and visual perception responses are purposefully directed by the reader in some integrated way to the problem of extracting meaning from cues in a text, in sequence, so that the reader brings a maximum of understanding to the author's message. As we progress along the lines of a text it is not unlike the process of finding footholds when climbing up a cliff face, yet the achievement is in the single completed task.

We ask questions all the time as we read and our theories of what might occur so well that we are scarily aware that they exist. We only become aware of our questioning when our answers fail to match the information before us. Asking questions is a means of eliminating alternatives. We can encourage children to ask themselves questions and develop their strategies for improving predictions. All this applies to reading and writing. We must read by asking and answering questions if we are to understand what we are reading. Pauncefote and Brown [1981, 1986] have provided an excellent example of this view of reading as a large body of careful research on reciprocal teaching.

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**Definition Two**

**Defining Literacy**

I believe the most socially useful definition of literacy must be contained in terms of two terms of primary and secondary discourse. The first is 'literacy' in a variety of forms; common sense, a common discourse. Therefore, literary discourses refer to language which means are made of them, since they are many secondary Discourses, and we all have value and fail to know these; if one wants to be rather pedantic and formal, then we could define literacy as the sum of of one always to secondary discourses which are (almost all of these in a modern society). One can also give the 'public' criteria, often sorts of arts and gendering practices; literacy (films, references, complex, information) - "people is the discourse - to give definitions of various other sorts of literacy (see: "spoken literacy", "computer literacy", "library literacy").

But I will step from the addition of this phrase 'considering print', rather than to manage the feelings of people committed (as I am not) to reading and writing in institutional and valuable skills. In addition, it is clear that more powerful new literacies are found in secondary discourses, which, while they do not involve print, confer a great many of the same skills, behaviors and ways of thinking that we associate with literacy (for example, the same and diverse practices that have gone under the label "new literacy").

We can talk about "community-based literacies" or "public sphere literacies" in terms of whether they involve readers of community-organized or more public sphere secondary Discourses. We can talk about "dominant literacies" and "non-dominant literacies" in terms of whether they involve majority of dominant or non-dominant secondary Discourses. We can also talk about sharing literacy ("powerful") that we can use a "main language" or a "main Discourse" (a set of arts work, expression, movement, or literacy) for the purpose of integration and the way they constitute us as persons and present as in society and thus literating literary has constituted and institutionalized. Now that what I have called a "sharing literacy" is a perception of a Discourse (the specific one only), not a particular Discourse.

There are two principles which apply to Discourses, and to literacies, which relate them to our previous distinction between acquisitions and learning.
On one level, the difference between the two definitions should be allowed to stand, without explanation, otherwise one risks 'explaining away' why one person said that and another said this. But on another level it is interesting to try to understand why they are different, and how their being different adds to our understanding.

One dimension which if not clearly understood will cause great confusion, is that of change over time. Reading and writing are developmental; that is, they involve an accumulating set of learnings that take time, occur over time. One must be specific as to the place in the developmental sequence one is describing and the context that has set the conditions of growth, as it will not be evident from the description. An acorn grows into a seedling and then a sapling and then a tree. The seedling cannot be seen in the tree; the tree cannot be seen in the sapling. The beginnings of learning to read in a set of pedagogical sequences such as one might see in New Zealand first years classrooms lie within the repeated successful encounters with heavily reduced, extensively illustrated, little books of only 50 or so words in total. Many of the words are short and of high frequency, others are easily recovered from the readily available story line or the illustrations, and these words are often repeated several times over in exactly or very similar simple or repeated short sentences and phrases within a strong simple narrative. The tentative, discovery-laden, careful, monotonic out-loud word-by-single-word sorting and checking, the pointing, the appeals, the frequent false starts, re-attempts, acts of repair and constant state of concentrated looking and wary listening are all part of the nature of emergence as the learner picks and cuts their way for the first time through the thickets of print. None of this can be discerned in the final, polished, paced and intoned 0.25 seconds per word of the entirely independent reading of a College student.

Secondly, reading and writing are both very sensitive to instructional contexts, and that too should be articulated. One important feature these two definitions do share is that they both describe a response to 'continuous text', and...
not merely words in isolation, which would be closer to Stanovich and his clinical model of science. Definition one is Marie Clay, from *Becoming Literate: the construction of inner control*, p. 6 and definition two is James Gee, a social linguist from his book with the completely different title *Social Linguistics and Literacies; ideology in discourses*, p. 153. There is, of course, no one to arbitrate on these definitions, no body or committee or elected group. Language is under only the control of its use and the ratchet effect.

It is as if any new science, as it embarks on its study of some slice of the phenomenal world, has initially nothing else to go on but the everyday terms it inherits. It must make do, and there will inevitably be confusions, conflicts, and difficulties. Eventually, as it builds up a momentum of shared experiences it can develop its vocabulary to suit. Such things Wittgenstein has helped us see.

However there may never be words for certain things.
DOUBLE FEATURE

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Chapter Six

Useful Beings

Introduction

This is a brief chapter, an interlude to reflect on the two philosophers thus far discussed, alongside each other, in the same space, so to speak. Both born in 1889, in neighbouring countries with very strong historical connections, Germany and Austria -- Wittgenstein in glittering Vienna, the youngest of eight to a talented family amongst the most eminent of the city's haute-bourgeoise -- Heidegger in the small German farming village of Messkirch, and which, reminiscent of Kant, he never left. Grappling with the same historical events in the same decades, from very different positions, with extremely different life histories and philosophical missions it is interesting to contemplate how history will view their respective contributions to twentieth century thought.
About Philosophy: Wittgenstein described philosophy as an activity that initially leaves us confused. One reason this mistake is made is because it is assumed that because all words have a uniform appearance so must their application in the world. Philosophy is the cause of the confusion in that it is its own thinking that gets the confusion going. But after this initial confusion philosophy then takes us further; it is also the agent of clarification. And this clarification is achieved by pointing out that which is most familiar, by assembling reminders, by sorting out what we mean by something. This results in striking and powerful observations.

The parallels with Heidegger and his 'meditative thinking' are clear here. Heidegger's questions are also about the most striking and most powerful. Heidegger also, for instance, points out this 'contradiction' in philosophy, that nothing new is said, that it is merely stating the obvious, yet the 'obvious' is at the same time the most hidden. For both philosophers philosophy has this 'originating' characteristic, which means that it stands 'outside' or 'beneath' the discoveries, debates and confusions of discourses. This could be applied to the question of learning to read and write. What is there that is so obvious, so simple and familiar and that needs a kind of thinking that is not so resolutely additive to be understood, in literacy acquisition? What lies in front of our noses that we do not see and that is not reached by the way we set up out research designs.

Going further into the comparison of the two thinkers, it could be said that Heidegger covers more ground than Wittgenstein in drawing into view the implications of philosophical thinking. Wittgenstein hints at rather than explicitly states what Heidegger directly and with more purpose calls the profound transformations, the breaking and opening of perspectives that philosophy makes possible. Heidegger more determinedly explores the hidden (what Wittgenstein identifies as too simple and familiar) and the open (for Wittgenstein the arena of use that breathes life into a sign),
attempting to lie out their working dynamics. He gives his attention to the ontological dimensions of this activity of being.

Roughly speaking, philosophy always aims at the first and last grounds of the essent, with particular emphasis on man himself and on the meaning and goals of human nature. p 10, *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

Thus there is the potential in Heidegger for more profound historical descriptions of literacy learning if we wished to take it up. If we deem it necessary. But there is also the potential of merely replacing one set of perspectives with another. There is a quality about Wittgenstein that avoids this.

*About Dasein, and Life-Forms:* Wittgenstein thinks constantly about the place of life-forms, of the language-game which is the 'whole' made up of the two parts; a) the contextual, surrounding, 'non-linguistic' activity and b) the language part of the activity's occurrence. By extrapolation then: all talk about and by implication knowledge of learning to read and write is not timeless and pure of its own accord; rather it continues to be done in the world, in real practices and in actual activities by people. These people are us. We have cultures, beliefs, values and economies; we have intentions, purposes, pains and pleasures; and names and faces and neighbours and jobs -- and live and die. We are, in short, in the world.

This parallels (early) Heidegger and his request that to study being and beings we must study Dasein, and that this must be done 'historically', that is, as a temporal event. Life form is, as a concept, targeting similar ontological characteristics as Dasein. Forms of life are the many different ways of being in the world through which things come to stand and be talked of as what they are. Both philosophers dwell on how human being and the kind of being that is peculiar to it is critical to nearing an understanding of things in the world. For literacy acquisition this will be important. Literacy learning is a practised and real activity; its nature is to be sought in the variety of human
activity; and it is not merely done by or with or to people. It is part of the life-form they evince.

**About Being and beings:** Both philosophers drive us from different directions towards questioning the base from which a phenomenon can be said to exist or occur. While it may seem that Wittgenstein is pre-occupied with language, it is that which gives language its point and place (use or form of life) that can be drawn out of his thought. His approach is activity or behaviourally based. It is a kind of real-life persistence as he reveals time and time again the boundless and continuous human creativity and the underlying instability or, from a positive angle, flexibility, behind the configuration, identification and talking of things, objects, phenomena and events -- what Heidegger calls beings. Heidegger stressed in his essay on truth the openness in which all human behaviour occurred and how it is through this behaviour what-is becomes that which it is. Eventually Heidegger seeks out what he sees as the more fundamental issue. It is to do with Being itself, and how it, Being, is the condition that bounds all that Wittgenstein so intensely describes.

Learning to read and write is somewhere in this all-encompassing theatre of human being historical destiny, bound up within life-forms and their appearances through the course of history.

**Immanuel Kant:** In our descriptions of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, there is an inward spiralling toward the centrally puzzling ensemble of knowledge, language, meaning and activity. It may be said that this was Kant's problematic, in The Critique of Pure Reason; the problematic of how to put together these disparate yet interlocking pieces of the machine of reason in such a way that it would work to produce truth -- a truth that would sit between scepticism and naive realism, making itself possible. In Heidegger's What is a thing? a publication of lectures given in 1935-36, there is extensive reference to Kant, and around the middle of the book we read;
With the second section of our chapter, the whole work of the *Critique of Pure Reason* reaches its deepest basis, founded by itself. The highest principle of all synthetic judgments (or, as we say, the basic determination of the essence of human knowledge, its truth and its object) is expressed in this formula at the end of the second section: "...The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience..." (A158 B 197, N.K.S., p. 194.)

In Kant's words the issue at its fundamental point is to elaborate how *experience* itself (forms of life, the activities of living) and the objects that are experienced are not separate, are not detached free-wheeling entities but are welded together, each conditioned or made possible at the same time as each other, bringing each other into being simultaneously. It may look as though the named objects in the world are independently what they are, extractable from this or that context or experience. But this is because the bed of experience that gives them placement is too close, perhaps necessarily and by its nature too close, to be seen as such -- and in the normal way of things, i.e. for non-philosophical purposes, this is no problem because it does not interfere with what needs to done, i.e., with the language-game and its design.

It is toward these 'conditions' we would look to find the bases of literacy acquisition. If literacy acquisition is thought of as an experience in the world, then the conditions that underlie this experience may be sought. What are the bases on which literacy acquisition is as it is? Why is it the phenomenon we experience it as being, in this particular form, with these particular characteristics?

* 

We can now turn to a writer who explores the extent to which the conditions of experience can be found within socio-historical dimensions of human existence. In the writings of Michel Foucault, much attention is given to the conditions of knowledge, particularly to the relationships between social practice, order, and human science. This will be most useful since literacy acquisition is a highly ordered social practice, with its own active scientific community.
CHAPTER SEVEN

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BEING INTERPRETED: FOUCAULT

Introduction

Like Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Foucault takes great interest in the kinds of relationships that exist between human practices in the world and the functioning of language; how knowledge is assembled and employed; how truth is in some sense constituted or grounded. The general arguments he puts forward regarding knowledge/thinking/talking and its formation may be said to be very similar to Wittgenstein and Heidegger in many respects. Yet his technique is very different in that his philosophical contributions are developed within the context of investigating particular and regionalized historical human activities.

This section on Foucault begins by describing some of characteristics of his thought. The two commentators of Foucault's work most relied upon in this chapter are Clare O'Farrell and Gary Gutting.
PART ONE

Foucault's Work

Features of Foucault's Thought

Foucault's Major Publications

Heidegger and Wittgenstein talk about knowledge as they traverse language and being; thinking, talking, feeling; and the world, and people and the things within it in historically expansive (as in the case of Heidegger) or historically intimate, selected (especially Wittgenstein) ways.

They write books and essays with titles such as (Heidegger) Being and Time, What is a Thing?, The Essence of Truth, The End of Philosophy and The Task of Thinking, Plato's Doctrine of the Truth, On Time and Being, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics; or (Wittgenstein) Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Philosophical Investigations.

Foucault, on the other hand, has a very different list of publications, which reveal I think even in their titles his particular intellectual concerns and contributions. Between the 1940s and his death in 1984 his major works are as follows:

1954 Maladie mentale et personnalité, later (1962) revised as Maladie mentale et psychologie and translated as Mental illness and psychology.


1966 *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*, translated as *The Order of Things; an archaeology of the human sciences*.

1969 *L'archéologie du savoir*, translated as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.


1984 *L’usage des plaisirs: histoire de la sexualité*, tome 2, translated as *The Use of Pleasure*.


**Human Practice Histories**

Several features of the nature of Foucault's thought become evident from reading and thinking about this list.

1. He is clearly very interested in some of the ways knowledge works in situations where human beings talk about and classify themselves and each other as they interact, as they behave together within their social groupings. Madness; medicine; punishment, incarceration, and discipline; and sexuality, pleasure and care of the self all involve combinations of *activités*, actions and behaviours with knowledge or theories or understandings; and institutions of various kinds. He recognises and studies (with varying emphasis at different times) not just what people say or write, or even think, believe and feel - what might be called
discourse - but also what they do, where they do it and how they do it - the nondiscursive social practices that surround, support or influence the discourse. His preoccupation is therefore within the human or social sciences but where what we know about ourselves and what we think we are is linked in an intricate and dense relationship of reciprocal causation with what we set about doing with respect to each other or ourselves.

A clear example of this would be his description of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. We read in *Michel Foucault; beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow;

Bentham's Panopticon might appear to be simply a minor individual scheme or an idealistic proposal for the reform and perfection of society. However, this viewpoint would not be quite accurate. ...The very genius of the Panopticon lies in its combination of abstract schematization and very concrete applications. ...

In Foucault's terms, the Panopticon brings together knowledge, power, the control of the body, and the control of space into an integrated technology of discipline. It is a mechanism for the location of bodies in space, for the distribution of individuals in relation to one another, for hierarchical organization, for the efficient disposition of centres and channels of power. pp 188-189.

The arguments accord explanatory power to the physical detail of the structure and the uses to which it was put as much as the thought and discourse that led to its development.

2. Secondly, he has successively concentrated on a series of particular areas or specific regions rather than on pan-categorisations or all-absorbing principles or axioms of logic, epistemology or ontology. His attention is not in the first instance on the abstract, higher level generalisations and conceptualisations that typify quests to ground knowledge or understand how truth or language or rationality functions. Nor does he accumulate ever more encompassing
understandings from one publication to the next. Avoiding kingdoms and phyla, he stays with species and genera. In the introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Foucault Gary Gutting writes:

Interpretation distorts because Foucault's work is at root ad hoc, fragmentary, and incomplete. Each of his books is determined by concerns and approaches specific to it and should not be understood as developing or deploying a theory or method that is a general instrument of intellectual progress. In Isaiah Berlin's adaptation of Archilochus's metaphor, Foucault is not a hedgehog but a fox. p 2.

The footnote explains this metaphor;

2 A fragment of the archaic Greek poet Archilochus runs, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Berlin uses this image to divide thinkers into two classes: those (the hedgehogs) "who relate everything to a central vision ... in terms of which they understand, think, and feel, - a single, universal, organizing principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance " and those (the foxes) "who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some de facto way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related by no moral or aesthetic principle" (Russian Thinkers, London: Penguin, 1979, 22).

Gutting goes on to point out that it "is striking that Foucault's books hardly ever refer back to his previous works" p3.

Foucault writes about a singularity, then moves to something else. In her recent article, 'Foucault as Cultural Icon', presented to the Humanities Research Centre, ANU, Canberra, 25th May, 1999, Clare O'Farrell quotes Foucault as saying to a German interviewer;

'Don't keep going back to things I said in the past. When I utter them, they are already forgotten. I think in order to forget. Everything I have said in the past is of absolutely no importance. One writes something when one has already worn it out in one's head; drained bloodless thought, one writes it and that's that. What I have written doesn't interest me. What interests me is what I could write and what I could do.' p 2

This generously articulate impatient intensity characterises his style, and his content, well. Foucault writes, it seems, not so much to slowly and methodically construct a convincing worldview as to exorcise from within himself the
demon of some deeper insight, through the act of writing itself. And this becomes more than just a serial transition from one set of ideas to another: rather it becomes an epistemological statement in its own right. It becomes an attempt to relocate ‘truth’ in something other than a single order of words/ideas.

It is not so much the ‘idea’ and its representational accuracy that activates him as something within his own, less readily explained reactions. O’Farrell, this time in her footnotes to Foucault: Historian or Philosopher? shares this remark of Foucault’s:

Every time I have tried to do theoretical work, it has been on the basis of elements from my experience - always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognised something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in the thing I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography. p 152

This tendency in his thought makes Foucault serially specific, singular and local rather than general, universal and comprehensive; and individually as well as conceptually inclined.

3. Despite the specificity of each topic mentioned above, and Foucault’s professed impatience to be rid of what he wrote in the past, there is a common thread, discernible in his very agitation. O’Farrell goes on in her ANU address:

Foucault’s frequent changes of subject matter, and technical vocabulary, not to mention declarations of this kind, often obscured the fact that he remained interested in the same structural problems, namely how human beings seek to impose order on the world via their social structure and knowledge and how those orders change with the passage of time. p 2

Each of his topics share this questioning of ‘order’, and to do this he targets the more questionable, unstable or fluctuating aspects of human self-consideration. He investigates what it is that has been said and done about being or not
being properly or adequately human. He mines the tension between ordinary-normal-ideal clustered images of being human versus odd-abnormal-fringe aberrations or to use a biological image, 'sports', eg. ideal rational human being in contrast to being insane or mad; physically 'normal', ie., healthy in contrast to being ill and in need of cure; being moral, lawful, or law-abiding as opposed to being in need of punishment or discipline; to be sexually normal or to be deviant. There is an overall problem of what 'good' might mean in terms of a good person -- rationally, healthily, morally, socially, naturally, personally or sexually.

Another way this aspect of Foucault's work has been described is in terms of 'marginality'. There is in Foucault a contrast of margins and centres. O'Farrell's *Foucault; Historian or Philosopher?* presents an overall schema for interpreting Foucault in terms of the 'Same' and the 'Other', and the 'limit' between the two. She posits a fundamental conceptual polarisation between two world views -- two world views that represent at base two thickly divided descriptions of truth and knowledge; and then she gives what she sees as Foucault's resolution, which is to write a history of the limits;

... this is a question of an opposition between a world view based on the belief that we are discontinuous and gradually changing historical beings, and a world view which posits a small number of general principles valid for all times and places.

Which view or which combination of these views most accurately describes the reality of existence? Foucault's own solution to this problem was to write a *history of the limits*, of that edge between the orderly and historical systems societies impose upon the world (the Same), and that which is outside, or beyond that order (the Other). He often changed his mind about how this project should be carried out, but it was the constancy of a philosophical quest and a philosophical vision which led him to make these constant changes, shifts in emphasis, and reinterpretations of his work. p vii

This term 'limit' designates the border territory outlying the mainstream, and is the natural habitat of the margin;

Perhaps the most obvious way of looking at limits in history, is to look at the margins of our society, marginal groups and marginal experiences. As Foucault says: 'It
seemed to me interesting to try to understand our society and civilization in terms of exclusion, of rejection ... its limits.' One can examine what makes a society, a system of knowledge or a system of beliefs work, by describing what it excludes, what it marginalises.

p 65

3a A page later O'Farrell makes the irresistible connection between Foucault's personal life and his intellectual one;

But Foucault's reasons for studying the margins of history, those grey problem-areas at the edge of our society, areas which in recent years have become the focus of so much attention, are not simply philosophical or ethical; they are also personal. In an infrequent autobiographical confession he says somewhat bitterly: 'I was never really integrated into the Communist Party because I was a homosexual ... This problem, say, of locking up the mentally ill - did the historians bring it up? No, it was necessary for a 'twisted' person to have the bad idea of introducing questions at once personal and political.' p 66,

I think Foucault's statement is ambiguous, open to more interpretations than that given by O'Farrell. It is not quite clear from the quote itself what the point of confession is -- is it not being integrated into the communist party or is it being homosexual, ie. 'twisted', or is it not being integrated because he was homosexual? Why would or should he 'confess' to any of these facts? Were they not well known, kept a secret? And from the words alone he could be being as ironic, or contemplative as he might be bitter. Nor is it so obvious why one would describe this kind of personal comment as infrequent -- how frequent are the personal comments of academics? I am not sure I have expectations of philosophers or historians to be autobiographical at all.

But he is making a point, point 3a, that he is in a unique and privileged position to make -- that there is an explanatory connection at some level between how he was situated, as a homosexual, and the marginalised groups he discusses in his books. This connection may perhaps be logical or psychological, or perhaps an empathy, a drive or motivation. But alongside this and picking up on the same 'connection', it becomes tempting as a distant observer able to view
as a whole much of Foucault's output to project onto all of his works this kind of
unifying interpretative problematic. It is as if Foucault was indirectly
investigating or covertly drawing upon his own particular position in the wider
social system as he investigated or developed his insights into more general and
deep causes of human rejection and deviancy classifications. He found himself
a pathway that began with mental health, passed through physical health, legal
and disciplinary constraints and formations, and finally reached the heart of the
issue itself, sexuality. It is tempting, and not without explanatory potential, this
interpretation; but it also seems unauthentic; perhaps because the discourse of the
intellectual and the discourse of the personal have yet to be mapped together in
any way that does not lead to undesirable outcomes such as reductionism,
degradation or irrelevancy.

Yet another interpretation may be that it was just such an authentic
discourse, one that held the personal and intellectual together, that he sought.
The quotes above from Foucault about why he wrote -- to exorcise ideas and
thoughts -- would support this connection between a personal state of being and
how one exercised one’s intellectual capacities.

In her final chapter O’Farrell writes about ‘conduct’;

In a final interview, Foucault explains that the problem with his earlier books was
that he had largely ignored the question of ‘individual conduct’, ...

...in the introduction to L'Usage des plaisirs, ... he draws attention to the efforts and risks
involved in trying to ‘change one’s way of seeing, in modifying the horizon of what one
knows’ (UP:17). In the end these changes brought him full circle and he was able to see
much more clearly what he had been doing all along with out being entirely aware of it. Why
write books, he concludes, if they simply stockpile information and have no effect on the
author himself? Rather than being a self-righteous exercise in laying down the law for
others, philosophy should be an ‘ascesis’, an attempt to work on the limits of oneself in
thought, to see how far it is possible to think differently. ...

... If all of Foucault’s work had been one long effort to link the experience of the limits and
order to one historical form, here he renounces this search. So, in order to examine ‘the way
a human being turns him - or herself into a subject’, he explains that he has ‘chosen the
domain of sexuality - how men have learned to recognise themselves as subjects of
“sexuality”. In other words, sexuality is not the only, or even the most important, historical
area of human experience in relation to the formation of the subject or the self. Rather, it is
simply the area that Foucault has chosen to interest himself in, for a variety of reasons, some of them no doubt personal as a number of critics have suggested. pp 117 - 118

Within all of this is some intimation of how genuine human science may work; it reflects on one of the major issues in *The Order of Things*, which is how the knowing subject can treat itself as an object of its own knowledge.

4. A fourth point, not so immediately obvious from the list of titles but hinted at nonetheless, and partly a logical extension of Foucault’s interest in particular events, is that Foucault is committed to *empirical*, factual research. Each of the socially based topics he chooses to study are rooted in real-life practices humans have at some point in their history developed to sort and interact with themselves and Foucault treats them seriously and in themselves with empirical detail and depth.

O’Farrell again;

*Foucault becomes an empiricist’s dream. Not only does he immerse himself in an overwhelming mass of detail devoid of annoying and interfering subjective viewpoints or ideologies, but he is also closer than anyone to the objective truth of these details, having experienced the ‘facts’ for himself. Such a theoretician is to be admired indeed.* p 111

So detailed and factual are his analyses that as O’Farrell notes in her ANU paper that much of Foucault’s influence has been in the many different disciplines he has commented upon during his career;

... as one commentator put it, Foucault had the irritating ability to step into a new field and come up with ideas that forced specialists who had spent years in the area to significantly revise their approach. p 1
5. Finally this critical point: every title except *Mental illness and psychology* and *Discourse on Language* contains a time-related term -- a *history*, an *archaeology*, a *birth*. Foucault, in marked contrast to Wittgenstein (who does write tiny histories that he has dreamed up) and Heidegger (who tries to still history in subordination to Being), writes recognizable *histories*, about actual and particular and different things that have occurred in the passage of human thought and practice. Intentionally he studies specific, historically designated locations, where the topics, and their placement in a temporally organized social context, matter in themselves.

Working in real time bounded by historically located beginnings and ends, his issues are purposefully particularized and unique facets of human life. His subject matter is the edgy issues of moral contention and intellectual debate like madness and punishment, medical interpretation and sexuality: and these as occurrences in an actual, specified historical space.

It turns out however that despite the use of what at first sight appear to be time-past, i.e. history-related terms in his titles, the historical space he works in is not solely restricted to the past. Foucault's view seems to be that historical explanation is first and foremost an *explanation* or source of understanding. While it may have become accepted practice for the past, usually considered as a past long enough ago to be a different political or social or perhaps personal place, to be the richest source of historical explanation, it need not be the only source. History must be understood to be more than its just one of its more frequent or dominant modes of realization; history is dominantly, but not exclusively, about events *previous* in time and can also be about events *other* in time.

For a deeper analysis of this one might turn back to Heidegger and the problem instantiated in the title *Sein und Zeit -- Being and Time* -- played out through the text as the intersituatedness of Dasein and historicity. The 'there-ness' that belongs to Dasein is that from out of which time and space spread. But for Foucault, notes O'Farrell;
simultaneous events or structures (synchrony) were just as much a part of history as the linear succession of events through time (diachrony). ... This view of history, as has often been remarked, favours metaphors of space and geometry, rather than those of evolution and development. p 58

History is like a three dimensional spread sheet to display across and through time and space the empirically based descriptions of the marginal human knowledges and practices he analyses.

**The 'Philosophical' Works**

The two texts that do not seem to fit so neatly into the above summary of Foucault's publications and seem more to resemble traditional philosophical texts are *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*, translated as *The Order of Things; an archaeology of the human sciences*, and *L'archéologie du savoir*, translated as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. While their titles do suggest something of a historical orientation with the term 'archaeology', there is no reference to any particular discourse and the reference to history looks methodological rather than practical.

However *Les mots et les choses*, despite its title, is in fact a fairly strict historical analysis. While it is not around a single identified period, and casts its net of analysis across a broader set of more abstractly conceived topics, it nonetheless is a set of descriptions of the synchronised changing conceptions of life, labour, and language through a particular historical period; a period in western European time history broken into the Renaissance, the Classical period and Modernity. The analysis is historical, detailed and empirically framed.

What *The Order of Things; an archaeology of the human sciences* does do quite explicitly is include alongside this historical component an argued commentary on the nature of knowledge and of human existence, which culminates in Chapter 8 in a concentrated critique of the modern conception of 'man'.
Gary Gutting in *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason* comments, capturing what amounts to a history/philosophy hybrid thus;

In OT [*The Order of Things*] (in many ways his major work), Foucault provided a comprehensive, though often schematic, account of the entire body of modern positive knowledge of human beings. Here his central claim is that all such knowledge is based on a particular conception of human beings (a conception he labels *man*). The distinctive feature of man, in this sense, is to be both an object in the world and the knowing subject through which there exists a world of objects. Although modern thinkers tend to take this conception of ourselves as definitive of human reality once and for all, Foucault maintains that it is just one historical construal of it - and one that is presently passing away. p5

So, what we have is an expansive historically based and argued account with richly described historical shifts and discontinuities - leading to the ‘just one historical construal’ claim. This ‘account’ or ‘claim’ is also very philosophical - if we wish to call any account that is concerned with the nature of things themselves, how we know them, and of the particular thing called human being philosophical.

This tendency to do philosophy is present in Foucault’s other books. Within his discussions, fenced as they are by time and space, concepts concerning knowledge or thought, language and truth, are introduced. There is philosophical import in all that he writes, including many explicit statements and reflections on knowledge/truth/talk. It is abundantly clear these topics targeted in the titles -- madness or medical science -- are not to serve merely as elucidating examples of priorly conceived higher generalizations about, say ‘truth’ or ‘language’, or Being or Human Being; he is interested in them each in their own right. Yet it is also clear that each time he seems compelled to talk his interest through to a point where revelations - different they may be from topic to topic - about humankind, the history of thought, epistemology and so on emerge. Foucault does do philosophy, of a kind, within his historical analyses, ie., does question at the first and last grounds of the essent; does provide explanations that throw ‘light on our concept of meaning something’.

In the later book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, there is much less history or empirical investigation. Foucault appears to be quite specifically laying out
a general theory of the nature of knowledge in social sciences, based upon a particular technique, the 'archaeological' method. But while it might appear to be, certainly from the title, a pure exercise in epistemology it is in reality more a 'meta-discussion' of his previous studies, frequently referring to and thus firmly rooted in his earlier historical analyses. It builds upon what came before. As O'Farrell says;

In this book Foucault is purporting to 'explain' the complex methodology he had practised in his earlier books, although as many commentators point out, he appears to spend more time explaining what he should have been doing as well as exercising his formidable talent for constructing geometrical methods for analysing ideas and history. p 62

And Gutting;

It is clear that, at a minimum, AK [Archaeology of Knowledge ] is important as an explicit formulation of the approach to the history of thought that Foucault developed in FD, BC, and OT. As we have seen, its methodology does not entirely accord with the practice of the preceding case studies: but it is a reconstruction faithful to the central features of that practice. p 260

This book is a reflection, with some additions, of previous work. While it is not a pure work of philosophy any more than were his histories it goes far further in proposing (while to some extend also opposing) generalities and higher level conceptions than most of his other texts, ie., as he outlines the elements of division that form across a range of different disciplines or subjects or sciences 'discursive formations'. It is not a radical departure from his previous work but an extension of sorts, and is, at least according to Gutting, 'a historian's articulation of his methodology'. In his introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, he makes this comment regarding Foucault's 'methods', echoing points made in the previous chapter;

Although much has been made of his archaeological and genealogical methods, his approach to each topic is driven much more by the specific historical subject matter than by prior methodological commitments. "Archaeology" and "genealogy" are primarily retrospective
(and usually idealized) descriptions of Foucault's complex effort to come to terms with his historical material. His "discourse on method," The Archaeology of Knowledge, is a reconstruction, with a not insignificant amount of trimming and shaping, of what went on in the three histories that preceded it. p. 7

For Foucault, says Gutting, each specific historical subject matter under consideration demanded its own epistemological approach or method, and this is more significant overall than his attempt to formulate generalized or generalizable methodologies.
PART TWO

Foucault's Methods

Archaeology and Genealogy

In this chapter we continue to delve into Foucault's thought, but concentrating more on the methodology rather than the content of his investigations. This will be undertaken through an close analysis of the terms archaeology and genealogy. Dictionary definitions will be used as a launching pad and further use is made of the work of O'Farrell and Gutting, and Dreyfus and Rabinow.

Archaeology

Dictionary-wise, from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, we read this entry for archaeology;

1. Ancient history generally; systematic description or study of antiquities. 2. Spec. The scientific study of the remains and monuments of the pre-historic period. p 99

In both meanings 1 and 2 there is the notion, ironic as it seems at first sight, of time as a barrier of sorts to the community of culture necessary for 'ordinary', common or garden history. History can cope with, indeed is predicated on, the passing of time; but if there is too much time history in the ordinary sense cannot take place.

From 1 above we see that archaeology is a special form of history, called ancient history, the history of cultures and civilizations from long ago, far back in time. It is the history of those peoples we call the ancients which most certainly includes cultures such as the Greeks and Romans, the Egyptians, the Persians, but possibly not the Celts, Masai, or the Aborigines. Ancient history includes the study of antiquities, artefacts of some artistry such as we would recognise, and this implies recognisable civilizations, which itself seems to imply a society with
some form of written language.

Presumably ordinary history is not possible for some reason. It may be that the sheer passage of vast amounts of time means we cannot connect ourselves by a comprehensible single continuous cultural line to what is deemed as ancient. It uncouples us from is too long ago. But the passing of time itself may not be the issue pure and simple; it is also the creation and destruction of patterns of behaviour, of language and the objects of life, that occurs during that time that the past. A kind of cultural amnesia or estrangement is the result of this and we can no longer know the culture, with all its goods and habits, and its language and beliefs, from the inside as it were, such as we know our own and our own historical past. We cannot do ‘ordinary’ history because we are too badly equipped -- with meanings in common, with language, with shared semiotic codes. We are not enveloped in this ancient form of life as we are our own and therefore do not have access to a field of interpretation to lay down and across it in advance. It is mysterious to us and we have to piece it together upwards and painstakingly from the fragments that have been left behind rather than exploiting the projections of understanding that would be possible if we were party to its inner cultural consciousness.

Given that this is the Oxford Dictionary, and the history being considered is European, the loosening that causes the gulf will most likely be generalized as the middle ages - that chasm that came between ‘our’ ancients and ourselves. ‘Middle’ gives the thinking away, being in this case a hiatus of civilization itself and defining into existence ‘ancient’ and the ‘now’ of European based culture.

The loss of cultural continuity through long vigorous tracts of time with past civilizations means that we need to resort to a special kind of history, one that studies ‘antiquities’, objects and things, that have survived. Foucault exploits this meaning. Objects possess an inbuilt scientific objectivity that meets the demands of the most positivistic or empirically rigorous epistemology. We would not bother to do this kind of more empirical, deductive or systematic history if we were better connected by some gradually collected uninterrupted layered continuum of meanings or memories, of language, of institutions or customs, of myths and
rituals, of discourses. It would be too hard. Yet it may be a more empirical and revealing form of history for some purposes. The second meaning is:

Again it seems that we are still wanting to do history-of sorts, as there is this reference to pre-history. But because it is pre-history, i.e., targeting a time period before the culture being studied had history, we cannot undertake ordinary history. It would seem that the information sources we normally use to undertake a historical investigation are not available -- information presumably in the form of records of some kind that give a direct access to the stuff of historical knowledge.

What seems to be missing when one attempts to study pre-history are the symbolic or interpretative aspects -- in particular the words -- that would give us knowledge about the society and how it functioned. What are available for our task are the 'remains' -- what we would call objects and things rather than records, things that have happened to survive that give indirect information -- clues and hints and suggestions. These are used to do a history-like study instead.

The study is classified as 'scientific'. This conjures up a whole set of attitudes and beliefs about how knowledge is to be won from the world, and would seem to indicate a shift in how the humans being studied are now to be seen. They cease to be just further examples of ourselves, us, our kind as it were, that we know about and on whom we employ the usual acts of empathy to imagine how they might think and feel and act. They become more alien and 'other' -- strangers with strange ways. The assumptions and parallels with ourselves, our experiences and those of peoples we are familiar with, all take on less value as the scientific imperative, modified to suit the branch of science being considered, places its particular demands for evidence on our thought.

In its purest sense we may characterise archaeology as more essentially this scientific study of remains, and leave to the side why this form of investigation is undertaken rather than others. It may be because records in the normal sense
were never developed and the remains are all there is; it may be because what
records there are meaningless to us; it may be that the records are lost; or it may
be, and this is where Foucault is headed I think, that such an approach has a
truth-granting quality not to be found in more standard historical studies. The
situation is similar to above -- we can bring little to the task and are forced to
think more on the objects themselves. There are only the remains to go on. This
forces an empirically oriented approach and diminishes the influence of the
practices, knowledges, beliefs, prejudices, hopes or values of one's own culture.

Metaphorically one might imagine his archaeology to be a historico-
conceptual/linguistic excavation, digging around in the cultural middens accreted
through time and across geographical space to uncover artefacts that when placed
with others are constitutive of the formations of the "knowledge" under study. It
suggests an empirical evidential approach based on items or fragments that must
be studied in themselves; it is like 'cultural palaeontology'.

**Documents and Monuments**

Hence Foucault's distinction between 'documents' and 'monuments'.

a) **Documents** - these arise in traditional history which tends to treat the
discourses of the past as 'documents'; traditional history assumes that these
discourses can be read, understood, assessed and judged as if we now still speak
the same language. It is as if by merely being human we exist in the same one
continuous space and place of meanings: as if there is an eternal oceanic meta-
language where all is pre-said and from which all individual languages select their
individual characteristics:

b) **Monuments** - archaeology, on the other hand, treats discourses as 'monuments'
that are silent in themselves and in terms of language or meaning structures in
general are more radically discontinuous with us. A monument belongs in its time
and is referenced to the events that make up its network. Incommensurate with
current discourses, completely solipsistic with internally established conditions of
truth and knowledge, the discourses of history, diachronic or synchronic,
when seen as monuments are not able to be seen as accumulative toward an ever expanding or improving understanding of the world and all that moves upon it. The discontinuity between discourses throws into relief the extent to which our own knowledges themselves are mute from the outside.

Foucault states in the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> To be brief, then, let us say that history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorise' the *monuments* of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to each other to form totalities. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument. p 7

Traditional history tried to memorise monuments, that is, bring them into its ken and decipher them within its current discourses. It is an inclusive encompassing kind of enterprise. Archaeology leaves the monuments within their own totalities rather than assimilate them into the current.

The metaphorical use of the term was not original to Foucault, and nor did it arise fully fledged in his writings. Gutting notes in *Michel Foucault*:

> In the course of developing his critique of the human sciences, Foucault became increasingly sensitive to questions about the methods of historical analysis he was using. Specifically, he came to see himself as employing a distinctive method of analysis that he called *archaeological*. The use of *archaeology* as a methodological metaphor goes back at least to Merleau-Ponty, and Foucault initially uses it in a very casual and vague way. By the time he wrote BC, he was sufficiently taken with it (though still not entirely clear about its meaning) to subtitle the book "An archaeology of medical perception [regard]". In the book following OT - AK - Foucault offered an extended reflection on the archaeological method he had developed in his preceding studies. p 5

However archaeology proved itself to be a richly expressive metaphor.
for the kind of historical work Foucault wished to, or was compelled to, undertake. His use of the term became so frequent and established that it began to cross into non-metaphorical use. Then, later in his career, he introduced another 'time' based metaphor. We read in O'Farrell's *Historian or Philosopher*:

During the 1970's, Foucault replaced his 'archaeology' with a 'genealogy' and in the definitions he offers of the latter, we are able to see the change from a simple method of ordering documents, to a method which is also a politics and an ontology based on the notion of the universality of power relations. Genealogy, he says, is 'the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allow us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today'. ... Reinterpreting 'archaeology' in terms of 'genealogy', Foucault says:

'archaeology' would be the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities, and 'genealogy' would be the tactics whereby on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play.

Foucault put this genealogical method into practice in *Surveiller et punir* and *La Volonté de savoir*, p65

What is 'genealogy'?

From the description given by O'Farrell it is hard to make the leap from its common use to Foucault's use.

**Genealogy**

The Shorter Oxford gives us this for 'genealogy'... (see over..)
This has some very different time implications from archaeology. Genealogy is a description *through* time rather than a description at a point *in* time. It produces family trees, carefully fixing a person in a sequence of inheritance or inheritances. It *accounts* for a person via their lines of descent and is an itemisation of the past as it went by to place the present as a temporary place in the ongoing. Archaeology is not about a sequence or a descent; it is more to do with reconstructing a culture or cultural situation: genealogy would draw in the lines that show how the present is contingent on the sequences that flowed from these past or other practices.

The linkages are articulated and where someone - or something - comes from is explained. Genealogy is a time-consuming and meticulous investigation requiring the patience to search through records and documents, often obscure and hard to find, in churches, shipping records, hospitals, or departments of deaths, births and marriages; all to piece together who was connected to whom and how. Often demanding that one ignore the idealized family mythologies for which it has no respect, all sorts of unwanted facts and family secrets may be unearthed, such as bigamy, blackmail, madness, bankruptcy, debt, physical weaknesses, unmarried mothers, unscrupulous fathers, adoptions, rapes, murders, and acts of shame and disgrace. It may reveal the constant assembly and disassembly of sets of traits; the eyes of a beautiful aunt, the teeth of a malformed uncle, the intelligence of a brilliant grandfather but the emotional instability of an insane grandmother. It is a record of times of prosperity and good health.
and those that lived and reproduced well, and of famine and disease and those who were sickly or childless, empirically contemptuous of the stories we may wish to tell of ourselves.

In this way an individual is dismantled and deconstructed, and identity demystified and seen more clearly as a post-hoc attempt to project a unity onto what is at base a piecemeal and purposeless collection of features. The 'essence' of a person is broken up into the 'sub-individual' parts.

A person is not formed in some act of creation where from nothing at all their identity and nature are given at the point of genesis. An individual does not exist in an atemporal dimension, ie., a metaphysical eternity of changeless suspension.

As with archaeology Foucault was not original in using the term 'genealogy' metaphorically. Dreyfus and Rabinow in *Michel Foucault; Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* mention how Merleau-Ponty (again), an influence on Foucault, found it useful as part of his existential phenomenology based around the body, eg.,

Merleau-Ponty already argued that the lived body was a "nascent logos" and that its attempt to get a maximum grip on the world both produced theory and objectification and hid this production. He projected a "Genealogy of Truth" based on the body. Obviously Foucault's genealogy of truth based on the body would look quite different, but nonetheless the project is the same. p 167

However the roots of this metaphor go further back, certainly at least to Nietzsche's *Toward a Genealogy of Morals*. Dreyfus and Rabinow make Foucault's strong relationship to Nietzsche very clear;

Foucault's elaboration of genealogy was the first major step toward a more satisfactory and self-consciously complex analysis of power. Foucault took this step in a essay published in 1971, entitled "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." ... it would be hard to over estimate the importance of the essay for understanding the progression of the work which followed; all of the seeds of Foucault's work of the 1970s can be found in this discussion of Nietzsche. p 106
They go on to provide a full description of the characteristics of Foucault's genealogy, drawing extensively from the two essays Foucault wrote on Nietzsche - *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* and *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx*. To summarise Dreyfus and Rabinow (see pages 106 to 109):

1). Genealogy is, first and foremost, opposed to traditional history. It is an attempt to do history in a new way.

2). How then is it different? It is different because;

2.1 -it aims to record the *singularity* of events,

2.2 -it does not accommodate or recognise fixed *essences*, underlying *laws*, and metaphysical *finalities*, or unchanging *truths*,

2.3 -it seeks out *discontinuities*,

2.4 -it finds *recurrences* and *play* not *progress* and *seriousness*,

2.5 -it avoids a search for an underlying depth or interpretation that would unite and stays with the surface which is various: it is *superficial* and *dispersed*.

We read;

For Nietzsche, as Foucault reads him, history is the story of petty malice, of violently imposed interpretations, of vicious intentions, of high-sounding stories masking the lowest of motives. To the Nietzschean genealogist the foundation of morality, at least since Plato, is not to be found in ideal truth. It is found in *postea origo*: "lowly origins," catty fights, minor crudeness, ceaseless and nasty clashing of wills. The story of history is one of accidents, dispersion, chance events, lies - not the lofty development of Truth or the concrete development of Freedom. For Nietzsche, the genealogist par excellence, the history of truth is the history of error and arbitrariness: "The faith on which our belief in science rests is still a metaphysical faith ... The Christian faith, which was also the faith of Plato, that God is Truth and truth divine ... But what if this equation becomes less and less credible, if the only things that may still be viewed as divine are error, blindness and lies; if God himself [the truth] turns out to be our longest lie?" (GM 288). p 108

Stability, continuity, depth, are great hegemonic forces genealogy has to resist. When human history is looked at genealogically one will not discover beneath all the ebb and flow, rise and fall, teeming activity and daily life of people,
cultures, nations or the whole species a unifying unidirectional march toward some higher ideal; one will not discover progress toward some ultimate telos of truth, beauty or goodness, or some form of alloy thereof.

**How Is This Genealogy?**

Dreyfus and Rabinow do not attempt to draw back into the term's standard usage, and this does not necessarily detract from the power of this kind of history; yet it is only by trying to make this link that it has its initial power - otherwise any word could have been used. Furthermore it can become difficult to distinguish between the method of genealogy and the subject matter to which the method is applied -- what is the method itself, and what is it being used to clarify? And it would help establish what is central to the historical method and what is more inconsequential. We need to do a little more work in showing how much Foucault is able to exploit the streams of logic and nuance that come with the term itself; that is, how does the term 'genealogy' itself help construct an understanding of this form of doing history.

**Nietzsche II**

Nietzsche's use of the term helps us here. Foucault's formalizes both 'archaeology' and 'genealogy', and they become concrete technical terms in his writings. Nietzsche in his more poetic style seems to use genealogy, eg., as in Genealogy of Morals, as part of a cluster of metaphors for the type of analysis he was using to try and lay open for inspection and understanding, in this case, morality. It does not have methodological status for Nietzsche but his cluster of metaphors is nonetheless quite informative. For instance in Beyond Good and Evil there is a section, 'Part Five: On the Natural History of Morals', where he writes;

Moral sensibility is as subtle, late, manifold, sensitive and refined in Europe today as the "science of morals" pertaining to it is still young, inept, clumsy and coarse-fingered ... One should, in all strictness, admit what will be needed here for a long time to come, what alone is
Nietzsche talks of a 'natural history' of morals, 'typology' of morals (both
metaphoric uses of the words natural history and typology) and a 'science' of
morals. He is trying to subject morality to the kind of analysis more typically
scientific or typological - this is what we read in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary
about 'typology':

1. The study of symbolic representation, esp. of the origin and meaning of scripture types; also, transf.
symbolic significance, representation, or treatment; symbolism. 2. The study of or a discourse on printing
types or printing 1882. 3. Archæol. [after G.] The classification of remains and specimens according to the
type they exhibit and its evolution, etc. 1886. p 2594

Note the archaeological connection in this definition. The words 'live, grow, beget
and perish' in the quote above are field-related to genealogy, especially 'beget', in
that genealogy is all about who begets whom. A little further on we read;

... - in short, moralities too are only a sign-language of the emotions. p 92

Here again is the tracing of one thing, ie., morality, to another thing completely,
ie., emotions.

The second chapter of Human, All to Human is entitled 'On the History of the
Moral Sensations'. This time it is the word history which is used, yet in
conjunction with the other terms it is not conventional history -- this is indicated
in the word 'sensations'.

Nietzsche wants to give morality a 1) history, 2) natural history, 3)
genealogy, 4) typology and 4) science. His point seems to be, and this is close to
Foucault's (and Wittgenstein, and Clay's when the issue is becoming literate
rather than becoming moral) that morality has a pedigree, is amenable to a rational
analysis that would elucidate developmental pathways of change or demonstrate
ontogenesis; morality is not a timeless, self-evident given, formed perfectly
and in a finished state at its point of conception.

These 'borrowed' terms help assemble a structure of ideas that indicates the kind of analysis that Nietzsche is attempting - he is trying to help us gain a perspective on morality by clarifying its source in something other than itself. By tracing morality back to its originating sources that are other than itself we learn something very significant about the kind of phenomenon it is. There is lineage and descent. Lineage informs. Descent reveals. This would be Foucault's point also.

*Toward a Genealogy of Morals* itself contains these three essays or inquiries that do this, ie, that analyse subjects of morality; *Good and Evil versus Good and Bad, Guilt, Bad Conscience and Related Matters, What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals*, and several titles of his other books carry the same implication; *Beyond Good and Evil, Human, All Too Human; On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*. R. J. Hollingdale, in his commentary on Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* notes:

Nietzsche quite rightly considered the criticism of morality in terms of itself one of his most radical innovations: he claimed to have been the first to bring morality as such within the domain of philosophical problems. ... Through subjecting morality to objective philosophical scrutiny - that is to say, through examining it without believing at the start that one already knows what the outcome of the examination will be - he thought he might be able to aim at truth in reality. pp 217 - 218

Very few today remember Paul Rée ... Rée's short book *Psychological Observations* (1875) acted on Nietzsche as a catalyst; and Rée wrote his main work, *The Origin of the Moral Sensations*, during 1876-7 in the same house in Sorrento in which Nietzsche was at the same time writing *Human, All Too Human*. p 222

A further point; according to Robert M. Baird, who wrote the entry on Nietzsche for Microsoft Encarta, Nietzsche was influenced by the theory of evolution; we note the 'Origins' reference above in Rée's book, and the crucial role of genealogy tracing in theories of biological change over time as generations shift and mutate continuously. Nietzsche gives morality an ancestry and origins in something other than itself; it has a genealogy, a history, and becomes the
subject of a science, a psychology, even a physiology, - all adding up to a form of questioning that seeks a structural explanation that resembles a lineage. All important is the idea, so central to evolution yet so difficult to stomach when it comes to anything human and so contrary to creationist theory, at least in its naive forms: the idea that from one thing, e.g., an ape-like animal, something completely different, at least on our eyes i.e., a human being can arise, and in doing so completely belie its origins.

Nietzsche's words on punishment, for example, from *Toward a Genealogy of Morals*:

GUILT, BAD CONSCIENCE, AND RELATED MATTERS

[12]

Let us add a word here concerning the origin and aim of punishment - two problems which are, or should be, distinct. ...For every kind of historiography there is no more important proposition than this, which has been discovered with so much effort, but now also ought to be discovered once and for all: the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual usefulness, its actual employment and incorporation into a system of aims, lie worlds apart. ...

[13]

To return to the subject, namely punishment, we must distinguish two things: first the relatively enduring aspect, the custom, the act, the “drama,” a certain strict succession of procedures; on the fluid aspect, the meaning, the aim, the expectation which attends the execution of these procedures. ... Today it is impossible to say definitely why punishment is meted out; all concepts in which a whole process is comprehended semiotically, escape definition; only what has no history is definable. ... pp 452-453

The genealogy of punishment would attempt to bring to light aspects of the passage the activity has had through time from its fragmented origins, identifying - though never finally - its accumulation and constant refiguring of different purposes and roles. In a phrase very Wittgensteinian in its implications, Nietzsche states that only things without history are definable. A language-game is very like a history; the language-game is the encompassing context of human relationships, which must include the past, in which a word is arising and
finding itself with an ongoing place, its use. This is a history; and Wittgenstein is giving a history of the word ‘game’ when he sets out its many different uses. He is giving a synchronic history. Similarly when he sets up his scenarios of, say, a builder and his assistant, he is again writing a small fictional history.

**So What Is Genealogy?**

Genealogy is a blood relation of history, one might say, but a very distant one. Archaeology still has its closer familial link revealed through terms like ancient *history* or pre-*history*. Archaeology is still overtly in the field of meaning of history. It would be strange to call genealogy ‘history’. A person’s genealogy would not be the same as their history. Genealogy is much more limited; it asks far fewer questions about what something once meant and more about how things and what they mean shift and alter through time. It is satisfied with an explanation that consists of no more than a line of descent. It is this line of descent. In this way it asserts a need to attend to time longitudinally - archaeology does not assert this developmental, longitudinal aspect of explanation - and is not much more than a tracing of time passing through reproductive (though not cloning) sequences.

As Nietzsche uses it, merely claiming that a topic such as morality or punishment has a genealogy is enough to have strong metaphorical impact. The very fact that there is a lineage to morality, that it was not always there and not always there as it is now is, and that its identity had a birth and thus may have a death; this is a fact thrust into view by the expression ‘genealogy of morality’ that is camouflaged in the expression ‘history of morality’. It is an affect also achieved by talking of an origin -- in the sense of descent -- or a birth. Foucault too would seem to be using genealogy in this way and from this it is possible to extrapolate out to some of the other claims given to the term.

The notions of birth and origin from something other work against fixed and eternal essences. Genealogy does not easily countenance an ideal that will stand above or lie beneath the passing of time. It tends to favour flat ontological simplicity, such as a lines or a tree diagram of lines on a flat surface.
Nothing is raised or depressed, given grandeur or ignobility. By the nature of its terms of reference it accentuates the discontinuous; i.e. death.

Genealogy can be usefully contrasted with biography. Biography draws us to the history of continuity rather than of discontinuity - the person is identified and their history is a sub-story of this pre-given identity, which in itself remains outside the processes of change. The individual remains in a most essential sense outside time. Genealogy on the other hand relies on a lineage that consists of discontinuity and of others - one has to go beyond the individual, make a break and go outside, so to speak, to find what you want. It leaps from individual to individual, i.e., from singular event to singular event, and thus makes the individual more truly historical, i.e., replaces the individual more completely embedded in time by denying the ‘timeless essence’ that is meant to be the defining substance. There is nothing monotonous about it as there is always a birth of someone new as an addition and reconstitution of the aspects or characteristics -- like Wittgenstein's family resemblances.

Nor can each new person by virtue of being new be merely a cipher in some more fundamental ascent to some higher plain; genealogy does not suppose later generations to be ongoing improvements on the earlier. It is much more haphazard; as a discipline it must take what it finds from generation to generation and make no assumptions about teleology.

And nor does ancestry predict progeny. A person's life is their own with accidents, opportunities, new combinations of traits producing unexpected outcomes not seen in previous generations; and is not predetermined by their parentage. A line of descent is only what has happened to have happened.

In Nietzsche, Genealogy, History Foucault interweaves his and Nietzsche's theories of genealogy. The elements outlined in the previous paragraphs become a critique of history, a critique of a form of history that is really a suprahistory or metahistory, that casts over change through time a broad net of coherence, direction, enduring essences and a single problematic. We read;
the history of morality in terms of a linear development — in reducing its entire history and
 genesis to an exclusive concern for utility. He assumed that words had kept their meaning,
 that desires still pointed in a single direction, and that ideas retained their logic; and he
 ignored the fact that the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles,
 plundering, disguises, ploys. From these elements, however, genealogy retrieves an
 indispensable restraint; it must record the singularity of event outside of any monotonous
 finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without
 history — in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts...

page 78. Why does Nietzsche challenge the pursuit of the origin (Ueberzeugung), at least on those
 occasions when he is truly a genealogist? First, because it is an attempt to capture the exact
 essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities: because this
 search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and
 succession. This search is directed to "that which was already there," the image of a primordial
 truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately
 disclose as original identity. However if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in
 metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind
 things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their
 essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.

page 79. What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolate identity of their
 origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.

page 81. Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the
 genealogist sets out to study the beginning — numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints
 of colour are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of
 the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost
 events.

page 82. Finally descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in
 temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in
 the debilitated and prostrate bodies of whose ancestors committed errors.

page 85. The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas),
 the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in
 perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the
 articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and
 the process of history's destruction of the body.
**Archaeology and Genealogy**

Thus along with archaeology it seems a useful metaphor. For Foucault, archaeology remains the primary method for analysing knowledge discourses as such -- their internal structures, the interconnectedness of their features of language and action and thought -- whereas genealogy with its powerful evocation of processes of becoming and of lines of descent rather than essences and substances becomes more a way of dealing with nondiscursive forces in the creation and sustaining of discourses; that is, it is integral to Foucault's analyses of power. Whatever else power means, it is about one thing being able to change another -- 'change' is the key term relating power to genealogy here.

So, in discussing Foucault's move to genealogy, Dreyfus and Rabinow say:

> In Foucault's later works, practice is considered more fundamental than theory. ... the intelligibility of the human sciences is not to be found in their own theories. ... [but] as part of a larger set of organized and organizing practices in whose spread the human sciences play a crucial role. p 105

The addition of genealogy to Foucault's methodology corresponds to his move beyond theory. Gutting makes a similar point;

> ...although AK's methodology is primarily oriented toward the description of discursive formations, the book does point - with many unclarities and hesitations - toward Foucault's later effort to come to terms with nondiscursive causal factors in the history of thought. AK thus appears as a methodological essay that both sums up Foucault's previous historical work and moves haltingly toward his later genealogical work. p 260

**Summary**

In all the above Foucault is wrestling with history, and its moral and epistemological capacity as part of his project. History is of major concern to him yet he has strong criticisms of 'traditional' history; his methods of archaeology and genealogy may be seen as attempts to create more revealing forms historical analysis. This issue of history we will explore further in the next section.
PART THREE

History

History

How does Foucault integrate with Heidegger and Wittgenstein and their philosophical intentions? What are these problems with traditional history and how much do they bear down on our study? These will be the themes of this chapter.

Where have we got so far? We have extrapolated out from a core list of his publications a number of features of Foucault's thought and now also explored aspects of his methodology. Historically oriented, he appears to have undertaken a series of independent empirically focussed investigations into socially marginal topics. The promise is that literacy acquisition will bend itself into these methodologies productively -- that these new forged historical stances of archaeology and genealogy can prove useful in revealing some of the structure and constitution of the knowledge, and talk and thought, that is built into the enterprise of learning to read and write. Archaeology will give us a kind of phenomenological distance, softening the attraction of entering into the internal argumentations and disputations. Genealogy pulls us back from expecting or projecting a single unified field of basically rational investigation getting closer and closer to the truth each day, and opens the possibility of including the darker descent lines of the current literacy acquisition operations and its most dearly held practices and beliefs, and knowledge.

Thus Foucault's empirico-historical analytic could be useful in investigating literacy acquisition. Learning to read and write with its mix of discursive and non-discursive elements, its claim to a human science knowledge base and its areas of relationship with marginality could resemble the areas discussed by Foucault.

In the first part Heidegger and Wittgenstein are reconsidered in reference to Foucault. Co-positioning the three thinkers adds clarity and some authority to our approach, as well as strengthening our base from which to approach literacy acquisition. Dreyfus and Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* is consulted and quoted frequently and I continue to make generous use of Ofarrell.

Furthermore the claim has been made that 'history' may have a crucial role to play in at least some kinds of investigations that try to take a philosophical view of their subject matter, and now that we have discussed archaeology and genealogy we need now to bring to the surface the implications and ramifications of this. What kind and sort of history/philosophy is being referred to here? There are issues around history persisting in various forms that have to do with how it contributes to understanding, and what is its relationship with knowledge and truth.

What threat is history to what we can know? Does it limit truth? Is it necessary to any investigation? What are the requirements of historical analysis? Are there, to borrow from Wittgenstein, to 'throw light on our concept of meaning something?'; to uncover aspects that 'are most important for us because of their simplicity and familiarity'; or Heidegger, to throw light on 'man himself and on the meaning and goals of human nature'.

In the second part of the chapter Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* is the vehicle for us to generate some discussion of these perplexing problems, and to eventually better orient our 'historical' contemplation of the question of becoming literate.
Michel Foucault, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger; The Common Ground and Beyond

Can we trace Foucault's philosophical position to Heidegger and Wittgenstein, if not in historical fact at least in intellectual kinship?

Foucault's Heideggarian heritage is easy enough to establish. O'Farrell notes, and I have included her footnote in full;

Indeed in an interview conducted in 1984, Foucault explained that although he had written very little on Nietzsche and nothing on Heidegger, these two authors had exercised a considerable influence on his work. 52  p34

52. Foucault 'Le Retour de la morale', 1984, p.40. It may be noted, however, that when asked at different stages of his career about 'influences', Foucault gave a variety of different answers.

His connections with Wittgenstein are nowhere near so clear. However that there is common ground between Foucault and both the two earlier thinkers is part of the contextualising and rationalization of Foucault's work undertaken by Dreyfus and Rabinow. They note in their introduction how Foucault was 'steeped' in the work of Heidegger (p xxii), and Heidegger is frequently called upon as an explanatory adjunct to their interpretations of Foucault. They do not make the same point with regard to Wittgenstein but in the first half of the book there are several references to Foucault's certain partial alignment with Wittgenstein even when the point is to show this or that further dissimilarity. The various references to the differences between the three thinkers are against a backdrop of parallels across and between all and each.

Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein, according to Dreyfus and Rabinow, displays a 'behaviourism' (p62), 'pragmatism' (p94), and 'linguistic relativism' (p87), all of which
accord with what Foucault is doing, and we read;

No doubt he would agree with writers from Wittgenstein to ... that the specific understanding of specific speech acts involves a taken-for-granted shared background of practices, since no one can ever fully say what he means to exclude in advance every possible misunderstanding. p49

Disciplines do not define their objects, types of descriptions, legitimate practitioners, concepts and methods in the same way from period to period, and even within a given period the objects of a science are constantly undergoing shifts transformations substitutions.

Foucault is not the first to have noted this problem. Wittgenstein would say that disciplines are not exempt from the general truth that we do not classify objects, whether they be chairs and games or botany and physics, by identifying an essence or list of essential features. Rather 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.' Our concepts, Wittgenstein contends, are like a thread made up of fibres. 'The strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.' Instead of a definition, then, we capture this 'family resemblance' by selecting a perspicuous example and organizing other cases as more or less like this example.

Historians of science such as Thomas Kuhn who have focused on discontinuities, have like Foucault, had to face the problem of accounting for unity through change. Kuhn's solution, influenced by Wittgenstein, is to introduce the notion of a paradigm—a specific exemplar of successful work -- and to attempt to account for the unity of a scientific community, with its objects, methods, and so on, in terms of its shared allegiance to such a paradigm rather than its allegiance to a specific set of beliefs. pp 59-60

The conceptual relationship with Wittgenstein is clearly discernible. Both thinkers are exploring how meanings come about, and both concern themselves with contexts for use of language. Foucault is, as was briefly mentioned in an earlier chapter but now needs fuller explanation, in part an extension of Wittgenstein, applying the principles of 'life-forms' more thoroughly. Wittgenstein aphoristically dabs and stabs time and time again at micro-descriptions of how language functions. Foucault is anything but aphoristic despite the lyrical, evocative, and quotable nature of his prose, and his figurative and creative use of language.
In marked contrast to Wittgenstein he consistently and elaborately describes and characterises in lengthy detail the extended formats or orders that are the breeding grounds and the heirs of any meaning, truth, and knowledge that becomes appropriate to the discourse being studied.

Wittgenstein, in trying to peel open the use of words, relies on small sub-contextual scenes, plucked from his world experience and/or his imagination, that are implicitly underwritten by versions or recognizable variations of (his) everyday life and language eg., the cabin of a locomotive with all its different levers, or the imagined use of the word 'game' -- both locomotives and games have since continued to mutate (the restless ceaseless Ratchet Effect). He does no more than hint at methods that might much more fully develop this crucial initial insight -- that words do not have simple single referential meanings but are indissolubly interlinked with ongoing action and practice.

Foucault on the other hand goes well beyond mere hinting. Instead he shoots for the method itself. The meaning-systems under consideration are all real, not imagined. They are each meaning-systems he has some interest in. He substitutes for locomotive cabins and highly simplified imagined little language-games more sweeping and socially integrated arenas (they are not so sweeping as Heidegger’s overarching interest in Western thought itself, which is a chunk of history with enough bulk to begin to reflexively define history). Foucault decides upon a historically located topic and proceeds to piece together how the knowledge is or came to be structured as it is, how it fits together more as a unit, whole, discipline or order. This more extended network of relationships becomes an essential feature of the description of the mechanisms and forces, the power, that supports and provides some understanding of, the life-form.

Historical location itself, as in the overarching divisions into 'ages' (Foucault’s 'epoch-ery') -- the Renaissance, the Classical age, Modernity -- becomes a potent explanatory force on its own in certain periods of Foucault’s thought. Within the epochs, eg., as described in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, he tries to find similarities in the key logical units, in the strategies of explanation or understanding, or in the patterns of
cognitive action or satisfaction - all features of the game, so to speak - that cut across several different overlapping arenas of human endeavour, eg., language studies, economics, or biology.

Thus we might say that Foucault has intellectual similarities with Wittgenstein in at least two areas we have discussed in an earlier chapter, namely a) the concept of language-games, where the words must be seen as pieces of a larger puzzle, to be part of a larger discourse and/or beyond-discourse whole that includes the human activity being enacted, and b) the concept of family resemblances, which ousts or at least challenges the belief that single essential unchanging characteristics always define the meaning of words, practices, events and so on. We might also say that Foucault in spelling out the implications of these insights in fuller and more socially urgent circumstances raises the stakes of the argument for social practice.

The Discursive and the Non-discursive

Not that, according to Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault has always had a consistent position on the relationship between language and its context. We read in the earlier section on the introduction of genealogy into Foucault's thought that it accompanied and was part of a shift toward more weight being accorded the non-discursive elements in the analysis of meanings. They claim that the relationship of the language to the non-language part of the language-game, the discursive to the nondiscursive, unites Heidegger and Wittgenstein, but was a source of some uncertainty for Foucault, who veered too much toward the discursive aspects (structuralism) at one point in his career and thus came to an intellectual dead-end;

Hermeneutic and pragmatic thinkers such as Heidegger and Wittgenstein... have argued that, indeed, all meaningful activity must be grounded in something unthought and unthinkable. All activities make sense only against a background of practices, and this common sense horizon cannot be represented or objectified. p94

At first Foucault’s account seems to be a concrete and restricted version of the general views shared by Wittgenstein and Heidegger. All three thinkers hold that a whole constellations of practices enables those who share those practices to single out and talk
about objects. Foucault even emphasises the importance of nondiscursive social practices in
his list of relations that make it possible to pick out objects and give them public reality.
'These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes,
behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of
characterization' (AK 45). He stresses, as do the other thinkers interested in the practical
background which makes objectivity possible, that this space in which objects can be
encountered is not be found by analysing the concepts of the objects it forms. 'These relations
are not present in the object; it is not that they are deployed when the object is being
analysed.... They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear,...to be
placed in a field of exteriority' (AK 45).

It might seem that Foucault simply applies this general thesis concerning the
importance of background practices to the enunciative functions which make possible serious
speech acts and their objects. Foucault, however, next makes a structuralist move which
sharply distinguishes his account of background practices from that of Wittgenstein and
Heidegger. Although he is clearly aware that nondiscursive practices play a role in 'forming'
objects he insists that the crucial role is played by what he calls discursive relations. p 62

It is this attempt to privilege the role of discourse that according to Rabinow and
Dreyfus, is all of a part with his unsustainable and self-contradictory move into
privileging theory over practice, reflecting his early structuralist leanings. They
say however with respect to Foucault's later thought;

In Foucault's later works, practice, on all levels, is considered more important than theory.
Again the intelligibility of the human sciences is not to be found in their own theories. It is
not to be found in some system of formation rules either; this level of rules is simply dropped.
Nor is it to be found in the horizon of meaning shared by the participants. Rather, Foucault
now finds the human sciences intelligible as part of a larger set of organising practices in
whose spread the human sciences play a crucial role. p 103

This aspect of Foucault's thought, emphasising practice, which is most strongly
also part of Wittgenstein, was noted in our first chapter on Foucault. It was
always implied in the archaeological method, in that objects from a distant past
cannot be understood without recourse to both a whole gamut of human
practice.
Heidegger

Heidegger’s method in his early writings is described by Dreyfus and Rabinow as hermeneutics (the *hermeneutics* of the title of the book);

Heidegger’s phenomenology stresses the idea that human subjects are formed by the historical cultural practices in which they develop. These practices form a background that can never be made completely explicit, and so cannot be understood in terms of the beliefs of a meaning-giving subject. The background practices do, however, contain a meaning. They embody a way of understanding and coping with things, people, and institutions. Heidegger calls this meaning in the practices an interpretation, and proposes to make manifest certain general features of this interpretation. In *Being and Time* he calls his method, which amounts to giving an interpretation of the interpretation embodied in everyday practices, *hermeneutics*. p. xxii

This is the hermeneutics that, according to Dreyfus and Rabinow, partially inspires, defines, and eventually confines, Foucault’s thought. On pages 122 and following they overview Foucault's work, assessing the degree to which he is 'structuralist' or 'hermeneutical'. In providing a description that takes his method 'beyond' these two competing forces they name Foucault's method 'interpretative analytics'. Then in the following paragraphs they place this term in an historical context, which again relies heavily on Heidegger. It is interesting to quote this at length not only to show the relevance of Heidegger but also to gain insight from these authors' perspective into Heidegger and Foucault, and their intellectual predecessors:

...We prefer to call Foucault's method *interpretative analytics*. Our use of *analytic* follows and develops a line that begins with Kant's transcendental analytics and is rethought in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*. Kant problematized Enlightenment thought by seeking the conditions of possibility and limitations of rational analysis. Heidegger problematized the modern attempt to find a transcendental ground in the knowing subject by investigating the ahistorical and cross-cultural existential preconditions of human self-understanding. Kant and Heidegger both took for granted the importance of studying human beings. They both wanted to provide a universal theory and to know the sources and legitimate uses of the concepts presupposed by their predecessors. Foucault accepts this project but rejects the attempts to find a universal grounding in either thought or Being. Analytics today must find a way of taking seriously the problems and conceptual tools of the
past, but not the solutions and conclusions based on them. Foucault (like the later Heidegger) replaces ontology with a special kind of history that focuses on the cultural practices that have made us what we are.

Our use of interpretation develops a line which began with Nietzsche’s concept of genealogy and was re-thought in Heideggerian hermeneutics. Genealogy accepts the fact that we are nothing but our history, and that therefore we will never get a total and detached picture either of who we are or of our history. Heidegger showed that Nietzsche’s insight seemed to leave only the possibility of a free play of equally arbitrary interpretations. But this seems inevitable only if one forgets that it is precisely because we are nothing but our history that we can, at any time, entertain only a narrow range of possibilities; we must inevitably read our history in terms of our current practices. p 122

Dreyfus and Rabinow lead us through Kant and his efforts to explain the shapes of knowledge by describing the essential and inherent parameters of human rational thought itself, its characteristics, innate structures and functions. A critique of purest or purified reason. Heidegger stayed close to the need to analyse human being but provided a different sort of categorisation, based on the conditions that permitted Dasein to find itself in the world as it does. All this is replaced, or rather, realized, in yet another form, by Foucault in ‘a special kind of history’. This ‘historicization’ gives the clue to the next paragraph with its reference to Nietzsche and genealogy, and the most persistent of philosophical problems -- one that has been hinted at in the discussion earlier on genealogy -- how to have a true view of something that is constitutional to oneself. For Dreyfus and Rabinow, one ‘must inevitably read our history in terms of our current practices’. This is the particularly Foucaultian move.

It is one thing to state that history can only be read in terms of current practices. It is another to try as Foucault did to do this reading itself, i.e., to try carry through the premise in actual, real, thorough committed practice. This would seem to be both a strength and a challenge of his particular contribution.

Kant, Heidegger and Foucault all seek out the conditions that make possible knowledge, truth and understanding. For Heidegger and Foucault (deriving from Nietzsche, see p 34 in Foucault; historian or philosopher? as well as quote immediately above), history becomes an essential ingredient in this search. Heidegger as we saw in our earlier chapter, has human destiny unfolding
through time as 'human subjects are formed by the historical cultural practices in which they develop'.

As we read all this about Heidegger and Wittgenstein and Foucault, we discern beneath the differences and compatibilities a commonality of goal in some larger sense. Foucault continues the themes of knowledge and truth and a commonality results in the ways they conceive of the reciprocal influence of human diachronic or synchronic existence in time and the truth/knowledge couplet that would appear at least to lift itself off from time.

**The Problem Of, and With, History**

With both Heidegger and Foucault the issue of history recurs and recurs. With Wittgenstein it is there also, but less explicit as he tends to consider short periods of time -- the time it takes for a use to become established in the run of human intercourse. Yet 'use' is as time-embedded as any other activity, and change through time, such as the development of uses, is the province of history, and its problem.

If we are to question learning to read and write in any fundamental way, penetrating its meanings and its state of being then we need assistance in dealing with how history works. Archaeology and genealogy have been useful to help with some understanding of history. This base understanding can be extended by a closer look at that most important of influences on Foucault, namely that of Nietzsche.

What are the problems with traditional history?
Nietzsche, like Foucault, was a vigorous critic of aspects of traditional history. In the quote from Dreyfus and Rabinow in an earlier chapter we read how Nietzsche challenged conceptions of human history as an ideal driven ascent upward to ever more glorious and magnificent dimensions of existence with counter-claims such as 'The story of history is one of accidents, dispersion, chance events, lies', or 'the history of truth is the history of error and arbitrariness'. In the wake of Hegel and his overarching views on the march of history to ever more dialectically advanced states of manifestation of the Idea, Nietzsche objected strongly to teleological, progress-dominated views of history. Why is this? Why, for instance, did Nietzsche need to use terms like 'genealogy' to reconstruct historical analyses?

In his short essay, *On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life* Nietzsche takes on some of the problems that are associated with doing history. Here he is writing about an outbreak of what he calls 'a consumptive historical fever' amongst the German people of his time. He claims that the common attitude of the modern man, particularly amongst the German modern man, is of pride in the extent and quality of its historical sense and advancement. Yet according to Nietzsche that of which they are so proud should be seen in reality as a 'contemporary disgrace, infirmity and defect'. It is a disease that has become apparent to him through experience of his own torment, a torment brought about at least in part by the fact that his own expertise is in itself historical. He is a student of the far distant period of ancient Greeks, placing him at a disadvantage with more modern history. Yet this very distance may through its inappropriateness and opposition confer some benefit.

The thesis proposed in his essay is this;

This is the specific principle which the reader is invited to consider: *that for the health of a single individual, a people, and a culture the unhistorical and the historical are equally essential.*
Too much history, or history allowed to go unchecked or given free reign is 'unhealthy'. It is unhealthy because it suppresses or starves action and life. It stalls living, brings it to a halt. Developing the argument here are the opening lines of the Forward to the essay:

"Incidentally, I despise everything which merely instructs me without increasing or immediately enlivening my activity." These are Goethe's words. With them, ... our consideration of the worth and the worthlessness of history may begin. For this work is to set down why, in the spirit of Goethe's saying, we must seriously despise instruction without vitality, knowledge which enervates activity, and history as an expensive surplus of knowledge and a luxury, because we lack what is still most essential to us and because what is superfluous is hostile to what is essential. To be sure, we need history. But we need it in a manner different from the way in which the spoil'd idler in the garden of knowledge uses it, no matter how elegantly he may look down on our coarse and graceless needs and distresses. That is, we need it for life and action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and action or merely for glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to use history only insofar as it serves the living. But there is a degree of doing history and valuing of it through which life atrophies and degenerates. p 1

History needs to be done - this is a key point in the argument. Nietzsche is not unconditionally anti-history. But it needs to be tempered if it is to serve life and action and not cause degeneration or atrophication. History it seems can have grave risks and these risks seem to relate to knowledge becoming too protective, a complacent luxurious cushion against the more vital driving needs of life. What are the mechanisms at work here?

In section I he describes the historicity of human being by comparison with an animal in a herd, which 'does not know what yesterday or today is. It springs around, eats, digests, jumps up again, and so from morning to night and from day to day, with its likes and dislikes closely tied to the moment, and thus neither melancholy nor weary' (p 2). For the human;

he wonders about himself, that he is not able to learn to forget and that he always hangs onto things past. No matter how far or how fast he runs, this chain runs with him. It is something amazing: the moment, in one sudden motion there, in one sudden motion gone, before
nothing, afterwards nothing, nevertheless comes back again as a ghost and disturbs the tranquillity of each later moment. A leaf is continuously released from the roll of time, falls out, flutters away — and suddenly flutters back again into the man's lap. For the man says, 'I remember,' and envies the beast, which immediately forgets and sees each moment really perish, sink back into cloud and night, and vanish forever.

Thus the beast lives unbistorically, for it gets up in the present like a number without any odd fraction left over; it does not know how to play a part, hides nothing, and appears in each moment exactly and entirely what it is. Thus a beast can be nothing other than honest. By contrast, the human being resists the large and ever increasing burden of the past, which pushes him down or bows him over. It makes his way difficult, like an invisible and dark burden ... he learns to understand the expression 'It was,' that password with which struggle, suffering, and weariness come over human beings, so as to remind him what his existence basically is -- a never completed past tense. If death finally brings the longed for forgetting, it nevertheless thereby destroys present existence and thus impresses its seal on the knowledge that existence is only an uninterrupted living in the past [Geseenen], something which exists for the purpose of self-denial, self-destruction, and self-contradiction. p 2

It is part of human being to be in time; in Heidegger's terms it is core feature of the thereness of Dasein. But it seems Nietzsche is showing here both 1) that history is an essential projection in the construction of human temporal being and 2) that history brings along with its own arrival a threat, a potential anti-life force. There is a way in which life surrenders itself to history, succumbing to its burdensomeness and giving history opportunities to become over-rich, overblown, and too fully what it is. This is what I think Nietzsche is describing to us here, this state of over-history, later described in the essay as 'superhistory'. It realizes its ever-present threatening potential to be a burden that weighs down on life; it is in this indulged form a depressant.

Once it insinuates itself like this it causes a person to live constantly in a world of becoming, unable to believe in himself and 'like the true pupil of Heraclitus, finally hardly dare any more lift his finger.' It is a paralysis from too much awareness of the inevitable forces of endless change. This is the fundamental weakness of history that is exploited with a semi-deliberate self-protective intent by the 'spoilt idler in the garden of knowledge' or for the 'comfortable turning away from life'; for purposes of laziness or self-interest
or complacency history is allowed to darken the present. This must mean that the true benefit of history, the history that can be identified as necessary in human affairs, has become inaccessible.

So then, how does productive history work. Further on we read that if history is not to become this ‘grave-digger of the present’ then we need to re-awaken ourselves to the strength of a ‘plastic force’, a force that enables a culture or person or a people to subjugate what it can from the past and ‘forget’ the rest. This produces a horizon, and he says:

This is a general principle: each living being can become healthy, strong, and fertile only within a horizon. If he is incapable of drawing a horizon around himself and too egotistical to enclose his own view within an alien one, then he wastes away there, pale or weary, to an early death. Cheerfulness, good conscience, joyful action, trust in what is to come -- all that depends, with the individual as with a people, on the following facts: that there is a line which divides the observable brightness from the unilluminated darkness, that we know how to forget at the right time as well as remember at the right time, that we feel with the powerful instinct the time when we must perceive historically and when unhistorically.

This is the specific principle which the reader is invited to consider: that for the health of a single individual, a people, and a culture the unhistorical and the historical are equally essential. p 3

Without the historical sense there is only the beast; human being begins with the powers of ‘thinking, reflecting, comparing, separating, and combining’ (p 4), all of which are powers that generate history. But if these powers are given too much reign an excess of history results and with this excess of history human being stops again.

Why does history cause this to happen? Because taken purely on its own terms, as ‘superhistory’, it leads to this conclusion;

...the past and the present are one and the same, that is, in all their multiplicity typically identical and, as unchanging types everywhere present, they are a motionless picture of immutable values and eternally similar meaning. As the hundreds of different languages correspond to the same typically permanent needs of people, so that someone who understood these needs could learn nothing new from all the languages, so the superhistorical thinker illuminates for himself all the histories of people and of individuals from within, guessing like a clairvoyant the original sense
of the different hieroglyphics and gradually even growing tired of avoiding the constantly new streams of written signals streaming forth. p6

So history is intimately tied up with the suffocating plenitude of knowledge that 'once it becomes sovereign, would be a kind of conclusion to living and a final reckoning for humanity...’. (p6). History, it seems produces a knowledge grid lock, because all is known and understood before it happens and action is pre-empted, dead at birth.

History only works productively, usefully, when it takes its place alongside other forces that contain it in its rightful place, holding it in check by the exercise of their own energies. It is only when history is itself ruled by a higher force can it offer 'something healthy with future promise' (p6). This fact limits the kind of epistemological status history can hope to have. It can never stand alone, purely and on its own terms. Because history stands in the service of life, which is an unhistorical power, it is 'never able to (and should never be to) become pure science, something like mathematics’ (p6). History can never be pure and thus never be a science. A science seeks eternal truths and eternal truths in history would cause a conceptual standstill.

So where does this leave history with regard to truth? Later in the essay Nietzsche tackles the issue of objectivity in history:

With this word, people understand a condition in the historian in which he looks at an event with such purity in all his motives and consequences that they have no effect at all on his subject. ... Or that by some inner capacity things depict themselves and, as it were, draw a good likeness of themselves or photograph themselves on a purely passive medium?

This would be a mythology and on top of that a bad one. ... To think of history as objective in this way is the secret work of the dramatist, that is, to think of everything one after the other, to weave the isolated details into a totality, always on the condition that a unity of the plan in the material has to be established, if it is not inherent in it. Thus, man spins a web over the past and tames it; ... Schiller, in fact, is completely clear concerning the essential subjectivity ... when he says of historians: 'One phenomenon after another begins to liberate itself from accidental and lawless freedom and, as a coordinated link, to become part of a harmonious totality, which naturally is present only in its depiction.' p20
This kind of emotionless objectivity is not to be admired or sought. Proper historical objectivity is creative and active rather than neutral and passive and it is 'the person of experience and reflection' (p 22) who writes history, not the young who are 'lashed through all the centuries' yet 'understand nothing about a war, a diplomatic action, or a trade policy.' (p 24)

Constantly Nietzsche criticises the kind of arrogance that characterises the modern complacency towards history. Both Christianity and Hegel are portrayed as using history to do no more than trace a path to the present. He says of Hegel:

I believe that there has been no dangerous variation or change in German culture this century which has not become more dangerous through the monstrous influence of the philosophy of Hegel, an influence which continues to flow right up to the present. The belief that one is a latecomer of the age is truly crippling and disorientating; but it must appear fearful and destructive when such a belief one day with a bold reversal idolizes this late comer as the true meaning and purpose of all earlier events, when his knowledgeable misery is equated to the completion of world history. ... Thus for Hegel the summit and end point of the world process coincided with his own individual existence in Berlin. ... The personality and the world process! The world process and the personality of the turnip flea! If only people did not have to hear the hyperbole of all hyperboles, the word World, World, World, when really each person should speak in all honesty only of Men, Men, Men. ... [Man] stands high and proud on the pyramid of the world process. As he sets down on the top his final stone of knowledge, he appears to call out to all nature listening all around, 'We are at the goal, we are at the goal, we are the perfection of nature.' pp 27 - 29

Paradoxically history is required for its own overcoming. The active and striving person needs history in a number of ways; Nietzsche talks about history serving three purposes;

1) to provide supportive exemplars from the past that offset the 'despair and ... disgust in the midst of weak and hopeless idlers ...'p 6,

2) to give a sense of honour and reverence for the past, to give a sense of faith and love when we reflect from whence we have come,

3) and to provide a critical method, so that a 'person must have the power and from time to time use it to break a past and to dissolve it, in order to be able to live.' p 11. He says;
For when the past is analyzed critically, then we grasp with a knife at its roots and go cruelly beyond all reverence. It is always a dangerous process, that is, a dangerous process for life itself. And people or ages serving life in this way, by judging and destroying a past, are always dangerous and in danger. For since we are now the products of earlier generations, we are also the products of their aberrations, passions, mistakes and even crimes. It is impossible to lose oneself from this chain entirely. When we condemn that confusion and consider ourselves released from it, then we have not overcome the fact we are derived from it. In the best case, we bring the matter to a conflict between our inherited customary nature and our knowledge, in fact, even to a war ... p 11

**Foucault and Nietzsche**

There are clear parallels between the two thinkers. Both are fully committed against any form of teleology, an overarching history that sees itself as progress toward higher ideals. This we have noted before. And the reasons seem to be very similar -- just as for Nietzsche it is one of the aspects of 'grand' history that stifles and suffocates human change it is what Foucault is trying to break through in order to show that precise and specific historical analysis is what will free us up, eg. in this quote from O'Farrell;

Philosophers, particularly since Hegel and Nietzsche, Foucault says, have had an unfortunate tendency to dramatise the present, heralding it as the high point in history, the apocalyptic dawning of 'new age, the age of the 'end of all philosophy'. ... Instead, we should be much more modest and start from the view that 'the time we live in is not the unique or fundamental or irruptive point in history where everything is completed and begun again'. In fact we live in 'a time like any other, or rather, a time which is never quite like any other'.49 This 'modesty' about our present has a double advantage: first of all, it means we need no longer occupy the triumphant and superior position which condemns all the efforts of past ages to irrevocable error and blindness. On the other hand, we need not stand in awe of the past or look back nostalgically to a mythical golden age.50 Instead, every period in history has its own very specific problems whose solutions are also quite specific to that time. But for all their specificity, these problems and solutions can be of considerable use to us in our attempts to think through our present relation to truth and how we form ourselves in relation to truth. p 126

We must crack into the arrogance, and disrupt the spaceless determinism that general histories bequeath. Foucault's archaeological and genealogical
methods would seem to be examples of Nietzsche's critical use of history; and his use of archaeology to produce a distancing effect is similar to the kind of forgetting that Nietzsche recommends. Clearly archaeology is trying to crack apart the sense of conclusion or final reckoning by making alien the culture studied, and distancing it as if it were ancient. What must be forgotten in order to make history useful is the powerful insistence of the meanings we inherit as they cloak themselves in the guise of immutable tradition or timeless truth, or even conceal themselves completely by closely nestling just below conscious attention as suggested by Heidegger and Wittgenstein -- whether that truth be of a moral kind such as Nietzsche opposed or a human science kind such as Foucault critiques.

Foucault's prepossession for marginal conditions resembles Nietzsche's contempt for the 'spoilt idler' seeking a comfortable turning away from life. It is in the spirit of Nietzsche's plastic force for it is this plastic force that determines the 'borderline at which the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present' p 3. It also concurs with Nietzsche's reinstatement of the historical power of the aberrations, mistakes and even crimes, and with his critique of the so called 'objectivity' of the historian which is more a disguised attempt to homogenise the past by melting it into a seamless continuous mould -- it is at the margins that the discontinuous and incommensurate shows itself. Insisting on the dis-intergrated and the discontinuous disturbs our desire to spin a web of harmonious unity over our being in time.

**Summary**

We have reasserted the viability of using the related and mutually enhancing investigative techniques of Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Foucault. When we come to look directly at the question of learning to read and write we have ready this growing conceptual frame to help think into the phenomenon -- a frame that draws in elements of openness, freedom and meditative thinking; forms of life and language-games, and how important use is in understanding meaning; and
now with the additional reference to Nietzsche, the deepening explanatory
problematic that arises with history as we try to fathom the nature of knowledge.
We are choosing to study now a special kind of history that concentrates on how
we, and our knowledges, are constituted by our social practices over time; a form
of study dubbed by Dreyfus and Rabinow from out of their own particular take
on Foucault as *interpretative analytics*.

In the next chapter we address head on the encounter between philosophy
and history.
In this chapter the feasibility of the Foucault's philosophical/historical method, and its applicability to our task here, is described. Although it seems as though literacy has been left far behind, it may not matter. It has fallen off the edge of one horizon, but as the slow spin of the argument continues, it will surely reappear fresh and bright rising on the edge of another.

History has thrown up certain epistemological complexities and potentialities. These complexities and potentialities are in this chapter mulled over from several angles. The interface between philosophy and history is considered, again using O'Farrell and Gatting. This leads into a discussion of the status of truth in Foucault, with the work of Patti Lather being included as an example of a social scientist dealing with the problem of one truth versus many truths. The broad domain of the question of truth is our general location. This culminates in a summary description of Foucault's project as the pursuit of freedom.

Philosopher or Historian? Philosophy or History.

Trying to adequately 'place' Foucault's project with respect to history and the traditional home of epistemology, philosophy, is one way of opening up this field of questions. Is he a philosopher or a historian? This is the title of O'Farrell's text on Foucault that we have made much use of in our discussion, and it is a question or problematic that would seem to reverberate beyond the surface yet nonetheless highly arguable decisions such as which university department teaches Foucault, or in which Dewey category he belongs on the library shelves. In my view its manifestation through his writings is largely coextensive with much broader and more widespread diffused and demanding negotiations with questions of truth and knowledge.

Foucault's reviewers and commentators can sometimes leave one with the feeling that they are juggling the words around hopefully in the belief that perhaps the reader will find an understanding the writer couldn't quite express. For instance on the back cover of The Foucault Reader; an introduction
to Foucault's thought edited by Paul Rabinow we read;

'Scarcely any philosopher working on the history of philosophy or historian working on the history of institutions, social science or sexuality can avoid confronting the challenge of Foucault's books' - Michael Ignatieff in The Times Literary Supplement

Here history and philosophy seem to jostle about, with philosophers working on the history of philosophy (as philosophers or as historians) and historians working on histories. Given the extent of the problem facing any commentator the dilemmas with the choices of words can be appreciated. But the descriptions and interpretations will rapidly become, or remain, confusing if they perpetuate shallow interpretations of 'philosophy' and 'history'. Inadequate interpretations will undermine or betray the intensity of thought demanded by the intellectual quest and will end up glossing over this underlying problematic - which is to a large extent the very issue itself. It would seem important that the reader is not diverted away from the more fundamental demand which is to tease apart the way these two Gargantuan disciplines do and do not have trouble with each other -- where they come from, how they are positioned, the tasks they are set to do, and their mutually repelling and converging forces. The traditional, and confused and contestable, lowest common denominator meanings are not up to this task and tangles will result if the 'ordinary' meanings of these non-ordinary human intellectual developments are left to do the work of thinking themselves through.

Not so much Philosophy

Gutting talks about the two dimensions of Foucault's work in The Cambridge Companion; not without a little sophisticated juggling of his own I think;

In the first dimension he appears as a philosophical historian, progressively developing a series of complementary historical methods; an archaeology of discourse...a genealogy of power relations...and a problematisation of ethics... In the second dimension he appears as a historicist philosopher, offering, parallel to his methodological innovations, successively deeper and mutually supporting theories of knowledge, power and the self. p2
But he inclines his interpretations of Foucault away from the more philosophical readings; for instance he says in *Michel Foucault's archaeology of scientific reason* this about *Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> It may, however, seem that AK is something more than a historian’s articulation of his methodology. In particular, we may be inclined to regard is as an effort to provide a philosophical basis or justification for this methodology. On such a view ... Foucault’s goal is to ground his historical practice in a philosophical account of knowledge and language. I will express my reservations regarding this interpretation... in the next, concluding chapter. p260

Justifiably I think, he wants to avoid an interpretation that would attribute to Foucault essentialist overarching or underpinning theoretical statements, eg., the kind that would resemble Kant’s transcendental claims about the limits of rational thought. He stresses Foucault’s antithesis to trying to ground his historical method in ‘philosophy’ or to giving philosophical accounts that were meant to state the case about knowledge and language once and for all.

But the kind of philosophy Gutting has in mind, some of the time at least, is quite traditional. In his final chapter Gutting he says;

> Foucault proposes, in the end, a twofold transformation of the traditional concept of philosophy. First, he turns it away from the effort at an a priori determination of the essential limits of human thought and action and instead makes it a historical demonstration of the contingency of what present themselves as necessary restrictions. Second, he no longer asks it to provide the justification for the values that guide our lives but instead employs it to clear the path of intellectual obstacles to the achievement of those values. p285

Gutting continues, talking over the issues involved in assessing the place of Foucault's intellectual efforts. He describes Foucault’s “historicocritical project” as “a new, more modest (and realistic) way of seeking” the goals that have been traditionally philosophical -- using Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Hegel as typically traditional philosophers and the mind-body problem, proofs of God’s existence, and refutations of scepticism as typically traditional philosophical questions -- and he attributes to Foucault “many of the same intellectual skills and virtues as philosophizing” such as the “meticulous
analysis of concepts, rigorous assessment of arguments, dialectical flair and imagination.” In the end, despite Foucault’s methods, Gutting sees nothing in Foucault’s position that means traditional philosophy need give up “the possibility of our someday actually finding answers to the great, ultimate questions.”

In terms of squaring Foucault off with traditional philosophy this works well at the level of argument. However it is at the expense of some precision in the use of terms which then belies a deeper interpretation of Foucault; for instance the ‘transformation of philosophy’ is an ambiguous term and could be seen to mean that traditional philosophy does have to give up its traditional aims and objectives. It can not be transformed yet still remain the same. Gutting’s arrangement of terms means dimming other issues lying behind the question ‘philosopher or historian?’ that are not so much to do with his orientation to however one defines traditional philosophy or history but connect with truth seeking enterprises in general. Gutting’s arguments I believe tend towards being an apologetic for the impact of Foucault’s threatening lean on what knowledge is and in particular how it works with regard to these two heavily burdened disciplines.

Another perspective
If one is prepared to allow ‘philosophy’ more room then a different perspective emerges. We noted earlier Foucault’s tendency to move on from rather than build upon his own earlier work, and how Foucault himself treated his writing as a kind of ‘exorcism’. We read him saying (in ‘Foucault as Cultural Icon’);

‘Don’t keep going back to things I said in the past. When I utter them, they are already forgotten. I think in order to forget. Everything I have said in the past is of absolutely no importance. One writes something when one has already worn it out in one’s head; drained bloodless thought, one writes it and that’s that. What I have written doesn’t interest me. What interests me is what I could write and what I could do.’ p 2

There may be much to be understood by allowing Foucault’s epistemology to
remain perplexing in this manner, even leaving aside the complex issue of how well his articulated or espoused epistemology as in Archaeology of Knowledge lines up with his epistemology-in-practice as in his other texts.

In Foucault; historian or philosopher? O’Farrell puts her question in this way;

Thus the issue of how Foucault’s work should be described is a very important one, for it addresses a wide range of questions, questions that not only relate to the very heart of what Foucault is actually doing in his books, but to the most general effects they have had, and to important general philosophical, historiographical and epistemological problems. p21

and on the final page O’Farrell revisits;

At this point, we might ask once again the question which forms the title of this book: is Michel Foucault a historian or a philosopher? The answer to this question, as has been suggested here on a number of occasions, is that Foucault is a philosopher who writes history, transforming it into philosophy. 70 In adopting this historical point of view, the philosopher abandons all his well ordered certainties, but it is an abandonment that Foucault was more than willing to defend, right until the very last... p 130

And then to the footnote referenced on page 152;

70. Veyne comments: ‘Philosophy itself, in becoming a radical historicism, engulfs, recuperates or transforms history and this is at the heart of the meaning of the Foucault phenomenon.’
Bellour 1997. p21

We read here from O’Farrell that Foucault:
1) is a philosopher,
2) but who writes history,
3) and turns this history into philosophy;
4) but not into straightforward philosophy since the act of transformation is not one way, is not a simple subsuming or annexation of history; history acts back, infecting philosophy and making it a different entity as well, i.e., less committed to well-ordered certainties.

Veyne, in O’Farrell’s footnote, goes in the other direction to the same
place; this time it is philosophy’s transformation which is first stated -- it becomes in itself something different, a ‘radical historicism’ -- which then spills out to dramatically influence what history is. For O’Farrell, and Veyne, there is a philosophy in Foucault.

**Truth and Time**

What O’Farrell is putting forward more directly and consistently is the serious possibility that philosophy is changing in itself.

Going back to the previous chapters we can review our arguments emphasising this issue of time and truth. We explored how Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein each in quite different ways grappled with this problem of history and its relationship with truth. Time is a key factor in each case. In Wittgenstein the aspect of history was manifest not in the traditional sense but in the sense of the language-game, which I have claimed is in principle a micro-history. Nietzsche, on the other hand, tackled history directly, trying to clear a pathway between the need to take into account the historical nature of human beings yet not make that fact itself a-historical -- a problem that Heidegger also seemed to try to assuage with his lifting apart of being and time. Foucault continues this interchange with history, with his own narrative on these epistemological dilemmas. They are dilemmas to do with truth and its relationship to human activities - discursive formations, life-forms, language-games - as they inevitably occupy space and time. His position can be extrapolated out from the confined micro-temporal logical accounts typical of Wittgenstein, who seeks out how the world, language and knowledge work, or determined ontological accounts like those of Heidegger who persists for an account of Being that itself persists beneath its historically occurring unconcealing. Foucault’s practised and espoused epistemology is a dialogue upon how any knowledge of any field or topic can be thought about, i.e., known given the existence of what Nietzsche so evocatively describes, the historical nature of human being, i.e., time.

Our claim here is that this is not an accidental position but one which
refracts this current manifestation of a dominating epistemological problem; how truth or knowledge is to be regarded once recognised as being generated from and sustained by the life-flow of the activity system to which it applies.

So with regard to the question of learning to read and write, we seek to better understand the nature of its practices and the discourses that surround and accompany them. If this historical approach is adopted because it reveals, archaeologically and genealogically, the inner workings as it were, we change the status of what are considered to be facts, discoverers and truths -- we 'de-eternalise' them; at the very least we shift the emphasis away from these traditionally high status epistemological entities.

It is not simply that history accounts for time and philosophy doesn't. It is almost that they aid and abet each other to cause the problems that, for instance, Wittgenstein identified as being peculiar to the philosopher and Nietzsche to the historian. History does have an explicit relationship with time, just as philosophy has an explicit relationship with wisdom. Yet Nietzsche's essay repeatedly asserted that history, while it uses the occurrence of events through time as its grist, has the tendency to collect these events together into a life-stopping simultaneity, stifling or stultifying further activity. Similarly the philosophy that Wittgenstein critiques overlooks the historical nature of the life-forms and takes the present as the thing itself, believing that the existence through time of words implies the unchanging existence through time of their meanings.

Another, parallel, critique of this aspect of philosophy can be found in *Pascalian Meditations* by Pierre Bourdieu. Philosophy and its preoccupation with asserting that meanings are fixed, essences eternalised, and once and forever the facts asserted is his target, as is the assumed detachment from empirical reality that marks out scholasticism in general. Commenting on the isolation, the 'scholastic enclosure', of the summits of academic life -- Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard, Heidelberg and Göttingen -- he points out how the École Normale, a paradigm of such a life, is quite set apart from the vicissitudes of the real world still manages to have so much currency for American campus radicalism (see page 41). He says in the next paragraph this about the American
And this is surely no accident. American universities, especially the most prestigious and the most exclusive, are *akkolê* made into an institution. Very often situated away from the major cities -- like Princeton, totally isolated from New York and Philadelphia -- or in lifeless suburbs -- like Harvard in Cambridge -- or, when they are in the city -- like Yale in New Haven, Columbia on the fringes of Harlem or the University of Chicago on the edge of an immense ghetto -- totally cut off from the adjacent communities, in particular by the heavy police protection they provide, they have a cultural, artistic, even political life of their own, with, for example, their student newspaper which relates the parish-pump news of the campus. This separate existence, together with the studious atmosphere, withdrawn from the hubbub of the world, helps isolate professors and students from current events and from politics, which is in any case very distant, geographically and socially, and seen as beyond their grasp. p41

Several pages later he homes in on philosophy for its particular disregard of its own socio-historical genesis and therefore its forgetfulness of history;

The principle of absolutizing works by dehistoricizing them is ... set out very clearly in the various 'philosophical' solutions to the contradiction, as old as the teaching of philosophy, which arises from the existence of a plurality of philosophical visions, each claiming exclusive access to a truth which they claim to be single.

... Kant, Hegel and Heidegger ... have in common the fact that they abolish history as such, by bringing together at the same point alpha and omega, *arkhê* and *telos*, past thought and the present thought which thinks it better than it thought itself -- to use Kant's formula which every historian of philosophy spontaneously reinvents as soon as he seeks to give a sense to his undertaking. p44

History as much as philosophy and philosophy as much as history will assert the reality of essences. The relationship is therefore complex and ironic.

But it is the nature and possibility of the existence of this 'exclusive access to a truth' and how it does and doesn't make sense once history is seriously and properly considered is the region of thought that Foucault would seem to be grappling with. The challenges he is throwing out are like those of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger are to do somehow with these themes of time and certainty, knowledge and truth. If these challenges are taken seriously philosophy must be shifting, becoming something different, something much
more sensitive to history.

To decide to call Foucault either a philosopher or historian is in the end not so much the point -- it may not be possible to enter the problematic with the intent to provide an answer because the meanings of the terms that the question begins with begin their process of transformation on the way through the discussion, i.e., there is a radical transformation of one or other of the denotations that shift the ground from underneath one's feet. Rather the gains may be made by continuing to think about how and why we articulate time and truth.

In summary I think the hard work Gutting had to do to situate Foucault in the space across philosophy and history was because Foucault's particular and peculiar position on how intellectual investigations may be productively undertaken raises axial questions that methodologically and epistemologically impact with some force on both disciplines. It is a consistently high profile question throughout the whole corpus of his work and the case might be put that the intellectual contribution of his work to current thought depends on the kinds of answers one comes up with. The credentials of Foucault's empirical approach - - an approach that delves into particular historically situated regions of human existence that are as activity based as they are intellectually expressed -- maybe to some extent in balance on this question because at base it seems to have bearing upon the kinds of authentic 'philosophy or history' that remain to be carried out once certain understandings, perhaps those of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein and Heidegger, philosophers not on Gutting's list, have been taken aboard.

Truth: single or multiple

The quote above from Bourdieu leads us into another recurring sub-problem of the history/philosophy interface that will be productive to explore -- the problem of relativism. Bourdieu states:

The principle of absolutizing works by dehistoricizing them is ... set out very clearly in the various 'philosophical' solutions to the contradiction, as old as the teaching of philosophy, which arises from the existence of a plurality of philosophical visions, each
claiming exclusive access to a truth which they claim to be single.

If it is insisted against this dehistoricising that meanings are completely historically embedded it is a short step into denying the existence of truth as such -- truth considered in the ordinary sense as something single and enduring through time, and space; the truth that supports most (philosophical and perhaps many scientific) conceptions of knowledge. And the problem with denying truth is that one seemingly cuts off the branch upon which one sits.

This sub-problem has been predatory upon our discussion from the moment we recognized Foucault as being serially interested in a number of differently described independent specific contexts rather than building systematically a single ever more correct intellectual edifice. This historically committed subject-centred approach, especially exacerbated by Foucault's 'write it out of my system' self-commentary, must as a practice be a kind of operationalizing of relativity.

Here is Foucault himself writing about truth with regard to 'certain empirical forms of knowledge'. He says on pages 111-112 in "Truth and Power", in Power and Knowledge, edited by Colin Gordon:

> It seemed to me that in certain empirical forms of knowledge like biology, political economy, psychiatry, medicine etc., the rhythm of transformation doesn't follow the smooth, continuum schemas of development which are normally accepted. The great biological image of a progressive maturation of science still underpins a good many historical analyses; it does not seem to me pertinent to history. In a science like medicine, for example, up to the end of the eighteenth century one has a certain type of discourse whose gradual transformation, within a period of twenty-five or thirty years, broke not only with the 'true' propositions which it had hitherto been possible to formulate but also, more profoundly, with the ways of speaking and seeing, the whole ensemble of practices which served as supports for medical knowledge.

The word 'true' is in inverted commas. How might we conceive of this unstable, or serial or mutable nature truth?

In an essay "Michel Foucault's Historical Materialism", published in Critical Theory, Poststructuralism and the Social Context (edited by Michael
Peters, Wayne Hope, James Marshall and Stephen Webster) Olssen asks of Foucault's epistemology:

Is he not implying that his own perspective is true? There does not seem to be any simple answer. Whether he is arguing that truth is something that simply cannot ever be attained (the will to truth, simply being an expression, following Nietzsche, of the will to power), or whether he is suggesting, alternatively, that the issue of 'truth' can be 'bracketed out' or, alternatively again, that he is not interested in the truth status of the discourses he examines, is not clear. Foucault appears to be a good Nietzschean in believing that there are multiple perspectives through which truth can be read. p 95

Thus pointing out the seeming contradiction in relativism as a position and the problems Foucault presents with what he is doing.

**Close Inspection**

'Close inspection' is one key to understanding what is happening here I think. So very characteristic of Wittgenstein and Foucault close inspection will of its own accord draw one's thought into an awareness of diversity and dispersion. Here is one example of Foucault at work, dealing with the issue of unity in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* with respect to a writer’s *œuvre*:

But the unities that must be suspended above all are those that emerge in the most immediate way: those of the book and the *œuvre*. At first sight, it would seem that one could not abandon these unities without extreme artificiality. Are they not given in the most definite way? There is the material individualization of the book, which occupies a determined space, which has economic value, and which itself indicates, by a number of signs the limits of its beginning and its end; and there is the establishment of the *œuvre*, which we recognize and delimit by attributing a certain number of texts to an author. And yet as soon as one looks at the matter a little more closely the difficulties begin... 

The problems raised by the *œuvre* ... A collection of texts that can be designated by the sign of a proper name. But this designation (even leaving to one side problems of attribution) is not a homogeneous function: does the name of an author designate in the same way a text that he has published under his name, a text that he has presented under a pseudonym, another found after his death in the form of an unfinished draft, and another that is merely a collection of jottings, a notebook? The establishment of a complete *œuvre* presupposes a number of choices that are difficult to justify or even to formulate: is it enough to add to the texts published by
the author those that he intended for publication but which remained unfinished by the fact of his death? Should one also include all his sketches and first drafts, with all their corrections and crossings out? Should one add sketches that he himself abandoned? ... letters, notes, reported conversations, transcriptions, ... that vast mass of verbal traces left...at his death. ... But it is at once apparent that such a unity, far from being given immediately, is the result of an operation; that this operation is interpretative (since it deciphers, in the text, the transcription of something that it both conceals and manifests); and that the operation that determines the \textit{opus}, in its unity, and consequently the \textit{œuvre} itself will not be the same in the case of the author of \textit{Le Théâtre et son Double} (Artaud) and the author of the \textit{Tractatus} (Wittgenstein), and therefore when one speaks of an \textit{œuvre} in each case one is using the word in a different sense. pp 23-24

There are strong resemblances here to Wittgenstein's investigative methods, and to Nietzsche's description of how artificial the unities in history are. He not only mentions Wittgenstein but the whole passage is very Wittgensteinian in its style of conceptual penetration -- and Nietzschean in its conclusion.

\textbf{Interpretation and Dispersion}

The apparent unity is the result of an operation performed to interpret the thing, in this case the \textit{œuvre}, into existence; in a manner similar to the interpretation that must be cast across historical events to give them sequence. When looked at closely things show themselves in a different light. An object is not in an existence of its own accord and with its own privately owned word or name to designate it. To be identified an operation is required and this operation is a decision-making of sorts, about whether this or that is to be included or not, or exceptions under some circumstances and exclusions under others. Wittgenstein would say that it is the use of a word that arbitrates its meaning; in a way, so does Foucault, but extended out into historico/socio/political fields of explanation. He says further on in \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge};

... The conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, the historical conditions required if one is to 'say anything' about it, and if several people are to say different things about it, the conditions necessary if it is to exist in relation to other objects, if it is to establish with them relations of resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation -- as we see these conditions are many and imposing. Which means that one cannot speak of anything at any time; it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for
us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground. But this difficulty is not only a negative one; it must not be attached to some obstacle whose power appears to be, exclusively, to blind, to hinder, to prevent discovery, to conceal the purity of the evidence or the dumb obstinacy of the things themselves; the object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. pp 44-45

Here is Clare O’Farrell’s translation of the final paragraph;

The object does not wait in limbo for the order that is going to set it free and allow it to take on a visible and garrulous objectivity. It does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the outer edges of the light. It exists according to the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. p 50

The complex group of relations are lightly described in Foucault’s next paragraph;

These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization;... p45

A close look reveals within an object a diversity that is held together by an operation that interprets, and this operation is governed by a set of relations. This is how discourse works or what a discourse is; it is like a group of rules that set the horizon

An Example from Swift

In Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, there is a reference to two sages who, wising up to the apparent fact that words merely name things, decide to dispense with the words altogether and just use the things. The argument is that rather than use words;

...it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such Things as were necessary to express the particular Business they were to discourse on.
Upon meeting in the street two sages would:

lay down their Loads, open their Sacks, and hold conversation for an Hour together; then put up their Implements, help each other resume their Burthens, and take their Leave. page 148, Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings.

The immediate absurdity is that this is not convenience at all. Carrying around bags of objects is entirely burdensome. But then if we think what can be said with just objects we see a deeper absurdity. Nothing can be said with a bag of things. A number of objects taken out of a bag and held up in the air in sequence would not in itself constitute a conversation. It is nothing more than a sequence of objects taken out of a bag and held up in the air. It could form the basis of a conversation, or of a telling, if we perform a Wittgensteinian experiment on it and give it a history -- this would mean adding a whole system of convention, syntax, referential agreement, or whatever, creating a language out of human activity in a manner closer to sign language than oral speech.

Eg, if one held up a book, think of the many problems as you try to say something; what sort of book (big or small, old or new, manuscript or printed, sports or cooking) --and would it matter? How would one refer to the cover as opposed to the pages or the page numbers or the typeface? How would one 'say' “the book is in the bag” and then say “tomorrow the book will be in the bag”?

The phenomena or objects in themselves 'say' nothing. Interpretation is required to give access to the phenomena in any way that would enable something to be part of something sayable. Interpretation draws into itself everything the range of human activity and interactivity suggests it wants incorporated, everything that is relevant to the hopes, desires, intentions, and purposes as well as the perceptual, physical and cognitive requisites of the act at that time. Because human activity occurs through time and space as real acts the interpretation is continuously dispersed through space and time; ie,
geographically and historically, or historically diachronically and synchronically -- as Wittgenstein shows with 'game' and Foucault with _œuvre._

**Discursive Formations**

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault is I think describing this interpretation as involving not only 1) the formation of objects but also 2) modes of enunciation, of saying things about things in different ways; 3) formation of concepts, different ways of thinking about things and describing them and categorising them; and 4) formation of what he calls strategies, themes or theories about putting these previous elements together, like a schema for relationships. Together these become like the rules for 'discursive formations', which are somehow the structure of the interpretative field, giving it its own nature and form. However these are brief descriptions of complex concepts.

**Difference**

Close inspection reveals this much. It then also reveals that interpretations around phenomena do not coexist interactively. That is, they do not have a meeting ground whereupon they can converse and compare notes. What comes to light through close inspection is that things show themselves up as being different in different ways in different sets of these complex networks of relations.

Each different discourse is like a projected surface, a different 'truth' surface onto which a phenomenon can be imaged. Consider this passage from the *Preface* of Foucault's *The Order of Things*;

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This book first arose out of a passage in Borges,...This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into; (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) _et cetera_ , (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. page xv
Here is a strange, humorous cross-eyed list. Each item is constrained to the companionship of its colleagues by the imposed and forced single ontological entity of a list of things briefly described. Yet each belongs to a very different truth-surface therefore cannot be easily assembled alongside these colleagues. The list is riven by each item deeply disturbing its posed associates, and the result is disfigured nonsense.

A similar juxtaposition occurs at the beginning of *The Birth of the Clinic*. Foucault presents his readers with an astoundingly peculiar description of a medical treatment; the treatment of a hysterical given towards the middle of the eighteenth century that consisted of making the patient take baths ten or twelve hours a day, for ten whole months. Such bathing caused all sorts of peeling of membranes from internal passageways and organs -- such as the trachea, the tongue and the ureter -- expelled through urine, vomiting or expectoration. But it wasn't peculiar once. In the same vein he presents a outrageous description of a punishment in the opening pages on *Discipline and Punish*, with flesh being torn from bones and molten lead and sulphur and burning resin, and horses pulling apart the sinews and joints. Yet it too was what it was about at the time.

Both these descriptions immediately followed by descriptions of treatments and punishments eighty to a hundred years later and Foucault makes the claim that there have been radical shifts in thinking, in the discursive formation, or in what he sometimes calls the 'episteme'. This would seem to be the kind of 'relativism' that arises in Foucault. It is a radical difference; a difference of a different kind that means that there is not a single measuring stick that will apply to both; there is not a simple ground for comparison. Is it possible to inspect a phenomenon using a number of different truth-surfaces and merely collect the results together in any meaningful way? Perhaps, but there are problems. The surfaces may sit badly together, like jarring angles in a clumsy cubist painting.

*Science, politics and ethics*

Is this radical relativity a characteristic of the human sciences. There is
some indication that it is. Here is a quote from an interview conducted by Paul Rabinow in May, 1984, "just before Foucault's death, to answer questions frequently asked by American audiences"; first the question, then the answer;

Q. Would you say that your work centres on the relations among ethics, politics, and the genealogy of truth?

M.F. No doubt one could say that in some sense I try to analyse the relations among science, politics and ethics. But I don't think that would be an entirely accurate representation of the work I set out to do. I don't want to remain at that level: rather, I am trying to see how these processes may have interfered with one another in the formation of a scientific domain, a political structure, a moral practice. p386 The Foucault Reader

A discursive formation or discourse is all three at once; a scientific domain and a political structure and a moral practice. The interference, which creates the interpretation, is not such that one imagines a pure form that is unfortunately sullied by the unwonted invasion of political partisanship or moral activists. There is no pure form. The interference, like the patterns formed when sound or light waves interfere, is the shape of the phenomenon itself. But it is clear that he is referring to what we might call the human or social sciences -- the kind of sciences that he analysed in his publications. He goes on to say:

Let's take psychiatry as an example: no doubt one can analyze it today in its epistemological structure -- even if that is still rather loose; one can also analyze it within the framework of the political institutions in which it operates; one can also study it in its ethical implications, as regards the person who is the object of the psychiatry as much as the psychiatrist himself. But my goal hasn't been to do this. Rather I have tried to see how the formation of psychiatry as a science, the limitation of its field, and the definition of its object implicated a political structure and a moral practice: in the twofold sense that they were presupposed by the progressive organization of psychiatry as a science and that they were also changed by this development.

The same is true in relation to delinquency ... In the case of sexuality it was the development of a moral attitude I wanted to isolate; but I tried to reconstruct it through the play that it engaged in with political structures (essentially in the relation between self-control and domination of others) and with the modalities of knowledge (self-knowledge and knowledge of different areas of activity).
... It is basically a matter of different examples in which the three fundamental elements of any experience are implicated: a game of truth, relations of power, and forms of relation to oneself and to others. pp 586-387

Science may be seen as the game of truth, politics as relations of power and ethics as forms of relations to oneself and others and these create the conditions that translate into what we have called above 'interpretation'. But does that mean that all human intellectual activity is thus conditioned? Perhaps not. Here is a quote from an earlier interview, published in 1977, with two Italian interviewers, Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino and in English published both in Colin Gordon's Power/Knowledge and Rabinow's The Foucault Reader, again with the question first;

Q. Could you briefly outline the route which lead you from your work on madness in the classical age to the study of criminality and delinquency?

M.F. When I was studying in the early 1950s, one of the great problems that arose was that of the political status of science and the ideological functions which it could serve. It wasn't exactly the Lysenko business which dominated everything, but I believe that around that sordid affair—which had long remained buried and carefully hidden—a whole number of interesting questions were provoked. These can all be summed up in two words: power and knowledge. I believe I wrote Madness and Civilization to some extent within the horizon of these questions. For me, it was a matter of saying this: if, concerning a science like theoretical physics or organic chemistry, one poses the problem of its relations with the political and economic structures of society, isn't one posing an excessively complicated question? Doesn't this set the threshold of possible explanations impossibly high? But on the other hand, if one takes a form of knowledge (savoir) like psychiatry, won't the question be much easier to resolve, since the epistemological profile of psychiatry is a low one and psychiatric practice is linked with a whole range of institutions, economic requirements and political issues of social regulation? Couldn't the interweaving effects of power and knowledge be grasped with greater certainty in the case of a science as 'dubious' as psychiatry. It was this same question which I wanted to pose concerning medicine in The Birth of a Clinic: medicine certainly has a much more solid armature than psychiatry, but it too is profoundly enmeshed in social structures. p109 Power/Knowledge

It seems that knowledge comes in varying forms of epistemological profiles. Epistemological profiles seem to measure the different proportions of pure
knowledge compared to political influence or moral import or economic control. This may suggest that it is possible to have quite pure forms of knowledge, i.e., knowledge for its own sake; and that this true knowledge is what true scientists aim for.

However I am not sure that is quite what Foucault means and nor is it not what I would propose. This is our most persevering and recalcitrant of issues -- is there a human-independent reality? We grapple with this questioning all sorts of forms for all sorts of reasons, some real and urgent, some intellectual and contemplative; sometimes for pride, sometimes for power, sometimes to get things done, and so on. We ask if there is what is its nature and can we ever know it and talk about it, but here, for this issue we might propose that certainly it is much easier to see the different interferences in some sciences, namely the human sciences than the hard sciences. But it may be more a matter of what is hard or easy to see than what is actually happening when one investigates deeply. The human sciences may be simply simpler to analyse, having a looser weave; 'be much easier to resolve', as he says above.

Thus the straightforward 'high/low' comparisons (which seem at first sight to privilege the so-called pure sciences and with that a reality) are to make the point that all knowledge-seeking endeavours are articulated with forms of human interest and concern, but in many different and intricate ways, with different visibilities, different implications and for different reasons all of which will be relative to and constructive of the ontological status of the entities studied. The human sciences merely are the ones that because of the epithet 'human' wear their epistemological heritage on their sleeve. They are 'profoundly enmeshed'.

**Relativism in summary**

It is not so much that we have answered or solved the problem of relativism as much as simply described the kind of relativist Foucault is. It seems the issue is not so much of finding 'a' truth as taking on board what we learn by investigating closely how truth conditions are constituted and what we think
when we put different interpretations alongside each other.

Lather dismisses relativism as a criticism that dominating groups will throw at those who challenge them; she says:

In sum, fears of relativism and its seeming attendant, nihilism or Nietzschean anger, seem to me an implosion of Western, white male, class-privileged arrogance -- if we cannot know everything, then we can know nothing.  p 116

Yet like the earlier issue of historian or philosopher, the discussion cannot, I think, be considered sorted. Lather at times seems to come close to implying that plurality is 'the truth', is its own 'other' thus recreating a duality, and glosses over what it is to live as opposed to write about the incommensurability that Foucault's relativity brings out. Truth in both forms are terms to be reckoned with. They do not dialogue or debate with each other. One cannot win over the other.

Dreyfus and Rabinow also suppress this incommensurability. In Michel Foucault; Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics they try to pull together an overarching, rationally conceived, dynamic of Foucault's work based on his gradual working through of the tension between two deeply influential and sophisticated conceptual forces, namely hermeneutics and structuralism. This 'reversal' dynamic whereby a thinker pursues a line of thought to a conclusion that proves untenable and therefore must be abandoned is attributed also to Heidegger and Wittgenstein;

Near the end of the Archaeology, when Foucault considers the possibility that archaeology might not turn out to be the stable and autonomous discipline that he had hoped, he notes that in such a case the problems it deals with and the tools it introduces might be "taken up later elsewhere, in a different way, at a higher level, or using different methods" (AK 208). These possibilities were more imminent than Foucault realized at the time. Just a few years later he himself took up the task and thus showed himself to be one of those rare thinkers, like Wittgenstein and Heidegger, whose work shows both an underlying continuity and an important reversal not because their early efforts were useless, but because in pushing one way of thinking to its limits they both recognized and overcame those limitations.

It is surely no coincidence that The Archaeology of Knowledge is followed by a self-imposed silence that is finally broken by two books in which the author, while still using
archaeological techniques, no longer claims to speak from a position of phenomenological detachment. pp 99-100

Dreyfus and Rabinow attribute to Foucault a general forward thrust, as though there is a progression and some underlying unity in the sequence of his work; which becomes a ‘closer to the truth’, at least in the sense of truth as consistency. It makes sense to project this kind of ongoing intellectual refinement or improvement perspective onto a temporally sequenced corpus of work. Yet from another position these would seem to be aspects of historical movement that Foucault and Nietzsche argued again

Gutting, in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, works hard to preserve Foucault’s specificity and marginality against interpretations such as that of Dreyfus and Rabinow. On pages four to six he notes how general interpretations suppress Foucault’s marginality and how we might be better off to regard Foucault as an intellectual artisan;

...someone who over the years constructed a variety of artifacts, the intellectual equivalents of the material objects created by a skilled goldsmith or cabinetmaker. P6

This I find a very appealing image -- that we have from Foucault’s life’s work a collection of objects each different. However what it leaves is a notion of a common plane of judgement, a surface on which the objects can be viewed together; a cabinetmaker makes a set of cabinets that may vary yet are still cabinets that perform cabinet-like functions. This gives a unity that again is in some contrast to other aspects of Foucault, such as the Chinese encyclopedia quoted earlier.

O’Farrell, in a less systematic or rationalist fashion, creates an overall thematic for Foucault as she moves him around the interplay and interrelationship of the Same, the Other and the Limit. But she does not try to trace a single intellectual quest and thus makes fewer judgements about the value of each of the different periods or preoccupations. This leaves it more open, with different sets of ideas alongside each other but not necessarily in competition.
for the title of 'truth' -- whether truth be judged as internally consistent or coherent, or in correspondence with reality, or simplest, or most falsifiable, or so on.
At this point we can pull together what we might see as Foucault's project. Given the privileged position of being able to overview his work, what were his themes?

**The Project**

O’Farrell gives this:

> he remained interested in the same structural problems, namely how human beings seek to impose order on the world via their social structure and knowledge and how those orders change with the passage of time. p 2

The same structural problems concern how it is the we ‘impose ‘order’, ie., knowledge, language, truth, (an imposition best seen in operation at its margins where its shallow irregularities and agitated ebb and flow expose more of the uncertainties) and then how with the everchanging movement in social structures these orders are susceptible to historical change. She says a little later on page 39, pulling together several of the points above around the 'historical';

The aim of Foucault's history is to show that our present is not the result of some inevitable historical necessity. It is instead the result of innumerable and very concrete human practices, and as such, can be changed by other practices. In studying history and historical limits, we can reflect upon our own limits and try to move beyond them. The knowledge of their existence means we are less determined by them, and can try to devise ways of thinking something else. As Foucault explains in *L’Usage des plaisirs*, his histories are written in an effort to examine how far thought can be liberated from ‘what it silently thinks and allowed to think otherwise’ (UP:15). He wants to ‘produce a shift in thought so that things can really change.’ p 59
'What it silently thinks' would seem to refer to that which Wittgenstein identified as things which are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. For Foucault the point would be that uncovering this is not merely for the internal satisfaction of an epistemological enterprise; it is for thought and action to shed the cloak of historically inherited and seemingly inviolate orders and to loosen itself up for other ways of being.

Gutting has a slightly different version of Foucault's project in *Michel Foucault's archaeology of scientific reason* but with the same fundamental point:

Foucault's work is a search for truths that will make us free. But he develops this enlightenment ideal in an essentially self-critical mode, exhibiting an acute awareness of how specific employments of reasons, even bodies of scientific knowledge, can themselves constrain and oppress human beings. The project of Foucault's history of thought is, accordingly, twofold: to show how particular domains of knowledge have constrained human freedom and to provide the intellectual resources for overcoming these constraints.

To expand, a little lyrically, on the differences between the two commentators; O'Farrell emphasises the space made available from a journey to the limits. This space, the disarrayed meaning-chaos of the no-man's land beyond the boundary, is the space which liberation draws from to occur. It gives it room to move and is the condition of making the experience of liberation possible. Gutting talks of the truths that set us free within a more mono-dimensional 'place of truths'. He has a more prosaic interpretation perhaps, with less metaphor. It is just one truth or the other for him, and limits have no place; human freedom has no ineluctable need for limits, and orders and freedom do not have subterranean tensions. For Gutting it is about the vigilant task of maintaining justice through the use of one's intellect with the particular reminder that 'knowledge', even of the scientific cast, is not innocent.

History provides the plane or schematic surface onto which knowledges can be spread. They can be seen one against another, opening out what is held ineluctably concealed, or giving voice to that which if left to its own
propaganda holds itself immutably silent. Liberation and freedom result.

The historical plane is archaeologically and genealogically fashioned. It is Foucault's project to show how human freedom has been constrained by domains of knowledge and to provide tools to liberate our thinking from these constraints. Both archaeology and genealogy attempt to make history more historical, more sealed off internally and thus not able to spill out and infect the present. Archaeology en-stranges us by distance, pushing other cultures so far off that we have to suspend our current ways of thinking to make the leap back or across; and this suspension gives us room to move, to think new thoughts; genealogy en-stranges us by destabilizing certainties on the basis of their having origins and descent, again giving us room to question that which seems to be beyond question.

Thus we analyse a discourse by both a) making it truly historical, making it its own internally constructed event, and suppressing our tendency to subsume it into our own meaning systems or into a greater metaphysical sequence of meaning that places us in an all-knowing position, and b) seeking a lineage or heritage for the discourse that shows via the historically occurring contingencies how this is supported.

Ethos

It might be fair to say that Foucault's project ends up as an ethos. In this rather densely packed quote from his essay on Kant, Foucault ties together some of the central concepts of his thought; the essay is a reflection on a small text of Kant's, *What is Enlightenment?* and Foucault is contemplating envisaging the Enlightenment, and modernity, as 'attitudes' rather than periods in history. He says;

And by attitude I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an ethos. p 39

He then uses the archaeological and genealogical methods to place his own
ethos alongside Kant's;

This philosophical ethos may be characterized as a limit-attitude. ... Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one; in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of a necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.

This entails an obvious consequence: that criticism is no longer going to be practised in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have lead us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible. It is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological - and not transcendental - in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and know; but will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think. It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom. p46

As we move on to consider where we might begin on the question of learning to read and write, the seeking of a new impetus, as far and wide as possible to the undefined work of freedom might be a excellent staring point.
CHAPTER EIGHT

FOUCAULT'S CONTRIBUTION

Consciousness Bound

Introduction

In this chapter we draw together the themes of Foucault and the question of learning to read and write. Attesting to the fecundity of his thought we begin with many questions and end with one major thought.
PART ONE

.... a broad sweep...

The question of learning to read and write arose because it was difficult to find a research question that did not simply seek its answers in the place where it had always been standing. A gloss of a selected part of the field in the earliest chapters traversed some of the field seemingly to use words in common and always pointing toward a vision called research or science but also systematically keeping it at a distance at the same time, like a donkey walking towards a carrot that hangs beyond its nose on a rod that is tied to a saddle on its back.

But with the distance travelled in this study, certain views of literacy learning have been expanded and fleshed out, and with Foucault the first task is to attempt a descriptive sweep across its broad manifestation in the modern world.

An Event in the World

With the commitment we have built up to context, the world must always be the scene, or screen, into or onto which the phenomenon is displayed. Clearly becoming literate as a topic has many features in common with the areas that interested Foucault, therefore the directions he would turn us in to build descriptions are appropriate. Firstly it is a large-scale social activity and in its operation it draws in an assembly of practices, behaviours and activities; and institutions and agencies and objects. One only has to think of a neighbourhood school for children in a country where schooling is compulsory to begin to appreciate the extent of dedicated practical activity, thought and knowledge, and things in the world that surrounds learning to be literate. Buildings, builders, architects; teachers, teacher training, teaching styles and techniques, teaching manuals, curricula; ministries, departments, accountability, standards; parents, children, attitudes and abilities; books, lessons, language; book publishers, writers, illustrators, printers, paper manufacturers and book sellers; school timetables, furniture.
Of course, much of this we know, but the exercise is, in the vein of Wittgenstein, useful 'reminding'. To continue and expand on this line of description, we can look more fully at the features of the enterprise.

The Presenting Phenomenon; learning to read and write
(a post-Foucault, preliminary non-critical description)

Here is a loose collection of Laws, Definitions and Postulates with Apologies to Clay and Gee for so blatantly stealing their thought, but their definitions are both necessary in this context and wonderfully fashioned pieces of intellectual art in their own right.

1. Definitions

Definition One

What is Reading?

I define reading as a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practised. My definition states that within the directional constraints of the printer's code, language and visual perception responses are purposefully directed by the reader in some integrated way to the problem of extracting meaning from cues in a text, in sequence, so that the reader brings a maximum of understanding to the author's message.

As we progress along the lines of a text it is not unlike the process of finding footholds when climbing up a cliff-face yet the achievement is in the single completed task.

We ask questions all the time as we read and our theories of what might occur work so well that we are scarcely aware that they exist. We only become aware of our questioning when our answers fail to match the information before us. Asking questions is a means of eliminating alternatives. We can encourage children to ask themselves questions and develop their strategies for improving predictions. All this applies to reading and writing. We must read by asking and answering questions if we are to understand what we are reading. Palincsar and Brown (1984, 1986) have provided an excellent example of this view of reading in a large body of careful research on reciprocal teaching.

Definition Two

Defining Literacy

I believe that any sociologically useful definitions of 'literacy' must be reached by terms of three notions of primary and secondary discourse. Thus I define 'literacy' as meaning of a fluent writer at a secondary discourse. Therefore, literacy is the ability, (more or less) there are many of them, since there are many secondary discourses, and we all have some, but not all are equal. If one succeeds in the either primary or secondary, then we would define' literacy' as meaning of a fluent writer at a secondary discourse reading a text (which is almost all of them in a modern society). Our task is to identify for what reason other sorts of terms and technologies (painting, literature, film, television, computers, telecommunications) are 'props' in the Discourse - to get definitions of various sorts of literacy (e.g. visual literacy, computer literacy, literary literacy).

But we can also gain from the addition of the phrase 'reciprocal teaching', a model to the message. The feelings of people committed (as we are) to reading and writing in decontextualised and valuable skills. In addition, it is clear that many different sociolinguistic categories have secondary Discourses while, while they do not work out, involve a great many of the same skills, habits, and ways of thinking that are associated with literacy. Here are some of the many and diverse practices that have gone under this label (oral literacy).

We can talk about community-based literacy as 'public space literacy' in terms of whether it involves matters of conversation-based or non-public space secondary discourses. We can talk about 'dominant literacy' and 'non-dominant literacy' in terms of whether they involve matters of dominant or non-dominant secondary Discourses. We can also talk about literacy being 'liberating,' 'powerful' if it can be used as a 'tool' in the Discourse (a post of sorts where the others, not only for the critique of other Discourses and the more they continue in a process and interest in a society that finds liberating literacy can constitute and transform us). Note that what I have called a 'liberating literacy' is a particular sort of a Discourse (in another sense) and a particular Discourse.

There are two examples which apply to Discourse, and technology, which offer the most obvious distinction between acquisition and learning.

Like playing twenty questions, how far in would you have to go before you realised it was reading and writing? Now to some laws;
2. **The Social Laws of Literacy; these appear to apply in general to all industrialised social systems**

1. Literacy learning is highly valued
2. The investment in its occurrence is heavy
3. We do not meet our targets
4. Research is seen as having the answers
5. But this proves in the end and endlessly not to be so

3. **Some Characteristics**

1. Learning to read and write is now going on in the world all the time. It is occurring.

2. It is a variously occurring phenomenon, happening in different ways in different places; eg. in schools or not, in different languages, to individuals of different ages, with many varying definitions of what being literate means.

3. It happens to individuals, person by person. It manifests itself in alterations in both the physical abilities (eye movements, neurological sequences) and cognitive states, skills (mental skills, vocabulary growth, knowledge acquisition) and strategic activity systems of an individual and can be empirically recognised in each person's behavioural shifts. A becoming literate individual begins to act differently in response to events, particularly print events, and in general.

4. On the other hand it depends upon, and is brought about through, the collected activities of collective cultural action. It needs groups of people from the past and in the present. One might say that literacy is something created and maintained over time by successive sets of people through the agreements and conventions that emerge between them in response to the demands and
opportunities of being together in the world. It essentially involves communication and sharing, and for humans to be in touch with each other. It is done within and by groups of people.

5. As a phenomenon in the world literacy acquisition doesn't just happen once, in bulk. It is being *recurringly realised*, happening again and again.

6. It recurs with *ceaseless variation*, i.e. it seems to always be a little different each time it occurs. Thus it seems sensitive to changing contexts whether they be social, economic or cultural; technological or political or physical. The texts are always changing, the technology of text productions, the language and its syntax, phonology and semantics are constantly on the move; as are teaching techniques, teacher/learner relationships, and attitudes and expectations towards becoming literate.

   So as endlessly mutating and regrouping social formations carry out the tasks of literacy education for others and themselves, it is a restless event through time that is happening in the world.

7. That some societies, and/or the individuals within it, attempt with great interest and effort to ensure people become literate is *prima facie* very evident. Some groups generate a great deal of activity dedicated to effecting the teaching and learning of reading and writing. This activity is emotional, intellectual, financial or behavioural. The building and maintaining of schools and the training and maintaining of teachers; all that accompanies education curricula, budgets and departments; undertaking research studies, writing and publishing textbooks; these all indicate great interest.

   This dedication to learning to read and write is accompanied by many semi-dedicated and non-dedicated interactions (the bed-time story, print-rich environments, emailing) that also lead to the acquisition of reading and writing which might reflect interest of a subliminal or structural kind.
This interest is itself not constant in either intensity or kind; it varies from society to society, and in any one society from one generation to the next, and one group to the next. However, it may be said that there is a geographically and historically variously distributed deep-seated interest in literacy and its acquisition processes. Within the world we see this manifested as highly intentional literacy acquisition activity. We can sum this up by describing the five Social Laws of Literacy Learning;

8. This social investment in the activities of learning to read and write tends of its own accord to generate questions and issues to be looked at more closely, i.e. thought about, investigated, questioned, studied, researched, compared and contrasted. This is a very recognisable human response -- frequently human groups treat the activities they care about in this way -- we often seek to know more about what we can do to fulfil our need and desires and interests.

SOME KEY CONCEPTS FROM FOUCAULT

Having washed with this broad descriptive brush, let us turn to some specifically useful concepts, beginning with knowledge.

Knowledge

From this roughly described assemblage, we can extract this strand; learning to read and write can be seen as an aggregate of different knowledges.

Foucault has many interesting critiques of knowledge. In the *Archaeology of knowledge* he talks about different thresholds of knowledge and how;

The moment at which a discursive practice achieves individuality and autonomy, the moment therefore at which a single system for the formation of statements is put into operation, or the moment at which this system is transformed, might be called a threshold of positivity. When in the operation of a discursive formation, a group of statements is articulated, claims to validate (even unsuccessfully) norms of verification and coherence, and when it exercises a dominant function (as a model, a critique, or a verification) over knowledge, we will say that the
discursive formation crosses a **threshold of epistemologization**. When the epistemological figure thus outlined obeys a number of formal criteria, when its statements comply ... with certain laws for the construction of propositions, we will say that it has crossed a **threshold of scientificity**. And when this scientific discourse is able, in turn to define the axioms necessary to it, the elements that it uses, the propositional structures that are legitimate to it, and the transformations that it accepts, when it is thus able, taking itself as a starting-point, to deploy the formal edifice that it constitutes, we will say that it has crossed the **threshold of formalization**. p 187

It is one of the tasks of archaeology to explore these different thresholds. Even if it is not transparently clear what Foucault meant by these thresholds, or even if they can be satisfactorily actualised, the idea that a discourse has within it a particular and describable level and **kind** of knowledge, or, even more appealing, with literacy learning, several conflicting or abutting levels of knowledges, could be useful.

For instance, there is an active and well established body of what might be called ‘scientific’ knowledge associated with learning to read and write, particularly around its psychology and pedagogy. It has in particular this **human science association**, under the umbrella discipline ‘education’ when to do with pedagogy but more allied with psychology when being studied in its perceptual and cognitive functioning -- or disfunctioning as with adults who through accident or disease have their literacy skills damaged. In *The Order of Things* Foucault has a great deal to say about the problems faced by the **human sciences** -- the entrapment of these disciplines in the ‘doubles’ which arises through the positing of finite ‘man’. As Dreyfus and Rabinow put it;

... man, as we know him today, makes his appearance and becomes the measure of all things.

Once the order of the world was no longer God-given and representable in a table, then the continuous relation which had placed man with the other beings of the world was broken.

*Man, who was once himself a being among others, now is a subject among objects. But man is not only a subject among objects, he soon realizes that what he is seeking to understand is not only the objects of the world but himself. Man becomes the subject and the object of his own understanding.* p 28

Can this kind of critique be applied to literacy acquisition? Clearly from our first two chapters, yes indeed. There seems to be the potential for some
interesting study which could shed light on the kind of social, cultural or educational exercise it is to scientifically research learning to read and write, but more crucially how viable is it to ever get research into an acquired activity that is so intimately entangled in human affairs as literacy. It seems inevitable that the need for the answers, the amount of investment that lies in the balance, is so powerful a force that like a magnetic field it turns all the findings, even if only very slightly, towards its preferment. Also even setting up the original constructs as we read with Bryant and Bradley in Chapter Two is an activity riddled with political and social bias. This must be recognised. One point that becomes clearer as we discuss the issue is that the human sciences cannot continue to be so blase about the effect the nature of their subject matter - human beings - has in their research. They need ontologies of the beings that are the topic of their work. Stanovich would have us believe that science is continuous from physics to learning how to read and write. But in a Wittgensteinian sense, only family resemblances will hold the 'sciences' conceptually together.

But we are not restricted to this more scientific focus. In many discourses 'knowledge' is not coextensive with 'science.' As outlined above, literacy learning would seem to be a clear example of a discursive formation (if one may attribute to it that much coherency) that is an amalgam of different kinds of knowledge -- like perhaps clinical medicine; Foucault says this of clinical medicine in The Archaeology of Knowledge;

Clinical medicine is certainly not a science. Not only because it does not comply with the formal criteria, or attain the level of rigour expected of physics, chemistry, or even of physiology; but also because it involves a scarcely organized mass of empirical observations, uncontrolled experiments and results, therapeutic prescriptions, and institutional regulations. And yet this non-science is not exclusive of a science: in the course of the nineteenth century, it established definite relations such perfectly constituted sciences as physiology, chemistry, or microbiology; moreover it gave rise to such discourse as that of morbid anatomy, which it would be presumptuous no doubt to call a false science. p181

Depending on the commentator (teacher, or parent, or education lecturer) literacy learning would probably have even less of its total mass pretending to
science than clinical medicine. It would also seem to be, in its own way, 'a scarcely organized mass' of empirical observations, uncontrolled experiments, and so on. If we think again of our local primary or elementary school there is, on the face of it, a mixture of different kinds of knowledges to go with every vested player in the game. There is a whole intertwined matting of beliefs, convictions and hopes, informal practices, implicit and experiential knowledge, inferences, and traditional ideas about literacy learning.

There are the knowledges, hopes, aspirations and prejudices, attitudes and beliefs of parents and relations. These lie adjacent and overlapping to those of the general community, and of institutions like the media and industry. The knowledges of the children themselves will be different. Then these all in some way all rub up against the ideologies and practices and theories, implicit and explicit, espoused or practised, of the teachers, who themselves have contact in accommodating or resisting ways with their colleagues and then also with experts and speakers, theorists and researchers, academics and lecturers at universities, centres for reading, academies and the like -- this latter group representing the 'higher' epistemological knowledge sector, the scientific end of the spectrum, of literacy learning. What does this mean; what is the effect of this collage of knowledges; how does it help us understand better the shape of the discourse?

**Epistemic Profiles**

Related to this concept of knowledges is the notion of epistemic profiles that we discussed in an earlier chapter. We might ask what is the epistemic profile of the discourse of literacy acquisition?

Foucault would surely call it 'low' compared to physics and chemistry, and it can be argued again our knowledge of literacy acquisition is of a form very similar to that of the discourses he studied, such as psychiatry. He says in *Power and Knowledge* of psychiatry that it is 'profoundly enmeshed in social structures', being linked with 'a whole range of institutions, economic requirements and political issues of social regulation'. Taking each in turn, it can be argued that
learning to be literate in its most common form in many countries is also undoubtedly profoundly linked with a whole range of:

a) **institutions** -- eg., schools, universities and colleges, publishing companies, official bureaucracies, departments, ministries of local and central varieties, homes and families, libraries, churches, governments and their agencies,

b) **economic requirements** -- eg., the financing of the above, the costs to the taxpayer or benefactor or aid agency or government department or parents; the profits to be made from providing tuition or materials; and the economic benefits, actual or perceived, accruing to individuals, social groups or to the state as a whole and,

c) **political issues of social regulation** -- firstly and most obviously in all the very many legal or communally expected, required or esteemed literacy-based competencies, and the relationship of this to the controlled or patterned dissemination and perpetuation of shared or targeted knowledges, beliefs, directives, myths or ideologies; to be a citizen one may have to be literate to be fully accessible to regulation, whether it be the filling in of a tax form, the reading of an idealised history of a nation's origins, or the mis-spelling of a piece of graffiti;

  -- secondly in the distribution of social goods and its apparent justification on the basis of educational or intellectual achievement;

  -- thirdly in obvious controls like censorship and in less obvious controls such as the wide range of actions of restriction/promulgation, rubbishing/privileging, deemphasising/promoting, refusing/supporting or taxing/subsidising, and so on, the publication and distribution of printed matter; and other forms of influence over who reads and writes and what is read and written

  -- and then from more Foucaultian theematics the disciplinary procedures (schooling, tuition) associated with its acquisition and ongoing practice, and the concept of forming the docile subject.
Literacy acquisition and the questions we ask as we undertake to study it cannot not to be properly understood without considerations of these other factors. It is far from being a pure idealised event, untainted by politics or economics. It is of and in the world and shaped and structured by its realities.

**Discursivity, Empirical**

So literacy acquisition resembles psychiatry and like medical practice in being this orchestrated complexity of discursive and nondiscursive categories. It is also a field where humans talk about and classify and divide each other and themselves. One is literate or not, or somewhere in between and this can be assessed, tested and measured. It marks people out from each other in various socially signified ways -- like illness, madness, sexual deviancy and criminality.

Then, like Foucault's topics, it is quite specific and thus lends itself well to his methodologies. Like punishment or sexuality it is, as described above, securely anchored in well-established sets of real world events, with recognisable easily identified histories that can be taken for themselves and on their own terms. Literacy acquisition suits specific empirically oriented investigative techniques -- there is plenty happening out in the field to be looked and discussed further; from Foucault we are highly sensitised to the advantages of finding and assimilating this kind of information.

**Order (margins)**

What is its relationship to order, and to the limit conditions and marginalisation? In one sense the issue of learning to read and write is a very normalised topic, unlike madness or punishment. But if instead we look from the other direction, toward the issue of illiteracy, the non-learning to read and write, it becomes much more apparent that we are indeed exploring toward the margins of order. Literacy failure could be configured as a significant limit condition in modern educated societies. It has possibly become a social pathology, a cognitive delinquency,
a sign of the cultural other in a way that might explain why literacy/illiteracy is treated as it is in modern educated societies.

For instance the positive correlative relationship that could most likely be established between a) the successful achievement of literacy acquisition by populations and b) the perception of cultural, economic and social well being of a nation or state signals the insinuation in a particular way of literacy acquisition into registers of social progress, and into the connotative meanings of what it is to be cultured, civilised and even properly human. In the same manner but in reverse, being illiterate could produce a culturally sub-conscious limit condition, the 'other' for being not properly human. This line of thought shows itself in the rather fruitless argument which we look later over whether reading is a natural act or not. Then, at the individual level, what is the relationship between 'intelligence' and literacy ability; or what is the relationship between 'cultured' and 'literate'. This line of questioning could throw up some interesting facts about where literacy acquisition fits within the workings of a modern social system and the roles it plays other than those espoused. For instance the stigma imposed on an illiterate individual might not be as strong as that of a homosexual but it is an interesting comparison nonetheless. The ontological status is different and explanations vary between the two states as to social, genetic or psychological 'causes'. But an illiterate individual may be worse than a 'twisted' one (see earlier quote page x), and in a position with far more hushed and secretive implications. For instance --would being illiterate have resulted in alienation from the French Communist party?

**Order (discipline)**

As a field of endeavour learning to read and write could be cast as a highly refined disciplinary technology; a historically matured, culturally shaped, socially admired, expertly practised, **ordering** of thinking, behaving, valuing and knowing. Within this ordering, it may be argued, within this process of teaching literacy one is gaining accesses for ongoing **surveillance** -- that is, through literacy we gain access to each others' minds because we 'know' what will be
happening to someone’s thoughts as one reads any text. Learning to read is learning to make conventionalised communal responses to visual (mainly) stimuli, which means that we have a technology whereupon we can read into each other’s minds. For instance, it might be claimed that:

- In knowing that a person is literate one knows how they are programmed to respond to certain ‘stimuli’ (for want of a better term).
- In knowing what a person who is literate is reading one knows what they are thinking.
- A canon of literature is like a window onto a schema of well-processed, socially engineered and ordered thoughts and emotional organization.
- The popular press means we know a great deal about each other’s mental contents.

Such claims may be true of all language; it may be in the very nature of language itself to possess these qualities of what amounts to a form of intersubjectivity, and they may form the foundation of the power of humans to communicate at all, and the outstanding expression of this in the sheer phenomenon of language. However the decontextualization that print is said to offer over, say spoken language, may make it far more socially powerful in this regard. The question is where does print sit in the general spread of human language use. There are many mechanisms of socio-cognitive control and ordering, from syntax to alphabetic coding, from literary style to the publication and dissemination of literacy primers, that could be investigated and interpreted.

Such an interpretation of literacy acquisition is not meant to imply that literacy acquisition is really something undesirable or evil. A critical feature of Foucault’s analyses of power is that power is not seen as force that is always negative or destructive and to be dismantled in the name of equality -- any more than order itself is something inherently unwanted. This could not be possible. So reconstituting literacy acquisition in terms of discipline or surveillance is not to automatically claim it is essentially hegemonic even though hegemonic aspects may be uncovered. It is more a matter of delineating the power lines that are part of its very development and being, and while these will always reflect in
part that which gives a phenomenon its 'form' they can at the same time have impress on our lives in oppressive and negative ways.

**History**

Learning to read and write is a topic clearly amenable to a social history even in the ordinary sense of history. Change over time is fast, fast enough perhaps for people to have seen it in their lifetimes, and there are many different areas where the description and documentation of these changes would be and has been informative and challenging to our current views and beliefs.

But over and above this there would also seem to be great potential in treating literacy acquisition archaeologically -- as above for instance -- and trying to distance oneself from it as an activity which is our own and treating it 'like' the circumscribed activity of, say, an ancient people. The techniques in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* of analysing a discursive formation as a discontinuous entity in terms of objects, modes of enunciation, formation of concepts and formation of strategies may prove useful for trying to understand the literacy acquisition phenomenon -- what it is and how it carries out its tasks in the world. Like a Wittgensteinian analysis using the concept of language-games, there is this strong focus on how activity systems -- both linguistic and extra-linguistic -- provide the ontological base for the field of interpretation in which concepts, objects, talk and strategies of comprehension or explanation can be generated. What are the objects (words, letters, teachers, reading, etc) and how are they spoken of; what are the concepts that dominate and structure the field?

Genealogy too offers promise with questioning learning to read and write. The aversion to the progressive and idealised concepts of progress expressed by both Nietzsche and Foucault leads one to reconsider the ascent of literacy acquisition and its avowed place in current cultures. On what kind of pedestal does literacy acquisition sit? A real or a Machiavellian one -- or a combination? There are parallels to be drawn between, say, prison reform as explained by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* and education reform involving literacy acquisition: just as the shift from the punishment of public torture to the
punishment of incarceration was not necessarily made for humanitarian reasons so the massive push to universal literacy education may not be fuelled by altruism. Where is learning to read and write in the activity and dispersion of power?

**Nietzsche, History, and Literacy Acquisition**

From our in-depth discussion of history from Nietzsche there are other very worthwhile leads as to how we might unpick deeper issues in literacy acquisition. Not only may there be a question about whether the pride of place literacy may have in explanations of humankind cultural achievement is deserved or accurate -- namely the way literacy is drawn into the Nietzschean questioning of about the unidirectional nature of progress ever upward. There is also another possible complexity of issues: that literacy acquisition is inherently historical in the paralysing and suffocating sense of historical. There is something in learning to read and write that attempts to 'stop' time and 'close' space.

All language would seem to intend to unite and bind groups of humans together by melting and mellowing time and space until in the Nietzschean sense they become a hard single timeless spaceless mathematical point -- making the re-distancing required by the archaeological method difficult and the re-partitioning required by genealogy a struggle. The final vanishing ideal of all language, the perfect communication, it could be argued, is a *lingua franca*, an eternally stable all-encompassing language. As an historical phenomenon, a *lingua franca* is a static being, clearly vulnerable to Nietzsche's criticisms of trying to say everything at once, a final viewpoint on the world. Like Hegel's world view, it is not universal -- it just belongs to someone. There is a critique of language itself in Nietzsche's analysis of history.

Written text, that for which literacy is needed, is especially designed to last through time and space, this being one of its advantages over oral language which, it could be argued, has been until recently (with the advent of voice transmission and recording) much more prone to restricted locations and disintegration. The text you read could have been produced far away and many
years ago, whereas oral text has a life no more reliable or enduring than that supported by human memory. Following this argument, all language but more particularly written language is potentially stultifying.

Then it could be claimed that literacy, and more particularly literacy acquisition, is an aggravated example of this time-stopping space-collapsing desiccation of human energy. It tends by nature toward being heavily conservative. Letters and words and the sounds and things they stand for, or the operations they are meant to perform are all given by social convention and agreement. In learning to read and write one is mastering a process to deal with formalities that have long and convoluted histories -- evolved formalities such as an alphabetic system, spelling formalities and syntactic rules, genre and registers, directional movement and print layout, orthography and phonology. In one sense, a piece of printed text merely represents its current point in the messy continuous ongoing development of cultural conventions of print communication. Yet particularly when learning to control the manipulation and patterned organisation of these conventions, a rigidity emerges whereupon the process seems fixed by the products of its very own development. The only way to have wide and easy access to what has been gathered in the corpus of print over time and space is to acquire an extremely particular habituated and automatised just-below-conscious-attention patterned set of cognitive operations demanded by the extant formalities. These operations are detemporalised and have no geography -- they are reified and fixed. Suppressed in this rigidity required by acquisition is amongst many other things the awareness that the survival of one system or formality over another has (historical proper) explanations in the psychology of human perception and cognition, and in historical and social patterns of class and power, domination and hegemony, invasion, enculturation, colonisation, trade and treaty and so on.

This may be potentially (though not exclusively) most damaging to people learning to read and write from the outside, as it were, in a language or sub-language other than their own but in which the skills and strategies of processing and interpreting print are given as a given, as a fixed historically-established
system of procedures for what you do when you encounter or wish to produce viable print. ‘Plasticity’ may be inaccessible for whole sets of literacy acquirers -- but then for others it may be too disruptive of lives they prefer to live.

There is potential here perhaps, even though the arguments above have been far more suggestive than conclusive. There may be networks of links here between the place literacy has in teleological views of human progress, the ahistorical aspirations literacy has and accounts of current literacy acquisition practices and knowledges.

**A Difference; cognition**

But in one major sense becoming literate is unlike Foucault's topics -- it is about something *learned*. This would appear to give it less universality and for it to be more superstructural, less deeply implicated in the essential human condition. On one level, for instance, learning to read and write might be compared to learning to play a musical instrument, which is a skill only distantly related to the political and social forces governing human self-descriptions. The consequences of the state of literacy might seem to be not so dire or so fundamentally rooted in the structures of knowledge that may drive an epoch or episteme. If he were to deal with a language pathology it would more likely be one that has more physiological correlates and deal with language as a whole, which usually means oral language.

For instance literacy acquisition doesn't fit centrally into Foucault's notion of bio-power, which concentrates on the body, thus the talk of docile bodies in *Discipline and Punish*. This description is given of bio-power by James Marshall in ‘Foucault and Neo-Liberalism: Biopower and Busno-Power’ (*Philosophy of Education* 1995, downloaded from the internet 13/6/00);
Becoming literate does not traditionally find explanation in anatomical or biological dimensions. It is usually discussed in terms originating in psychological and cognitive discourses. But this could possibly prove to be a very enlightening difference and there may be some understanding to be had by developing a notion of something like cogno-power -- the power exercised inwardly on the cognitive manifestations of the being human-ness of populations. Literacy acquisition would be characterised as a technology or technique specifically targeted toward the specialised discipline of the trainable portions of the mind. It is a form of surveillance of the mind. This would be true even if one in the end needs to return to the body (such as the eyes, ears, mouth and hands) for final explanations of cognition and literacy learning.

Such a characterisation might then provide feasible explanations for why the discourse and its contextual institutions and practices look the way they do. Furthermore its potential for inner discipline might only recently have been fully realized in modern societies, and this realization may correlate to the increased attention given to universal literacy and shifts in expectations or attitudes towards illiteracy. Cognitive formations may all involve learning of some sort; perception may be itself learned, oral language also. But learning to read and write may be one of the more socially controllable cognitive activity systems; a fact so much more relevant to periods of human production dominated by information transmission.

_Ethos_

In one of her last footnotes O'Farrell quoted Foucault thus:

Foucault remarks: 'Every time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the basis of elements from my experience — always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognised something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography.' Foucault, 'Est-il important donc de penser?', _Libération_ 30 May 1981, cited in Rajchman, _The Freedom of Philosophy_, 1985, pp. 35-6. p 152
A final question in our summary of Foucault here would be, is there something dully jarring in literacy acquisition? Is there something disfunctioning. I think it is possible and certainly fruitful to argue that there might be -- that in certain current practices around literacy acquisition there is exclusion and unhappiness, there is something not quite right, that we are looking at literacy acquisition through a cracked and clouded lens and practicing upon ourselves technologies damaging and divisive in certain ways.

The issue we are investigating maybe about the constraining of human freedom, as Gutting put it -- the question may be for all that is said about literacy and the need for its acquisition, is there constraint to human freedom. Does literacy acquisition oppress, does it over-determine existence through the thoughts silently in operation beneath the display and propaganda? If it does, how does it? What are the mechanisms? Again such lines of investigation may be useful and revealing.

In which case, there is some point to exploring the very evitable nature of literacy learning practices, to try and 'produce a shift in thought so things can really change'. Foucault's description of *ethos* as 'a way... of acting and behaving that one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task,' is similar to Nietzsche's description of a plastic force that needs a horizon; says Nietzsche, 'This is a general principle: each living being can become healthy, strong, and fertile only within a horizon.' An attitude, a disposition, is a horizon, is a stance or orientation cast with edges and the habitation of belonging and vocation of a task.

It is the philosophical ethos that is to be taken aboard with respect to literacy acquisition, seeking out the instances of the activity that are just so many historical events; separate out from the 'contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think.'
PART TWO

.....a sustained discussion.....

A History

It is hard to understand in some ways the general shallowness and inadequacy of common historical knowledge about literacy instruction (such that the Great Debate should have such unwarranted longevity), and it is hard to explain both the dearth of historical studies and the rigid neglect of those that there are, such as Graff’s work. Literacy is treated as if it has no history, as if it was invented all at once, as is. It seems that it is too current, too close to home, or to use a colloquialism that seems most apt, ‘too hot to handle’, not in the immediate electoral-term based urgency of weekly politics but in the slower deeper rhythms of cultural development, in the Heideggerian sense. This is the Nietzschean suffocation at the hands of history.

But then that is the perceived scientific way, as we read in Stanovich, and that must be one explanation. The call for more research does not seem to include historical research - and in this case, stricter science means deeper forgetting, perhaps.

Or perhaps it's because the history would too obviously be the history of petty malice, etc. There is evidence that certainly in the America of the 'great debate' a little of this goes on - hence Stanovich’s plea for the dispassionate scientific method. Recall this quotation from Dreyfus and Rabinow, page 119 above;

For Nietzsche, as Foucault reads him, history is the story of petty malice, of violently imposed interpretations, of vicious intentions, of high-sounding stories masking the lowest of motives. To the Nietzschean genealogist the foundation of morality, at least since Plato, is not to be found in ideal truth. It is found in pudenda origo: "lowly origins," catty fights, minor crudeness, ceaseless and nasty clashing of wills. The story of history is one of accidents, dispersion, chance events, lies - not the lofty development of Truth or the concrete development of Freedom. For Nietzsche, the genealogist par excellence, the history of truth is the history of error and arbitrariness: “The faith on which our belief
in science rests is still a metaphysical faith ... The Christian faith, which was also the faith of Plato, that God is Truth and truth divine ... But what if this equation becomes less and less credible; if the only things that may still be viewed as divine are error, blindness and lies; if God himself [the truth] turns out to be our longest lie...

In the work of Tomasello, introduced earlier in regard to Wittgenstein, there is a broader conception of history, a more genealogically oriented history called a *sociogenesis*. This seems a fruitful approach to a phenomenon like literacy that is both a cultural and an anthropological event.

**The Sociogenesis of Culture**

In principle, the work of Tomasello and associates (Chapter Five) has provided a clearly viable explanation for the capture and elaboration of cultural tools. Bridging the gap between biological and historical evolution, Tomasello links Wittgenstein with learning theorists Bruner and Vygotsky and his own work at the interface of language, culture and primate evolution. The *ratchet effect* (see box left, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* p. 38), describes a kind of Lamarckian evolution, - the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which cannot happen in the natural world. Whatever human beings find interesting or useful or attractive enough to show or teach to the young, and the young find it by the ratchet effect from generation to generation to become part of the ongoing cultural heritage. Or, as each successive generation takes over the artefact - object, discourse or set of skills, it can be *modified* - adjusted, expanded, reduced, refined or improved.
For instance in the case of a hammer, modifications can be and have been made at different generation points that alter and improve it in one way or another. From simple rock to advanced composite stick/stone and rope state of the art 1000BC to tomorrow's moon-mined, maro-fired, SDrex, Ultraplastick Weightless, each generation works its needs and imagination (or capitalist fetish for product) on the hammer. Better grip, more enduring materials, faster production techniques, perhaps, would all have been reasons to change the design. But it is most important to understand that this is nothing to do with what a hammer is, or needs to be, or 'really' is - it is to do with how a group of advanced primates build a culture across succeeding generations. Despite the comparative ease of explaining 'after the fact' why a particular change occurred, innovation cannot be predicted on the basis of merely one or two principles such as 'improved quality of raw material production', and you do not know what a given generation will do, and what it will leave undone.

**EVOLUTIONARY PROCESSES**

**Tropical male forest birds plumage excesses:** a limit is imposed upon their limitless taste for ornate elaborate plumage and the female attention it delivers by the combined disadvantages of being too easily seen and too easily chased down. It is impossible to predict, given the number and indeterminacy of the parameters, how these factors will stack up against each other at any one time -
- which combination of heavy and light feathers,
- which colours most quickly attract the female and/or increase her fertility,
- average copulation time,
- the amount of rainfall that season, which can effect both density of subcanopy forest cover and feather weight,
- the population size.

Only post hoc reasoning will work, and arbitration is not on who lives the longest or has the most successful conquests but on whose contribution to the ensuing gene pool is the largest.

**Language** (called a 'revolution' by Watson and Giorcelli in Chapter One, and listed as the greatest in comparison with transportation, industry, information technology and telecommunications in the twentieth century, see p. 5) is just such an artefact, under the same forces, continually being acted upon as it is being used, growing, increasing in complexity perhaps, with the ratchet effect easing into the next generation changes made available to the learners.
**Intersubjectivity**

For Tomasello, the central mechanism of the ratchet effect is *imitative learning* - a particular kind of highly attentive and complexly framed learning that apportions ontological status or functional value to the observer, the observed, the action and the objects. He claims that imitative learning is genetically based and limited to humans, and is characterised by (these are different descriptions of the same thing);

- an awareness of intersubjectivity,
- an understanding of the other as being like oneself
- an awareness of the other as a subject of experiences, not merely an object of my experience
- *a way of seeing conspecifics as intentional beings* (see pages 50 to 55).

This awareness begins to emerge in human infants at approximately nine months and is for Tomasello the biological hallmark of human as opposed to other primate behaviour. Certainly it could be argued that it sets up the possibility of the *language game*, putting the 'co-' in an interlocking ensemble of co-shared activities, co-perceived objects, co-enacted behavioural sequences, co-ordinated actions, reactions and responses, and co-intended goals (my words), but described much more simply by Wittgenstein as 'the whole, consisting of the language and the actions into which it is woven' (see page 80 above).

**Perspectivity**

As we read in Tomasello (see page 91 above), 'Children talk about events and states of affairs in the world'. This talk, this occasion for learning, is not one of philosophical neutrality or impartiality, not walking around a room of objects on shelves and detachedly saying, ok now let's learn some more names for things differentiated purely on the basis of their perceptual features alone. Rather it is one of being in the world, full of intent and purpose for both learner and adult, and is thus what Tomasello describes as *perspectival*. The learner has to enter the perspective of the adult to work out what the adult's communicative intent is - this
is an inescapable feature of the model. The highly structured and protective social circumstances and repeated pattern of activities around sleeping, eating and excreting helps the infant considerably on this task. The new becomes the familiar and this releases attentional capacity that the child can employ in further cognitive adventures, exercising his or her unceasing inquisitiveness, hypothesis-formation skills and unquenchable interest in others. Once the learner has a sense of what the adults' actions, including verbal 'actions', are about, he or she has an entry ticket to the game and can begin to participate. The accompanying vocalisation of the adult, i.e. the talk, is understood by the child as being intended for being heard, as an integral part of the activity that will contribute. Tomasello states:

We may then say that linguistic symbols are social conventions for inducing others to construe, or take a perspective on, some experiential situation. ... On the one hand the perspectival nature of language would seem to present the child with great difficulties involving referential indeterminacy and the like, but on the other hand perspectives contrast with each other—indeed constraining each other—and so make the problems a bit more manageable. p. 118-119

The key notion of 'perspectival' unites a range of theorists. As postulated by Tomasello, it is hard-wired into the learning mechanism itself, and therefore it offers some explanation of the problem of language and truth, of the world as it is as opposed to the world as it is perceived, and to realism and constructivism. Learning a language is not just, to parody Augustine's description, a game of perceive and name.

**Literacy and Cultural Evolution; forces that shape**

If we accept that the ratchet effect is adequate to explain cultural evolution, then a number of sets of forces will mutually guide and constrain the development of any artefact as it moves across generations.

1) The social function(s) of that artefact, with all the different and sometimes competing roles it is expected to fulfil, will be a powerful adjudicating force for all possible changes, limiting the excessive attention to one aspect (say, aesthetics) at
the expense of another (say, ease of production). Humans will vote with their usage, as to speak.

2) The capacities inherent in the matter and form of the artefact. That is, nothing can perform outside the limits of its physical capabilities. A rock will be very useful for activities that call on hardness but will be of no use when flammability is required, and the accumulation of human knowledge is partly about knowing the capacities of all things in the natural world.

3) Its transmission to the next generation. One might imagine that there are many things such as knowledges and technologies that are learnable by each successive generation, and that some are learnable by everyone (to speak) and others not (to sing opera), and some learnable when young (to tie a shoe lace), and others not (to drive a car). Other things, such as athletic prowess are non-transmissible.

So, the functional improvement of the hammer would be implicitly or explicitly a goal of every generation but the design parameters interact with each other, and thus moderate degree and rate of change - it cannot be too heavy, too hard to produce, too fragile, too expensive, too dangerous or too hard to use. The ongoing shaping of artifacts in human societies is a tension of different capacities with different constraints across a range of levels, and it is not until we see what a society produced do we know what were the factors they were willing to forgo and which not.

**The Sociogenesis of Literacy**

Turning now to literacy we can start to look closely at the sociogenetic forces that shaped it into its current form. Within the sociogenetic explanation should lie fuller relative understandings of the Social Laws of Literacy, and better understandings of the social placing of text, for although this has not been ostensibly articulated up until this point, the success of oral language stands alongside the literacy failure as a harsh reminder and stern critic of human efforts. Many definitions of literacy are like the one Nicholson gives us, - it is merely speech written down (see p.35, *Reading the Writing on the Wall*). The alternative would be that it is it a symbolic communication in its own right, using vision
Above are some paragraphs from Stanovich, *Progress in Understanding Reading*. We read that the argument arises out of a teaching problematic, not an ontogenetic exploration which is why so much of the argumentation is, like claims for the value of literacy, so poorly conceived. As almost everywhere where the debate lines are drawn, each 'side', it seems, refusing rather than being unable to see the point that lies behind the sometimes overstated and clumsily expressed positions of the other 'side'. Because of the debate dynamic, exaggeration becomes part of the game. The addition of subjective evaluations such as 'elegant' and 'erudite' above do not improve the search for collaborative ground.

In conclusion, the persistent claim behind the clamouring words is that a full *sociogenesis* of the literacy discourse is very badly needed to clean up the vocabulary and lay out the history. For instance, can it be true that
'speech is easy and reading hard?' Is speech at its best easy? Is reading at its most familiar hard? What are the definitions of easy and hard being used. What are obvious facts?

The alphabetic rendering of speech was slow to come about argues Nicholson quoting Liberman, because the automaticity of the operation of many perceptual aspects of language eg the sounds, places them just below conscious recognition. This is a good point and will need recognition later, but does it justify Liberman's conclusion ...

The large time gap between the evolution of speech and the discovery of writing indicates that the ability to speak is a product of human evolution, whereas the creation of a writing system was an invention just as radio, television and computers are inventions. p.36

But there could be other reasons why writing seemed so slow to develop. There may have been no suitable surfaces for easy inscription and reproduction of inscription upon, or population densities not great enough to produce the quantity of social interaction necessary to develop a need for the more enduring decontextualisation of print. Or oral language too underdeveloped syntactically to endure the translocation into the syntax and registers required by print. There is no way of sorting this, and opposing answers could be forced from the ambiguities of the existing phenomena, but as one spends more time thinking about and working with these two very popular and successful language artefacts comparisons of this sort seem wrongheaded.

Speaking and writing, listening and reading are such very different activities and each has taken up its range of places and uses in the social system marketplace located in such different social locations over historical time have adjusted and adapted to accommodate each other. They are different entities, that have different social roles, in particular that relate differently to technology. But first let us make this point; logically it is possible to have communication using eyes alone, and also using ears alone. Much must depend on what else you want to be doing at the time of communicating. With sound communication the sight and the hands are freed up to participate in other ways. With visual communication, it depends
where the encoding has occurred - sign language, for instance is a very different encoding from print. But both tie up vision, leaving only hearing (and smelling etc) open to outside stimulus. But psychology rather than logic governs human action and the purity of any one perceptual mode is of no consequence if there are advantages to be had by mixing perceptual modes.

Thus the favoured visual symbolic system currently in favour in the world-alphabetic print on paper or screen - for language is one that is largely parasitic on the pre-existing spoken language system. The general design of alphabetic print is a closed set of independently existing visually accessible conventionally agreed symbols that can be combined in many different ways in small groups to medium sized groups to form semantically viable units called a 'word'. Within words these symbols will individually or in clusters partially represent the phonology of speech. What would make speech seem biological and print cultural?

Technologies Of Communication - Oral Language

The term 'oral language', with the derivation - oris, Latin for mouth, and lingua, Latin for tongue - is overkill or redundant in that simply 'language' should do, there being no reason to suspect that tongues are anywhere else than in mouths. However the term 'language', although in the first instance taking its name from the quick supple lifts and curls of the tongue, (synecdoche - part names the whole) has come to also signify other literacy modes, such as written language, and thus needs the conditioner, 'oral'. Within the words themselves, oral language seems to have some primacy.

This must be in part due to this unique quality -- social pressures, kinship relationships and complex social groupings and organisations have through the processes of evolution ensured that the body's sound-receptive organs - ears - and the body's most able sound-productive organs - mouth and tongue and larynx - have become very closely attuned, forming a technologically light-weight, fully portable and intergrated, constant feedback hypothesis-producing system, all under the one executive control, the brain, even before the development of actual speech. With speech, the stimulus is both humanly produced and humanly received.
1) In **speaking**, the patterns of vibration in the air set alight by configurations of mouth and throat and tongue, together with the wave profiles impressed on the passing air by the larynx carry the information. Straight off the body into the soft air, and holding their buckled compressions as they radiate out across the immediate space, the sound waves travel and bounce around and over and behind until they weaken and die. Some find their way toward a curled and furled crescent that funnels them deep into the dark passages of the ear, finally depositing their tiny energies onto the elastic drum which transmits the tiny pummellings and punchings into the inner ear.

Travelling very fast, the speed of sound, but not as fast as the currents that pass through the human nervous system itself, the upshot is an exchange of information that becomes a form of communication that is very interactive, used readily and irresistibly for chatter, quip and lively exchange. With no major muscle groups involved, it is quick and easy to **produce** when speaking and quick and easy to **process** when listening. It resembles the speed of thought itself, with a comparable sense of weightlessness, as the moving air is packed and curved in small trembling gusts and vibrating currents, in the conveyance of our words. Air being so insubstantial as to be virtually unnoticeable, the muscle sets in the throat and larynx, the tongue and the mouth meet very little resistance, and can carry out their functioning with very little impact to the rest of the body, which is left to go about other business. Eating has to be timed with talking, as does breathing. But the hands and eyes are free. At the same time, by being channelled through the taut apertures of the larynx, quite noticeable changes in sound are produced by these muscle sets, enabling considerable amounts of information to be encoded into the medium.

2) Yet **hearing**, which is essentially **touch** (which will also account for another communicative system, Braille) is also keenly developed, with a wide range of receptivity values, a few easily deciphered and easily combined cross-matched dimensions (pitch, loudness), and multidirectional movement through space to the ears. Receptivity is through touch direct on to the body - a touch usually too light to be felt through any other receptor, minimising interference factors and
circumventing the need to have physical closure (we do not have ear-lids) to the system that can remain on alert even when sleeping. Processing capacity in the brain is directed to deconstructing the pressure messages but this does not seem excessive.

**Domains of Excellence/Outstanding Characteristics**

Speech is, then a communicative mode that has dominance and excellence in these contexts.

- Highly visible events, publicly accessible.
- Easily learned, partly because of high degrees of integration with activity on language games.
- Spontaneous/musical.
- User friendly.
- Robust, and flexible, able to withstand on going changes and wide ranges of variation in pronunciation, syntax.
- Locally adaptive.
- Highly interactive, designed for turntaking, even interruption.
- Self-effacing. Pragmatic.
- The dialectic.

* **Technologies Of Communication- Visual Language**

A) Signed Language

To provide a more subtle description we need first of all to look at what the parallel to speaking/hearing would be in the visual medium. Sign language is probably the closest we have. If one was reading sign language, the dynamics are somewhat the same as with oral language. The body moves. The arms and hands and fingers adopt a position and wait. Visual activity during this short stabilisation of movements, consists of millions of photons bringing to the retina the situation of surfaces that can be then read as a message. Again, directly off the body, and using technological equipment and expertise that exists inside the body-limits. The musculature movements are huge compared to speech, and will influence if not dominate any activity that attempts to be concurrent with signing.

But this time it is the visual receptive system. **Vision**, with its richness of speed-of-light, clear, and clean, electromagnetic input data from across tiny or huge distances in straight lines with almost no corruption, and dual colour-
sensitive reception system with quick stop-start facilities, built in pre-checking and extra-space perceiving qualities, dominates perception, demanding and receiving large portions of associated or dedicated cognitive energy. The visual information forms the structure of the world and in some ways it is too powerful a sense to be used for language.

In *signing* the eyes will be totally consumed with attention to the signing, as light, unlike sound, is unidirectional, and the distance between the signer and the signee is restricted by focal limitations - the eye is constructed to expand its field of view rather than maintain focus as distances increase. Any object in the way and the system breaks down.

There may have been a time when signing was culturally in competition with speaking - it still is, in a way, lying in store as an alternative should it be favoured by the conditions one day. It has very clear advantages in some circumstances - when one does not want to be heard and obviously for the deaf. But the capacities of the physical features of the world impose restrictions such that the ratchet effect has not gripped it in general and speaking has gained dominance.

B) Written Language

Turning to the other visual communicative system, we have to more carefully separate out the production from the reception.

*Reading*, in its mature forms, can easily match the speed of talk, because the tiny sets of muscles that control the movement of the eyeball and thus the exact square millimetre on the page from which information is being extracted are so fast yet *accurate*, and the other technologies of reading are very fast cognitive processing activities, namely the quite large processing component as the visual information has to be seen not for what it is but as something else. Unlike hearing where the pace is set by the speaker, in reading the reader sets the pace.

But not so *writing*, the production of enduring visual symbols, which in a manner of speaking lets the side down and denies visual forms of language the conversational, contextualised interchange and capacity enjoyed by speech. With writing the picture begins to emerge a little more clearly. In writing that we see the essential elements that have made print so successful. Firstly it employs
external objects - the body is not enough - and their associated technologies, and even at its simplest makes relatively heavy demands on the external cultural technology and material resources of a society. This is brought about because its achievement is to transform a shortlived temporary encodement - a movement - into a more stable enduring encodement - a visual form.

The durability of visual forms must have been clear from the very first drawings made by humanoids. The pursuit of a technology to incorporate flickering language into a true footprint is the history of the technology of print - by 'pursuit' is meant a strong receptivity on behalf of the ratchet effect. The computer screen must be a contender for the best yet as a surface onto which spaceless time can be turned into timeless space. But durability proved to be a prize hard to win as nothing 'naturally' occurring fulfilled all that was required of the product and that peculiar elasticity that would allow its surfaces to receive and visibly display in hold position the imprint was elusive until the production of paper, which is still an expensive and resource hungry product. The writing materials must have been a drawback - so hard to use, clumsy, and messy. The dependence on technology has meant that print has had a long association with a number of industries that today are quite large - clay and wax tablets, papyrus and paper, ink and book publishing.

But within the first realisations that image/meaning could, if one took a little time, be taken off the body and laid out on another surface, art, and literacy were born. Time spent carefully extricating from the hands and placing onto a wall a meaning, is then counterbalanced by the reflection time and care needed to retrieve the image/meaning.

In reading print then there is a different dynamic to listening. Looking at print is like looking into a mirror that represents the entire arena of human meaning and just this one perspectival aspect of it. It isolates just one aspect of oneself and the reader's task is to re-cognise the reflected form. This time the message is not read directly off-the-body itself at all. In a two step movement, the message is taken 'off the body' and traced via some deliberately manipulated shapes onto some suitably elastic surface in the environment, where it lies with
heart stopping vulnerability, unsteadily poised to leap back into the arms of human forms of life from which it has been so laboriously disinterred the minute any eye alights upon it. That at any chosen time later and as frequently as desired, the eye can revisit. The message bounces back the instant it is touched by the trigger of sight. Sometimes as one reads one can feel the bounce along the line of sight.

This is the crucial *stabilisation of the signal* and thus the message, which makes reading a worthy competitor for listening, and it is achieved by this crucial technologically 'beyond the body and out in the social world' middle step.

But it implies that to process print some extra work is needed to handle the transformation. As in its production print required the integration of movement and visual information to produce letters, in reading this amalgam must converted back to a semantic identity, possibly mediated by sound(movement). Processing in reading is very fast, and the only muscles involved are primarily associated with eye movement, but the steps of mediation required as payoff for endurance would seem to make it more effortful. The upshot is that while reading, concentration is absorbed, and the brain as a processing unit functioning closer to the limits of its control. This makes it much more likely that within the diversity of a population, some individuals will find the task difficult because they have genetic dispositions towards apportioning cognitive capacity toward other functions, and have internal resistance to the sustained highly focused, single attentiveness demanded by reading. For instance consider the general work of the eyes and to what extent their spectrum of functioning is curtailed and subjugated by reading. It the evolution of the eye, there were no experiences that would have required such lengthy intense periods of only the smallest of musculature contractions and release, with no shift in focal distance.

The act of reading is like coming under a spell. The cognitive resources are held captive, attention distracted and critical faculties put into shadow; the mind prised open and the thoughts of others given ease of entry. It might be said that when the processing demands are high, the screening of the semantic content will be low. This must contribute to the reputation print has acquired for being so very believable.
Permanent speech

The same end effect of stabilisation is achieved if one audiotapes speech, but with very different consequences. The technology barrier is very high, much higher than print, and yet the end product not so convenient, sturdy, flexible, portable etc. So while it seems that a sound-based communication system brings many, many benefits partly derived from the medium it uses, lightweight and portable, there are other benefits to be had by using a more thoroughly symbolic system with static signalling properties, achievable visually, because vision is space (whereas sound is time therefore never still).

Domains of Excellence/Outstanding Characteristics

Written language takes up communicative roles in a range of other social locations and surfaces.
- It is more private and secretive, internally monitored rather than externally monitored.
- Storage of information.
- It is more difficult to learn, being in general considerably more decontextualised than oral language. That is, oral language can be as decontextualised as written language, as when one talks about things that happened in another land in another time, but it lends itself very well to the contextualisations that seem so conducive to learning and seems to be so easily learnable because of this. Written language can be contextualised, eg kitset assembly plans, but its special quality of permanence means that it becomes most productive when decontextualisation has to be worked with.
- It is more difficult to learn because it is non-engaging and non-participatory. Conversations are possible in print but are almost entirely nonexistent at the level learners might need. At a more advanced level, letters and emails are probably the equivalent.
- Permanent, enduring, trustworthy.
- It is firmly inflexible at every level of language use, - grammatically pedantic, nearly Fascist in its obsession with spelling and coercive in its fonts and formats.
- It resists localisation, thus must always alienate those in small pockets.
- It monolithically forbids interruption and turns dialectic into a rehearsal.
- User unfriendly - in production, laborious; in storage, cumbersome; in retrieval, demanding.
- Hubris-high, myth maintenance-high, sense of own importance-high.
- Mediated, distanced, removed
Another set of differences as follows built on the major split between time and space. As we inhabit both but each differently having a communicative form for each makes sense. It would be logically possible to have two separate communicative systems running on different principles of analysis and partitioning, but what has historically taken hold in the literacy of the European countries is an alphabetic system, where information about the sound is contained in the visual units and vice versa.

**Summary**

In a manner of speaking, reading and speaking cannot really be compared in this way (see table below). They have very different technological bases, which gives then very different uses and thus means they have quite different social niches. But neither will be fully exhausted by the niche they have historically come to occupy. Each can do some of the work of the other. They occupy mutually negotiated logically appropriate different regions in the overall territory of language. They also occupy very different complexities in terms of their inherent capacities.

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**Originating Impetus**

What have been the social forces in the development of literacy. That it was developed for mostly rather mundane reasons, as Nicholson reports Daniels as saying (page 35) is a theory that fits well with the emphasis we have taken up here on the embeddedness of language in the ongoing affairs of making a living - print,
with the huge advantage of permanence greatly facilitates commercialism by the recording of exchange of goods and ownership of property, and the like. It is not hard to imagine making great effort and persevering at the physical difficulties and social resistances when the reward is one of recording exactly what you bought or precisely what you sold. Most probably the enduring visual symbol would hold a religious/spiritual/aesthetic fascination as well.

**The Social Evolution of Reading**

As we build up this description of language and try to clarify similarities and differences between speech and print, we can see how the idea that speech is 'natural' whereas print is an invention and therefore 'unnatural' arose. Talking, as a language mode, integrates very well with the approaches to language espoused by Tomasello and Wittgenstein - one can talk while engaging both physically and cognitively in many other of life's lively activities, eg, cooking, playing sport, building a boat. Wittgenstein is interesting in that the language game prescribes the integration of talking with doing - yet reading print leaves almost no room physically or cognitively for other activity to occur. The form of writing he chooses is the least sustained yet still have some message.

The differences between speech and print are not usefully captured by gloss and generalisation such as children learn to talk 'naturally' but have to be 'taught' to read, or that speech is instinctual but reading is not. They are both blendings of previously existing instincts that have found outlets amongst new technology. But they are certainly very different modes and given the particular roles adopted by print in the overall realm of communications, its deeper need for technology, its greater contribution to capitalist production and its inherent challenge to blend different sensory sources in order to still time and its more dominating presence in the world it will be the more intellectually demanding of the two -- a reality captured at almost every stage, - design, production (writing), and processing (reading).
The Social Laws of Literacy

1. Literacy learning is highly valued
2. The investment in its occurrence is heavy
3. We do not meet our targets
4. Research is seen as having the answers
5. But this proves in the end and endlessly not to be so

A body of understandings can be built around the laws. Simple as they seem, each represents the gathering of a number of strands of thought. For instance, the valuing of literacy is a partly a complex blend of honourable (humanistic) and dishonourable (personal profit, political power) hopes, partly a default attitude, partly a tautology, partly performative, and partly a complete irrelevancy. Graff frequently comments on the contradictory nature of much of what is said about literacy, eg, contrary to the 'myth', countries are often performing badly in periods of high literacy rates; or illiterate adults often hold important social positions.

That it is a powerful form of cognitive disciplining, willingly self-imposed and rife with the contradictions of power is beyond doubt. It is a binding of what we have seen from Heidegger is essentially freedom-dependent, namely cognition. This remains to be explored as part of the ongoing work of freedom. But whereas speech is too close and too foundational to be really seen as a human cultural achievement, literacy is not, and because achievement is so central to self esteem at every level, investment is heavy.

There is one point about law three which is interesting. We do not succeed in our aims of literacy achievement. This location is where there is a need for a language form that everyone can use, creating a universal discourse with free right of entry to all who would call themselves human. It is an issue of diversity, as we saw in Chapter One and Two.

Diversity and Sociogenesis

Each human comes with a unique set of genes that will, by and large and in the main, blueprint his or her gross physical and mental development. Genes set the upper and lower limits, so to speak, of each individual's capacity or ability in all areas of perception, coordination and cognition. Thanks to the ratchet effect, modern societies abound with all sorts of culturally developed learnable skill-
clusters, from the very simple like walking or doing up one's shoe laces to the complex like reading, playing the violin, and driving a car. All vary in the different proportions of perception, cognition, motor strength and coordination required. There are some social skills that one considers in a general sense require such a low level of perceptual, cognitive and motor skills that everyone will master them, such as walking, dressing oneself, hitting a ball with a bat perhaps. Other sets of abilities one expects to be quite rare, such as in the physical realm, musical and sport geniuses. In the course of growing up, a human child touches upon many different artefacts that he or she could adopt and moves into some and not others as suits. As long as some pick up on the opportunity to develop, say Morris dancing, then the ratchet effect will keep alive howbeit at a low frequency, through the population.

The processes of social evolution will have in part shaped a skill towards the better fulfilment of its social role, and constrained any tendency it had to spill over and cease to play its part well. So, with driving a car; social evolution acts to make sure that this remains within the reach of most able-bodied people over 17 years old, and that roads are not too dangerous and car too fast or unsafe. With oral language, there are a multitude of social pressures to preserve its wide learnability and keep it from becoming too rigid, and to maintaining a easily learned phonology. If we consider literacy however, there is nothing in its social development which suggests that it was ever under pressure to be universally learnable, unlike oral language. The history of literacy has been a history of groups and sectors, clusters around production units such as manuscript production. According to Graff:

In earliest times, literacy was highly restricted and a relatively unprestigious craft; it carried little of the association with wealth power and status and knowledge it later acquired. It was a tool, useful, as it would remain, first for the needs of state and bureaucracy, church and trade. p. 25

Those that had influence over its development at any time are likely to have never conceived of universal literacy. That it was useful for social functioning there is no question, but like virtuoso violin playing, or mechanical expertise, it can perform
its functions very well without everybody having to know its secret workings. As with pure maths or playing virtuoso violin the ratchet effect merely ensures that anything learnable by even only a small percentage of any diverse population can remain. It functions at the level of the population, not the individual, and for each 'skill conglomerate' a percentage of population that can learn it to what degree of competency can be roughly estimated.

Literacy has never been, according to Graff, as influential as useful or significant as it is has been made out to be. But in an act of bad faith it has been canonised by fiat. **Compulsory mass schooling and its commitment to universal literacy does not match the diversity across the human population.** And individuals suffer.

Diversity within a population is the key factor in the possibility of evolution occurring, and is the major reason behind sexual as opposed to asexual reproduction. Oral language development, always close to locality through the social and environmental intimacy or as Heidegger would put it, homeliness, of the learning context, broke itself across the expanding populations of humans. How will literacy respond?

Because there is such inexactitude even amongst the professionals as to what terms such as 'instruction' mean, it is impossible to say how many children would learn to read without any instruction. The classroom offers a 'rough' instruction that is clearly enough for many children. Focussed individual instruction, as practiced by Reading Recovery, can, it seems bring almost 90 of children into literacy, at least at this early level (see website). But this should have been known before legislating it into law, and the great debate has had no other role than that of a major distraction.

That something dully jars about the whole literacy issue is clear when illiteracy is visited in the essay that follows.

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Literate BEINGS and BEING Illiterate

The Reader
Translated by Carol Brown Janeway

Bernhard Schlink

"For generations to come, people will be reading and marvelling over Bernhard Schlink's The Reader."
Evening Standard
PART ONE

Der Vorleser/The Reader

Introduction

The following essay is intended to provide a magnifying lens through which to look very closely at reading and writing as social phenomena. It is in essay-form because there are very many such stories to be told, and is built around a recent novel, *The Reader*, by Bernhard Schlink, translated by Carol Brown Janeway.

Trans-lating

According to Louis Begley in *The New York Review of Books*, Sunday, 31 March 2002, the German term *Das Vorleser*, which denotes someone who reads aloud to others, has no exact equivalent in English. This seems such an interesting phenomenon - having no 'exact' equivalent - because on the face of it all languages merely represent, with impartiality and total lack of influence, the world. There is only one world, the world we all share, with its rocks and trees, rivers and oceans, despite there being different languages. Different languages are not different in terms of what they talk about – humans going about their businesses of living – but are different merely in terms of which the subset of the set of all the sounds humanly possible have become caught in their functioning.

It may not be so simple, for here we see that quite a straightforward word in one language, German, has no equal in even such a relatively close language as English. Perhaps reading out loud is a particularly German occupation? – that would help explain it. Or is it to do with the particular way German makes nouns?
Or just an accidental feature, an aberration. And what a headache for the translators and everyone else involved in trying to publish an English edition of German author Bernard Schlink’s 1995 first book bearing the title *Das Vorleser*.

**Meditating**

The book has rich, detailed fictional descriptions of the workings of literacy and illiteracy in real action and as integrated within peoples’ lives, and if thought about could lead to deeper understandings or potential understandings of our question of learning to read and write. Because it is not a book about literacy per se, therefore not about becoming or being literate, it lays out its literary themes in very naturalistic and incidental ways; and it is set in historical times not too far from those inhabited and discussed by Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Foucault. That is, it is set in post-war Germany, and ruminates on what it is to be a human being in this place at this time.

In his address in honour of German composer Conradin Kreutzer (found in *Discourse on Thinking*, published 1966 by Harper and Row, New York) Heidegger used the term ‘meditating’ to describe a kind of reflective, contemplative thinking that stills inward rather than speeds outward (my words), that questions in order to halt the inertial onward/upward progress-hungry march of this or that practice, or break apart habitual, result-driven ways of looking at the world. The aim is to restore our more fundamental powers of decision-making at the level of the more fundamental issues and give more fully thought out foundation to our efforts.

It is intently not an attempt to improve never-endingly the efficiency of our technology – there is a different type of thinking that performs this function which Heidegger has termed ‘calculative’ thinking, and it is this thinking that to some extent has taken possession of the mind of modern (European) man and become the hallmark of his world conquering activities. Calculative thinking has the power to become its own end, or to look as if it has, and forget that it is always in the
service of something else, some other goal; by contrast, meditative thinking has no
direct purpose, and is utterly non-pragmatic.

Meditative thinking is in general always seeking "the meaning that reigns in
everything that is" (p, 46); or, with respect to technology, "the ground that has
enabled modern technology to discover and set free new energies in nature?" (p,
50). It is about our activities having meanings and grounds. Without a sense of the
grounds or the meanings modern man for all his expansive knowledge and
capabilities is threatened with a loss of rootedness, that is, a loss of autochthony.
Heidegger asks,

"What really is happening in our age? By what is it characterised?" (p, 49)

We find out what it is about, we find out what is really happening when we stop
and actually go above and beyond the hype and advertisement, or the standard
practised explanation, or the jingo and the slogan; beyond such statements such as
"Science is a road to a happier human life." (p. 50) We must ask and we must
ponder; and as Heidegger puts it, do it "here, on this patch of home ground; now, in
the present hour of history." (p. 4)

To meditate on learning to read and write is to ask the same questions with
respect to literacy. Instead of simply how can we improve our practice with
respect to teaching literacy or literacy instruction we might ask, 'What is really
going on' behind the worthy words and heady claims that sometimes accompany
the teaching of reading and writing, behind the activities and buildings and books;
and behind the satisfactions and annoyances. What is going on behind what we
have called the Social Laws of Literacy? How well do we know why we do it over
and above the need we create for ourselves by putting so much in print – like
producing only long-stemmed glasses and then claiming we have a need for straws.
Of course we have a need for straws and all the learning that would go along with
them, because we have supplied ourselves exclusively long-stemmed glasses.
Heidegger leaves us with some important lines of questioning here. To what extent is learning to read and write associated with rootlessness? Is there a widespread belief that literacy leads like science to a happier life? How prevalent is calculative thinking in the discourse of literacy acquisition? Has it come to dominate, so that through our research and investigation we seek to better understand many aspects of literacy processes and how to facilitate their transmission only so that we can do it faster? Then, in terms of meaning; ------- meaning, what is it? What does it mean to learn to write and read; what does it mean to an individual or to a group, or to a society or a form of life.

Back to Translations

It is a nagging question; how exact can a translation ever be? Is Das Vorleser when translated the 'same' book. Possibly not. How many words do have these 'exact' equivalents in another language, and how many have only inexact, and how many no translatable equivalent? All the way through the act of translation one imagines that there will be a multitude of shifts and adjustments and dissimilarities as the translators slowly and steadily, in small processed increments and word choice by word choice, attempt to trans- late/relocate the story, the plot, the book complete, not just from out of one language into another but one culture -within- the-language to another.

When the United States edition was published it had been given the title The Reader. When taken at face value, both major characters, Michael Berg and Hanna Schmitz, could potentially qualify as the person to whom the title referred, on the grounds that for both reading has great significance. One might eventually settle on Michael because his reading occupies far more of the book than Hanna's, even though her reading is more profound. In the German edition, however, it is clear that there is only one character to whom the title Das Vorleser can be bestowed, and that is Michael. He reads out loud in two potent and stressful periods of his life;
periods stressful and potent for both him and the person who listens to him read (does German have a word for this person who is listening not just to speech but to read-out-loud speech?). The act of reading out loud has both a clear purpose and many consequences both for Michael and his ‘other’, and the act of reading out loud becomes an aspect of himself, a feature, that is part of his attempt to understand and solve his plight.

The English word reader would seem to bring to mind first and foremost silent reading. But Das Vorleser is necessarily out loud, and necessarily reading that a) partly or wholly needs another person, and b) at the interface of the two great perceptual media through which language is actualised: speaking/listening and writing/reading. This does not quite change the book in the core story it tells but it does in its aesthetics and the metaphors and images available to explore and develop human meanings and ways of being.

**Reading and Speaking – a short diversion**

Simplifying an earlier discussion, reading and speaking can most simply distinguished from each other by perceptual mode; eyes-vision-reading and ears-hearing-listening. Related to this is the dimension they occupy; *space* for reading because it is in principle permanent and enduring in time, but *time* for speaking, which like music has the great quality of passing across space and distance. The words ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ mean different things in reading (much to the temporary confusion of many a young learner) and in speaking; in speaking the beginning is what you said earlier, which can be repeated but never returned to, whereas in reading it’s a point in space that you can indeed return to.

Reading and speaking are not so easily separated in actual use and are mutually implicated in each other in many situations. Information will pass back and forth, as the two language modes feed on each other, reflecting, extending, borrowing. This is particularly true in alphabetic languages like English,
where information about how the language sounds is contained in how the language looks in print. Because of this, and because learning to speak English generally precedes learning to read, reading is cast as the more dependent of the two. However, it need not necessarily be so.

**Literacy**

However, both titles, *The Reader* and *Das Vorleser*, place literacy squarely at centre stage and as we shall see later, it is a powerful move. It is not the central theme of the book but it brings suspense, sophistication and moral complexity to the plot. *Das Vorleser* is like a window display of the placement of literacy across a social system and the individuals within it.

Its central theme is in fact the historical and ethical problem of what Schlink calls in the book ‘second generation’ Germans. These are Germans too young or born too late to be part of World War II but who are in various kinship relationships with those that were. Although innocent themselves they are nonetheless yet implicated through familial kinship, and are unable to morally condemn the previous generation – their aunts, their grandfathers, their second cousins - without huge personal and emotional costs and consequences. Into this theme is added literacy/illiteracy, which smudges the clear division into right and wrong and demands a more detailed or advanced set of ethical or moral codes based on sociological explanations for behaviour.

Translated by Carol Brown Janeway, *The Reader*, again according to Louis Begley, “had the biggest international success of any German novel since *The Tin Drum.*” As an aside, it was one of a number of books given instant bestseller status by being selected by a very popular talk show host, Oprah Winfrey, as one of her Book Club recommendations.
The book is in three parts. Part One describes the affair between Hanna and Michael. Louis Begley, New York Times book review, informatively if rather cynically, puts it like this:

Not long after the war, one may suppose in 1960 or thereabouts, in a small West German city, a fifteen-year-old boy, Michael Berg, born into a solidly bourgeois and anti-Nazi family (the father, a university professor of philosophy, was chased from his job for undertaking to give a lecture on Spinoza), is seduced by a good-looking woman in her thirties, one Hanna Schmitz, who happens to be a streetcar conductor. She is a wonderfully maternal lover, although her temper can flash in one moment of anger, she hits him so hard on the face with a leather belt that his lip splits.

We can flesh this out a little. Michael was walking home from school, feeling ill for the third day running - not surprising given that, as was discovered later, he had just caught hepatitis. He is suddenly struck with a completely overwhelming urge to vomit and despite the enormous shame and desperate attempts to swallow back, was sick, in the street. A woman came to his rescue, taking him right out of the public view into the courtyard and cleaning him up; and then sluicing the vomit outside away down the gutter.

When she sees he is crying she hugs him and something happens. He feels her breasts against his chest and he then ‘smelled the sourness of my own breath
and felt a sudden sweat as she held me, and didn’t know where to look. I stopped crying.’ (p. 3) He crosses some boundary from boyhood to manhood.

The woman was Hanna. She was thirty-six with ash blond hair and a “broad-planed strong womanly face.” Time passes, from autumn to spring, and when he is almost well but not yet back at school, Michael is drawn to go and see her and thank her for her kindness, which he does - but in doing so he is captivated, and has to flee, having just been sprung as he watched Frau Schmitz put on her stockings.

On the second visit, he helps shift some coal, gets dirty, is offered a bath and with the inevitable nakedness concomitant with having a bath, coupled with Frau Schmitz’s insistence that she dry him off with a towel, the affair kicks off. The pattern developed - he visits her at her flat, it seems like everyday, skipping school if he has to to fit in with her hours, and they make love. All is well, given the circumstances. Happiness abounds.

Not quite. At times, she behaves in ways that baffle him. There are events that are a little unusual and many that Michael cannot understand.

For instance for several days she is merely ‘the woman’ and when he asks her name she eyes him suspiciously. When he tells her he is still at school, but missing lessons to see her she reacts instantly;

‘Out.’ She threw back the blanket. ‘Get out of my bed. And if you don’t want to do your work, don’t come back. (p. 33)

and dismisses him.

The next day she asks him what he is learning in school and he tells her about Homer, Cicero and Hemingway’s Old Man and the Sea. She then asks about, and he goes on to tell her about, the German he is reading and at that point she asks him to read it to her, because, she says, he has such a nice voice. He tries to kiss her but she pulls away, saying,
Once, to surprise her, make her happy, he got up at four in the morning and caught the tram on her route. He especially got on the second car as there would be more privacy and perhaps they could sneak a kiss, but Hanna ignored him completely, leaving him trapped in the second car by himself, and later chastised him for spying on her. And there was the incident over the note which we will describe in full detail a little later, that occurred when they were on holiday together. He slips out early one morning to surprise her with a rose and some breakfast as she wakes. He leaves a note to explain his absence. But when he returns there is no note and Hanna is white with rage. She hits him, as Begley says, and splits his lip. They of course make up but to him it is a puzzle that she behaved so strangely.

He found that he did not talk about her to his friends and at one point in the book she feels to him like a ‘secret illness.’ He has no idea what she does when they are not together; she always evades his questions. And they never unexpectedly meet, except once, the last time in their relationship: Hanna had been moody and touchy, snapping at him when he asks her what is wrong; then she turns into her old self and they make love; then she says, “go to your friends.” (p. 79); which he does, going to the pool and becoming absorbed with “homework and volleyball and gossip and flirting.” (p. 79). Unexpectedly for Michael she turns up at the pool about 20 to 30 metres away, looking at him, only to then disappear very quickly as Michael stood up.

The next day she is gone, without trace or warning, and the only information he can find out is that the Tram Company had just two weeks earlier offered her training to become a driver. She has thrown it all away. Michael goes into mourning.
II – Retelling

Some years later, around 1965, Michael is a law student. This is Part Two. He is attending as part of a seminar on retrospective war crimes a set of trials of former camp guards, all of whom are women and one of which is Hanna. The charges include the murder of a group of Jewish women concentration camp prisoners. The women were nearly all burned alive when the church in which they being held in transit from a satellite camp near Cracow to Auschwitz was accidentally bombed and caught fire, and they were not able to escape as the guards made no attempt to unlock the doors.

Michael hears Hanna's name called and sees her stand up and step forward. Of course he recognises her. He reports to himself and the reader that he feels nothing, nothing at all. As the trial proceeds he is again perplexed by her responses to some situations.

The trial could not have gone worse for Hanna. She had already made a bad impression on the court during the preliminary questioning. After the indictment had been read out, she spoke up to say that something was incorrect: the presiding judge rebuked her irritably, telling her that she had had plenty of time to study the charges and register objections; now the trial was in progress and the evidence would show what was correct and incorrect. When the presiding judge proposed at the beginning of the actual testimony that the German version of the daughter's book not be read into the record as it had been prepared for publication by a German publisher and the manuscript made available to all participants in the trial, Hanna had to be argued into it by her lawyer under the exasperated eyes of the judge. She did not willingly agree. She also did not want to acknowledge that she had admitted, in an earlier deposition, to having had the keys to the church. She had not had the key. No one had had the key, there had not been any one key to the church, but several keys to several different doors, and they had all only worked from the outside. But the court record of her examination by the judge, approved and signed by her, read differently, and the fact that she asked why they were trying to pin something on her did not make matters any better. She didn't ask loudly or arrogantly, but with determination, and, I think, in visible and audible confusion and helplessness, and the fact that she spoke of others trying to pin something on her did not mean she was claiming any miscarriage of justice by the court. But the presiding judge interpreted it that way and responded sharply. Hanna's
lawyer leapt to his feet and let loose, overeagerly; he was asked whether he was agreeing with his client’s accusations and sat down again.

Hanna wanted to do the right thing. When she thought she was being done an injustice, she contradicted it, and when something was rightly claimed or alleged, she acknowledged it. She contradicted vigorously and admitted willingly, as though her admissions gave her the right to her contradictions or as though, along with her own contradictions, she took on a responsibility to admit what she could not deny. But she had no sense of context, of the rules of the game, of the formulae by which her statements and those of others were totted up into guilt and innocence, conviction and acquittal. (p. 107 – 109)

Later, there is a crucial piece of evidence in the form of report very incriminating to its writer. The other defendants claim Hanna wrote the report. She denies this, but when a handwriting test is proposed to help settle the matter Hanna changes her mind and says that she did write it after all;

A prosecutor suggested that an expert be called to compare the handwriting in the report and the handwriting of the defendant Schmitz.

'My handwriting? You want my handwriting?…'

The judge, the prosecutor, and Hanna’s lawyer discussed whether a person’s handwriting retains its character over more than fifteen years and can be identified. Hanna listened and tried several times to say or ask something, and was increasingly alarmed. Then she said, ‘You don’t have to call an expert. I admit I wrote the report.’ (p. 128)

And the chapter ends.

The two pieces of information needed to help Michael (and the readers) understand Hanna’s actions comes in separate waves, one upon the other. The first wave is that prior to her affair with Michael Hanna had been a member of the Nazi party and a camp guard. This is revealed the moment Michael sees her in the court, and explains so much of her reluctance to talk about her past, her secretiveness and why she has to move on as she is always subject to having to declare herself to the police authorities. But this information does not impress itself upon Michael as a discovery, more as a shock that he had an affair with a criminal. The second wave upon which the first partly rests is that she 1) cannot read nor write and 2) does not
want anyone to know. The book is nearly two thirds on before this is revealed to us, the readers, and it is done so in the form of Michael’s own discovery (as D.J.Enright observes, in a review called Modern Love in The New York Review of Books March 26, 1998, rather late in the day for one so sharp-witted). We discover as he does, as he pieces it together, and this is a revelation, as he goes back over the past and reinterprets the events of their affair.

And thus what we essentially have been reading about is, with respect to Hanna, a study in illiteracy; illiteracy in the face of learning to read and write. The book’s concealing of this fact for so long matches Hanna’s own and it allows us to have seen Hanna and her behaviour as they would be seen by Michael, and to pay attention to them in themselves before diminishing them too quickly into explanation. But once this inner truth is grasped it retrospectively explains the whole array of behaviours that appeared so self-protective, so strange, so recalcitrant, so aggressive, so anti-social and so out of step.

So many things fall into place. She would not have liked seeing him on the tram, spying as it were, on her life and her secrets. Of course there was a note explaining where Michael was that morning on their holiday when she split his lip. Just before she disappeared, she had been offered training to upgrade as a driver, a position that would have involved reading. She left rather than face the truth. It turned out that earlier she had worked at a factory, Siemens, and there again she turned down a promotion because she could not read and write, joined the SS and became a camp guard.

She had ignored the summons to appear in court because she could not read them. She signed the court statements and become committed to acts she never did nor even knew about, rather than say she could not read them. She could not read the ‘daughter’s book’ (this is referred to in the above quote - the daughter was in prison with her mother but unlike her mother, survived and wrote a book about her experiences) so objected in court when it was not going to be read out loud. Her
confusion and helplessness arose because she had not been able to read what the court is assuming she has read, and she has little sense of the 'games' of literacy practised in courtrooms and through the law, and she is not aware of the power of the printed word in the arranging and presenting of ideas and of asserting veracity – and its firmer grip on conceptions of truth.

In the daughter's book it is reported she used to take the weaker girls under her wing and give them better barracks and lesser work. In return the girls, sworn to secrecy, would read to her in the evenings. To the outside world, it looks as though she was taking sexual advantage of those she had power over. Better that she be suspected of being a lesbian than being seen as illiterate.

Here is Michael's analysis:

I could understand that she was ashamed at not being able to read and write, and would rather drive me away than expose herself. I was no stranger to shame as the cause of behaviour that was deviant or defensive, secretive or misleading or hurtful. But could Hanna's shame at being illiterate be sufficient reason for her behaviour at the trial or in the camp? To accept exposure as a criminal for fear of being exposed as an illiterate? To commit crimes to avoid the same thing?

How often I have asked myself these same questions, both then and since. If Hanna's motive was fear of exposure – why opt for horrible exposure as a criminal over the harmless exposure as an illiterate? Or did she believe she could escape exposure altogether? Was she simply stupid? And was she vain enough, and evil enough, to become a criminal simply to avoid exposure?

Both then and since, I have always rejected this. Hanna had not decided in favour of crime. ... Hanna did not weigh exposure as an illiterate against exposure as a criminal. She did not calculate and she did not manoeuvre. She accepted that she would be called to account, and simply did not wish to endure further exposure. She was not pursuing her own interests, but fighting for her own truth, her own justice. Because she had always had to disguise somewhat, and could never be completely candid. It was a pitiful truth and a pitiful justice, but it was hers, and the struggle for it was her struggle.

She must have been completely exhausted. Her struggle was not limited to the trial. She was struggling, as she always had struggled, not to show what she could do but to hide what she couldn't do. A life made up of advances that were actually frantic defeats and victories that were concealed defeats. (pp. 152-153)
Michael has a dilemma about whether to tell the judge her secret, and thereby make a strong claim for some kind of leniency; but he does not. The verdict is guilty and the women are given periods in prison with the exception of Hanna, who is given life imprisonment.

The verdict took hours to read and Michael, sitting in the same place as always, waits to see if Hanna will look at him.

But she looked straight ahead and through everything. A proud, wounded, lost, and infinitely tired look. A look that wished to see nothing and no one. (p. 162)

III - Retelling

In her eighth year of imprisonment Hanna receives a set of cassette tapes, beginning with the *Odyssey*, the homecoming. They were from Michael. Following Hanna's trial he had continued his studies, met Gertrude and married her and had had a daughter, left Gertrude, found a career in one of the least interactive branches of law, namely legal history - and had come to the realisation that his initial belief that the history of law was “a development toward greater beauty and truth, rationality and humanity” was a chimera. Instead, like in the *Odyssey*, the goal legal history achieves is like Ulysses’ homecoming; he is home only to set off again.

The *Odyssey* is the story of motion both purposeful and purposeless, successful and futile. What else is the history of law? (p. 180)

He has trouble reading. When he had tried to read silently, he felt sleepy; but when he put the book down, he became immediately awake. So he reads aloud and finds that only then his eyes stay open.

So I read aloud, and my eyes didn’t close. (p. 181)

Thus he becomes *Das Vorleser*. His eyes stay open, and he finds that reading aloud takes longer, but you are left with clearer more long-lasting ideas. He reads
to Hanna on tape, and the titles he choses, in Michael’s own words, collectively “testify to a great and fundamental confidence in bourgeois culture.” (p. 183) Later when it came to him writing his own books, again it was reading aloud that enabled him to tell if the feeling was right and Hanna was the court of judgement every piece of his writing had to pass through before being sent to the publisher.

Hanna however does not remain the passive recipient of Michael’s neediness. Four years later she writes him a note – as if she had been writing to him for years; by getting the books from the prison library and trying to follow along to his tapes she had taught herself to read and write. Her first note is a complimentary comment on his writing:

Kid, the last story was especially nice. Thank you. Hanna. (p. 185)

Michael is delighted but then as we have come to learn to be so typical of him feels that she has learned too late, or perhaps not;

Or is there no such thing as ‘too late’? and is ‘late’ always better than ‘never’? I don’t know. (p. 187)

She writes to him frequently and delights him with the freshness of her words, but he never writes back. He is Dassel Vorleser and needs to read aloud. By not acknowledging her writing he is never her reader.

The book begins concluding. Hanna’s plea for clemency looks as though it will soon be granted and the prison asks Michael, as her only contact known to them, to visit and to make some arrangements for her in the outside. He makes arrangements, finding her a flat and some employment, but he puts off the visit. When the Governor finally calls a week before she is released he knows he must go.

The visit is a disaster. It is one of the saddest moments in the book, told in Michael’s words as he is the narrator, a position of power and in this case also penance, but it is Hanna who is being heard. All Michael could notice was how ill-fitting her clothes were and how she smelled like an old woman. How DO old
women smell? Were there no boutiques in the prison? Michael is incapable of meeting Hanna human to human.

She sees all this in his face;

I saw the expectation in her face, saw it light up with joy when she recognised me, watched her eyes scan my face as I approached, saw them seek, inquire, then look uncertain and hurt, and saw the light go out of her face. (p. 194)

He goes to pick her up a week later, but early the morning of her release she hanged herself in her cell. The warden takes him to see her cell and there he sees her small library. The library included literature of both the victims and of the perpetrators of the war crimes, poems (mainly about the delight and the yearning for nature), articles and recipes, and newspaper stories about Michael.

There was a tea caddy with a note. It had instructions for some money to be given to the daughter who had survived the burning church; and a brief message to Michael;

'And tell him I said hello'. (p. 205)

Needless to say, the daughter will not accept the money – she does keep the caddy it came in as she had had one like it stolen from her in the camps – but turns back to Michael to ask where he suggests the money should go;

'For illiterates who want to learn to read and write. There must be non-profit organisations, foundations, societies you could give the money to.'

'I'm sure there are,' She thought about it.

'Are there corresponding Jewish organisations?'

'You can depend on it, if there are organisations for something, then there are Jewish organisations for it. Illiteracy, it has to be admitted, is hardly a Jewish problem. (p. 213)
PART TWO

The Meaning of Being Illiterate

An Analysis

Illiteracy; Hanna and Michael

Themes

Das Vorleser, The Reader, is not about literacy. It is about the shifting complexities of moral issues that continue in the wake of World War II in Germany. Within this there will be patterns and allocations of literacy development or responsiveness across individuals and groups, as there will be patterns and allocations of many other qualities and attributes. Any of these may be forefronted, lifted out, in a move much like metonymy, and used to represent and symbolise the whole. Schlink is not directly exploring the causal role of illiteracy in the establishment and running of concentration camps but he is proffering literacy as a space for the plot to occupy and for meanings to develop; and it proves to be an extraordinarily fertile space.

First of all it adds mystery and suspense for the whole first half of the book. It is as if Hanna the character and Schlink the author work in tandem to conceal her inability to read and write yet have reading happening in the form of Das Vorleser. The clues to her illiteracy tend to be in how Hanna feels and reacts to events.

Also, the introduction of ‘illiteracy’ changes the moral status of Hanna’s war crimes, producing a rather more complex ethical situation – Hanna turns from being clearly and demonstrably an agent of violence to being also a social victim.
burdened with this debilitating secret that can trace some of its origins to an inadequate education system. It is a shift in culpability.

Literacy is like the dance floor upon which Hanna and Michael move together through the book, through their lives, as an embracing couple, the move of one affecting the move of the other, held together by das Vorleser, the welding together of speaking and reading. The usual natural coupling of sexual opposites to form dance partners deepens as many other opposites, beginning with the literate /illiterate, well up, and these opposite characteristics where Michael is one pole and Hanna the other become a very typical literate /illiterate profile;

Hanna = old, poor, no family, guilty, imprisoned, working class, violent, healthy
Michael = young, wealthy, family, innocent, free, middle class, passive, sickly.

Both Hanna and Michael are finely sketched contrasting studies in literacy responsiveness. To investigate the meaning of literacy we could think we should turn first and foremost to Michael, as it makes some sense to look at the place of literacy by investigating its highest and most valued achievements, and Michael is indeed a high achievement. He is the ‘main’ character, and the narrator, so we have abundant access to his activities, and the logics which infuse his life. His literacy credentials are exemplary. He even writes books, a higher level of literacy achievement than merely reading them, thus is amongst the literacy elite in that there must be many more readers than authors. He is a legal historian, and both the law and history are examples of richly-worded and word-reliant disciplines exhibiting literacy at pinnacles of esoteric expressionism, of functional maturity and social necessity. He is extremely well read in the classics, needless to say, and manages his social existence with some ease. All this is said in the text.

He is also fraught. That his predilection for multitudinous intellectualisations, fractured guilts and fragmented dilemmas can be laid at the feet
of his highly developed literacy is certainly a feasible hypothesis – and has the potential to hint at limits, of a kind, around the advantages high degrees of literacy can eventually deliver. This line of investigation might lead to the meaning of literacy and its potential to create a life too symbolic.

But compared to what is to be had from Hanna’s his is a bloodless line. It is her illiteracy that captures the imagination. She does not technically occupy centre stage in the book but it is she who takes our breath away, who lives and dies with high joy and deep tragedy, who seemed to miss out, but arrives too late. Literacy has had enormous effect on both their lives. However, the diffuse worthiness of Michael’s high literacy does not seem to have the same power to reveal, to us at this point and at this hour, that Hanna’s endlessly repeating shame and struggle, pride and fear has. Because it has such a sharp hitting focus, Hanna’s illiteracy may reveal more about the meaning of literacy than Michael’s literacy. Hanna’s eventual literacy of the human condition, in the end, may reveal more about essential literacy than the drained baroque of Michael’s ultra-literacy – or whatever essential literacy he reaches (as in writing Hanna’s story) is achieved only through his association with her.

Hanna’s route takes us deep into the heart of literacy directly and forcefully, drawing up unambiguous and highly charged emotions that would seem to signal a critical point has been approached. This route is through a particular form of illiteracy that seems to lay bare people’s souls and sense of self, and that also seems to fuel a highly energised and socially committed problematic, that of eradicating illiteracy.

When one considers, illiteracy must already be in a general sense the question of learning to read and write, given that one thing calls its opposite into question. But there is more to it than this. In many circumstances, such as Hanna’s, it is a serious problem being illiterate. So it presents itself within itself as a problematic in this quite straightforward way yet with such force that it begins to be a larger
driving force for literacy itself, for becoming literate. Literacy learning becomes to be about eradicating illiteracy rather than achieving literacy – or, because illiteracy is so much to be avoided it strongly informs the practices of becoming literate. Thus it would seem that any attempt to ask the question of learning to read and write some attention must be given to the set of states collectively known as ‘what it is to not learn to read and write’.

The illiteracy we are talking about here is of a particular species. It is not merely the neutral opposite of learning to read and write but some permutation of it. It is a kind of illiteracy identified as ‘illiteracy-in-the-midst-of-literacy’ and in particular ‘illiteracy-in-the-face-of-literacy-learning’. It is rather the failure to learn to read and write than the non-learning to read and write. Other forms of illiteracy can possibly be teased out, such as non-literacy, where there has been no attempt to learn or a-literacy where literacy is not a possibility and pre-literacy, which is the non-literacy that exists prior to learning to read and write. But it is this identified failure to learn to read and write despite effort on someone’s part that produces extraordinary strong feelings and throws into relief, perhaps, the impact of literacy learning on human being. There is a spontaneous visceral intensity to the feelings that are often reported around the issue of illiteracy that, if genuine, would tag it as a question with potential to reveal something interesting, something interesting about the relationship between learning literacy and the meaning and goals of the human being-there. This is particularly so when the social expectation, encoded into law and common practice, is universal literacy within compulsory education. It is this expectation that has caused this form of illiteracy and thus much of Hannah’s distress.

The dominating question is why are these feelings aroused and with such strength, merely because some people cannot master a particular complex motor/cognitive task.
A Scientific Study

Yet one might object that it is merely a novel, merely fiction and not really a 'true' picture of what happens in people's lives. Do people really behave like that? Could that really happen? Scientific methods and writings, on the other hand, deal with just these issues of veracity, and with their built-in discourses of doubt and self-critical analyses would give better raw material for us to work on. Possibly. But we have seen already the contestability of the term 'scientific'. Furthermore, novels do not have the 'calculative' background of scientific studies. Heidegger suggests in the memorial address that the power of calculative thinking is that it gives us more and more technological power, but this can threaten to dominate, and science is implicated in this quest for control and power. In comparison a novel freewheels, offering unprovable possibilities to be pondered and contemplated.

In many ways the novel resembles a 'case study' in scientific methodology. They are inherently on the same continuum. It is a period of life, a description of a sequence of life activity, a case study of individuals. However the novel has the big advantage of being able to artificially construct much more of long full-length picture of any individual, in a way that would be exhaustive in real life yet is needed to gain a full sense of what that person is. It seems an inescapable fact that human sciences are limited by their methods.

In his article in Harvard Educational Review, May 1985, Understanding Reading Disability: A Case Study Approach Peter H. Johnston states:

*Employing Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on psychological research, I will argue that an understanding of reading failure cannot be gained through fragmented analyses of the speed of various isolated mental acts out of the context of their social and motivational environment and antecedents. Rather, a useful understanding will only emerge from an integrated examination of the cognitive, affective, social, and personal history of the learner.* (p. 155)
According to Johnston, ‘an integrated examination of the cognitive, affective, social and personal history’, is required. This is very much the same as the history a novel might give of a person – it is what novels do. Johnson is himself aware of this contradiction. The difficulty for the case study is that having to remain within or close to the publicly verifiable facts puts some limits on the breadth of investigation, and therefore on the explanation that can be given. A researcher has only so much time, and can only expect a limited amount of cooperation, or to invade personal privacy just so much. Nonetheless using the more formalised language of psychology the consequences of illiteracy, or partial literacy when described in human science studies do resemble closely those written into the character of Hanna. Here are some further excerpts from Johnston, beginning with the abstract;

*Using three compelling case studies, Peter Johnston examines the psychological and social determinants of reading failure – factors that has been generally overlooked in mainstream reading theory. Extensive verbal reports by the three male participants reflect the effects that anxiety, maladaptive strategies, conflicting motives and causal attributions have on reading ability.*

These are the words of an adult disabled reader and his wife:

Mrs Wilson: *I can remember one night our then little girl, who’s now a teenager – we were taking her to the emergency room ... OK ... on the way to the emergency room, though – as sick as she was – she was reading the billboards to him, saying different things. “Oh Daddy, look at” and so on and so forth. And when we got her situated that night and came home, he said, “You know I cannot believe that this little first grader can read words off those billboards and I can’t,” And he said to me, “How am I going to explain that to her when she comes home and says, ‘Daddy what’s this?’”*

Mr Wilson: *And I was totally ... I never ... and it's only happened to me once. I was jealous of my own child ... jealous so bad that I was ... really felt it ... in my whole life. The jealousy that I felt for her ... and of course it was over in a second, but...* (p. 153)

Johnston goes on;
Adults who are not literate are painfully aware that they are considered inadequate. Bill, Jack, and Charlie each said that if people learned about his reading problems they would think of him as stupid. (p. 159)

And gives this description

In general, Jack, Bill and Charlie took a preventative approach to the problem, which involved systematically excluding print from their lives. The goal of their behaviour was never to be caught in a situation in which they might be expected to read. This meant avoiding print at all costs in any potentially social situation. ... (p. 160)

In my view, the effect of anxiety in reading difficulty cannot be over estimated, although its circular causal properties are difficult to demonstrate. Charlie, the most severely disabled of the three discussed, is a very fit and healthy forty-three year old who had been taking medication for high blood pressure since he was thirty two. My first session with him is illustrative. His wife had made the initial contact to him to see me. I was to meet him at an appointed place. He arrived ten minutes early, left, and called his wife to tell her I had not shown up. When we later met, his anxiety was apparent in ways. When I gave him the preprimer word list from the Analytical Reading Inventory, ... he could read only two words. He was flushed and wringing his hands under the table. Later in the session, after some success with words like stop, he was able to recognise, one at a time, more of these words ... When asked to write 'men' he wrote mem, immediately scribbled it out, then wrote me, scribbled that out even more quickly, and then wrote m, and with trembling hand, admitting to nervousness, he was unable to write any more. Later, after experiencing some success, he was able to write this word unprompted. The next time his performance deteriorated in this manner, he noted his nervousness and indulged in extensive self-reccrimination. His wife told me the next day that he had gone to a bar on his way home and "got smashed - he's never had to expose himself like that before."(p. 168)

The Question

Embarrassment, jealousy, anxiety, avoidance, frustration, concealing and isolation are certainly present in the article, just as they were in the novel, as is the constant linking of illiteracy with being dumb. Why is this? What is the huge significance of literacy that to fail to achieve it has such dire results? For all its usefulness, literacy is merely a learned skill, or more accurately, collection of interwoven skills across eyes and brain.
PART TWO

The Meaning of Being Illiterate

Experiencing Illiteracy

Heidegger talked about openness, freedom and then concealing. These are the forces we see at play in Hanna's life. Literacy is initially an 'opening' as it creates vast new vistas of manifestness, making possible interactions never before possible. But its limits were there in its creation, even though with respect to Hanna, they were slow, historically, to surface. She has run into the issue of 'learnability', an issue that faces all cultural artefacts. Language, for instance, is only useful if it remains in a form learnable from generation to generation. Such a force must operate in oral language to ensure it stays within limits. Written language was not initially meant to be learned by everyone, and its transition into an expected universal skill could be expected to place strain on its various features that were not shaped over time for that purpose.

In the note incident Hanna battles with the 'darkness' into which she is thrust.

I had left a note on the night table. 'Good morning! Bringing back breakfast, be right back,' or words to that effect. When I returned, she was standing in the room, trembling with rage and white-faced.

'How could you go just like that?'

I put down the breakfast tray with the rose on it and wanted to take her in my arms. 'Hanna.'

'Don't touch me.' She was holding the narrow leather belt that she wore around her dress; she took a step backwards and hit me across the face with it. My lip split and I tasted blood. It didn't hurt. I was horrified. She swung again.

But she didn't hit me. She let her arm fall, dropped the belt, and burst into tears. I had never seen her cry. Her face lost all its shape. Wide-open eyes, wide-open mouth, eyelids swollen after the
first tears, red blotches on her cheeks and neck. Her mouth was making croaking throaty sounds like the toneless cry when we made love. She stood there looking at me through the tears.

I should have taken her in my arms. But I couldn’t. I didn’t know what to do. At home none of us cried like that. We didn’t hit, not even with our hands, let alone a leather belt. We talked. But what was I supposed to say now?

She took two steps towards me, beat her fists against me, then clung to me. Her shoulders trembled, she knocked her forehead against my chest. Then she gave a deep sigh and snuggled into my arms. ...

‘What was the matter? Why did you get so angry? We were lying side by side, so satiated and content that I thought everything would be cleared up now.

‘What was the matter, what was the matter — you always ask such silly questions. You can’t just leave like that.’

‘But I left you a note...’

‘Note?’

I sat up. The note was no longer on the night table where I had left it. I got to my feet, and searched next to the night table, and underneath, and under the bed and in it. I couldn’t find it. ‘I don’t understand. I wrote you a note saying I was going to get breakfast and I’d be right back.’

‘You did?’ I don’t see any note.’

‘You don’t believe me?’

‘I’d love to believe you. But I don’t see any note.’

We didn’t go on fighting. Had a gust of wind come and taken the note and carried it away to God knows where? Had it all been a misunderstanding, her fury, my split lip, her wounded face, my helplessness?

Should I have gone on searching, for the note, for the cause of Hanna’s fury, for the source of my helplessness? ‘Read me something, kid!’ She cuddled up to me and I picked up Eichendorff’s Memoir of a Good-for-Nothing and continued from where I left off. ... Again, Hanna followed everything eagerly. She liked the scattering of poems. She liked the disguises, the mix-ups, the complications and the pursuits which the hero gets tangled up in Italy. (pp. 52-54)

We are seeing here the kind of shapes and patterns of response illiteracy takes within the emotional life of a human being. Several faces emerge. It begins with the face of rage. The rage, perhaps, of loneliness and being abandoned. With a desperate tragic irony, it appears at that point when even the person closest to you and with whom communication is most complete still belongs with the others, and inhabits this radically different territory of intercourse, across an uncrossable divide that is in some sense of your own making. The rage at there being a dividing power
stronger than even the strongest of unifying power, the power of love. The rage at being tricked into showing emotions that cannot be explained because they arise from your untellable secret. The rage of the trapped, the hopeless.

Then, there is a withdrawal (Don’t touch me) that bitterly accepts and asserts this uncrossable distance between the literate and the rest and that mocks the weak well-meaning attempts that pretend to comfort. Face and accept the alienation, and do not try to mitigate, ameliorate or negotiate.

The face of aggression emerges with a hitting out, which is like a heavy-handed impact-language attempting to regain communication through pain. Dropping down below the lucid searchlight scan of the intellect into the dark and forcing the other to take notice of your humanity. It is an attempt to reunify, to get back to a common place – I can hurt you, you are like me.

Then, she goes weak and surrenders, and this contorts her face and makes her look like the ugly distorted human being illiteracy of this kind can make you feel as though you are. Communication is now through primitive involuntary grunts of the kind born from the most powerful most necessary yet most inarticulate of forces, sex. But this works. Comfort is required, protestingly but with the touch of forehead to chest, brain to heart, and one human being can again recognise another through these essential body locations, and the abject isolation of non-communication is forced to retreat. Normal things reappear and reassert an everydayness, such as food, (breakfast) and the tasks of being a daily person, cleanliness.

With rationality restored Michael is on home territory and begins to seek reasons. With this comes rationalisation, the construction of feeble feasible stories which make possible the lies – the lies about the note which Hanna may have seen but not as a piece of information, more as a taunt and evidence that she would never find love. Her lie, if it is a lie, is truer than the conventional truth because although she did know there was a note to her notes do not exist.
Redemption, resolution completes the canvas as Hanna gets Michael to read to her and this brings to the surface the final irony that undergirds the whole book. This is the tragedy of this story. Hanna initiates and partakes voluntarily with passion and insight in an act that requires being fully human and fully a language user, namely the act of understanding the narratives of our lives. She has always been able to do this. Michael can read but is not the human being Hanna is. Reading, the 'mere act', is conquered as it is no longer identified by its one visible part (synedoche), no longer conflated with its with its performance aspects - a syndrome we can name as 'Wittgenstein's disorder' - and its power to arbitrate human being dissipated. Instead it is made to serve. This is a victory, but it is tenuous and tiring and damaging.

It is one hypothesis of this thesis that once a symbolic system is got about, such as language, then things not being what they are but what they have attributed to them becomes common place. That is what a symbol is - some perceivable thing that must not be looked at for what it is in itself (like a table) but looked at for what it signals.

**The Final Chapter; The Writer**

In the end, it is Hanna's writing that is neglected, and in the end this may be where we would need to go next it we were not coming to the end of this study. In the final chapter of *The Reader*, it is **writing rather than reading** that comes to the fore. So very much neglected in the scheme of literacy at every level, and not subject to the same social laws as reading, its importance is muted and its nature glossed over. As a theme **writing** was suppressed throughout the whole first half of the book - as it can so easily be in any discussion on literacy. It is can never be absent because all that is read must have been written, but partly because its work is done by the time one comes to read and also because the author of any text is only partly visible in the text itself, it is readily ignored, forgotten, lightly sidestepped or clumsily
muzzled. Besides, one author serves many readers. But is that so – or is that very much the result of the dominance of the publishing industry? Wherein lies the truth about writing, from the first handprint onwards?

It slowly emerges in the later part of the *The Reader* - 1) with the stories (prose) Michael wrote and sent to Hanna on tape, and 2) with Hanna’s (poetry) writings to him and to herself, to end up in the dominant and I would argue more human position.

With Hanna dead, Michael can no longer be *Das Vorleser* for there is now no listener. The new role is to *write* the story of himself and Hanna, which he does many times over in his head, taking ten years to get to the right story. Why did he write the story? To be free of it, even if that is impossible, says Michael. Just as the Ancient Mariner clung to the wrist of the hapless wedding guest with his craggy arm till his tale of crime and redemption was through. To be free of it. Because all journeys end where they began.

But the story, in as far as it is about literacy, has worked its way through a sequence of increasing control for Michael and Hanna;

*a. reading/listening to* school-chosen texts from the canon, then widening out to ...

*b. reading/listening to* freely chosen more broadly based books; then the move to the role of a contributor rather than a user of the written corpus, ie to ...

*c. writing*, he his own books, she her own poetry and finishing with ...

- for Michael one of literacy’s final and most original purposes which is to document/record human lives, by *writing* the story of someone else,
- Hanna, becoming her servant or prophet, lifting her out of the confines of her real-time existence into the flow of humanity;
- for Hanna, the gifting of a life worth writing about, as she more than most knew that as important as the words and letters are, it is the human story that is the heart of literacy.

Writing must precede reading to bring it onto existence, and here we see that writing must follow reading, as an exorcism. Literacy's final strength and final message, writing, must also be its first. It is at this point that Hanna and Michael find rhythm. At last they dance in unison their parts in perfect time.

And it is the contradictions and uncertainties that sit like left over coffee grounds in our mind. There are the thoughts that we have not got to the bottom of, such as how language holds us captive and how the bulk of our cognitive activity is just below the surface of our consciousness, where it has to remain to be functional, but where it is not accessible to critique.

_The question of learning to read and write_ - an ambitious topic rather too ambitiously undertaken. But to become literate, for all that it is now so seemingly everyday, is still in our reflective minds an achievement of great cultural worth.

_Reading_ - we remain quietly impressed by the cleverness and complexity of the task and take proud pleasure from the sweet hum of the cognitive machinery when everything is working well in its place.

_Writing_ - it is both the beginning and the end, the more inclusive concept and possibly the most original, bringing much greater joys and much harder questions.

End
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The Owl

Peter Peryer