PART 1
CONTENT

COMMITMENT, CRITERIA AND CHANGE

In the Introduction I noted that reactions to the call to reflexivity are variable. For some they are unduly philosophical. At best they are of marginal significance to social scientific practice and at worst, destructive. For others these critiques serve as the legislative forums in which what counts as the 'truth' is to be subjected to continued deconstruction in order to expose the myth of a 'modernist dream'. While aspects of these perspectives assist in generating a greater sensitivity to the issues that inform practice, the overall result can be so unhelpful that it tends to polarize debates and achieves little for advancing our understandings of the limits, strengths and role of social research in the constitution and understanding of social relations.

The production of reflexive thoughts on social scientific activity takes place against a background of pre-reflexive assumptions. This may seem like a paradox, but it prevents a paralysis in action. Some set of assumptions is necessary in order to practice in the first instance. They might subsequently be open to revision in order to learn from the ebbs and flows of history and accompanying changes in contextual knowledge. To this extent we have the benefit of hindsight through an open-endedness that subjects ideas and practices to revision, rejection and qualification. After all, ideas and experiences from the past inform the present and future.

Reflexivity is a guard against hypodermic realism: that is, the assumption that there is an unproblematic relationship between the social scientific text and its valid and reliable representation of the 'real' world. It also guards against the assumption that textual openness reflects a fluid world in which choice is equally distributed within and between different populations. Writings on reflexivity exist on a sliding scale from those who seek to represent the real while recognizing such an enterprise must be open to revision through the production of new knowledge, to those for whom such an enterprise is pointless and ultimately, arbitrary.

Within the following histories we will see sets of reasons that drove writers to clarify their relationship to a range of ideas and issues that informed the contexts in which their work was produced (Hughes 1979). By moving beyond a relativism that threatens to collapse into solipsism and the sort of *ad hominem*

denunciations that relieves hearers and readers of the need for systematic, relational thought, we can open up a productive dimension and see what those ideas may still offer us in seeking to understand current times. In the process we can admit of a socio-historical dimension to our activities without which social research would have no capacity to produce meaning and insight in its studies. We have much to learn from history in order to improve our current practices, as well as from imagining futures that have the capacity to correct some of the defects of the present.

Overall, this process can set up a continual scrutiny in order to develop ideas and practices for knowing the social world. Degrees of 'fixity' of assumptions are required on the part of the social scientist, without which one would collapse into infinite regress, in order to examine the social world in the first instance. The question is not whether this occurs, but how and with what implications for our understandings? It is a willingness to consider the content and context of social scientific practices and how that relates to its process and product and then refine its insights as a result, that separates lay from social scientific reflexivity. I now turn to an examination of those 'fixities' in different traditions and how they have provided distinct and novel answers to these issues.

Commitment and Criteria

Our brief history could start a very long time ago. In celebration of 'classical rationality', for example, we find a concern with reflection as means for prioritizing a stability which then allows the analyst to cast an objective gaze upon social reality. Reflexivity then emerges as a focus because the dynamics of change inform an increasing need to understand the socio-historical context of knowledge production (Sandywell 1996). Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century, Johann Fichte, writing in the post-Kantian idealist tradition, argued that the 'I' was an activity that was aware by limiting itself through an awareness of a 'non-I'. As he put it: 'All possible consciousness, as something objective for a subject, presupposes an immediate consciousness in which what is subjective and what is objective are simply one and the same. Otherwise, consciousness is simply incomprehensible' (Fichte 1994: 114). George Herbert Mead, working in the pragmatist tradition in the early part of the twentieth century, then wrote: 'Inner consciousness is socially organized by the importation of the social organization of the outer world' (Mead 1964: 141).

What we see in this shift are more socially and historically sensitive approaches to ideas as exemplified in philosophical and social scientific critiques of Cartesian dualism. Our concerns, however, are not just philosophical, but relate to the implications of these changes for an understanding of the place and practice of social research in society.

Commitment

Taking these insights into the realm of methodology, a neo-Kantian view holds that conceptualizations of the world order what would otherwise be chaotic, through the capacity of transcendental reason present within the minds of individual investigators. Kant divided his ideas on reality into the noumenal – those things 'in themselves' that exist independently of human cognition – and the phenomenal – those things that are knowable in relation to human cognition. Because we cannot know all of the reality that we inhabit through cognition, we are led to examine the forms through which reality is represented to us. For Max Weber (1949), the practice of social research must replicate the same qualities that Kant found within the human mind. They cannot simply be about the collection of social facts, but reflexive practices in terms of being 'ideas of ideas' (Albrow 1990: 149). His 'ideal type', which has been the subject of much writing, thereby serves as an analytic instrument for the ordering of empirical reality.

A difference between the social and natural sciences is said to exist because the former produce understandings of the ways in which history and culture are themselves changed by human actions. Therefore, in seeking to understand a dynamic environment, they too will exhibit a conceptual and methodological dynamism. What we then find are Weber's methodological writings combining influences from Wilhelm Dilthey's emphasis on the meaningful 'inner' experiences of people (understanding), together with an analysis of the observed regularities of human behaviour (Weber 1949). In the name of a social science, Weber sought to fuse the intentionality of conduct with an analysis of cause and effect. Meaning could then be understood and explained through reference to the social conditions of action.

An overall concern with the social sciences and the study of the meaning of action meant that it was not possible to turn to law-like generalizations for analytic purposes. Nor was it possible for reflection to turn unproblematically into a social scientific methodology that ruled out reflexivity as an unnecessary preoccupation. Weber shared with the Austrian economists a concern with the idea of choice driven by ultimate values, but without allusion to an abstract model of a rational person that persists in so much social science to this day.

Reference to ultimate values was based upon a methodological individualism that appeared to work as a corrective to the grander claims of Weber's time. Yet what we often see in his work is a mixture of ethical pluralism and reference to the nation as an ultimate value. His works were informed, in various ways, by his political predispositions, philosophical influences, interdisciplinary engagement (at one time he referred to himself as a 'social economist': Holton and Turner 1989) and a refusal to read off human actions according to the dictates of universal explanations (whether based on individual rational calculation or read off from some concept of social totality).

The sum of influences upon Weber constitute a powerful set of ideas that still resonate with contemporary issues. Weber's recognition of the reactions of social

research to the changing conditions in which they find themselves provides a core dynamic for the philosophy of social research as it seeks to understand the grounds for the status of disciplines (Williams and May 1996). The relevance of social research lies in refracting the social landscapes it studies because it is a part of those and their corresponding cultural practices. It does not reflect, but mediates through the deployment of particular tools of inquiry. Perhaps Weber was insufficiently aware of this relationship in terms of its implications for research practice, but he was only too aware that disciplines are bound to evolve through a need to reflect changes in their environments (Weber 1949).

Max Weber's understandings of processes of rationalization ultimately reveal a tension between his methodological writings and historical sociology. Ruling out instrumental rationality as sufficient grounds for the explanation of human conduct and allowing for the importance of substantive rationality as a sphere of value choice into which social research should not venture, became an undertaking that led to an emphasis upon voluntarism in the face of the iron cage of modernity. Contingency then unfolds as necessity with the hope of transcendence residing within the isolated subject. As one form of rationality was unfolding 'externally' to mould the subject in its image and so stifle imagination and freedom, it left the other to emerge through an apparently autonomous process of 'internal' choice.

The implications of this line of thought had a particular effect upon Weber. Here was an extraordinary thinker seeking to bring together Kant and Nietzsche with Marx as the significant ghost, who poured scorn upon traditional approaches to morality, knowledge and truth. At this point Goethe appears as the figure that allows Weber to seek an active resolution of these conflicts (Albrow 1990). In subscribing to an ethic of ultimate ends and it being no business of the scientist to enter into political judgements, the search for his own meaning must lie elsewhere. What then appears for Weber is the same fate as he was to leave for the rest of us: that is, an individual matter in the face of the forces of detraditionalization and scientific progress, leading us into further disenchantment. It is at this point that the persona of heroic scientist, rather than scholar whose meanings should be related to a context, gained its hold with particular consequences for Weber's own well-being and intellectual legacy. We can see this in both 'Politics as a vocation' and 'Science as a vocation'. In these essays he alludes to the facts of environments in order that his audiences may see the choices that face them. There is nothing beyond personal responsibility for choice: 'Scientific pleading is meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other' (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1970: 147). Then, in discussing differences in age, he writes: 'Age is not decisive; what is decisive is the trained relentlessness in viewing the realities of life, and the ability to face such realities and measure up to them inwardly' (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1970: 126–7). We end up with an ethic of responsibility deriving from the inevitability of individual choice given the impersonality of social forces. Behind

and moving through these forces stand politics and the threat of violence with the accompanying demand that social scientists make a clear differentiation between facts and values in their work.

In 'Science as a vocation' Weber wrote of the value of commitment, as well as the need for intellectual integrity. This is over eighty years before the philosopher Bernard Williams (2002) was to extol such virtues as a source of hope for the future and a means of counterattack against those who preferred irony to the demands of the production of truth. Yet if we end up with a radical situatedness in which these matters become the sole province of the individual, how can the social sciences be sustainable, cultural practices? Culture and context become secondary to a space in which the individual is left to face these inevitable burdens alone.

A resulting tension between an ethic of responsibility for the production of accurate accounts and the ethic of conviction that motivates us to do so in the first place, while subsuming our own substantive values, is individualized. Yet how is this to be reconciled with a continual need to seek new ways of understanding social life within the unfolding of history (Weber 1949)? The dialectic of individual transcendence with its utopian ideals and empathic understanding may be just too great a burden to place upon our shoulders without supportive cultures of inquiry.

With the above noted in this unfolding journey, we can take from Weber matters of continued importance. There is the issue of there being no universalistic standpoint upon which to base the foundations of a social scientific methodology. Instead there are only particular perspectives making choices problematic, if not impossible. The Kantian separation of art, morality and science was placed in question by Weber and his studies on rationality. Subsequent postmodernist writings have sought to de-differentiate these spheres or to blur their boundaries, the basis and consequence of which can be seen in the debates that took place between Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas (see Holub 1991) and the accompanying interventions of Richard Rorty (1992).

It is at this point that the tragedy which Charles Turner (1990) highlights in Weber's writings is so apparent: between that of needing to hold onto one's convictions in order to maintain dignity, while also recognizing the existence of so many others such that their realization is far removed from any likely reality. Yet the 'Weberian move away from an (ironic) "totalising perspective" refuses to substitute for an ethical "totality" a series of postmodern partial standpoints. For a standpoint worth adopting is one which … never abandons its secret desire to be the only one worth adopting' (C. Turner 1990: 115). Weber exposes the illusion that a general standpoint can act as final arbitrator *and* that it is not necessary to cease our investigations at the partiality of different viewpoints. Instead, as a matter of practical importance, we can learn from mediating between different cultures of inquiry (Hall 1999).

We also have the importance of the context of knowledge production, as well as reception. It is clear that Weber was sophisticated in his understanding of, for

example, the consequences of the material relations between commerce and the university (Tribe 1994), but there is a need to go further if we are to productively deploy his legacy for contemporary understandings. We can do this by taking a strategic, rather than strictly methodological position, in Weber's writings on value freedom (J. Scott 1997). By taking the latter we end up in a situation in which the fact-value dichotomy becomes so entrenched it does not take us forward in terms of understanding, while also being indefensible at the level of practice.

If reflexivity works in the service of research to deploy ontological, epistemological and methodological fixities – often to define the difference between science and common sense – we set limits on reflexive thought that do not enable us to see the relations between what is produced and how it is received in the public domain. Simply asserting that one sphere of activity is value laden while the other is not, undermines the productive potential of social science where its findings are contestable in the public domain. They are contested because they are invested with meaning and its product often assumes that there is a separation to be made between knowledge and action. Introducing history into this relationship allows us to move from the idea of an ontological or logical separation between facts and values to one of 'natural proximity' (Pels 2003). What is allowed for is a greater reflexive vigilance in understanding their relationship in practice which allows us to see the value of respective knowledges in social life.

Criteria for Doing

For Alfred Schutz, Weber failed to recognize the episodic nature of human conduct and hence that causal adequacy was bound by sociological and historical understanding (Schutz 1973). For Schutz the meaning is the event, or an act is a meaningful process. From this point of view *verstehen* (see Outhwaite 1986) is not a method for doing social research, but what social scientists should study, for it represents the 'experiential form in which common sense thinking takes cognisance of the social cultural world' (Schutz 1979: 29).

The mediation of first and second order constructs should be a topic of reflexive concern. A common-sense stock of knowledge orientates people to apply meaning to their own actions, those of others and the events that they encounter. The lifeworld exhibits the basis for a primary experience that enables people to orientate their actions through taking its self-evidence, or pre-reflexive constitution, for granted: 'I find myself always within an historically given world which, as a world of nature as well as a sociocultural world, had existed before my birth and which will continue to exist after my death' (Schutz 1970: 163–4).

The generation of social scientific knowledge (second order) should concern itself with the explication of Husserl's 'natural attitude' by rendering apparent the 'taken-for-granted' in everyday life. It follows that social phenomena are

constituted as meaningful before the researcher appears on the scene. These basic 'meaning structures' are then analytically rearranged by social research with the consequence that it does not accurately reflect social relations. To guard against this, Schutz argued that social scientific constructs must satisfy the 'postulate of adequacy' by being compatible 'with the constructs of everyday life' (Schutz 1979: 35).

Schutz presents a clear argument for the study of 'lay' reflexivity. This is not a subjective state of affairs, but an intersubjective one that represents a process of acculturation as manifested through publicly available forms of communication, including language. In order to adequately grasp the meanings used in everyday life the 'postulate of adequacy' should be followed: 'Compliance with this postulate warrants the consistency of the constructs of the social scientist with the constructs of common-sense experience of the social reality' (Schutz 1970: 279).

Although moving the analytic focus of social research towards a representation of everyday life and meaning production, Schutz leaves an important issue to one side. Recalling Heidegger's insights, interpretative procedures produce meanings that are oriented only to the context in which they are produced. Therefore, this may be interpreted as suggesting that the 'truth' of these procedures cannot be established outside of these contexts. Social research is then destined to become a relative and descriptive endeavour. However, at this point a Kantian element in Schutz's work appears in terms of the discovery of the organizing principles of our 'being-in-the-world' that 'consists in spelling out the transcendental conditions of the meaningful world as we know it' (Bauman 1978: 183).

Despite the critique of Max Weber, the social sciences retain their role in thinking through 'ideas about ideas'. We can see this in the criteria for the 'postulate of logical consistency' such that:

> the objective validity of thought objects constructed by the social scientist and their strictly logical character is one of the most important features by which scientific thought objects are distinguished from the thought objects constructed by common-sense thinking in daily life which they have to supersede. (Schutz 1970: 278)

While an intriguing formulation, we are still left with a tension: that is, between the form of justification within the social scientific community and its intelligibility to common-sense reasoning. An action-oriented social theory with an emphasis upon common-sense reasoning appears as a solution to this issue. In the unfolding of social thought, Alan Dawe (1970) originally held this to be part of the social action, rather than social system, end of social theory. He was to correct this dichotomy with a more productive understanding of the relations between social scientific production and reception when he noted that both perspectives begin with human action (Dawe 1979). Instead of a separation between the two, they capture an ambivalence that represents an existential feature of social life as

expressed between impersonality and freedom of choice: 'Thus dualism of social experience is central to our very existence in modern society. It is … central to all the forms of thought and work which articulate our experience of that society' (Dawe 1979: 365).

With Weber the resultant issues tended to become an individual matter. What now emerges is not a construct of the social sciences, but a relationship inherent to social life that varies according to circumstance. In being reflected back into the domain of social research and then mediated from there via reasons and consequences into the public domain, we have a vibrancy and relevance of insights, if not an acceptability according to universal rules of scientific method. If we take this view, we are left with a productive legacy when the strictly methodological interpretation of Schutz's work moves aside for a more nuanced view. Schutz left social science with a critique of the 'intellectualist bias' in knowledge construction (O'Neill 1972) that became apparent in the work of many scholars (see Berger and Luckmann 1967; Strydom 2000).

Ambivalence within everyday life is catered for through many techniques that enable sufficient consistency to allow for a degree of predictability. Yet the articulation in social scientific work of experiences of seeking to regain such control in daily life are often mediated through the lenses of work that claim to be reflexive, but may be nothing more than the disguised regurgitation of positivism. Thus, we see a celebration of fluidity through social studies, but upon examination of the justifications for the process through which the work was conducted, a falling back upon established and detached ways of seeing and constituting social reality. The confidence to retort with anything other than either a totally 'detached' paradigm or the allusion to the account being but one interpretation among many others is often apparent.

With respect to these issues, Alfred Schutz had a much more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between common-sense and social scientific understandings than subsequent interpretations have allowed (O'Neill 1995). Stepping outside not only the strictly methodological literature, but also the socio-theoretical literature that seeks its place through castigation of 'other' perspectives, we find a number of productive elements in Schutz's work for the purposes of our study. For instance, moving away from narrow interpretations of the postulate of adequacy, we can take from it an emphasis upon how scientific reasoning is also dependent upon the 'common-sense communicative competence of the community of scientists in general and the larger lay society in which they live and work' (O'Neill 1995: 152). A normative orientation towards the search for the truth informs a community of scientific inquirers that draws from a wider view of value orientations. Therefore, in terms of theory: 'coherence, simplicity, and elegance determine theory selection as much as the preservation of otherwise well-confirmed theories of predictive power and instrumental potential' (Habermas 2003: 223).

To examine these relations requires not only an understanding of changes over time, but also the creation of 'mediating institutions' between social scientific

and lay understandings of knowledge and its implications for action. A public discussion of the role and value of these mediating institutions is significant. In its absence, researchers are left to fall back upon institutional positions and justifications separate from any discussion of mediation. How the domains of science and common sense interact and inform each other is of primary consideration, not the assumption that each is unproblematically separate. We need to find a language that not only translates between institutional and individual discourses, but also between scientific and common-sense ones (O'Neill 1995: 152).

I started this section with the differences between Schutz and Weber. Yet if we take the latter's idea of authority in terms of the position of the social scientist and the ethic of conviction and place that alongside how expertise is increasingly placed in question in contemporary times and the need for mediating institutions and discourses, it allows us to examine the contemporary importance of the relationship between knowledge, expertise and democracy (S. Turner 2003). Once again, neither allusion to simple dichotomies or separations between social thinkers will get us far in understanding this in terms of the role and practice of research.

Doing as Criteria

Schutz's emphasis upon common sense was to take social science in new directions with the emphasis upon 'science' without positivism. Harold Garfinkel was then to take this turn in the most novel way according to some primary issues. First, what is the status of the actor's accounts of their actions, in particular when these conflict with the accounts offered by social scientists? Second, people share knowledge, but how does this relate to a theory of action which seeks to generalize beyond the particularity of social settings? Third, people are not manipulated by forces beyond their control, but make strategic choices that shape their environments. These three gaps that he identified in Parsonian systems theory are referred to as the problems of 'rationality', 'intersubjectivity' and 'reflexivity' (Heritage 1984: 23). In addressing these issues ethnomethodology was to provide a unique perspective.

The tools of inquiry for this purpose were noted by Garfinkel in his dissertation:

> At least two important theoretical developments stem from the researches of Max Weber. One development, already well worked, seeks to arrive at a generalized social system by uniting a theory that treats the structuring of experience with another theory designed to answer the question, 'What is man?' Speaking loosely, a synthesis is attempted between the facts of social structure and the facts of personality. The other development, not yet adequately exploited, seeks a generalized social system built solely from the analysis of experience structures. (quoted in Heritage 1984: 9)

Seeking the means to analyse these 'experience structures' led Garfinkel (1967) to refuse to differentiate between everyday theorizing in social life and social science. This is where the concept of 'indexicality' comes in. Indexicality is taken from Charles Peirce's semiology and in ethnomethodological parlance, this states that everyday language and actions cannot be understood without being situated within the social context in which they are uttered and produced because meanings will vary from context to context. Schutz's Kantian influence is thereby overcome. To address this, social scientists produce metaphors in order to theorize as to how objects are constructed in the social world. Nevertheless, these do not reflect the situated and practical manner in which the process of recognition and production takes place in everyday life. Researchers are called upon to build analytic apparatuses that 'will provide for how it is that any activities, which members do in such a way as to be recognizable as such to members, are done, and done recognizably' (Sacks 1974: 218).

The social scientists' use of abstract theoretical 'categories' results in a disjuncture between the 'concreteness' of everyday activities and their social scientific representation. The overall result is that 'real society' comes into being only 'as the achieved results of administering the policies and methods of formal, constructive analysis' (Garfinkel 1991: 13). To accurately represent meaning-production within the lifeworld, its context-dependence must be recognized not as an analytic impediment, but as the starting *and* finishing point of social analysis.

Meaning within the lifeworld is now sought in the situated and practical aspects of everyday life without reference to what has been termed as a 'phenomenological residua' in social thought (Coulter 1979). Both the setting in which action takes place and the account of that action are fused in the routine, reflexive monitoring of conduct undertaken by actors within the lifeworld. Further, reasons given for actions are not viewed against the background of a normative order that is 'internalised' by actors (Heritage 1984). Instead, following Winch's (1990) interpretations of the social scientific implications of the work of the later Wittgenstein, they are determined through the study of publicly available linguistic forms. Words become the tools through which intersubjective understanding is achieved and thus the proper topic and not resource, for social research.

The idea of reflexivity, as the basis of order within the lifeworld, is given through accurate descriptions of accounting procedures used by 'members' within social settings:

> The central recommendation is that the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings 'account-able'. The 'reflexive' or 'incarnate' character of accounting practices and accounts makes up the crux of that recommendation. (Garfinkel 1967: 1)

Reflexivity contributes to social order and is displayed through situated and public activities that are open to analysis.

A number of consequences for the study of social life now follow. First, all that is accountable by lay actors becomes rational. Second, indifference in the process of studying formal structures is maintained by abstaining from all judgements of their 'adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practicality, success, or consequentiality' (Garfinkel and Sacks 1986: 166). Third, the hermeneutic implications of a meeting between the language games of ethnomethodologists and lay actors are sidelined in favour of meticulous description in the manner suggested above. Fourth, the issue between language as a medium for the expression of interests and motives by people differentially positioned within discourses and language as a topic for uncovering the methods through which ordered activity is generated, is found in favour of the latter. Finally, but by no means exhaustively, the idea of knowing and being in the social world is reduced to a study of language use.

When it comes to an understanding of the relations between social scientific and lay discourse, we are left with an issue. Is there a collapse between an understanding of reflexivity in actions *and* the ability of actors to reflect upon those actions? A key question arises: 'if, and in what way, the "reflexivity" of actions implies the "reflexivity" of actors, or what kind of "reflective capabilities" are implied in the ethnomethodological perspective?' (Czyzewski 1994: 166). Actors within the lifeworld appear to be denied the potential not only to reflect upon their actions, but also to change the conditions under and through which their actions takes place.

What of the reflexivity of the investigator in this process? The impression is of an analyst who seems capable of freeing themselves from their own language games without concern for the process or consequence of mediation between frames of meaning. What is eradicated is a consideration of the relations between production and reception of social scientific knowledge. Such considerations are side-stepped in favour of a collapse: 'If it is possible to lay bare the constitutive ordering of the world that experimental subjects owe to their own interpretive rules, then the process of translation between them and the observer can be done away with' (Habermas 1990: 110).

Objectivist accounts are set up as the protagonist to the reflexive but what guarantees, the ethnomethodologist would ask, are given by being generally reflexive? To regard reflexivity as being the property of particular positions, texts or social researchers allows it to operate on the basis of being exclusive. Yet from the point of view of ethnomethodology, reflexivity is mundane and uninteresting and so it questions the 'epistemological hubris that seems to accompany self-consciously reflexive claims'. Its study of 'constitutive reflexivity proposes no unreflexive counterpart' and instead is part of the 'infrastructure of objective accounting' (Lynch 2000: 47).

Processes of purification and institutionalization within social scientific communities now leads to a terminal point: the expunging of all residues that once provided for radical insights. In a consideration of the ethnomethodological legacy, Mervin Pollner refers to endogenous and radical reflexivity. The former refers to the constituting social reality in terms of 'how what members do in, to,

and about social reality' (Pollner 1991: 372). The latter, on the other hand, refers to how social reality, in general, is constituted. The object of its practices thus includes the presuppositions that are employed by social inquirers in their construction of social reality. For him, the central legacy of ethnomethodology lies in its emphasis upon radical reflexivity.

A greater emphasis upon endogenous reflexivity in the unfolding of this tradition has led to radical reflexivity being downplayed. Relations between the general and particular are not considered. Above all, it is about 'unsettling' and not simply the generation of meticulous descriptions via methodological prescriptions. It generates 'an insecurity regarding basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality'. Further, 'Because it is the antithesis of "settling down" it is not surprising that radical reflexivity is abandoned' (Pollner 1991: 370) as a community of inquiry is constituted that seeks a scientism, albeit in a different form, for its legitimacy. This may also be the consequence of the blurring of the boundaries between conversation analysis (CA) and ethnomethodology with the emphasis upon the former being an 'increasingly detailed explication of endogenous processes' (Pollner 1991: 373). To this extent there appears, in the history of this tradition, to be differences between Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks on the topic of radical reflexivity.

Ethnomethodology sought to overcome the scholastic point of view in the study of social life (Garfinkel 1991). It aimed to guard against writings on reflexivity becoming a means of privileging particular positions by reminding us about the mundanity of reflexivity in everyday life (Lynch 2000). By attending to the ways in which everyday life is produced through the work of interpretation by lay actors, there is a key challenge to the idea that the social world is unintelligible until the work of the social scientist is completed. As a study in the legacy of Winch for social science concludes: 'Everyday understanding might not be the last word, but it certainly ought to be the first' (Hutchinson et al. 2008: 138).

What we see in the relations between research and social life is not eradicated by reliance upon either scientism or naturalistic description. Both act as affirmations of end points by either collapsing the differences between social scientific discourse and everyday life, or by assuming one is superior to the other. Instead we need to see understanding as a task and not something eradicated by a reflexive situationalism or some free-floating universalism. Such a task may come with a commitment to social change.

Commitment to Change

Alvin Gouldner took aim at ethnomethodology as a form of 'micro-anarchism' that delighted in exposing the fragility of the social order. It appeals to those who wished to engage in a 'non-violent revolt' against the status quo because they could not, or would not, challenge dominant social structures (Gouldner 1971: 394–5).

His aim was more concerned with social change and the inevitable, pre-reflexive assumptions of social scientists.

Social scientists normalize 'unpermitted worlds' that threaten stability and order. Accommodation to this state of affairs is enacted in several ways. First, via allusions to value neutrality that enable an existential distance to be maintained from the implications of one's work and the subjects of investigation. Second, it is ignored via technicist allusions that deny its significance through sole attention to the rigour of method or rule it out via the adoption of particular methodologies (Gouldner 1971: 484–8). Both of these moves, as Jürgen Habermas (1989) argues, are symptomatic of the empiricist legacy in our apparent post-empiricist age.

Gouldner expressed caution about the possibilities for his call to reflexivity given how it might be translated into practice. He did not want it to become: 'just another topic for panel meetings at professional conventions' or 'another burbling little stream of technical reports' that focus upon the 'profession's origins, educational characteristics, patterns of productivity, political preferences, communication networks, nor even about its fads, foibles, and phonies' (Gouldner 1971: 489). To guard against this predisposition towards 'administrative de-politicisation' (May 2006) that is so characteristic of associations that seek to represent particular academic specialisms in terms of some narrow idea of detached professionalism and the preservation of hierarchies, a 'radical' project was required.

The term 'radical' is deployed because knowledge production should be linked to the investigator's position within the world. Further, the knowledge produced should seek to transform, as well as know the world, while the body of knowledge should pass through the researcher as a total person. These translate into issues that concern not 'how to *work* but how to *live*' (Gouldner 1971: 489. Original italics). Attention to the conduct of social researchers, therefore, is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for maturation: 'What is needed is a new *praxis* that transforms the person' (Gouldner 1971: 494. Original italics).

We are left with the following implications for a reflexive practice. Understanding is to be directed toward how the researcher's praxis and their role and social position relate to the product and process of their work. It seeks to deepen self-awareness of the production of valid and reliable 'bits of information', strengthen a commitment to the value of this awareness and generate a willingness to be open to 'hostile information'. It is not about the object of study, as such, but the mode of study in terms of the relationship that is established between being a social scientist and a person in the world (Gouldner 1971: 494).

We now enter the realm of the personal and its relationship to the process and product of social research. Taking formal logic, along with the evidential basis for the adoption of a theory, or its openness and resistance to falsification as sufficient reason, brackets an understanding of the experiential basis of theoretical adherence. It is not suggested, in any way, that we replace evidence with the particularity of experience, but it is to accept that the behaviour of the

social scientist is not 'shaped solely by a willing conformity to the morality of scientific method' (Gouldner 1971: 30). What, then, are the factors that shape such behaviour?

What is not open to scrutiny is the relationship between a social scientist and a theory as being 'intuitively convincing'. An alignment between the background assumptions of the social scientist and those of the theory occurs such that 'psychic closure' or 'consensual validation' is achieved (Gouldner 1971: 30). Here Gouldner is drawing upon the work of Michael Polanyi. He is getting at articulation, never being able to reach finitude, expressing the 'ineffable': 'something that I know and can describe even less precisely than usual, or even only vaguely' (Polanyi 1962: 88). The 'internal', as represented by the biography of the researcher and the 'external', represented by the work of theory, become aligned through elements that are obscured in each. These background assumptions range from those that are general and orientate in such a way that the unfamiliar becomes meaningful, through to assumptions as applied to those within a single domain: 'they are, in effect, the metaphysics of a domain' (Gouldner 1971: 31). As to whether theories must rest upon such assumptions, or if researchers should or should not be influenced by them, these matters are held to be for philosophers of science and 'methodological moralists', respectively. That they influence practice is an empirical matter (Gouldner 1971: 32).

Background assumptions are characterized by the absence of explicit criteria to assess their utility and when it comes to domain assumptions, they rest upon sentiments. This is not to say that they are directly related, for when sentiments are at variance with those things taught within the culture we may find open rebellion and 'adopting or seeking new domain assumptions more consonant with the feelings they actually have' (Gouldner 1971: 39). It is not to suggest that this is commonplace because it may be easier to live with older assumptions; feelings of inadequacy may result from such disjuncture such that it is individualized and turned into an expression of personal pathology, or it may be articulated among trusted others where it finds understanding within supportive cultures of inquiry.

Whatever the outcome, such tensions may be expressed in terms of the relations between what is called 'role reality' and 'personal reality'. Role reality is what is expected to be learnt and known by a competent practitioner, while personal reality relates to the imputations made about the social world separate from the obligations attendant upon systematic thought and evaluation. What may result from this tension is a subjecting of the latter to 'systematic doubt' such that they sink into 'subsidiary awareness', but nevertheless remain of consequence for practice (Gouldner 1971: 41–5). A resultant conflation of personal and role reality enables the particular to be read as the general; the point being that cultures generate different personal realities and so exhibit differences in the process and product of theory construction (Gouldner 1975: 309).

While the history of social science has been written as a difference in view between Weber and Gouldner, the latter still speaks of a tragedy in the practice of social research totally reminiscent of the former. While both emphasize that

disciplinary preoccupations can become a form of escape, rather than engagement with the issues of the time, their 'solutions' are not the same. The struggle between scientific demands and personal impulses is overcome for one by a refusal to be assimilated to something that is ultimately unbearable and illegitimate. There is an escape from tragedy when it is recognized that the practitioner:

> need not allow themselves to be assimilated to their cultural masks … when they insist that it is they who are the measure, and they who do the measuring … in confining work to the requirements of a demanding and unfulfillable paradigm [they are] sacrificing unexpressed parts of themselves … in a wager that this sacrifice is 'best for science'. (Gouldner 1975: 320–1)

There are a limited number of solutions for how to link a person with the expectations surrounding their role. While Gouldner outlines some of these and makes no assumption regarding a final resting place, he is clear that those who jump the gap without knowing where they will end up are to be applauded for providing models for those who are left just 'dawdling at the edge' (Gouldner 1975: 322).

Gouldner takes reflexivity into new terrains by linking the personal and cultural with the particular and general. Yet some have interpreted his concerns about 'dawdling at the edge' as confusion between a call to reflexivity and his own intellectual memoirs (O'Neill 1972: 216). For the purposes of this discussion, however, despite his call for blending the inculcated gaze of the social scientist that allows for the constitution of the social world as an object of investigation with subjective experiences, what we end up with is a call that relies upon authenticity at the individual level. While he and Weber were to converge and diverge on issues, we may end up in the same place. Although attention to the conduct of social scientists is necessary in order to understand the differences between good and poor practice, it is not a sufficient condition for maturation. Gouldner's call displays a disjuncture between professional rhetoric, practice transformation and conditions of production. As a result it has a tendency to become nothing more than an act of celebration or impeachment: 'Hooray for myself. Down with the others!' (Pels 2003: 167).

Taking this legacy forward into our unfolding history allows us to examine another tradition that sought to take up the issues of how positioning and belonging relate to knowledge production. This is where feminisms enter the terrain of our investigations.

Feminisms and Transformation

The insights of feminisms are central to the investigation of reflexivity. They examine the separation between subject and object (another way of expressing

Gouldner's personal and role reality within a community of researchers) not from a position of disinterest from which the researcher works, but that interest itself comes from 'being engaged' (Hartsock 1987).

What this places in question are simple and unsustainable ideas of bias being constituted in terms of possessing 'interests'. At one level this is undertaken through a general comparison of the differences between men and women: an 'abstract masculinity' compared to the 'connectedness and continuities' between women living in everyday life exemplified through the exercise of empathy and an 'ethic of care' (see Larrabee 1993). As I mentioned earlier, despite methodologically and theoretically sophisticated arguments to the contrary, so many researchers are still caught in simple separations between facts and values through an over-extension of domains of practice. Even though these remain disguised behind the dances of textual sophistications and theoretical exegesis, their persistence is evident in the justifications used about practice and the forms of expertise constituted to pronounce upon various phenomena.

The dominance and persistence of these ways of thinking leads to an absence of understanding of how people are embedded within the social milieux that they inhabit, how they shape and are influenced by actions. Scientific abstraction can gloss over experience in everyday life, the result of which is the production of a 'third version' of events that is explicable neither in terms of the subjectivity of the analyst, nor that of the subject herself. Borrowing from the theoretical and empirical labours of non-feminists exacerbated this problem and was to demonstrate the limits of conventional approaches that glossed over important elements in social life: for example, the unseen and yet fundamental efforts involved in emotional labour, relational work with significant and generalized others and the whole politics of reproduction without which production would be unthinkable. These are the invisible workings of societies and an absence of their understanding leads to questions about the modes through which partial understandings of the social world are constructed and passed off as universal truths.

Dorothy Smith (1988, 1993, 1999), who draws upon various sources including Schutz, Garfinkel and Marx, takes the absence of women's experiences in social scientific accounts as symptomatic of 'relations of ruling' which occur through processes of social construction: 'They are relations that coordinate people's activities across and beyond local sites of everyday experience' (Smith 2002: 45). The creation of a sphere in which women can make links between experiences and the images and ideas through which they can make sense of them – the dimension between knowledge production and reception – is thereby limited. The point is to create this sphere of reflection by employing the ontological exclusion of women in the service of improvements in scientific insights.

Women are not constituted as subjects, but the 'other'; they become the objects, rather than the subjects, of social scientific discourses. Women are not seen as possessing 'an autonomous source of knowledge, experience, relevance and imagination' (Smith 1988: 51). Such exclusion is deployed productively because

an analytic focus upon the differences in men's and women's situations gives 'a scientific advantage to those who can make use of the differences' (S. Harding 1991: 120). A 'strong objectivity' thereby emerges in which thinking from women's lives can uncover those processes and structures which, from a male point of view, appear natural but from a feminist standpoint position require explanation. A resultant focus upon macro tendencies 'permits a more robust notion of reflexivity than is currently available in the sociology of knowledge or the philosophy of science' (S. Harding 1991: 149).

Captured here are the relations between the particular, expressed in terms of women's experiences and the general, as that which roots those experiences through social location and resultant knowledge within a more general theory of social processes concerning class, race, gender and sexuality. The otherwise problematic relations between experience and representation via social scientific work that ended up sequestrating those experiences, as Garfinkel and Schutz argued, is thereby resolved through an objective vantage point from women's lives as the 'other'.

Whereas conventional epistemology speaks of knowledge as if it were a free-floating voice, this approach takes the underlying social epistemology that is implied in any theory of knowledge. It then examines the significance of the gap that lies between an understanding from the point of view of oppressed and dominated groups and the dominant conceptual schemes that ride over such experiences in the name of a 'weak' objective social science. The result is a 'standpoint' that, unlike a perspective, is socially mediated and requires *both* science and politics to achieve (S. Harding 1991: 276, footnote).

In terms of the relations between facts and values and how those impinge upon practice, a distinction is made between constitutive and contextual values. The former refer to those values that inform the 'rules determining what constitutes acceptable scientific practice or scientific method'. Contextual values, on the other hand, 'belong to the social and cultural environment in which science is done' (Longino 1990: 4). Instead of assuming a simple distinction, as with the idea of natural proximity, they exist in a dynamic interaction that is actually required by the process and practice of scientific inquiry.

This dynamic works to both protect and challenge scientific claims exhibiting the same ambivalence that is characteristic of the world which is studied. Claims to autonomy are frequently based upon the separation of facts and values as acts of purifying ambivalence in the name of defending scientific activity and certainty. However, as is possible with more productive readings of Weber and Schutz, to see this as a strictly epistemological matter precludes the social dimension to scientific activity. To admit of a social dimension to knowledge is often seen to rule out allusion to certainty and permanence. Is this a great loss? Given that 'no epistemological theory has been able to guarantee the attainment of those ideals, this seems a minor loss' (Longino 1990: 232).

There is no need to be content with a 'weak' reflexivity that creates an artificial isolation of research communities from larger social forces. They are 'disabled by

their lack of any mechanism for identifying the cultural values and interests of the researchers, which form part of the evidence for the results of research in both the natural and social sciences' (S. Harding 1991: 162). The result is a tendency towards judgemental relativism and weak objectivity and while there are allusions to not wishing to harm subjects and note cultural biases, these concerns still 'remain at the level of desire rather than competent enactment' (S. Harding 1991:163). By taking account of social situations and cultural particularities in terms of relations between other work that is of importance, an 'oppositional theory' may be developed which takes on board experiences and examines the causal tendencies that are part of natural and social life.

During the process of social investigation it is necessary to take these insights on board and translate them into research practice. The process of research itself is not regarded as being valid by virtue of being constituted by the reflexive attitude of the investigator's point of view. Research becomes a dialogic process whereby the views of research participants are incorporated into the findings (J. Cook and Fonow 1990). Rooting actual experiences within institutional relations not only brings to light similarities in experiences, but also demonstrates disjunctures between personality and culture that demand analytic attention, as opposed to being glossed over in favour of formulaic neatness as determined by the isolated and lone researcher.

A process of 'explication' arises in which relevance derives from the subject's 'lived actualities' and not from:

> an abstract space with relevances determined by notions such as the cumulation of a body of scientific knowledge … The discovery of an objectively existing social process is thus, through its capacity to generate bases of experience, seen *from such bases of experience.* The aim is to disclose the social process from within as it is lived. (D. Smith 1988: 176–7. Original italics)

The feminist analyst takes the ambivalence that arises from seeking to answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'How do others see me?' An absence of connectivity due to occupying contradictory social locations (inside and outside) is then turned into an analytic advantage. What is retained is a scientific viewpoint *for* women without collapsing into the issues associated with identity politics in which knowledge is accessible only to particular groups which then not only acts as a reason for celebration, but also functions as exclusion.

The overall result so easily slips into a celebration of situatedness in which a particular ethic takes the place of epistemology and borders on individualism in which the opportunity to learn from others and engage in understanding so easily departs. Yet does this still privilege a 'view from nowhere' that is characteristic of weak objectivism? The issue of judgement of relevance still remains. Wealth and power divide women as much as men, so does this evade, as oppose to seek to resolve, issues associated with the relations between research and everyday life?

In seeking answers to these issues we can see a change in thought in Sandra Harding's work in *Feminism and Methodology* to *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Harding 1987, 1991). What emerges are the following points of clarification. First, in considering gender differences, it is an examination of the causes of differences that is the unifying principle *between* different women. In the pursuit of this aim a common factor emerges: 'it is the same group of white, European, bourgeois men who have legitimated and brought into being for the rest of us life worlds different from theirs' (S. Harding 1986: 175). This, in turn, contributes to an 'intellectual participatory democracy' into which the results of feminist research are fed and discussed:

> To enact or operationalize the directive of strong objectivity is to value the Other's perspective and to pass over in thought into the social condition that creates it – not in order to stay there, to 'go native' or merge the self with the Other, but in order to look back at the self in all its cultural particularity from a more distant, critical, objectifying location. (S. Harding 1991: 151)

This represents the need to recognize and investigate, rather than deny, the relations between subject and object. Contained within this call is also the need to avoid an adherence to a 'truth ideal' that is nothing more than attempts by powerful groups to legitimize how social relations are to be organized, as well as determine the form of interactions with nature (S. Harding 2006). Overall this is held to be a common project that involves a critical reflexivity through attention to history in the collective constitution of women as 'other'. A dialogic approach to scientific activity then acts as a check upon the privileging of social scientific accounts according to one standpoint as an assumed 'universal'. The aim is to create a forum through which the lost voices of women may be recovered in terms of making links between women's experiences in a more public, rather than private, forum. This activity of empowerment overcomes the tendency to see women as other. In the process, women's reflexivity within everyday experiences is revealed, rather than concealed in the partial perspectives of male 'scientific' findings.

An emphasis upon the epistemological advantages of ontological exclusion is certainly a novel move, taking us from the apparent certainties of early modernity to its later, ontological phase. At the same time it could be read as yet another means of gaining access to a universal truth that downplays difference via a denial of relativism which has posed critical issues within feminist thought itself (Haraway 1991; Murray 1997; Soper 1997; Spelman 1990). To speak in the name 'of' requires some unifying factors among women. As noted, a 'unifying principle' among different women may be a common group of men as rulers, but critiques emerged from within feminism itself on the basis that such ideas still rested upon the idea of 'woman' as somehow universal and thus, in the process, questioned the ontological basis upon which these perspectives were constructed.

Judith Butler writes of performativity in relation to both gender and sex as being different from performance because it does not presuppose a subject or a standpoint rooted in ontology. Taking performative speech acts, as those things that bring something into being as a result of being named, along with the insights of Michel Foucault, it follows that discourse brings into being the subject, not the subject who produces discourse. In this way performativity is '*that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*' (Butler 1994: 33. Original italics). The opportunities for women to access understandings that bring together their experiences with explanations for those in relation to positions in a social field beyond discourses, is thereby diminished through being constituted by discourses.

Symbolic systems are held to be unstable and hence open to revision. With subject consciousness and its relation to that beyond discourse blocked, is engagement in the name of improvement also then blocked? With the subject positioned by objects within an object culture, narratives from everyday life become but one element, as opposed to *the* element in contemporary culture (Lash 1999). What emerges is a radicalized ontology in which it is no longer possible to speak of 'woman' but 'women'. Associating ontology with a necessary commitment to essentialism provides for celebrations of indeterminacy, fragmentation and relativism. A degree of stability or even a common 'foe' from which to base an engaged research practice aimed at change by recognizing the social nature of scientific knowledge production, now moves aside for an emphasis upon difference: 'if we ... say no to modernity and its regulatory shackles in an effort to rehabilitate a utopia of the past, then I think we miss the chance to understand how the analysis of sexuality is pervasively structured by sexual difference' (Butler 1999: 20).

Disrupting what is taken to be the exclusionary effects of performativity in order to produce a more inclusionary society is a clear aim of Judith Butler's work. The normative judgements for this purpose are not apparent and we are left with a position that it not so much for consensus, but against non-consensus. In terms of the implications for the role of social research in society, we see a clear tendency towards privileging the local, specific and discrete, over matters concerned with articulation and contextualization (Fraser in Benhabib et al. 1995). The overall effect is to theorize a social openness but the implications for an engaged practice are far less clear.

The issue of agency and the ability to exercise reflexivity in an approach that sees identity as bound up within a relational approach to language has been raised in respect to ethnomethodology. We have reflexivity in action, but what about reflexivity upon actions? If we take identity as an effect of language, what happens about the relationship between social scientific findings and lay knowledge in terms of any transformative potential for improving women's lives that results from such interaction? The overall effect easily slips into a detachment between analysis and social location (McNay 2008). Yet a concern with the relationship between

openness and engagement can be seen in an interview in which Judith Butler speaks of the need to produce feminist alternatives to those such as Catharine MacKinnon in the public sphere, but without undermining or demonizing existing work (Butler 1994). Such a move requires that the focus upon how subjects are constituted becomes one goal among others within a normative framework:

> there are questions of social and economic justice which are not primarily concerned with questions of subject-formation. To this end it is crucial to re-think the domain of power-relations, and to develop a way of adjudicating political norms without forgetting that such an adjudication will also always be a struggle for power. (Butler 1995: 141)

How do you undertake such work without displacing the very terms of reference that have constituted the uniqueness and power of feminist approaches to knowing the social world? A productive ambivalence that informs intellectual practice is so easily side-stepped in favour of ever increasing retreats into theoretical neatness. The institutionalization of such activities is a social process, but a perspective that focuses upon discourse deconstruction to the exclusion of a focus on the institutional arrangements under which knowledge production, dissemination and reception takes place is not politically well equipped to defend itself, except in the most reified places far removed from the lives of those whom it is intended to assist. It can easily become not the discipline of feminism conducted in the name of women, but the disciplining of feminism itself (Messer-Davidow 2002). We find that the history of an intellectual and political struggle to enable women's studies to be recognized within educational institutions runs the danger of being assumed by those who now enjoy the benefits afforded by earlier resistance and struggle.

What is at risk if engagement with social processes, that is said to characterize feminist practice aimed at social change, is abandoned? As Mary Maynard (1998) points out, feminist approaches to research may not reflect new methods of social investigation as such, but new questions pursued for different purposes. Here the practice and dissemination of research findings is explicitly designed to improve the position of women in different societies and groups through contributing to dialogic communities that are designed to enhance understanding. In the need to recognize, but not reify, difference and in the name of improving women's position within societies, writers have noted the need for a balance between the potential arrogant complacency of universalism and the nihilism of perspectivism (J. Martin 1994).

The social character of knowledge and the efforts involved in mediating between constitutive and contextual values can so easily be lost, leaving not the work of understanding, but instead those who shout across chasms informed by a positioning and process that has long since ceased to be an object of investigation taken forward into practice. By taking an alternative route, feminist research

can build upon findings concerning women's positions and experiences within the social world (Walby 1997). That route is not achieved by 'flattening out' an understanding of conflict and diversity between and within women's experiences (Segal 1999), nor from regarding agency as arising from the indeterminacy of symbolic structures (McNay 2000, 2008).

Summary

Opening up the practice of social research to reflexive scrutiny has a number of consequences. At the experiential level of the researcher, a tension will be felt between the centrality of their experiences, measured against the aggregate of social values and practices they seek to understand. Feelings of inconsequentiality may result as individuality is absorbed within totality. For Weber this existed as a tension between an ethic of commitment and an ethic of responsibility: that is, a belief in the value of science and a commitment to represent that which is discovered. Although his work has been interpreted as erecting walls between the integrity of science and arbitrary values, it is equally plausible to suggest that it resulted from the effort to construct a sphere in which 'affirmation was possible and, most important, where bureaucratic and scientific rationality were impossible' (Wolin 2004: 380).

In the absence of supportive and open cultures of inquiry, all this so easily becomes unproductive, as opposed to a productive tension taken forward in practice. Expressions of individual inadequacy result in an age in which social problems are increasingly individualized. Pushing too far in this direction sees individuals or groups of individuals opting for particular schools of thought, thinkers or methods because such allegiances provide a relief from this basic tension or, alternatively, there is a reflexive turn inwards on scientific constitution that does little to help in understanding the relations between social research and social life.

Each of the above insights in this chapter has contributed to greater sensitivity in relation to these issues. At the same time each, in their different ways, quietly seeks closure of a more general consideration of the role and future of social research in social life. Max Weber and Alfred Schutz are both thinkers whose work has passed through so many hands. A return to their insights shows, as would be expected, both strengths and limitations. Similarly, with Harold Garfinkel we find an emphasis upon reflexivity that should alert us to unrealistic claims for the benefits of its various practices, along with a caution against collapsing spheres of activity whose differences constitute their vibrancy and insight.

We have much to thank the writers discussed in this chapter for showing us the social nature of knowledge production. However, there are limits to this endeavour when deployed in the service of reflexivity. It is plausible to suggest that precisely because the physical sciences are not so consciously reflexive, they are 'normal'

sciences in the Kuhnian sense of the word. How often can people explicate the reasons for their actions when they may be intuitive? Herein lie certain limits. So too do limits lie in the celebration of context over content. If production is reducible to an explanation of context, what might we then say about why some practices, ideas and findings get taken up elsewhere? Context can help us with understanding knowledge production, but content is also a key component of explanatory adequacy and the efforts aimed at achieving practical understandings in everyday life in terms of knowledge reception. An understanding of both production and reception enables us to examine the natural proximity of social science and social life and the interactions between constitutive and contextual values.

In terms of social research, this requires us to examine what it sees and the manner in which it is constructed, while considering its wider place within social relations. Accompanying this is recognition that 'practical' interventions in the organization of social life are central to its endeavours and vital to its future. Limits also need to be recognized. While Alvin Gouldner rightly introduced the topic of feeling to its practice, this can hover on the edges of an individualist and idealist conception 'straight out of nineteenth century Romanticism' (Dawe 1973: 51). The point of taking on board the role of experience in practice is also to hold a place for a practice whose value lies in its ability to provide insights that inform and also question our common understandings. The feelings and experiences of the researcher are the starting point to this process, but they are certainly not the finishing point.

Similarly, to allude, albeit in a disguised fashion, to a sense of belonging between the researcher and researched that is unproblematically regurgitated as a condition of interpretative adequacy and thus the authenticity of findings, elides an understanding of the different ways of understanding that come with any attempt aimed at explanation. This is the point that Dorothy Smith was making not only about feminist-inspired social research, but also about the translation and contestation of ideas between contexts and groups.

I chose here to concentrate on particular ideas within the diverse body of thought that constitutes feminisms. The reasons are that these authors explicitly seek to retain engagement with social and political issues, alongside recognition of the limitations of science and its reconstitution. Here we find several impulses characterizing the poles of reflexivity. First, the continual process of deconstruction in order to remain sensitive to working assumptions and their effects on research practice. Second, reconstruction in order to inform engagement via improved practice and third, a concern with the dissemination and interpretation of such knowledge and its implications for actions. Overall, therefore, deconstruction is performed in the name of reconstruction (Harding and Hintikka 1983).

We can also observe that an absence of reflexivity in research practice can be symptomatic of a politics that takes organic belonging as unproblematic and any questioning of those relations as an act that automatically debunks supposedly self-evident truths. Institutions are said to bear the problems of reflexivity, not people. Reflexivity is de-bunking as the automatic critique of the self-evident.

Knowing one's place according to a strong tradition is what constitutes a viable society and is the political and social solution to the problem of reflexivity. When dealing with the issue of reflexivity in this manner, however, we can terminate in some sinister 'solutions' to these 'problems' (Dahl 1999).

At another level we must ask: once the adherence to a technicality in method is unsettled, what takes its place? Reflexivity might work as a sensitizing device bringing into view those elements of research that remain hidden by the limitations of such approaches, but when it works to produce yet another social scientific hierarchy through which to judge the adequacy of results about the social world, it easily slips into undermining, as opposed to positively contributing to, dialogue and representation.

Such an outcome can easily occur within environments in which there is no shortage of those willing to occupy this space and who are far less reserved in their pronouncements of how the world should be. Both a narrow technicism and the repeated inventions of reflexive adequacy can work to produce an image of good and bad social science, leaving those less reserved about such matters to participate in the public realm in which judgements, formulations and policies are routinely made. Here, I am reminded of a colleague and friend, well known in social research, who rang me up to ask what an editorial board was asking about when they requested him to be 'more reflexive' in his article. He wanted to talk about the world, not the word. They wanted to reverse the equation in the name of something whose justifications had no sense at all of this relation.

Reflexive thinking can be part of a healthy and ongoing debate within the social sciences that should not only enable clarification and improvements in precision, but also aim to question the conventions upon which practices are based in order that pre-reflexive assumptions are open to critical scrutiny; all of which may be conducted in the name of obtaining greater insight into the dynamics of social life. However, there is a basic tension in these aims, for the very act of raising such issues may itself threaten established procedures and beliefs. The core question then becomes: how far do you go? David Silverman recounts a story to illustrate his resistance to taking reflexive questioning too far:

> Many years ago, I remember a research student who used to make visiting speakers flounder by asking them: 'how would you apply your own analysis to the text you have just presented?' As they wriggled, I wriggled too – not from intellectual difficulty but rather from distaste for this sort of wordplay which appeared to make a not very articulate student into a profound thinker. (Silverman 1997: 240)

Reflexive questioning should not only involve an examination of the grounds upon which we may claim to know the social world, but also point to the limitations of our knowledge. In this sense it acts as a corrective to the instrumentalism informed by the desire to control, rather than understand, the social world. Academic commentators do not enjoy a monopoly on reflexive questioning and

also find themselves increasingly subject to the very forces which may act to counter reflexivity. In our apparent methodologically post-positivist/empiricist/modernist age, the quiet revenge of instrumentality marches onwards.

We will return to the issues associated with the contexts of knowledge production later in the book. With the above issues in mind I now turn to a more in-depth understanding of mediation and social research. Here we find not only a one-way relation of contributing to an improvement in social research practice, but also a relation in which practice itself becomes the object of reflection, critique and change.