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This chapter raises the prospect of a newly emerging epistemological ecotone where adult learning has characteristics of both foundational (modern) and postmodern ways of knowing.

Troubling Adult Learning in the Present Time

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What's going on "just now"?

The French philosopher Michel Foucault asks, "What's going on just now? What's happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living?" (1982, p. 216). Answers to these questions have a profound impact on learning. The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education's (CONFINTEA V) *Agenda for the Future* (1997) focuses on "common concerns facing humanity . . . and on the vital role that adult learning has to play in enabling women and men of all ages to face [the moment's] most urgent challenges with knowledge, courage and creativity" (point 2). Article 2 of the *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning* (1997) states that "adult learning can shape identity and give meaning to life." What is going on just now affects learning to be, to become, to belong, and to act—principles espoused by proponents of the *Agenda for the Future*. But how, we may ask, is this learning taking place? What are its characteristics, and at what sites does it occur?

Many people in every age attempt to make sense of their "moment." This is no less true of our age, one described as postmodern by scholars. There are no agreed definitions or dates of origin of the postmodern constellation of views. It is widely diverse in its expressions and forms. But despite the lack of consensus, certain characteristics seem to define it, and certainly the antecedents to postmodernism continue to influence it.

Before probing Foucault's questions regarding the nature of this precise moment and how they relate to learning, it is important to briefly look at what has shaped our present time. We live with traces of seventeenth-century

Enlightenment (the Age of Reason) and eighteenth-century humanism. These are the precise moment's intellectual precursors. The preceding periods produced the belief that there is a stable, coherent, autonomous, rational, unitary self, and the idea that the world is knowable through computation, reason, and authority. Learning, it is postulated, is related to unambiguous, verifiable, and accurate knowledge of the world, with a goal toward predictability. That is, people learn through objective scientific inquiry that is neutral and value-free. What we come to "know" is called Truth—and it is universal and eternal. Data we come to know are labeled "facts." This leads to social progress, and to personal improvement. It is the "foundational" way of knowing, also described as "modernist." It holds that beliefs are justified when they are built on accepted wisdom. The current craze for "evidence-based" practice is the most recent incarnation of this positivist paradigm, a belief that the only valid knowledge is that which is generated from positive affirmation of ideas through rigorous measurement.

When applied to learning for social justice, a central thrust of adult learning today, foundationalism means that actors can rest assured they know what is "unjust," and they are authorized to produce solutions to society's ills. Quoting CONFINTEA V, Imel points out that adult learning is "for . . . promoting democracy, justice . . . and scientific, social and economic development" (2000, para. 2). The field of adult learning is awash in these modernist notions. Examining the "signature pedagogy" of the field reveals the grip that foundational thinking has on us. One need only turn to virtually any of the *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference* (www.adulterc.org/) or the premier journals of the field such as the *Adult Education Quarterly* for supporting evidence.

Social Movements: Butterflies, Mumia, Trannies, Oh My!

Social movements give the pulse of an era; therefore it is not surprising to find emerging contemporary paradigms of learning in them. Social movements introduce new values, which may eventually affect entire societies. Social movements are sites of learning, knowledge construction, meaning making, and resistance. Much has been written in adult education related to social movements and learning. Analysis of contemporary social movements offers a window into the "just now" that Foucault challenged us to probe.

Cultural critics and social theorists have recently characterized a "new" New Social Movement, called the Convergence Movement, which is sustained by convergence activism, direct action, and civil disobedience. It is a "movement of movements" that has birthed new radicalism (Klein, 2002). It is based on multiple issues of social justice and has been prompted by such factors as globalization, the shifting boundaries between public and private space, the growing income disparity in the United States (and

globally), the U.S. empire, emergence of new personal identities, resistance to invisibility for the marginalized, and new information and communication technologies or ICTs (Shepard and Hayduk, 2002). It is about people's dignity and the refusal to accept being erased from the social equation. The new movement represents the volatility of social tensions building over world capitalism, U.S. militarism, and neoliberal market policies. Sites of convergence and new meaning making, where hundreds of thousands have gathered, include protests in Seattle (in 1999); Washington, D.C. (1999); Prague (2000); Quebec (2000); Göteborg (2001); Genoa (2001); Washington again (2002); and Sea Isle, Georgia (2004). Massive education and direct action training took place in and through these events.

The title of this section alludes to the linkages in disparate groups in the Convergence Movement, contributing to the fluidity of the moment. Environmentalism is symbolized by Monarch butterflies; Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former U.S. Black Panther Party member, convicted of murdering a law enforcement officer, who has become a *cause célèbre* drawing international attention with people asserting that he is a victim of a right-wing police state; and transnians, referring to transsexuals fighting for gender identity rights and freedom of gender expression. These are but a few examples of disparate constituents that make up this new movement of movements.

The Convergence Movement differs from conventional new social movements such as the lesbian and gay movement, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement. These latter movements are deeply steeped in claims to an ultimate truth and in the stable, unitary identities of participants. That is, conventional social movements are built on the modernist notions of a collective *us* and a unitary *we*. For instance, gay men and lesbians, women, and African Americans claim to understand what it means to be members of these respective groups; the groups are essentialized. After all, without a sense of *we*, how can claims for equal rights be made? It is undisputable that organizing based on collective identity has been instrumental in social transformation.

Currently, postmodern notions contest the foundations of conventional social movements. For instance, it challenges regulation of identity, which is positioned as a subtle form of oppression (Briton, 1996). St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) remind us of the value of abandoning the desire for cohesive identity. Borrowing from the postmodern, the Convergence Movement is built on collective antioppression activism and on disrupted and reconstituted identities that in fact constitute an "anti-identity." That is, because "identity" and "essentialism" are interchangeable, the antiessentialism of the Convergence Movement that challenges identity categories is also anti-identity (Radhakrishnan, 2003). The Convergence Movement challenges the idea that race, gender, sexuality, and other demographics are fixed, permanent, and unalterable. In fact, the Convergence Movement critically mobilizes the plurality of deconstructed identities in ways that enhance democracy and social inclusion for all people. It does not produce a culture

of disappearance, but rather creates a culture of visibility through difference with a goal to recognize the right of all people to be different on their own terms.

The Convergence Movement: Insights into an Emerging Paradigm

The Convergence Movement offers insights into an emerging paradigm that is actually both modern and postmodern—and neither—simultaneously. Naomi Klein, a Canadian activist, believes that we are witnessing the birth of a new radicalism (Klein, 2002) in the Convergence Movement. She reports that the emerging movement is not designed from a preset structure; rather, coherence is achieved by skillfully “surfing” the structures that are already in place. Convergence Movement actors play out life within multiple contested spheres on multiple stages.

The Convergence Movement is organized at the grass roots, has decentralized coalitions, nonhierarchical models, leaderless structures, flexible tactics, antiauthoritarianism and antinormative processes, and learning that takes place in “cells.” It values broad participation, employs consensus decision making, and moves by the actions of multiple, autonomous individuals and groups. Members have mastered ICTs, and employ eye-catching visuals and sophisticated Web-based venues. It is about protests, demonstrations, occupations, vigils, and insubordinate behaviors—all acts by people that challenge postmodern notions of incredulity and suspicion of “truth.” It is more about “conspiracy” than “cooperation” of players. It has borrowed practices from anarchists, radical feminists, and queers deploying behaviors that challenge mainstream conceptual and operational frames.

The Convergence Movement is dancing around and through foundational and postmodern moments in a way that might be described as peri-(post)modern. The prefix peri- is here employed to describe something that surrounds or encloses the postmodern moment. Peri-(post)modern is used as the period of transition (that is, before) the post-postmodern. Adherents unwittingly engage in the repurposing of postmodernism. Klein (2002) points out that deconstruction and abandonment of well-structured ideological arguments has not led to incoherence and fragmentation (a postmodern expectation), but rather to flexible adaptation based on convergences that are part of a common cause aimed against oppressions in all forms. When convergence members reclaim the streets, it is for all oppressed peoples as members construct them.

If postmodernism is criticism, more questions, and a series of disparate assertions of mistrust, and offering few hopeful alternatives and solutions to social problems, as some critics claim, then the peri-postmodern moment is certainly not. It generates creative solutions and owns what it is: a movement for liberation (over oppression), freedom (over marginalization), and simplicity (over complicity). The peri-postmodern condition seen in the

Convergence Movement disturbs the dichotomy of foundationalism-postmodernism because it recognizes that within the latter are to be found irrationality and fragmentation, and within the former emancipation to be realized. The peri-postmodern celebrates the death of identity and its resurrection as a contested space where essentialist notions are assaulted.

The Convergence Movement challenges Cole and Hill's claim that "postmodernism refutes the idea of any common interest between oppressed groups . . . disallowing any action in common" (1999, p. 12). It is typical for movement members to find direct links, and pursue common action, between and among sex workers' rights, radical environmentalism, revolutionary notions of democracy, direct rebellious action for HIV/AIDS funding, abortion rights; against the racist prison industrial complex, antinuclear activism, the ethical treatment of animals, activism against genetically modified organisms (GMOs); support for Palestinians living under Israeli apartheid, radical sexual politics, the urban (green guerrilla) gardening movement, and antiglobalization and antineoliberalism (against Starbucks, Wal-Mart, Coke, and McDonalds).

It includes spontaneous episodes of culture jamming—a form of critical adult education practice (Sandlin, 2007) that resists the hegemony of the homogeneous popular culture of our times. Culture jamming fuses adult education's foundational ties to certainty in learning for social justice with postmodernism's incredulity to truth. Learning is waged through insurrectionary tactics, exploiting ICTs such as the Internet, and employing hacktivism (breaking into computers), détournement (the reuse of elements of popular media to generate a new work with a message that challenges the original), subvertisements (subversive advertisement), and the blogosphere (computer blogs and their interconnections).

Supporting the notion that the present moment has spawned a new paradigm, we can look to contemporary queer discourse where a further example of the peri-postmodern is found. Queer discourse points to an alternative way to be in the world, with a new frame to analyze and conceptualize our present moment. It affirms a new identity (for example, queer, which is *not* lesbian or gay), while refusing normative constructions of sexuality. Paradoxically it constructs an essential nonessential self.

The peri-postmodern emerges on other fronts as well, raising the question, "Are we approaching a post Post period?" For instance, in addition to rejection (deregulation) of identities such as gay or lesbian, there is currently a clear generational shift toward a postracial and postethnic moment. In the National Public Radio segment "Post-Racial America" (2003), the author avers that, "when asked about their race, many young people are more likely to say something like Blaxican, Mexipino, Chino-latino, than one of the sixty-three color-coded Census categories." Also exemplary is the exhibit "Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World," at the internationally renowned Heard Museum for the cultural heritage of Native American peoples in Phoenix, which "explores what it means to be of mixed

heritage with strong ties—and sometimes absent ties—to Native communities” (“Remix,” 2007) It is about being the non-Indian Indian and the Indian non-Indian simultaneously.

In ecology, an ecotone is the transition region between two adjacent ecological communities; it has shared characteristics of both and of neither, evidenced by emergent new properties. Odum (1966), the founder of modern ecology, offers that “an ecotone is a . . . junction zone or tension belt . . . [with] the tendency for increased variety and density [of life] . . . known as the ‘edge effect’” (p. 278). The peri-(post)modern illustrates an epistemological ecotone. The new postidentity self, not unlike the Convergence Movement already described, is a hybrid location, a place that creates “new . . . forms within [a] contact zone” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2003, p. 118). What is intriguing is that these postidentities are constructed by “insiders” rather than by members of the dominant group—insiders who trouble notions of what it means to be a gay, a black or brown person, a woman or a man. Equally interesting is the fact that identity-driven academic discourse largely fails to embrace the emerging postidentity movement, and in fact actively resists it. The “old” (foundational) and the “new” (post-modern) are in a state of interdependent mutuality; this tension belt constitutes a “third space” (Bhabha, 1995).

Meaning Making in the Epistemological Ecotone

Meaning making with and in the epistemological ecotone is linked to learning in numerous ways. A substantial number of young people claim they acquire knowledge through the politics of humor (for example, Jon Stewart’s “news” show or “Saturday Night Live”). Other venues include popular education and learning for emancipation in grassroots organizations. Radical citizenship education and radical democracy do not simply ask for rights on the basis of diversity but actually foster continuous proliferation of new forms of difference, of “new voices, new communities, and new identities, as part of an ongoing process of democratization” (Sandilands, 1993, para. 6). There is a powerful learning dimension to critical consumption activism (Flowers, 2007), and arts-based inquiry (street theater, dance, song, and larger-than-life puppetry).

Living in the ecotone demands that learners make meaning in the context of “what if” questions (Hill, 2004, p. 88), important questions first raised by St. Pierre, Hill, and Lewis (2003). What if one person’s liberation is another’s condemnation? What if empathy for marginalized and oppressed people is nothing more than forced intimacy that, in the end, appropriates the Other and erases difference? What if the learning associated with advocacy work is more about the cultural capital, privilege, and elitism of the one facilitating justice work than getting out of the way of the dreams, desires, pleasures, joys, and angers of the “rescued”? What if conflict and confrontation are the only means within the current cultural framework

where difference can be constantly reestablished? What if we adult educators are naive when we think our liberal projects can liberate without revolutionary dismantling of a system that is beyond band-aids?

If being postmodern means falling into relativism, learning associated with the peri-(post)modern is not. It operates from a moral and ethical framework. If the postmodern ends in more questions than solutions to life's problems, learning in the Convergence Movement does not. Foundational values in the ecotone include purpose, creation, and interpretation, within a radical critique. The Convergence Movement, as in postmodernism, plays with notions of a collective *we*. It offers new possibilities of conduct toward and treatment of difference. If postmodernism is soulless and hopeless and the place where an entire generation of adherents have elected to drown (Berman, 1982), this surely is not.

No Conclusion, But a Few Afterthoughts

"All conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive" (Derrida, 1997, p. xiii). To conclude is to preclude different interpretations and to forestall the opening of new possibilities. With this in mind, I cannot write a conclusion. But the question, "How do we proceed?" remains germane. These afterthoughts might permit conversation to move forward.

Learning is the process of making sense of experiences. It is a lifelong adventure. In fact, Lindeman (1926) promoted the idea that learning is "not merely preparation for an unknown kind of future living. . . . The whole of life is learning" (p. 5). Knowles (1980) further developed this concept. It is critical to understand that learning, based in experience, is inextricably linked to the precise moment in which the learner finds herself or himself, which today is heavily influenced by postmodern notions. Lyotard (1979/1984) describes the postmodern condition as increasingly skeptical toward universal truths, which are known as metanarratives (also called grand narratives or master narratives). Metanarratives are comprehensive ways to order and explain knowledge and experience. Metanarratives proliferate in adult education. For example, Zemke and Zemke (1984) make the claim that there are "30 Things We Know for Sure about Adult Learning," and Delahoussaye and Zemke (2001) report that there are "10 Things We Know for Sure About Learning Online." The "facts" found in these and other foundational texts on adult learning are troubled in the present moment's tension belt.

Adult learning is often situated as the quest for truth, authenticity, and what is right. These tenets have major implications for learning because they lead to the belief in an ultimate basis for knowledge. This way of knowing acts to justify and explain our social structures and institutions (Klages, 2007, para. 28) and the learning that takes place within them. Postmodern critique introduces a deep skepticism about authentic meanings in our present time (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000). Because postmodernism argues for

the impossibility of an ultimate basis for knowledge, it poses dilemmas for adult education's search for ultimate truths.

Postmodern notions that lay claim to ambiguity and the impossibility of truth and authenticity have only slowly infiltrated the dominant discourses in adult education. Where they have encroached, they have been both demonized and valorized. For example, Ellsworth's claim (1997) that postmodernism frees learning related to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality from the tyranny of leftist grand narratives can be used to illustrate postmodernism's value to the field. On the other hand, Edwards and Usher (2001) point out, "The location of adult education within a postmodern landscape has been, and continues to be, a troubled one" (p. 275).

Although some adult educators have critiqued the traces from the Enlightenment (for example, decentering the dichotomies of teacher-learner, theory-practice, and researcher-researched), few have explored the intersection of adult learning and social justice from a contemporary postmodern frame. To do so is to ask, "What does it mean to trouble notions like oppression and marginalization?" Hemphill (2001), commenting on our precise moment, offers that the "complex cultural and technological changes that are now underway will unavoidably have major effects on how we conceive of knowledge—its construction, conceptualization, storage, transmission, and social function" (p. 27). He warns that "adult education is too important an enterprise to be left to ossify in a decaying [foundational] paradigm" (p. 27). In the Convergence Movement, influenced by peri-(post)modernism, we find evidences that adult learning, caught in an epistemological ecotone, is rupturing from the rigid conventional modernist patterns of which Hemphill warns us.

Appignanesi and Garratt (1995) ask, "Can we imagine how postmodernism might end? End in what? It doesn't have a specifiable beginning . . . but is a continued enmeshment in modernity" (p. 172). They remind the reader that shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault "called for a re-thinking of the Enlightenment. The Grand Narrative philosophers who seemed off the agenda are suddenly back on again" (p. 173). Does the learning in epistemological ecotone rekindle metanarratives of social justice and human rights, perhaps as Foucault foresaw?

The Convergence Movement points to a precise moment that positions traditional (foundational) ways and postmodernism as having the same referent; that is, they deal with the same social situation and offer insights into human agency. It is a moment of contradiction, complexity, and hybridity. Perhaps the precise moment merely reflects what the Marxist humanist Marshall Berman (1982) has suggested: the appearance of another incarnation of the fluid nature of the experience of modernity. After all, things "modern" are relative. The term appears to have been first applied by Abbot Suger nine hundred years ago. He described the new Middle Age monastery of St. Denis as *opus modernum*, meaning a work that was "just now" (Appignanesi and Garratt, 1995). It was a clear disruption of the then-contemporary

Romanesque style of architecture. However, the just now never stands still; it is always in motion. Thus, learning in the postmodern is not simply a break from the past but rather comprises the past's elements in motion. The peri-postmodern moment is all of the contradiction that surrounds the new just now. It vexes us with the question, "Is it a harbinger of a post Postmodern moment" ushering in something yet to be described and understood?

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