The University of Hull

'BEING' IN CARE: DECONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

being a thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Hull

by

Jon Plant B.A. (Hons), M.A. Dip. s.w

June 2002
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

_Acknowledgments_ ............................................................................................................ 1  
_Introduction_ ........................................................................................................................ 2  

**PART ONE: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**  ......................................................... 9  

**CHAPTER ONE: WELFARE, THE STATE AND THE FAMILY**  ........................................ 10  
_Introduction_ ...................................................................................................................... 10  
_Welfare Perspectives Outlined_ ..................................................................................... 10  
_The Emergence of Welfare in the Liberal State_ ..................................................... 12  
_Childhood and Nationhood_ ......................................................................................... 14  
_Social Democratic Welfare: Consensus, Liberalism and the Rise of Social Work_............ 15  
_Child Abuse, Dissensus and Radicalism_ ........................................................................ 20  
_Child Abuse Inquiries_ .................................................................................................... 24  
_The Children Act 1989_ .................................................................................................... 26  
_Introducing a Discourse of Childhood_ ..................................................................... 29  
_Towards a postmodern critique_ .................................................................................. 34  
_Conclusion_ ........................................................................................................................ 37  

**CHAPTER TWO: FOUCAULT: DISCOURSE, POWER AND THE CONSTITUTED SUBJECT**  ................................................................. 39  
_Introduction_ ...................................................................................................................... 39  
_Epistemes, Discourse and Truth_ ................................................................................ 42  
_Discourse and Genealogy_ ............................................................................................. 45  
_Power and Disciplinary Practices_ ............................................................................... 48  
_Discipline and ‘Subjectification’_ ................................................................................. 53  
_Subjectification and Self-forming Identities: Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*_............. 54  
_Implications for a study of Social Work_ .................................................................... 57  
_Conclusion_ ........................................................................................................................ 62  

**CHAPTER THREE: DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTION**  .............................................. 66  
_Introduction_ ...................................................................................................................... 66  
_Saussure’s Structuralism_ ............................................................................................... 67  
_Barthé and Semiology: *Myth and the Naturalised Sign*_ .................................... 69  
_Mythical Childhood_ ........................................................................................................ 71  
_Structuralism and Post-structuralism: Some continuities and discontinuities*_............. 74  
_The Problem of ‘Presence’_ ........................................................................................... 76  
_i. Logocentrism, Presence and the Indeterminacy of Meaning_ .............................. 76  
_ii. Speech and Writing: The Structuring of ‘Presence’_ ............................................... 78  
_iii. Difference, Iteration, Presence_ .............................................................................. 82  
_iv. ‘Being’ under Erasure_ ............................................................................................ 85  
_v. Metaphor and Presence_ ........................................................................................... 86  
_Supplementarity and Metaphor: Introducing Deconstruction_ .................................... 89  
_The Practice of Deconstruction_ ................................................................................ 91  
_Derrida and Deconstruction Critiqued: The Collapse of the ‘Centre’_ ................. 94  
_Conclusion_ ........................................................................................................................ 97  

**PART TWO: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK APPLIED**  .................................. 100  

**CHAPTER FOUR: A GENEALOGY OF CHILDHOOD**  .................................................. 101  
_Introduction_ .................................................................................................................... 101  
_Childhood as Signifier_ .................................................................................................. 102  
_The Family and the Child_ ............................................................................................ 104
The Child of Nature: Rousseau’s Emile ................................................................. 105
The ‘Natural’ Child ‘In Need’ of the Supplement .................................................... 110
Childhood as a Social Construction ...................................................................... 113
The History of Childhood: a Metaphor for ‘Progress’ ........................................... 115
Welfare Responses to the Child in Need and the Delinquent ............................ 120
Towards the ‘Modern’ Child: A Fusion of Disciplines ........................................ 125
‘Mythical’ Childhood ............................................................................................ 127
Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 129

CHAPTER FIVE: ‘BEING’ IN CARE: DECONSTRUCTING RESIDENTIAL CARE ................................................................. 131

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 131
A Note on Deconstructive Readings ...................................................................... 132
Children ‘Looked After’ ‘In Care’ ........................................................................... 133
Being ‘In Care’ ........................................................................................................... 134
The Power of Metaphor: ‘In Care’ .......................................................................... 136

Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Residential Care: A Deconstructive Reading ........................................................................................................................................................................ 139

The Text .................................................................................................................. 141
The Preface: Authorship and Mythical Signification ............................................. 141
Family Autonomy vs State Intervention: “understanding”, “cohesion”, “care and
and protection” ............................................................................................................ 144
Who is the Guidance for? ...................................................................................... 146
Demarcating Residential Care ................................................................................. 149

Contents Section (pages v-x): ‘Care’ as the institution ........................................ 151
Chapter One: ‘Children’s Homes’ ‘Care’ as supplement to the institution....... 156
‘Home’ as somewhere ‘Other than’ ......................................................................... 159
‘Home’ as an Instrument ......................................................................................... 162
‘Exposure to Harm’: Identifying potential disruption ............................................ 163
‘A Positive and Desirable Option’ ‘Placements’, Care System’, ‘Specific
Tasks’ .................................................................................................................... 165
Statement of Purpose and Function of Children’s Home (para. 1.16-1.21):
Regulation in Practice ............................................................................................. 169
Problematising Children ‘In Care’ ........................................................................... 171
The Precedence of the System ................................................................................ 177
The Simultaneous Promotion and Marginalisation of ‘Good Practice’ ........... 179
Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 181

CHAPTER SIX: CHILDHOOD POSTPONED: METAPHOR, DIFFERENCE,
REGULATION IN RESIDENTIAL CARE ......................................................................... 184

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 184
Principles of ‘Good’ Child Care Practice: Unity in Contemporary Discourse...... 186
The ‘Naturalising Trick: ‘Needs’ and ‘knowledge’ of Child Development ......... 189
Promoting Rights, Affirming Needs: Circumscribing Children’s Rights and
Entitlements ................................................................................................................ 194
Temporality, Transition and Difference ................................................................ 197
The Child ‘in waiting’ ............................................................................................... 199
Listening to Children: ‘Age and level of Understanding’ .................................... 200
‘Leaving Care’: ‘Coming to Terms’ with the ‘Self’ ................................................... 202
Preparing for ‘Leaving Care’ Behind ...................................................................... 205
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Robert Harris for his enthusiasm and encouragement. Thanks also to friends and family who have supported, advised and kept faith with this project throughout.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Kathleen Lennon for her rigorous and constructive criticism, clarity and focus, but in particular for respecting the integrity of my work.
PAGE
NUMBERING
AS ORIGINAL
Introduction

This study is about childhood; more specifically it is about childhood in residential public care. It sets out to show how, despite well-intentioned policies and practices, children who are subject to the care of the state are, albeit inadvertently, located 'on the margins' by virtue of the very policies and practices which are designed to ensure their welfare and best interests. This is because those policies and practices seek to ensure that such children are provided with a form of care that is constituted out of prevailing conceptualisations of what childhood should be. Since such conceptualisations regard childhood as a definitive, universal state of transition towards adulthood that is of its very nature rooted in the 'natural' family, the effect is to locate these children always 'on the other side' of what should or ought to be, signifying for the mainstream what family life 'is'. Being 'in care' is therefore always 'second best'; even if the experience is positive, it is rarely desirable.

The study seeks to examine the knowledges which construct childhood and to demonstrate that, far from being universal and definitive, childhood is an historically and culturally-specific construct. It will be suggested that certainty and 'truth' about childhood, particularly in social work, rather than providing security, stability for 'future adults', actually serve to limit and constrain the possibilities and potentialities for both children and adults. For children in public care, the consequences can be more serious; they may not only experience a childhood which is characterised by absence, loss and postponement, but may find themselves as adults consigned to the margins of society. It will be further suggested that it is only by embracing uncertainty and ambivalence about
childhood and regarding sceptically the knowledges which construct it that it is possible to begin to 'think differently', not only about childhood, but about family and the social world. In this way, 'public care' may become something else and something more, conceived and constructed in such a way as to offer children 'differently positive and meaningful' child-rearing experiences.

In order to elucidate and substantiate the above theses, the study draws primarily from postmodern, and particularly post-structuralist thought. Given these are not themselves by any means 'fixed' terms of reference, it will be useful to clarify their usage in other disciplines and settle on an understanding for the purposes of this study.

Postmodernism represents a shift from the modernist thinking that had its roots in the project of Enlightenment which coalesced at the end of the eighteenth century. In short, a belief in social and economic progress, universal reason and the coherent, rational subject was to shape social scientific, political and scientific theory throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century (Williams: 1996). Postmodernism challenged the universalism of reason and progress and instead emphasised the relativity of knowledge, truth and the fragmented nature of the self.

As a cultural phenomenon, 'postmodern' can mean many things simultaneously; nor are the meanings necessarily consistent; rather, they may often be contradictory. In architecture, the modernist style of the Bauhaus group, founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius was based on the idea that art should serve the needs of the modern industrial world and that there was no distinction between fine art and practical crafts. The style emphasised the functionality of buildings and an appreciation of the aesthetic quality of basic materials, obviating the need for elaborate ornamentation and representationalism and purged of narrative (Jencks: 1975). Here, postmodernism emerged as a reaction to the anti-representational, technocratic and austere practices of the Bauhaus, or International Style as it became known, towards eclecticism and a return to narrative, traditionalism,
Introduction

Overt symbolism and the vernacular (Venturi: 1977). Similarly, in painting, modernism meant an abandonment of representation and a turning toward self-reflexivity and pursuit of the formal possibilities of painting itself through impressionism, cubism and abstraction. For Clement Greenberg (1980), postmodernism in art could only be seen as an abandonment of the higher modernist project of self-discovery and a return to figurative narrative of a lower, non-progressive order.

Conversely, for most literary critics postmodernism is taken to mean the self-reflexiveness in the writing of, for example Samuel Beckett and the so-called Theatre of the Absurd and the metafiction first seen in the 1960's and 1970's (Bertens: 1995). Also in photography, it is the shift away from realism toward anti-representational styles that are postmodern in, for example, the work of Cindy Sherman and Richard Levine (Crimp: 1987).

Postmodernism then, can mean opposite things in different places; for those postmodernists who see the movement as one away from representationalism, this has sometimes meant more than a questioning of the premises upon which the discipline is founded. Here, one might again talk in terms of the discourse that a particular discipline inhabits in that it is the very idea of, for example ‘art’ that is in question, its separateness, its enclosure within an autonomous realm and its exclusiveness that render it ineffectual and powerless in terms of political action (Bertens: 1995). It makes sense of itself to only itself thus remaining distant and seemingly irrelevant to the wider social world. It is here that a specifically post-structuralist analysis has its beginnings and from where this study will begin to explore some of the discourses of social theory and social work. That is, to explore representation as representation and not as ‘truth’. In general and for the purposes of this study, post-structuralism may be regarded as the postmodern approach that has been most
influential within philosophy (and in particular continental philosophy), literary theory and, increasingly, the social sciences.¹

Structuralism acknowledged that language is a sign-system with rules that account for the social production of meaning and was largely derived from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). As the primary instance of a sign-system, the structural linguistics of Saussure served as a model for application across the whole range of social scientific and anthropological disciplines. (A fuller discussion of linguistic structuralism and its relationship to post-structuralism can be found in Chapter Three). Post-structuralism grew out of this approach but rejects the limits of the closed system with governing rules, preferring to see meaning/signification as constantly deferred and displaced in the endless play of signification. Most significant is a challenge to the idea that language represents reality, that it merely mirrors our direct encountering of the world. Whereas for the empiricist, knowledge emerges from this direct experience and is simply given expression through language; for the postmodern theorist, and more specifically, the post-structuralist, language does not represent the social world, it constitutes it. Knowledge is thus always and already contorted through language, by its location in history, place and context. The very notion of human consciousness, of the knowing self, autonomous, free and unblemished by any ‘external’ context is thus rendered unstable and insecure; post-structuralism gives way to the idea of the constructed human subject, constituted by and through language.

In this sense, as far as the ‘subject’ is concerned, it might be argued that if the subject in modernity is determined from ‘within’, the postmodern subject is determined from ‘without’. For Michel Foucault (1971,1977,1978) this means that fundamental notions

¹ To clarify: for the purposes of this study postmodernism is thus regarded as a general complex cluster concept which in broad terms includes an “opposition to transcendental arguments and standpoints; rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation;...rejection of principles, distinctions, and descriptions that are thought to be binding for all times, persons and places...and a suspicion of grand narratives” (Magnus: 726: cited in Audi (ed):1999). To this extent the terms postmodernism and post-structuralism may hereafter be used interchangeably, except where the approach, concept or idea is specific to structuralism or post-structuralism.
which we accept as being permanent truths about human nature and the social world must be seen as historically and culturally specific and it is the shifting and permutating patterns of power in relation to the subject that warrants investigation. That, however, is not to imply that there any 'fundamental rationale' or conspiracy to such change other than that it worked. Foucault's work seeks to unmask the politics that are at work in representations and undermine the hegemony of any one discourse over another, particularly where it exists at the exclusion of that which constitutes the 'Other' in society.

As a way of describing the social world (as opposed to explanations which seek an underlying cause or ‘truth’), post-structuralism pursues the rejection of the project of Enlightenment articulated by postmodernity further, and demands that even everyday understandings of concepts like ‘childhood’, ‘family’, ‘welfare’ and ‘children’s needs’, as well as the social configurations, discourses and institutions in which they arise are interrogated; they may not always, (or not only) be what they appear to be. They can however, signify or mean something else and something more than is often taken for granted. Indeed, ‘taken for grantedness’ may itself be proved to be a powerful ‘alibi’, enclosing meaning and signification in such a way as to render alternative readings obsolete, or in a way, censoring meaning. For the post-structuralist, there are no ‘origins’ to meaning, no universal truths to be discovered, no signifiers which can ‘transcend’ discourse, either within or post Modernity. However, that is not necessarily to indicate conspiracy, but to draw attention in this study to the constant working and reworking of much of the discourse of ‘childhood’ and its correlates ‘child abuse’, ‘child protection’ and ‘child welfare’, and to suggest that it is often those things which we regard as eminently ‘reasonable’, as having a ‘common-sense logic’ about them that require closer scrutiny, their very ‘taken for-grantedness’ giving cause for enquiry.

The study is in two parts. Part One consists of Chapters One, Two and Three and sets out the historical context and the conceptual framework. In Part Two, consisting of
Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, the conceptual framework is applied to the field of study, childhood in residential care.

In Chapter One the study will introduce a number of perspectives on child welfare and begin to suggest that notions of childhood and children's needs as natural categories are, in fact, constructed within a variety of discourses. It will also be argued that the conventional accounts of these perspectives are over-orderly, simplifying what are complex and often contradictory networks and configurations of meaning. The Chapter concludes by proposing an alternative, postmodern critique for the study. In Chapter Two, Foucault's ideas on discourse and the way power is exercised in society will be explored further, with particular reference to the discourse of 'children's needs'. The tools for analysis will be developed in Chapter Three by elucidating Derrida's deconstructive 'method' and in Chapter Four correlations will be drawn between the post-structuralism of Foucault and Derrida with regard to the historical variability of childhood, proposing that the 'idea' of childhood as a distinct phase is philosophically tenuous and that child development in particular, despite its centrality within social work discourse, is ultimately 'unreliable' as a universal concept, especially with regard to children and young people on the margins of society. Through an intimate, deconstructive examination of legislative and policy frameworks and guidance for professional practice in residential care, Chapters Five and Six argue (against the orthodoxy), that the application of child development 'knowledge' and its supremely effective articulation of children's 'needs', far from promoting an 'inclusive' approach to the care, welfare and protection of children subject to 'corporate parenting' of the state, effectively ensure the maintenance of some on the 'outside' of what can then be determined as the mainstream or norm. Further, it will be suggested that this has implications not only for children in 'public care', but for all children. Throughout the discussion, the study will show how the establishment of a singular, distinctive, universal and coherent 'childhood' which is characterised by temporality, transition and irrationality has had a pivotal role within Modernity and the idea of the unified 'subject'.
As a consequence, it will be further proposed that children who are in public care, have a crucial and symbolic role for the 'mainstream' (the 'natural family') and are determinedly secured within a prefiguring 'discourse of childhood' which effectively evacuates them from speaking in the 'here and now'. On the basis on the deconstructive work of the preceding chapters, Chapter Seven concludes that the orthodox perspectives on child welfare are indeed inadequate. Whilst concurring with others that there has, within advanced Modernity, been an erosion of values-based practice in social work, the chapter argues that that this should not be confused with notions that we are within a 'postmodern era'. Further, if values are to be at the heart of professional practice, they need to be understood differently, that is, as based upon contingent forms of knowledge about childhood. Finally, the Conclusion summarises that main theses of the study and indicates some of the implications for policy, professional practice and further research.
PART ONE

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
CHAPTER ONE

WELFARE, THE STATE AND THE FAMILY

Introduction

This chapter begins by setting out an historical context to the thesis. This is drawn from what might be called the 'standard narrative' accounts of the emergence of the welfare state and, more particularly, a 'welfare response' to children and child maltreatment through the interactions between the state and the family. It is this context that forms the backdrop to the subsequent analysis of childhood in public care in later chapters. In addition, the chapter describes some of the differing perspectives and critiques of the welfare state and draws attention to some of the underlying assumptions which, despite their contribution to understanding the complex relationship between the state and the family, have largely regarded childhood as a fixed invariable in their analyses. The study also introduces Foucault's notion of intersecting discourses, which in this study are seen as constructing contemporary understandings of childhood. Finally, the chapter begins to introduce an alternative conceptual framework, drawn from the post-structuralism of both Foucault and Derrida, the primary sources for this analysis.

Welfare Perspectives Outlined

In Western, liberal states it is generally accepted that children are generally better provided for and 'healthier' than they were say, fifty or a hundred years ago. This progress is also generally seen as commensurate with a better understanding of what children's
needs are, based on an increasing knowledge of child development and the psycho-
dynamics of the family. Further, these and other social, economic and medical
developments of the twentieth century shaped the role of the state in relation to the
family in the form of welfare provisions and social work interventions which protect
children, support vulnerable families and safeguard child welfare. One way or another,
liberal frameworks, whether the 'classical liberal', *laissez-faire* approach of the mid-
nineteenth century, or those of a broadly 'social democratic' hue in the political consensus
of the post-war period, or the neo-liberalism of the 1980's and 1990's, all regard welfare as
something of a concession within a capitalist ethic of wealth production; the question is
simply one of degrees, that is, to what extent the state should compromise the operation
of a free market and individual autonomy and responsibility in order alleviate the effects of
unemployment and poverty. Social work is seen as intervening in a variety of ways along a
continuum from support, prevention, therapy, protection and control depending on
individual family circumstances combined with the moral, social and political milieu of the
time. Put simply, liberal approaches, one way or another, rely on the family as an 'ideal
type', from which deviation and subsequent intervention can then be calibrated.

Radical social work theory and practice emerged in the late 1960's and 1970's and was
largely a response to concern about controlling elements of social work practice within the
aforementioned liberal agenda. Here, welfare is seen as merely an instrument of the state,
maintaining the subordinate class towards the production of labour. In broader terms,
radical social work drew on Marxist theory and saw welfare spending as creating markets
for private sector producers and appropriating the working class into the capitalist system
by presenting a benevolent front - just enough to stifle popular discontent - a kind of
insurance policy for the dominant classes against the threat of revolutionary action.
Feminist analyses, which in some ways were affiliated to radical approaches extended the
critique of welfare further by placing gendered family relations on the political agenda.
Welfare policies were analysed as inherently sexist within patriarchy, maintaining
subordination and emphasising the 'natural' role of women within the family for child-rearing and caring (for the elderly and infirm of the family).

**The Emergence of Welfare in the Liberal State**

The provision of welfare services is a relatively recent phenomenon - in the mid-nineteenth century there was little welfare provision in the wake of the development of industrial capitalism. Inasmuch as the welfare needs of the population were met at all it was through the market and a liberal philosophy of *laissez-faire* - private landlords provided housing, private tutors provided education and private doctors provided medical care - all for a price that few could afford. Those who could not afford the price relied upon charity and the philanthropy of the middle classes. As a response to this seemingly intractable dilemma (which was both economic and moral) for the emergent liberal state, the Poor Law reforms of 1834 sought to distinguish between the deserving and non-deserving - poverty was individualised, the result of bad luck for the deserving or feckless indolence for the non-deserving. The workhouse system was intended to dissuade the work-shy and provided minimal refuge for the unfortunate: "Into such a house none will enter voluntarily; work confinement and discipline will deter the indolent and vicious; and nothing but extreme necessity will induce any to accept the comfort which must be obtained by the surrender of their free agency" (1833 Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, cited in Dearlove and Saunders: 1985). The problem was that the efforts of governments to improve conditions of the working class was incompatible with the free operation of the market for labour which produced low wages and the market for consumption, goods and services which led to high rents, living costs etc. Despite this dilemma, there can be little doubt that the potential threat posed by waves of discontent among working class families in the new industrial centres eventually induced a pragmatic response from the state in respect of welfare provision, notwithstanding a commitment to the capitalist social order and an overriding 'market imperative'.
Welfare, the State and the Family

Gradually, and by no means as part of any 'project' of 'social reform', a laissez-faire approach was eroded; reform, that was more often in response to middle-class sensibilities than human need, forged the basis for the welfare state. The Factory Acts of the 1840's and 1850's regulated child labour and from 1850 Boards of Health began to exercise regulatory powers over the sanitary conditions of working class areas. Education Acts passed from 1870 onwards culminated in the provision of free, universal education for all.

Thus, in the context of a new economic liberalism and an increasingly organised working class the need to attend to 'genuine' working class grievance and distinguish more clearly between the deserving and non-deserving poor could no longer be postponed or left to market forces alone. As far as children were concerned, it is within this conceptualisation that they emerge briefly as 'victims' and that child cruelty is perceived as a 'social problem', albeit still very much in Poor Law terms. The NSPCC (established in 1884) provided the main thrust for change and was instrumental in paving the way for the Protection of Cruelty to and Protection of Children Act 1889. The Act made wilful ill-treatment, neglect or abandonment of a boy under 14 years or a girl under 16 years an offence punishable by imprisonment or fine. The provisions of legislation were further extended to empower local authorities with responsibility for the removal and assumption of rights over a child who was deserted, orphaned, or whose parents were unfit to have care.

Although there were elements of 'prevention' emerging by the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in the work of the NSPCC who undertook a supervisory role with families, the general emphasis remained on families taking full responsibility for their members with intervention framed in terms of rescuing the child and punishing the parents.

However, by the time of the Liberal government's terms of office from 1905 - 1914 the state was beginning to take a much broader, preventative approach to welfare needs.
Children's needs in particular figured highly on the political agenda for a variety of reasons, not all of which were motivated out of an apparent increase in 'humanitarianism'.

Childhood and Nationhood

It was at this time that British industrial supremacy was beginning to be challenged by competitors and there was a generalised concern about national decline and malaise. Further, recruitment for the Boer war had raised concerns about the general unfitness of the working class; the socialist movement was gaining widespread support; Britain's birth rate was lagging behind those of Germany and America and there was public concern about the effects of poverty, heightened by Seebohm Rowntree's social survey of poverty in town life (1901). In response, a number of measures designed to alleviate the grievances of the respectable working class were taken in the form of pensions, health insurance and education. The Health Visiting Service was introduced along with school meals and regular medicals for school children.

The 1908 Children Act was heralded as a 'children's charter': existing laws relating to the prevention of cruelty to children were strengthened, the sale of cigarettes to minors was prohibited for the first time, and juvenile courts were introduced and remand homes established. The reforms however, reflected more than a new-found concern for the welfare of children; in terms of the liberal economy, the concern for industrial efficiency and a desire to maintain the empire they "hit the right political note; statist as opposed to philanthropic, but minimalist as distinct from socialist" (Frost and Stein: 1989:31).

In this period 'nationhood' and 'childhood' become inextricably intertwined; the health of the nation depended upon the health of its future 'citizenship'; in order to ensure the former the 'needs' of the nation were to be met through the constitution of and provision for the 'needs' of the child (see Hendrick: 1997). Such needs required the child to hold the promise of future prosperity. Legislation extended what had been largely bourgeois-derived and 'expert-formulated' notions of childhood to the whole population. Further, as potential *citizens* of the liberal-capitalist state, such needs for care, protection and welfare
Welfare, the State and the Family

came to be reconfigured within a framework of 'rights'; that is, as legitimate claims to, for example, protection from harm which must be met were children to fulfil their future role:

The incapacitated child, vulnerable, innocent, ignorant and dependent, was entirely suited to be a member of the twentieth century family, the 'haven' within the liberal-capitalist system, sustained by a popular vote...In an age of fierce imperial, political, military and economic national rivalries, in addition to domestic anxieties regarding poverty, class politics, social hygiene and racial efficiency, children were being reconstructed as material investments in national progress.

Hendrick: 1997:51

The establishment of a framework of child welfare legislation constructed the idea of children's rights which the state was ultimately required to ensure. This in turn served to further secure the separation of childhood from adulthood. Notions of children's incapacity and vulnerability was all the more strengthened and universalised which in turn made it all the more legitimate for the state to intervene in child rearing as the guardian of children's well-being.

Social Democratic Welfare: Consensus, Liberalism and the Rise of Social Work

In the inter-war period the main piece of child welfare legislation was the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act which was primarily concerned with offenders, reflecting the idea that delinquency was a consequence of bad parenting and environment. However, the Act also extended the grounds in which children were seen to be in need of state care and protection and required juvenile courts to consider the child's welfare in decision-making. In a way, the child's welfare and needs began to become public knowledge; a 'given' about the nature of childhood and family life that legitimised intervention. Local authorities were also now able to 'board out' children into foster care as well as sending them to institutions. The child 'of the family' was becoming one which had an emerging relationship to the state as a conduit for regulation and reform in the form of a collective responsibility borne by the state.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, women's labour was needed both in the armed forces and in order to take jobs usually done by men. Briefly, 'separation' of the child from the family became acceptable and there was a significant expansion in day nursery
provision. However, once the war was over, anxieties were raised about the implications of dislocated families and separation for children's well-being. Hendrick (1997) cites the experience of evacuation as a central theme in verifying various theories about the 'psychological child' (Hendrick: 1997) such as 'maternal deprivation' and 'separation anxiety', which, it was alleged, could lead to character disorders in later life (Bowlby: 1946). Such notions were given widespread approval at a time when public policy was to encourage women to return to the home and helped pave the way for the welfare state in implying the necessity of preventative health and welfare provision in order to ensure family and social stability. The evacuation experience also revealed the extent of poverty and deprivation of urban life to the concern of a wider population. Consequently, these and other concerns meant that "as a political rationality, 'welfarism' was structured by the wish to encourage national growth and well-being via the promotion of social responsibility and the mutuality of social risk..." (Parton: 1996: 8). By the outbreak of the Second World War children were entitled to free education up to the age of fourteen and the National Health Service Act of 1946 established the principle of free and universal medical care.

The 1948 Children Act reflected a climate of liberalism, economic and social reconstruction and a belief in the partnership between the state and the family. It was widely believed that poverty and deprivation would be overcome through economic prosperity and it was this atmosphere of optimism and political consensus that underpinned the growth of the welfare state and state social work in the post-war period. In part, it was the shared experience of austerity and sense of solidarity during the war years which occasioned this broad-based compromise of the interests of capital and labour in which the welfare state was a key component. This broadly 'social democratic' approach

1 Though it should be pointed out that this image was maintained, in part at least, by the passing, in the same year, of a Criminal Justice Act which dealt more firmly with young offenders. The logic was much the same, however: in the optimistic context of the welfare state, sociological justifications for crime would quickly disappear, leaving the state with the simple task of administering condign punishment to those who, in spite of the opportunities available to them, continued to offend.
believed in a mixed economy of welfare in which a degree of intervention that did not compromise the overall capitalist project, but gave it a 'human face', was regarded as desirable in the interests of society as a whole. For both capital and labour, sustained economic growth was the key with government acting to create the right conditions for this, mediate between unions and employers and administer the welfare state (Pierson: 1991).

The 1948 Act established Children's departments which were given specific duties towards the child 'in care': "...to exercise their powers with respect to him (sic) so as to further his interests and afford him the opportunity for the proper development of his character and abilities" (cited in Hendrick: 1994: 218). Certainly influenced by Bowlby (1944), Local Authorities were also given further encouragement to provide foster care instead of institutional care and greater emphasis was placed on restoration, wherever this was deemed appropriate. In broad terms, the aim was for a more generalised welfare provision which would enable the child to be maintained within the family and to return to it as soon as possible where it was not. Within social work agencies there was a growing sense of compatibility between worker and client; the character of social work seen as benign and paternalistic with an emphasis on the 'natural' family meeting the shared needs of its individual members towards the well-being of not only the individual child, but ideas of 'nationhood' in the liberal state, where the child of the family was the child of the nation-state, upon whom future prosperity depended.

It is during this period of consensus that therapeutic, conciliatory and preventative aspects of social work begin to emerge and thrive, loosely framed in legislation as a means of keeping in check possible infringements of individual rights and family autonomy. The child 'in care', came in legislation to symbolise an 'ideal type'; a whole plethora of psychoanalytical, social and medical understandings were synthesised and crystallised in the 1948 Act. Where the state was able to legitimately intervene on the basis of consensus around the needs of the child in the 'public care', a construction of childhood was ascribed
to it; what should, or should not be for the child ‘in care’ was everything that should be taken for granted by the ‘natural’ child in the ‘natural’ family.

Having largely established the ‘natural’ state of childhood, about which there was some consensus, social work entered the stage on cue, now legitimately able to exercise discretionary powers within the arena of ‘family’ in a capacity of supporting that to which all families should aspire (to what was ‘naturally’ appropriate and necessary for the child to fully develop); and if they occasionally did not aspire, legitimate action could be taken to secure removal. Post-war social work ‘casework’ was broadly founded upon psycho-analytical theory and reflected notions of individual or family pathology where the ‘deviant’ who, in the nineteenth century would have been characterised as ‘morally defective’, became now seen as in need of a psycho-therapeutic/psychiatric-type intervention. Deviance and delinquency became symptoms of damage in early life, often with little differentiation between the ‘offender’ and the ‘deprived’; both could be conceptualised as ‘victims’. The Welfare State provided the rationale upon which social work was able to intervene in the family; not only did it mediate between the mainstream and the excluded but also between the various disciplines which provided ‘knowledge’ about the ‘nature’ of family life and childhood; it ‘knew’ what the ‘interests’ of the child were. “Social scientific knowledge was given a pre-eminence in ordering the rationality of the emerging professions, which were seen as having a major contribution to developing individual and social welfare and thereby operationalising increasingly sophisticated mechanisms of social regulation” (Parton: 1996:8). In effect, it was possible for social work to be construed as politically neutral, giving appropriate value to a liberal ethic of family autonomy and individual freedom. In a period of consensus it acted to consolidate a childhood that was ‘naturalised’, intervening only where ‘needs’, ‘dysfunction’ or ‘preventative mental health’ required. Welfarism transformed relations between the ‘social’ and the ‘state’; economy, welfare and progress were conceptually part of the same whole. In consequence, the health
of the child within the family was of particular concern; intrusion into the family could be facilitated without undermining autonomy and responsibility.

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's the system of welfare was developed and extended by both major political parties in a period of relative affluence and optimism about the progress of the welfare state towards ultimately eradicating mass poverty and deprivation through continued economic growth. With the renewed emphasis on family bonds and the importance of attachments for children, policy and practice towards the family was predominantly about prevention; that is, avoiding the need for children to enter the care system in the first place. The 1963 Children and Young Persons Act reflected this disposition towards family support; even if children did enter the care system, the opportunity for rehabilitation was seen as something that should be regularly revisited. In consequence some children, who might otherwise have been adopted, spent significant periods in care, or 'yo-yoing' between care and the family home (Harding:1996). Gradually, consensus about the ambitions of the welfare state and the role of social work began to erode; there was a reappraisal from both sides of the political divide as, on the Left, it was realised that welfare was an inadequate response to the worst excesses of capitalism, serving the interests of the dominant groups more than the working class, and on the Right, welfare was seen as undermining individual autonomy, initiative and responsibility, as well as threatening private sector profitability. This reappraisal occurred at a time when there was a slowing down in economic growth, an increase in social deprivation and unemployment which combined with an unease about the viability of the 'project of welfare'. In part the very consensus about and containment of children within what was 'one' 'childhood' (rather than childhods) was what paradoxically contributed to a growing (and ongoing) dissensus and fragmentation about how to best manage welfare, family, and 'child' within the context of differing perspectives on gender, socio-structural relations, most notably drawn from radical and feminist analyses.
Child Abuse, Dissensus and Radicalism

The erosion of certainty about the ‘nature’ of childhood and family - concomitant with a fragmentation of consensus about the role of the welfare state and a slowing down of the economy - was manifested (perhaps constituted) through events surrounding the so-called ‘discovery’ of child physical abuse in the 1960’s and 1970’s and sexual abuse in the 1980’s. Subsequent events culminated in the Children Act 1989 and the child protection processes that then emerged.

In Britain events proved to be a variation on an American theme. The issue was first acknowledged in an article in the British Medical Journal by Griffiths and Moynihan (1963) which cited Kempe’s (1962) evidence of the ‘battered baby syndrome’ in the U.S and argued that many children were being misdiagnosed as having accidental injuries in Britain. Further impetus came from paediatricians and forensic pathologists, most notably Professor Keith Simpson who, in the British Medical Journal (1965) argued the syndrome was a “widespread crime that can easily escape detection” (Simpson: 1965:393) thus incorporating a criminal definition at least in terms of response, if medical in diagnosis.

Responses to the problem in both Britain and the US affirmed a medical perception and calls were made for closer liaison with radiologists and paediatricians from social work agencies. Support also came from various voluntary agencies representing bourgeois values who were socially distanced from the emerging definition of the ‘abuser’ (Parton: 1985); most significant in Britain were the NSPCC who were instrumental in placing the issue on the political agenda and in pioneering therapeutic approaches to dealing with ‘abusing’ or ‘dysfunctional’ families. The tendency toward medical explanations of child abuse whereby both victim and perpetrator can be characterised as in need of ‘treatment’ allowed for the

---

2 The so-called ‘discovery’ of child abuse originated in the US with John Caffey (1946), a specialist in paediatric radiology who discovered inexplicable bone fractures and subdural hematoma in small babies and opened up a debate about the possible role of parents in how these injuries were acquired. Events culminated in Kempe’s (1962) ‘discovery’ of the battered baby syndrome. By emphasising the injuries to the child attention was drawn away from socio-economic factors that may impinge on families and the labelling of the problem as a syndrome ensured its initial location in a medical, rather than a socio-legal framework. Pföhl (1977) argues that this enabled radiologists to
possibility of 'therapy', thus legitimating and facilitating social work access to the private
arena of the family. In the almost obsessive pursuit of 'causes' of abuse or on the pretext
of the long-term psychological effects on the victims or with claims to be able to 'predict'
abuse, access to the family is achieved where an otherwise overtly 'policing' and punitive
function would be regarded as unacceptable in the liberal democracy. In constructing a
unique 'bridge' between the criminal and the victim, professionals such as the police and
social workers, who historically and ideologically have evolved often conflicting roles,
found they were able to co-operate in an area of common ground towards a shared
objective. By virtue of doing so the 'policing' of families becomes further refined and
notions of privacy effectively redefined (Harris: 1994).

As the level, nature and scope of social work interventions increased, so concern about
the controlling elements of social work practice increased. It was proposed that where
liberal values did not correspond with client's values because, for example, of a different
emphasis on family life, marriage or gender relations, social work practice could act in an
oppressive and controlling way, failing to take account of structural inequality. Radical
social work was a direct response to this predicament, formulated in the late 1960's and
early 1970's from a broadly Marxist perspective. Here, social work was seen as endorsing
the oppressions experienced by those deemed superfluous or dangerous and represented
the controlling arm of the state, intervening to keep the working class in place.
Therapeutic and progressive liberal rehabilitative methods drawn from a psycho-dynamic
perspective were regarded by Marxists as just as oppressive as policies previously derived
from a 'Poor Law' mindset - more to do with the need to respond to increased
antagonism and hostility provoked by the state's approach towards the 'undeserving' than
any higher concern for the vulnerable and excluded.

"reap the rewards associated with diagnosis" (Pfohl: 1977:333) since radiology in the US at the time was marginalised
in the medical profession.
Feminist critiques which focused on the gender-specific consequences of the welfare state also began to take hold in the early 1970’s. These were driven by the second wave of feminism in the twentieth century from the mid-1960’s onwards (Friedan: 1963; Gavron: 1966). Here, the social reproduction of labour (including child care but also caring for others) was identified as being rooted in a whole set of gendered processes which maintained a family form in which marriage and family were key sites of oppression. The welfare state, as something organised around the interests of capital and of men was, in this way, seen as having consequences for women in terms of benefit provisions and omissions and in the fundamental assumption that women were the economic dependents of men (McIntosh: 1978). Further, this focus on the ‘private’ as well as the ‘public’ spheres of oppression meant that sexual relations, the division of labour within the home and the treatment of women and children by men within the family were all politicised and formed part of a new consciousness regarding gender relations (Delphy and Leonard: 1992). This movement effectively served to redefine social problems and showed how where women failed to meet their role as carers problems often became pathologised and represented in terms of an inability to cope, adjust or achieve. Further, attacks on the patriarchal family form from feminists also served to redefine adult-child sexual activity as abusive and raised concerns about the long-term consequences of such activity on a child’s psycho-sexual development.

Such concern with sexual abuse and violence within the family served to challenge idealised notions of family life and the ‘sanctity’ of the blood-tie. This recognition of the family as the arena for violence and abuse led to tensions between the respect for privacy and autonomy, characteristic of the liberal democracy, and the need to protect children, not only from the maltreatment of adults in and of itself, but by maintaining them within the safety of a coherent, intact and sanctified idea of ‘childhood’. Moreover, feminist

---

5 For a comprehensive account of the various strands of this feminist critique see Williams (1989).
critiques which challenged the 'blood-tie' also served to reinforce the idea of children as a 'separate entity' from the family; one who had legitimate 'rights' to protection from harm.

Radical and feminist critiques were not without their achievements, despite the fact that welfare remained within a dominant liberal, 'mixed economy' discourse. Social work was steered clear of more explicitly repressive policies towards approaches which accommodated the idea that family problems were as much to do with social structure and organisation as individual pathology - despite a continued focus on the individual in terms of 'treatment' or 'therapy'. Gradually, what had broadly been psycho-social (but weighted towards the 'psy') understandings of family problems and child abuse began to be broadened out to include a more developed 'sociological' perspective. Garbarino and Gilliam's (1980) 'ecological' understanding of child maltreatment placed emphasis on impoverished environment as stimulating psychological stress and socio-structural approaches argued that society itself set the pre-conditions for child maltreatment (Parton: 1985). The adoption of positive and rehabilitative models of social work ensured a strategy of state regulation could legitimately continue to operate within the arena of family life with some disquiet, but without too much resistance. However, although resistance to repressive policies achieved change, it crucially failed to control how such change was meted out - it was left to the 'experts' - the social workers, the psychologists and the medical profession to decide matters. It was more a case of seeing the individual as 'damaged' or the family as 'dysfunctional' as a result of poverty, deprivation and consequent bad parenting, rather than as inherently feckless and therefore undeserving.

One response to concerns about 'oppressive practice' was the emergence of 'empowering' practice, which was incorporated into mainstream social work (see Adams: 1990). The concept had its origins on the fringes of social work, or indeed within wholly autonomous self-help groups. Empowerment aimed to eradicate the powerlessness incited by negative valuations associated with an individuals affiliation to a particular group and to ensure equality of access to services which did not emphasise surveillance and control but were at first facilitative and preventative (see Ahmed: 1990). Once incorporated wholesale into the philosophy and practice of social work (i.e. immersed irretrievably within the discourse) such processes can arguably be seen as representing a subtle, yet sophisticated transformation in the exercise of power and regulatory imperatives of the state. Masquerading as 'progressive practice' and liberation from the classist, racist or sexist assumptions of state policy, empowerment draws individuals into changed processes of self-regulation under a populist guise of choice and self-determination, thus colluding in a particular structuring of social relations and ensuring that any subsequent failure to adjust or adapt can be well and truly located within the individual.
Radical and feminist critiques may not have succeeded in overthrowing a capitalist or patriarchal order, but they did succeed in going some way towards changing welfare policies and practice. More particularly, in Cleveland, for example, it was the power and influence of the middle classes (since it was they who were suspected of abuse in this case), espousing principles of family privacy, autonomy and control of excess bureaucracy which was able to curb the excessive intrusion and surveillance of the state.

Many of the above tensions and dilemmas were to find expression in the Children Act 1989; more fundamentally, the Act was concerned with defining and refining the boundaries and parameters of state intervention in family life, an issue focused in the public consciousness by the media as a result of the reports into the deaths of children and the Cleveland Inquiry.

**Child Abuse Inquiries**

Public inquiries into the deaths of Maria Colwell (HMSO: 1973); Kimberley Carlile (Greenwich: 1987); Jasmine Beckford (1985: Brent); Tyra Henry (Lambeth: 1987) and others, impacted on policy greatly and were crucial in providing the motivation for new processes of management and identification of 'risky' families. The first coherent attempt to 'manage' child abuse was inaugurated with a DHSS circular after the report of the enquiry into the death of Maria Colwell. Maria had been in care but was returned home by Social Services and the courts, only to die at the hands of her step-father. The DHSS circular stressed the need for teamwork, case conferences and child protection registers. Subsequent circulars in 1976 and 1980 aimed to promote better understanding between police and other agencies, rationalise management and broaden the criteria of abuse - although it still did not include sexual abuse. Significantly, responsibility for the death of Maria Colwell and other children often appeared to be apportioned more to the child care agency than the individual perpetrator. Social service departments were castigated for their failure to protect the child and for an over-emphasis on maintaining the 'natural' family at the expense of protecting the child (although the opposite criticism was levelled in the case
of Cleveland). At the same time, policy began to shift towards the prevention of further abuse by providing children with permanent substitute care either in adoptive placements or long-term foster care. The DHSS guide ‘Working Together’ (1988) was drafted in 1986; amongst agencies now to be included in child protection were hospital staff, midwives, health visitors, school nurses, G.Ps, police, teachers, voluntary organisations who were all required to be ‘aware of the signs of abuse’ (para. 3.8). The guide emphasised the need for inter-agency cooperation - explicitly in the case of sexual abuse - not stated as such in the 1986 draft and reflected the impact of the Cleveland enquiry in the interim period.

When in Cleveland (1987) the inadequacy of medical assessment alone was raised, along with the perceived over-zealous tendency to intervene, the focus was shifted further towards social assessment, placing the social worker centre stage with their interpretative knowledge of the subjective reality of family life. Cleveland’s crisis combusted in 1987 when the police decided to no longer act on uncorroborated medical diagnosis. 121 cases of suspected sexual abuse of children with an average age of 6-9 years caused much public alarm and media attention. The children were diagnosed on the basis of ‘anal dilation’. When the police withdrew, the social services decided to continue to act on referrals from the paediatrician. 26 of the 121 were eventually deemed wrongly diagnosed. Whilst the subsequent report brought child sexual abuse into a wider arena, it was the management of child protection upon which emphasis was placed. Suspicion of abuse was now seen as requiring a ‘social as well as medical assessment’ (‘Working Together’: DHSS Guide: 1988: para. 5.13). However, neither the reports, nor subsequent government guidance were primarily concerned with how to either detect or prevent abuse; the emphasis was on a rationalisation of agency response, better inter-agency co-operation and the shift from a medical to socio-legal assessment. Here, “the issue was not prevention and detection of the most elusive crime, but the etiquette of intervention” (Campbell: 1988: 210).

5 The paediatrician at the centre of the row, Dr Marietta Higgs, came in for particular vilification at the hands of the press. She was presented as an irrational feminist zealot; the Sunday Telegraph in 1987 ran a story suggesting she was projecting her own hatred for her father onto the fathers of the children she examined (see Campbell: 1988).
common thread throughout many of the above child abuse reports was the assumption that by refining procedure and legislation, abuse as defined can be prevented and unnecessary or excessive interference avoided.

**The Children Act 1989**

As the parameters of state intervention were rolled back in the 1980's in both economic and social terms, the family was posited as the institution wherein appropriate values would be instilled; its integrity and autonomy central to this role, with the state interventionist only in enabling the maintenance of familial relations and protection of the vulnerable child. Perhaps predictably, when the perceived permissiveness of the 1960's was being held to blame for the erosion of traditional family and moral values it was the social work profession which came to epitomise the excessively liberal, permissive attitudes responsible for undermining morality as well as draining public funds. It was in this political climate that local authorities found themselves at the forefront of criticism as burdening the wealth-creating potential of the free market enterprise economy. The social services in particular were seen not just as a high cost activity but also as encouraging reliance on state services and acting as a disincentive to individual and family responsibility. It is in this context of a state explicit in ideology and moral pontificating, yet minimalist in terms of intervention and support that economic policy mirrors social policy; the free market the cornerstone of the former; the family the cornerstone of the latter. Regulation of the family is thereby expressed in terms of individual 'freedom'; that is, freedom expressed and experienced *in relation to* unnecessary state interference. "In such circumstances, the law becomes crucial in defining and operationalising both 'natural' rights and 'natural' responsibility" (Parton: 1991:202). Thus, generalised welfare provision, particularly child care, becomes seen as too costly in economic terms; having too little coherence in political terms and too much ambivalence in moral terms. Freedom, in the context of neo-liberalism in the 1980's, far from being seen as a threat to social order and
Welfare, the State and the Family

stability, was precisely that which would ensure it, where it was defined as freedom from the interference of the state.

The Children Act gave rise to a legalistic, procedure-dominated model of child protection which served to define and legitimate particular notions of ‘rights’, ‘freedoms’ and ‘responsibilities’ presented in terms of protecting the ‘naturalness’ and autonomy of the traditional nuclear family and childhood within it. In this way, children of the family were effectively defined as the responsibility of the family, and the Western liberal state in a way in which other children are simply not. That is, an active, personal and collective responsibility, characterised as ‘natural’ but constructed upon socially determined concepts of rights and duties, defined through political imperatives and statutory duties but very distinct from, for example, a felt, moral responsibility towards all children or towards children in dire need in other parts of the world:

If child protection were based on considerations other than law and policy - a hierarchy of need for example, it is inconceivable that we should be so exercised by the murder of a single Maria Colwell ... yet so acquiescent in the systematic destruction of young lives in other parts of the globe.

Harris: 1993: 3

The effect of much of the above was to emphasise notions of individual rights (of both children and parents) arising out of both the nature and autonomy of the family, which demanded that when the state was required to intervene in order to protect the child, this was within the much clearer legal framework of the Children Act. In this way, legalism in child protection gave at least the appearance of defining more clearly family failure, and in effect redefined, reconstituted what family life ‘should’ be. Child protection then

---

6 To an extent the notion of children’s rights was accommodated in the Children Act 1989 in that the child’s wishes and feelings must be taken into account and separate legal representation is required in court procedures and that a local authority must provide a complaints procedure for children who are ‘looked after’ by them. At the same time, adult/child sexual relations are manifestly construed as abusive. This contradiction is accommodated by what Harris calls the notion of “child-as-vulnerable-citizen” (10:1993) requiring appropriate legal protection. In addition, the parental rights lobby found expression in the Act through the abandonment of the status of ‘voluntary care’ whereby responsibility had been assumed by the state after a given period of time via mere administrative process.
Welfare, the State and the Family

turns on a formulation in welfare law which specifies minimum rights for the child, visits minimum responsibilities on the family, and allocates powers and duties to the state to be exercised in the event of family failure. It is this network of rights, duties and powers which both creates and reflects the relations between child, family and state.

Harris: 1994:5

Moreover and in spite of the apparent intention towards minimalism and constraint in terms of codifying procedures, prescribing duties and circumscribing power, legalism, as an ‘ethos’ became very pervasive, dominating other aspects of provision so that the potential for child protection shaped all interventions. In this sense, a legalistic approach to child protection represented a more diverse, extensive manifestation of regulatory imperatives. For example, increasing numbers of local authorities began to have teams specialising in child protection and investigative work and the area was increasingly seen as a ‘field’ in its own right. An ethos of scrutiny, surveillance and prediction came to both predominated and permeates all aspects of child care - for example, in the replacement of day nursery provision with family centres, thus facilitating monitoring and observation of families. In many ways what was once ‘child care’ became reconstructed as ‘child protection’ rather than the latter as a component of the former. In part, this shift resulted from the widening of definitions of abuse to include neglect and emotional deprivation. But at the same time as the scope for protection widened, resources were being reduced and generalised, preventative measures had a waning credibility. Choices needed to be made between but between generalised prevention and prediction in child protection itself. The trend towards locating high risk families was seen as enabling protection whilst ensuring autonomy and focusing limited resources appropriately. The assumption has been that by becoming better able to predict high risk families and their degree of ‘dangerousness’ we are both able to minimise risks to children and eliminate unnecessary intervention in the family. Again, in order to facilitate this process a much clearer legal context was demanded. It would also be naive to see child protection as solely about policing ‘high risk’ families
since this fails to account for the principles of partnership and cooperation with parents embodied in the Act, which was achieved largely through the efforts of the parental rights lobby. Social regulation is not only top-down nor uni-directional, the Act is characterised by its attempt to accommodate the diversity of pressures and interests discussed. It is this very tension that is at the core of contemporary responses to child abuse.

Introducing a Discourse of Childhood

In many ways, child protection in the 1980’s and 1990’s became a ‘unifying symbol’ (Harris: 1994), a common banner beneath which the political Left and Right were able to come together, albeit very from different routes, in pursuit of a shared goal - the apparently politically neutral act of protecting the child. ‘Child protection’ thus became a valid pursuit for a variety of strange bedfellows, each able to justify their position from their own perspective so that whether one believes in social work as benign or controlling, children’s rights, ‘family values’ or state paternalism, each can be accommodated within the same ‘conceptual framework’ of child protection.

Similarly, what is significant about the variable interpretations of the role of the state, welfare and family life described in this chapter is that whilst each came with its own understandings of child abuse which sought to validate the originating perspective, all came to be immersed, to some extent, within a prevailing understanding of childhood offered by liberal professionalism. So, “feminists discover (child abuse) is all an expression of patriarchy; utopian socialists that it is a perversion of capitalism; conservatives that it is a symptom of moral decay” (Dingwall: 1989:49). Though often in conflict and contradiction, the above interpretations all revolve around naturalised versions of childhood. Thus, on the basis of increasing ‘knowledge’, progress and better understanding, the perspectives all debate the extent to which children ‘in childhood’ experience, suffer, manipulate, subvert

7 See also ‘Messages From Research’ (Department of Health: 1995) which highlighted the way in which local authorities work with children and families in need tended to draw them unnecessarily into the net of child protection, sometimes regardless of any actual, or potential ‘abuse’.
or are damaged by these various versions of reality, since in 'natural' childhood the innocent and the depraved, the needy and the over-indulged, the victim and the delinquent, the functional and the dysfunctional, the attached and the disordered are encapsulated within the same whole; that being one, definitive and universal childhood. The contradictions this inevitably raises were (and are) acknowledged, debated, reasoned - but only along the lines of competing perspectives that regard childhood as the constant. So, debates tend to revolve around concerns about 'the demise of family values', 'the rights of the child', the failure of education, the oppression of women and children, etc. - not for one moment was the certainty and distinctiveness of 'childhood' itself thrown into question; interest was, until very recently, focused on simply discovering more (psychologically, socially, developmentally) about what is largely accepted as a 'given'; that childhood 'is'.

In the twentieth century, this 'nature' of childhood was largely been derived from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology, most notably consolidated in the work of Jean Piaget (see Piaget: 1953). Such accounts continue to dominate everyday understandings about children and are reflected in attitudes and behaviour towards children. Prout and James offer the example of "the common parental lament 'its just a phase s/he's going through,' (which) relies heavily on an implicit piagetian model of child development, providing a biological explanation for a breakdown in social relationships" (Prout and James: 1997: 12). Further, developmental psychology continues to form the backbone of social work professional knowledge about children and professional child care practices, in an often unequivocal way as this study will come to show in subsequent chapters. This 'psychological child' (Hendrick: 1997) is necessarily attached to the 'natural' family; it contains a 'truth' which informs not only the development of the fully functioning adult in the future, but also the maternal and paternal roles, reinforced and extrapolated in the theories of maternal deprivation and attachment presented by Bowlby (1946/1953) which also still pervade professional child care practice. In this way, increasing
or 'new' 'knowledge' about childhood in the twentieth century no longer undermined the possibility of thinking of the child as 'natural' - it reinforced it. Indeed, it is the very accumulation of knowledge within certain parameters that serves to both discover more at the same time as fixing childhood to nature. In other words, further 'discoveries' about childhood become self-validating pursuits where 'what counts' as knowledge is prefigured and circumscribed by a pre-existing framework of understanding that is no longer open to question. This way of understanding knowledge Foucault describes as discourse and is discussed more fully in the following chapter. For now, suffice to say that discourse is that which limits the possibilities of knowledge in any given area of thought; it is both what contains, constrains and constructs thinking about social phenomena; thus "'truth' becomes a function of what can be said, written or thought" (McHoul: 1993:33). In this way, the 'history of childhood' is read in terms of the present, understandings of children and their treatment in the past may logically be characterised as a gradual and progressive awakening to the truth about the nature of childhood as knowledge casts the light of reason on the past. The effect of all of the above has served to reinforce the specificity and uniqueness of childhood as distinct from adulthood. Childhood in the twentieth century became increasingly immersed within a psychological/ 'needs' discourse that served to 'neutralise' any instability; or, more accurately, any instability could now be rationalised as within the child's 'nature'. It is as if in a 'moment' (that never was) of certainty about childhood, when it was almost possible to say what it was, it became simultaneously possible to construct different worlds around it that were often in conflict and competition; it was possible to conceptualise the 'given' (childhood) in a variety of contexts. These 'worlds' (discourses), however, were in the same space and orbit; they orbited childhood. An illusory stability to the signifier 'childhood' meant that it was

---

8 This being the sense of the term 'discourse' used throughout this discussion; as such it is distinct from discourse in the sense of 'linguistic systems' where an analysis seeks to establish underlying, universal 'rules' about how they work (as in a structuralist approach e.g. Levi-Strauss (1966), Saussure (1959)); or, in what might be loosely defined as a 'sociological' sense as the material substance of what makes up 'common sense' understandings or 'knowledges' of
conceptually possible, within a particular configuration of signification to validate and sustain a variety of perspectives and interests. The child 'in childhood' became primarily an object of concern, not least in respect of a conceptualisation as 'citizens' (albeit with limited enforcement powers in respect of rights). Children held within them the dreams and aspirations of many different interest groups. This study will come to explore further the contention that the notion of the 'natural child' is a construct whose subject (the child in childhood) is constituted out of intersecting discourses of 'family', 'childhood', 'needs', 'state' and 'welfare'; that is, childhood is a culturally and historically specific concept.

Similarly, the social construction of child abuse, aside from obviously violent acts, is fed by a particular correlation between 'deviance' and 'control'; clearly, it is not so much the behaviour of adults towards children in these circumstances which is of significance so much as the social meaning and status of the behaviour. When social workers provide services to families 'in need', often at the request of families themselves, they do so in order to assist, support and advise but also as a means of inspection and monitoring, in an almost permanent state of 'assessment' as to whether a family has slipped across the threshold into an area requiring statutory intervention.

Foucault's notion of discourse is significant for this study in terms of the way in which a naturalised childhood served as the common denominator for a number of competing and conflicting perspectives on the state. Tied to childhood, both liberal and radical frameworks of understanding were able to utilise the 'interests' of the natural child as the cornerstone of the 'natural' family in the pursuit of political and ideological goals. The possible exception to this might be seen as feminist analyses, which, by problematising family relations as patriarchal, began to challenge some of the underlying assumptions about the 'nature' of family life. Without doubt, feminism challenged the universalism of social and political thought as male-centred and the oppositional categories of

the social world and the methods in which these are used (for an overview of some of these approaches see McCarthy (1992) and for a particular strand Garfinkel (1967)).
man/woman (see Williams: 1996). Whilst this also extended into a critique of family, sexual relations and the child's position within this, the tendency was not arguably to undermine the child's nature as such, but to point to the threat posed to that nature within the patriarchal family. Such conceptualisations, whether implicitly or explicitly, relied on (required) the 'natural' child to stabilise the discourse. Whether they were damaged by 'bad' parents in terms of psychological/sexual/physical harm, or by 'bad' society/state in terms of disadvantage/oppression/deprivation, or, indeed a combination of both (environment/neglect/developmental delay), children were destined to suffer one way or another, in their state of natural incapacity.

As far as social work policy and practice is concerned, a 'perspective' on child welfare can be seen as an expression of a particular set of values and beliefs that gives a legitimacy to actions in a way which is validated and understood as 'making sense' from within, for example, a discourse of liberal professionalism. Needless to say, the individual social worker is at liberty to conceptualise themselves as 'radical', 'subversive', 'paternalistic', 'benevolent', 'controlling', 'empowering'. More likely, they may regard their motives and actions as embodying one or more of these, even in the same instant and in undertaking a single act, for example, removing a child from a family. Such diversity is unproblematically embraced within the discourse of 'social work' without any underlying 'policing' and control imperatives being compromised or any 'rupture' within the discourse. Similarly, at a macro level of social and historical analysis, a particular welfare perspective may inform a response to child abuse and may be classified in terms of the contemporaneous political, social and moral milieu but to proceed to over-categorise carries the inherent risk of over-simplifying the multi-faceted exercise of power. For example, whether an historically-specific policy response to child maltreatment can be characterised as articulating a belief

---

9 Removing a child could all at once be regarded as liberating and empowering (for the child), controlling and oppressive (for the parents); more helpfully (for this study, at least) it can be regarded as not one or the other, but both, simultaneously.

10 For this kind of typology see Harding: 1991.
in one, or a combination of principles of 'family autonomy', 'state paternalism', 'children's rights' or 'laissez-faire', it will not provide us with the possibility of understanding any of the aforementioned outside of the totality of the discourse of childhood.

In this way, different perspectives on welfare and the relationship between the state and the family are not mutually exclusive and should not be seen isolated and separable themes, but rather as part of the same whole. 'Common-sense' understandings of shifts and changes of in definitions of child abuse and the activity of child protection are in and of themselves problematical, being part of the same discourse, constituents of the same self-enclosed totality. Moreover, the very idea of a progressive humanitarianism, responding to the worst excesses of capitalism via the welfare state is thus re-positioned as epiphenomenal, rather than central to the development of child welfare. Shifts and changes in policy and practice, put alongside the critiques of welfare offered by Radicalism and feminism reflected firstly resistance, but ultimately an accommodation within an intact discourse, to changed understandings and relations between the family and the state. Essentially, the change presented was that the family in nature could no longer be taken for granted as the sanctuary for the child of nature.

Towards a postmodern critique

By the 1980's the perceived failure of the project of welfare enabled the rise of a neo-liberalism which was able to emphasise that it was the rational actions of individuals and the operation of a free market which guaranteed that society functions most effectively and efficiently and which was the only rational possibility for progress (Parton: 1997). The vision of a 'humane' social democratic welfare model, benignly meeting needs through the provision of universal services was undermined by the harsh realities of economic recession and the demands of globalised capital and the market. To an extent, it was a vision that collapsed beneath the auspices of a welfare project that had itself perpetuated the very divisions it purported to address - the growing gulf between rich and poor, Black
and white, the ‘included’ and the variously excluded (the offender, the child ‘in care’ the mentally ill). In this way it was in part the increasing disillusionment with radicalism and social democratic welfare which began to undermine the whole approach to welfare within modernity. All failed to realise the vision of emancipation and universal welfare.

The neo-liberal ethic of the 1980’s and 1990’s came to dominate the welfare agenda by re-establishing the rationality of market forces and the precedence of individual autonomy, choice and responsibility in contrast to the unwieldy apparatus of collective welfare and communitarianism. In addition, the collapse of the socialist states of Eastern Europe and the ideological crisis of the Left aided the pre-eminence of neo-liberalism as the whole idea of the socialist state fell largely into disrepute. The consequent dismantling of the welfare state placed those on the Left, including many feminists, in the paradoxical position of defending the remnants of state welfare, despite the fact that it had been the focus for critique as a state apparatus which perpetuated both capitalist and patriarchal forms, so that for many, “even a monolithic, centralised welfare state might be preferable to no welfare state at all” (Leonard:1997: 4).

Further, liberal, social democratic, Marxist and feminist approaches have not only been challenged by the radical Right, but also as part of an overall challenge to Modernity presented by postmodern theorists. Fundamentally, this postmodern critique is about a crisis of knowledge within the Western philosophical tradition, one which serves to challenge assumptions made not only about the representations presented by knowledge, but about the idea of representation itself i.e., a challenge to the idea that, through knowledge, the ‘real world’ can ever be represented. What both radical, social democratic, liberal and, to lesser extent, feminist frameworks assume, is that through ‘progress’ (for the radical through undermining and ultimately overthrowing the existing order, or for liberals, through economic growth, opportunity and wealth-accumulation) ‘universal’ welfare will, at some point in the future, be secured. It is this very idea of progress that postmodernism serves to challenge and post-structuralism seeks to undermine, both in terms of the
particular (i.e. how law and policy is played out in practice), and the generalised (i.e. the inherent logic that motivates and drives the idea of ‘progress’).

From a postmodern perspective, welfare, in all its forms and whatever the motives at any given cultural and historical location, is regarded as a product of modernity, the origins of which lie within the ‘project of Enlightenment’, formulated at the end of the eighteenth century. Here, a belief in ideas of progress, scientific knowledge, ‘truth’ and ‘discovery’ (crystallised in the French Revolution) came to dominate, provided the context for, and combined with a new capitalist agenda. ‘Progress’, in all its manifestations - economic, scientific, wealth-creating, humanitarian, emancipatory - provided an aspirational ethos which embraced capitalism and its oppositional ideology, socialism. To this extent, capitalism and socialism can be seen as ‘rival forms of modernity’ (Leonard: 1997). Or, put another way, they were a “family quarrel inside Modernity” (Bauman, cited in Leonard: 1997).

For the purposes of this study, Marxist, liberal, social democratic, feminist and neo-liberal critiques of welfare are all problematic in that they offer a ‘vision’ of emancipation, albeit via different routes. Each route to emancipation or universal ‘well-being’ itself requires domination (of either groups of people, ideas, or power structures) as, at the very least, a stage on the way. Those ‘on the outside’, the variously excluded, are required to determine the ‘mainstream’. Further, whilst liberal and social democratic visions of welfare aim for a balance between apparently ‘opposing’ interests of human need and capitalism, this itself presupposes that the relative ‘few’ will decide what ‘welfare’ should signify for the many - despite what might be good intentions, there remained (remains) a prefiguring ‘blue-print’ which contains thinly-veiled, but inevitable moral imperatives (about family form, gender relations, childhood etc.) which will determine the shape and form that welfare takes. This is no more keenly felt in the arena of social work policies and intervention to support the family and/or protect the child.
Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that the neither state, nor anyone else for that matter, unilaterally designates a definition of, say, child abuse, with which 'society' and the 'family' accords and to which social work professionals respond; such definitions are constantly being reworked by multitudinal forces in an often unpredictable way. Indeed, they are not ever 'fixed' and neither are responses to them; 'meaning' is constantly reconstituted in the 'ebb and flow' of signification. The 'appearance of certainty' (about childhood, child abuse, family, and so on) is no more than a reflection of the particularised relations of power at a given point, indeed, the more 'certain' things appear, the more fragile they become, likely to fragment at any moment as meaning erodes.

As far as this study is concerned, it is, therefore inadequate to see the state in the Marxist sense, as a coherent oppressive body emitting a uni-directional flow of power, or similarly, to see the family as some quietly acquiescent, reified construct that offers no resistance. That is not to negate the repressive exercise of power in society of one group over another but to suggest that as part of a 'social totality', power is also generative, creative and multi-directional. In this way, resistance is accommodated, allowed for, but ultimately circumscribed; the price to be paid for inclusion. These are all ideas which will receive further explanation in subsequent chapters. From an applied and 'professional practice' point of view all of this means concepts like childhood, child welfare and residential care need to be perceived multi-dimensionally (as having multiple signification and 'layers' of meaning) and with regard to the sometimes unintended consequences of policy directives and social action, right down to the very language used to construct, rather than reflect the 'reality' of social work practice. In this thesis, the post-structuralist framework, drawing primarily from the work of Foucault (1971, 1972, 1977, 1981) and Derrida (1972, 1973, 1976, 1987), will not, however, just be used as "an analytic scatterbomb waiting to be randomly secreted in argument by the cultural terrorist" (Jenks: 1993:138), but rigorously applied to selected texts, highlighting the intellectual deficit left
by remaining within the discourse of liberal professionalism; a deficit that may have real consequences in terms of the 'lived experience' of those on the 'receiving end' of social work interventions. Chapters Two and Three now begin to elaborate this conceptual framework.
CHAPTER TWO

FOUCAULT: DISCOURSE, POWER AND THE CONSTITUTED SUBJECT

Introduction

In this and the following chapter the study introduces and extrapolates some of the ideas of Foucault and Derrida respectively in order to draw together a conceptual framework applicable to a study of childhood in 'public care'.

It is worth stating here that neither of the two writers that this study primarily draws from attempts to theorise the 'postmodern' per se. This is despite an irretrievable and, perhaps, inevitable association with the term. Their project is not to 'inhabit', define or describe the 'postmodern era' or persuade the reader of the 'postmodern condition'. Rather, they set out distinct, but complementary approaches which unequivocally serve to undermine a monolithic rationality that is regarded as underpinning the Western philosophical tradition. In different ways, both are ultimately involved in a critique of the subject; not, however, in the sense of its 'disappearance', the 'end of an era' or a substantive 'break with the past', but in terms of how it is constituted, how it works as 'meaning-in-origin' and as a transcendental signifier in the philosophical tradition. Further,
both writers are concerned with the multiplicity of representation within an endlessly deferring field of signification. However, whereas Derrida's strand of post-structuralism is linguistic and textual in orientation, emphasising the interplay between reader and text and intertextuality, Foucault's emphasis is on the operation of power within the interplay of signification. Here, language and knowledge are seen as inseparable from power; Foucault's interest is in exposing the politics that are at work in 'representations' (discourses) and thereby in the constitution of the subject. The association of both writers with the postmodern is, therefore, more by default than design; less of a 'break' with tradition, more a re-examination of the very presuppositions that 'prop up' 'tradition'. And to this extent, as post-structuralists, they are, etymologically speaking, 'post-' more in the sense of 'from' than after in time or order.

Foucault's investigations are cross-disciplinary; they range from psychopathology (Madness and Civilisation: 1971) and medicine (The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception: 1963), to criminology (Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison: 1977) and the final three volume History of Sexuality. Despite the diversity of these fields of study, there is a continuity in Foucault's work. This is derived from his concern that conventional accounts of 'history' are always written from the perspective of the present; that is, as if history is a 'lead up' to the present where continuity always takes precedence over the discontinuity of practices. By writing across a variety of disciplines Foucault aims to establish a critique of strategic practices and structures of knowledge that have sustained the dominant discourses of Western culture. This is what Foucault prefers to call an 'archaeology' of knowledge:

He brushes the traditional scientific approach against the grain... redraws the frontiers, exposing hitherto unremarked overlaps and bringing together things usually far apart

Kearney: 1994:285

In The Order of Things (1970) Foucault provides a critique of discourse at it crosses a series of 'epistemic jumps', characterised not by continuity but discontinuous ruptures.
The focus in the early work is on how discourse operates within the ‘episteme’ which represents the underpinning field of knowledge that sets the limits to understanding about ‘what can be said’ across the whole range of seemingly unconnected disciplines. In this, Foucault validates the structuralist premise that concepts of ‘meaning’, ‘subject and ‘reason’ are constructions within underlying and unconscious systems of signs.

As enthusiasm for structuralism begins to subside in the 1970’s, discourse features less prominently in Foucault’s work; his attention is turned more towards how knowledge operates as a social power upon the ‘body’ of the individual and the ways in which various institutions define the ‘normal’ and the ‘deviant’. *Discipline and Punish* (1977) examines the confinement of the criminal and the emergence of the ‘disciplinary society’. Foucault suggests it is not possible to separate the emergence of the prison as a form of punishment in the mid-nineteenth century from the rise of a number of other institutions (the school, the factory) which also emphasise the discipline of the body as a new articulation of power.

A further movement towards the constitution of the self-forming subject can be discerned in Foucault’s final three-volume *History of Sexuality*. Here, Foucault examines the ‘confessional’ rationale behind the rise of the sexual sciences and the ways in which individuals participate in subject-constitution through psychological and medical discourses thereby becoming active in the ‘self-disciplining’ order. These movements in Foucault’s work are also characterised as a refinement of the ‘archaeological’ towards a more ‘genealogical’ approach, found in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. Whereas his archaeology treats systems of knowledge as discursive formations operating independently from the intentions of subjects, his genealogy goes further than this to explain both the transition from one, contingent system of thought to another, and emphasises the connection between power and knowledge on active, subject-formation through self-knowledge. In this way, Foucault dispenses with the structuralist quest to
universalise a theory of discourse in favour of an examination of the discursive practices of the human sciences. To this extent, Foucault's later work might be seen as a critique of his earlier work. This study relies on elements drawn from the full body of Foucault's work to develop some of the conceptual tools for analysis. Towards that end the elements that this chapter now elucidates are epistemes, discourse, genealogy, power/knowledge and disciplinary practices.

**Epistemes, Discourse and Truth**

Thus far, the discussion has already inferred that for Foucault 'truth' and 'knowledge' are constituted through discourse; this idea is set against the Enlightenment conception of knowledge as that which yields truth and progress; and, to this extent, is provisional, culturally and historically specific, as opposed to definitive, universal and progressive. Its status is determined through the norms and rules internal to the prevailing episteme which sets the parameters and delimits 'what can be said' and how we think about, for example, childhood, depending upon certain 'conditions of possibility'. An episteme represents the framework of reference which works as the 'historical a priori' of the given epoch and which 'pre-exists' the human subject. For this study, discourse cannot refer to a given system or a self-enclosed 'body' of 'knowledge' whose parameters are definable and achieve some kind of closure. It may, however, refer to particular forms of knowledge that arise, for example as part of a particular 'discipline', but that should not be taken to presuppose a 'closure'; the field of signification is open, fluid and indeterminate. Notwithstanding the above, certain conditions (social, political, cultural, historical) will arise where particular sets of knowledge are given weight and validity in such a way as to give the appearance of 'limits' ('body', 'form', 'shape') or parameters to understanding,
'thinking' and reasoning. It is these conditions that interest Foucault, as well as the specific propositions that count as ‘true’ where such conditions arise.¹

In ‘Politics and the Study of Discourse’ (1978), Foucault suggests some of the general criteria or conditions that ‘hold together’ discourse in a way that is ‘recognisable’, even though we would struggle to define the limits (this is not surprising since signifiers endlessly defer onward). Not only do discourses overlap and intersect, they may also inhere within one another but are still able to produce the appearance of being relatively well-bounded fields of ‘knowledge’. They are also historically specific, having “thresholds and conditions of birth and disappearance” (Foucault: 1978:62). It is not, then unity or ‘structure’ that enclose discourse but ‘criteria of formation’ that allow, permit and validate what might sometimes even be inconsistent or contradictory concepts, objects, operations and ‘theoretical options’. Further, discourse has what Foucault calls criteria of ‘transformation’ which enable all of the concepts, objects and operations to meet conditions at a moment in history. Finally, a discourse will have criteria of correlation that situate it among other discourses. In meeting these criteria we are able to construct not what is thematic or similar ‘within’ and between discourse (knowledge) but what is absent by virtue of meeting the said criteria or conditions in such a way as to infer an underlying, universalising ethos or ‘truth’, manifested as the progress of reason. (This idea can be correlated with Derrida’s notion of differance which will be described in Chapter Three.) In this way it becomes possible for discourse “to describe, as the episteme of a period, not the sum of its knowledge, nor the general style of its research, but the divergence, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations of its various scientific discourses: the episteme is not a sort of grand underlying theory, it is a space of dispersion, it is an open and doubtless indefinitely describable field of relationships” (Foucault: 1978:55).

¹Thus it is that which proposes, enables and progresses, as well as, and at the same time limiting, regulating and constraining ‘knowledge’, understanding, ‘common-sense’, call it what you will, that elicits our scrutiny.
Foucault identifies three broad epistemic periods. The first, up to the end of the sixteenth century was structured around 'resemblance' formulated through Renaissance ideas of similitude between things. Here, it is through the pursuit of a correspondence between things in nature that meaning is derived: “the search for meaning is to bring to light a resemblance” (McNay:1994:56). The second episteme is described by Foucault as the classical system of knowledge structured around 'representation' and the search for differences and contrasts that can be measured and ordered to derive truth. The belief was that the pursuit of knowledge would ultimately achieve certainty about the natural and social world. The third and Modern episteme gives rise to the human subject and is marked by a questioning of the representational function of language and a preoccupation with the source or origin of representation itself.

Foucault's idea of episteme can be seen, then as the 'rules of formation'; anonymous, time and culture-bound structures of thought that create the conditions of possibility for discourse to be constituted; a concept distinct and, more importantly, anterior to epistemological enquiry in the conventional sense, with which it should not be confused. Episteme is that which delimits knowledge within the whole field of experience and which allows discourse to be sustainable and 'true'; as such they are “out of reach for those whose thinking is bound by their laws” (Merquior: 37:1985). Epistemes underlay historical 'blocks' of knowledge; that is, they sustain the discontinuity within a conventional view of history as continuity and they succeed each other without any overarching logic. Foucault's particular interest is in those bodies of knowledge whose 'truths' are most tenuous and contentious (i.e. the human sciences, economics, medicine) but where the 'conditions of possibility' mean that the assertions they make are often expressed in terms of 'human nature' and 'universality', as if they were, indeed, indisputable. It is here that Foucault's analysis has a particular relevance to this study of childhood as an 'object' about which there is, perhaps more than anywhere else, (and for particular reasons, as we shall discover) an overriding sense of universalising themes and 'truths'. Far from the evolutionary
refinement of ‘fixed’ concepts or objects, such bodies of knowledge constitute of themselves concepts and objects which are historically discontinuous, thus also implying an economy of power relations (see McHoul and Grace: 1995:59). Foucault’s strategy, therefore exposes “the political and strategic nature of those ensembles of knowledge previously thought to be either relatively independent of power (the ‘human sciences); or (as in the case of criminology or sexuality), linked only in a vague or inadequate way to political institutions” (McHoul and Grace: 1995:60).

Discourse and Genealogy

It is fruitful in a certain way to describe that-which-is by making it appear as something that might not be, or that might not be as it is. Which is why this designation or description of the real never has a prescriptive value of the kind, ‘because this is, that will be.’ It is also why, in my opinion, recourse to history - one of the great facts in French philosophical thought for at least twenty years - is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; i.e., that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history...It means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made.

Foucault:1990:37

In constituting the subject, disciplines rely upon a ‘totalising’ view of history which is characterised by the practice of remembrance, reconstituting; that is, bringing forth ‘from’ the past that which is obscured in order to ‘complete’ the picture and awaken history as essentially narrative in form within the episteme. In Foucault’s terms, this approach takes ‘evidence’ as if it were a document which is scrutinised, analysed in order to reveal the ‘truth’ about the past. From a fragmented and undifferentiated past, history is put ‘back’ together, as if it were really a ‘whole’ that had been splintered and not a set of discontinuous, differentiated traces. ‘Remembrance’ and a progressive awakening; features of a logocentric history; one which relies on the structuring of certain oppositions to construct meaning. Such oppositions which couple and give precedence to continuity over change construct the notion of the ‘spirit’ of an age and relate the past with the present; tradition versus change (tradition linking the discontinuity of change to some grand,
overall schema and an origin from which all change has ensued); simple forms of knowledge versus 'genius' ('original', continuous knowledge and the 'revolutionary' thinking which is often individualised (Darwin, Marx) in order to maintain the opposition with continuity); stability versus metamorphosis/convergence (momentous events constructed in relation to periods of stability). These oppositions impose upon a presupposition that what is contemporary or present is logically, meaningfully related to the past; discourses categorised as, for example, 'literature', 'social science', which are relatively recent are then applied to 'history'.

Can one accept as such, the distinction between the major types of discourse, or that between such forms or genres as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history, fiction etc., and which tend to create certain great historical individualities? We are not even sure of ourselves when we use these distinctions in our own world of discourse, let alone when we are analysing groups of statements which, when first formulated, were distributed, divided in a quite different way.

Foucault: 1972:22

In place of a 'general' or conventional history Foucault suggests that we pose questions about the particular, require that evidence be redefined; that is, to ask 'what is to count as evidence?' or 'what is being asked of 'history'?'; 'how does it serve the present'? Thus differentiation and discontinuity become equal players. Against (what counts as) 'evidence', governed by a structural relationship to the 'episteme', its 'place' in the overall scheme of things, that from which we 'draw' (in both senses; 'gather' and 'depict') the past/present, Foucault suggests the metaphor 'document' should be rejected for the metaphor 'monument' - that which should be 'described'. 'History' in the conventional sense (that ascribes to the conventions of a pursuit of 'origins) must be held in abeyance, suspended since it anticipates and forecloses its own method of analysis and discourse to create 'unity'.

An exposure of the singularity, the idiosyncrasy of 'events' and discontinuity of history is the project of Foucault's genealogy, which might be described simply as a study of the 'gap', or difference between a separation of the past from the present. That is, how our 'selves' are arrived at is not just a 'product' of history but a construction of 'history in the
present’.2 ‘History’, or any field of ‘knowledge’ or discourse is not defined by what is said or ‘meant’ but by the difference between what could be said at a given point in time and what is actually said. It is in this sense that the study come to examine the history, or more accurately, genealogy, of childhood. This genealogy leaves the ‘discontinuity’ in history (history of the present) unresolved; it is no longer hooked into a grand, underlying theory; for Foucault, discontinuity is inconsequential in this respect; that which we should search for, but only on order to say it is there. This is a process which thereby ‘delegitimises’ the present, shakes to the foundations our knowledge of the present in relation to the past. Foucault chooses to examine aspects of the past which have been denied a history in place of teleological assumptions about progress, evolution, linearity. Genealogical researches can in this way open up new ‘spaces’ for debate, rather than offer equally definitive but alternative assertions to the orthodoxy. To this extent, Foucault’s genealogical approach to history is complementary to Derrida’s deconstructive approach to the text, described in the following chapter, and it is these two strands of post-structuralism that together form the conceptual framework that is applied to this study of childhood in public care. It is an approach which enables us to look at the ‘hierarchy’ of knowledge which defines the present and a sense of what ‘is’ in the present; that is, what ‘counts as’ knowledge in the present (in this study, specifically about childhood):

(genealogy) record(s) the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history - in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles

Foucault, cited in Rabinov: 76:1991

So, it is the fragmentary quality of apparently inconsequential phenomena that Foucault is interested in; a kind of ‘non-history’ of insignificance in place of an evolutionist linearity of events. The idea of the evolution of scientific disciplines and other bodies of knowledge

---

2 History, then, is as uncertain as it is fixed; how things ‘are’ is not the end ‘result’ or culmination of a sequence of events that has determined things as they appear to ‘be’; things may appear differently, are always already ‘other than’ they ‘are’; history ‘mediates’ the present.
which come to constitute our common sense understandings of the world and take us ever
closer to truth is again challenged. Here again ‘knowledge’ itself is no simple matter, even
where particular bodies of knowledge seem eminently coherent “obscure forms of
consciousness - practical, mythic and moral will always revolve around it” (Foucault:

**Power and Disciplinary Practices**

Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of
images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange,
there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of
communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of
knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; is not that the
beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social
order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated within it, according to a
whole technique of forces and bodies.

Foucault: 1977:17

Foucault is interested in the transformative relations between the body and social
institutions in terms of the political relations between the two. Power is individualised
through processes of *objectification* which take place in several ways. First through the
dividing practices. Here, social exclusion and modes of scientific classification combine to
create differentiation amongst previously undifferentiated masses and are fused with a
humanitarian ethic of reform and progress. Examples of this include the segregation of
lepers in the middle ages, the confinement of the poor and destitute and insane in
L'Hôpital Général of Paris in 1656; the classification of disease in the early nineteenth
century; the way in which psychiatry operates in hospitals and prisons and the
medicalisation, stigmatisation and normalisation of sexual deviance in modern Europe
(Foucault: 1981). Whereas in Feudal society power was seen as synonymous with
sovereignty and was generalised, in the nineteenth century a new form of disciplinary
power emerges which mediates relations between the state and the family/individual and
along with methods of exclusion objectifies, classifies and identifies sections of the

3 So, for example, with the apparent fact of a ‘surface naturalism’ or ‘pathology’, articulated through psychiatry; its very
‘reasonableness’ indicative of how exclusive the language of reason has become.
population, behaviours and diseases, conditions etc. This is a power that “insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied, to form a body of knowledge about these individuals, rather than deploy the ostentatious signs of sovereignty” (Foucault: 1977:220).  

In order to facilitate the extension of power, methods of control, containment and scientific classification are perceived in terms of their relationship to the humanitarian and Enlightenment discourse of ‘progress’, reform and ‘natural logic’. But for Foucault, notions of progressive humanitarianism and ‘reform’ of the individual are supplanted by the idea that the penal system does not only discourage reform; it actively promotes recidivism. “Humanism, good intentions, professional knowledge and reform rhetoric are neither in the idealist sense the producers of change nor in the materialist sense the mere product of changes in the political economy” (Cohen: 1985:25). The second mode of objectification alluded to above is related and overlaps the first but emphasises scientific classification. Whereas the dividing practices had the effect of constraint and exclusion in which individuals were largely victims of the process (and mostly prisoners and mental patients), scientific classification and modes of enquiry in the nineteenth century constituted the ‘body’ as the object for study (complemented by but not causally linked to the dividing practices); the body was appropriated into procedures of power and knowledge.  

The third mode of objectification is articulated in Foucault’s later works - The History of Sexuality and Discipline and Punish. Whereas the dividing practices and scientific classification were largely applied to populations on the margins of society and were processes applied to groups and individuals who were socially, economically and sometimes physically constrained for the purposes of scientific enquiry, containment, or exclusion, subjectification works differently; it is an active process of self-formation, mediated by an external ‘expert’  

---

4Thus the penal system survives even today amongst a range of other alternatives (probation, children’s homes, secure units) because it has other subliminal meanings that are about the construction of delinquency itself where a pathological notion of the delinquent is ‘less dangerous’ than, for example, the politicised revolutionary. “For a strategy of social order this advantage far outweighs the very minor disadvantage of habitualising criminals to a life-long cycle of crime and punishment.” (Harland: 1987: 165).
(for example, the psychoanalyst). Here, self understanding is arrived at through 'knowledge' derived from the human and social sciences.

Whereas a normative policy analysis takes for granted existing institutional structures and presumes that any inconsistencies, inadequacies or injustices can be eradicated by some adjustment to the operational functioning of the overall structure across time, place and culture, Foucault argues that power is simply reorganised and progress illusory. Foucault argues that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries power becomes increasingly exercised through the emergent human sciences and associated professional practices (medicine, psychiatry). The sciences, when applied to identified groups, represent a sophisticated use of power using techniques of surveillance, examination and classification. While prisons continue to have their place, other community-based options emerge. In this way, the scope of regulation is extended and the distinction between 'welfare' and 'punishment' less clear. Family, school and community become absorbed into new systems of social regulation (Cohen: 1985). The social worker, the psychologist, the psychiatrist, the probation worker all operate in ways which network new forms of power and control (Penna and O'Brien: 1996). The discipline/discourses of the human sciences give over their 'knowledge' to the disciplinary apparatus of society, not as dictates, directions in an oppressive, coercive way, but as 'truths', 'knowledge' of how things ought to be within the prevailing episteme, of what human nature is, of what is madness, 'normal' sexuality, criminal, and moreover, what is 'child', 'family' and 'state'. In this way, there is scope for non-conformity and resistance given the multiplicity of often competing discourses and the way in which knowledge-power works to create subject-identities which are accommodated within discourse which hold within themselves their own constituted 'truth'. It is, therefore, possible to transform, but not transcend the scope of disciplinary power. A child can be needy, vulnerable, the victim of adult's maltreatment at the same time as being the offender, the delinquent, the perpetrator; all are encapsulated within childhood and the 'truth' of a child's nature.
In this way, power is 'itself' is not 'embodied' or uni-directional but is also a relational matter, "it inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents" (Weedon: 1987:113). In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault describes how power has become both individualising and totalising and examines the moment when it was understood to be more efficient and profitable to place people under surveillance than to punish individuals. Foucault suggests that the end of the eighteenth century was a time when behaviours previously categorised as 'criminal' begin to acquire an alternative 'political' meaning and become represented as a protest against the existing social order. It is the modern penal system which manages to accommodate this potential for disruption.

According to Foucault, prior to the eighteenth century physical punishment was the major response to crime. Power is exercised over individuals and the population and upon the body. In other words, 'crime' signified differently, was highly individualised and seen more as an attack upon the 'body' of the king (as a signifier), in contrast to contemporary conceptualisations which more often regard crime as an infringement of social norms. Accordingly, punishment was inflicted upon the body of the criminal through various forms of torture, dismemberment and, ultimately, execution. Such punishments, however, were not inflicted in an arbitrary way - torture was used in a sophisticated and highly systematic way; precise forms of mutilation were used for specific crimes. These methods were just as systematic as deciding what fine or prison sentence to impose today.

As rule by sovereignty and right is eroded so too the 'body' is required for new purposes - meeting the needs of the industrialising economy in the factories. Thus, as the body begins to signify differently, so torture becomes anomalous and sovereign power denounced by reformers in its barbarity. Since mutilation as punishment is no longer meaningful or, perhaps more accurately, no longer relevant to the interests of industrial capitalism it acquires a different signification and as such might more easily be deemed immoral, brutal and inappropriate. The mutilated body is not of use in the factory; its
signifying value changes and the use of public spectacle and humiliation no longer viable or cost-effective from a practical point of view. Punishment *reconfigures* within the discourse of criminality not as revenge but correction and new modes of punishment emerge, most notably prisons, designed to control and punish, retain an able workforce and maximise surveillance. The exercise of power is now transformed; it is no longer an external force upon the body, or over individuals but is manifest through *internalised* processes of discipline and regulation. Bentham’s Panopticon is both example of and metaphor for, a disciplinary society which contains a prison building whose design, featuring a central observational tower, allows for the maximum surveillance of prisoners housed in the surrounding structures. Not knowing whether they were being observed or not, the idea was that the prisoners would behave as though they were observed at all times. The Panopticon was never built in its pure form, but serves as a powerful symbol of how Foucault sees the observing, scrutinising, regulatory imperatives operate in society. In the carceral society “is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons” (Foucault: 1977:128). The prison comes to symbolise all forms of punishment; all social institutions become part of the Panoptican world and power-knowledge comes to justify punishment as treatment of the mind (Cohen: 1985). Perhaps it is also not surprising that since residential care for children evolved out of the same rationale of segregation, surveillance and reform that children’s homes have in the past resembled prisons or that even more recently in residential care practices within the care ‘system’ often emphasise or prescribe ‘behaviour modification’ approaches or institutionalising and regulatory methods where the bias is toward the ‘control imperative’ and a tendency towards penalising non-conformity. Social work, children’s homes, child protection procedures, all are institutions that are operated by disciplinary power; they are the discipline-in-practice. It is important to point out here, if it is not already clear, that when we are talking about ‘discipline’ in is in both senses of the term that Foucault uses it, i.e., discipline as in *knowledge*; intellectual, academic ‘training’
within a discourse, as well as discipline as a more explicit form of control. Both meanings inhere simultaneously. The 'disciplinary society' is the society of disciplines, in the former definition of the term, one where the disciplines of science, psychiatry, criminology and related subjects come to constitute that which we define as the signs of 'society', 'family', 'child', 'subject', 'dysfunction', 'deviance'.

**Discipline and 'Subjectification'**

Foucault's 'counter-history' regards the subject not as the creative force, origin or drive behind 'progress' in the sciences, but as an effect in and of itself of a process of subjection wherein particular techniques have historically facilitated the construction of 'subject' denying the possibility of thinking differently. As previously suggested, expressions of subjectivity, 'truth', consciousness, whether ideas, beliefs or theories are preceded by processes external to the subject that actually enable the concept of subject to emerge. In short, the social precedes the private, the 'disciplinary society' gives rise to the subject, rather than vice versa. Moreover, Foucault gives attention to the peripheral, the marginal discourses that figure little in a 'conventional' history of ideas. Not that such discourses have been 'hidden' as such, but that they have held little credence in the scheme of things; they are marked by their subjugation from the dominant discourse and help to show how a variety of processes work to exclude, differentiate and categorise groups. In this way, the subject, rather than being at the centre of things, origin or core, is instead 'arrived at' and given 'form' (identity, diagnosis) as a consequence of the processes described. 'Truth' about a person's proclivities, whether sexual, social, psychological, or indeed about their very 'sense' of self-identity, is brought about not so much by dominant discursive practices but as an effect of the way in which these discourses work; i.e., they constitute, dominate, create the manner and the means by which we think about and describe ourselves and the way in which others think about and describe us. Foucault argues that marginal, subjugated discourses have been not silenced, but unheard because of the processes and techniques of
the disciplinary society. What is validated as 'truth' is that which is an effect of the medical, legal, psychiatric, religious practices of the nineteenth century. Here again, we are less concerned with where power lies, or with whom, than with the process of subjection; how subjects are constructed and what methods and techniques are used in order to classify, identify, regulate so that 'truths' about human nature, sexuality, childhood even, are able to establish themselves beyond question. However, the trick is not so much in refuting such 'truths' but in describing the means by which they become established and institutionalised so as to become irrefutable. Such means are variable, both historically and culturally; indeed they are embedded in variability and change, contrary to logic, which would dictate continuity and certainty; where truth seems most certain it is at its most fragile. It is this understanding of contingent and constituted truths that will form the substance of the discussion of the construction of childhood in Chapter Four.

Subjectification and Self-forming Identities: Foucault's *History of Sexuality*

It is in *The History of Sexuality* (1981) that Foucault refines the idea of 'subjectification' through an account of the constitution of knowledges within the discourse of sexuality that reduce sexual identities to biology, instinct and notions of repression. The process of 'subjectification' constitutes the human subject not as a passive object to be moulded and shaped by external forces but as an active, participatory actor in the process of 'self-formation'. Here, we have suggested that self-understanding is formed by reference to external techniques and mediated through an external authority, for example, the psychoanalyst - the 'valued' knowledge of the expert in modern society providing us with a deeper knowledge of the 'inside' of ourselves. Thus, a society emerges which creates individuals as both actors and objects (Boyne: 1990); where power is not so much 'owned' or possessed by any one group to the exclusion of others as it is experiential and exercised by all in a multitude of diverse and pervasive forms.
It is here that Foucault’s position moves from the subject as a tool of power within a normalised subjectivity towards the production of power from ‘within’ an internalised subject-identity. In the nineteenth century modern understandings of sexuality emerged where the body becomes the focus for scrutiny and surveillance within the emergent penal sciences, medicine and psychology. Against a progressive view which places Victorian inspired repression and collective silence about sex against twentieth century permissiveness and liberalism, Foucault argues the Victorian era was rather characterised by an obsessive interest in sex as a political and social problem. Indeed, the very idea of repression was constituted by a discourse of sexuality as an object for examination and classification within medical and psychiatric discourses, illustrated in the centrality sex takes as a theme in religious and, subsequently, clinical ‘confession’. The ‘discovery’ of ‘perverse’ and ‘deviant’ behaviours is, in this way, symptomatic of this ‘taking into discourse’ of the object, ‘sex’, concomitant with its medicalisation and internalisation within the ‘self-discovering’ subject to the extent that that the very ‘essence’ of selfhood is seen as residing within the sexual instinct/identity. By identifying and classifying ‘deviance’, ‘normal’ behaviour was established, most notably in the opposition created between the dominant heterosexual identity and the category of the homosexual. That said, as a productive force, internalised subject identities can, through a self-validating discourse, emerge and compete for equal rights and treatment whilst remaining ‘within’ a particularised set of power relations within discourse. The constituted subject-position allows not only for the collective categorisation of potentially threatening marginalised groups (thus facilitating greater surveillance and scrutiny), but also enables an identity: a kind of negative reconstitution of the fragmented ‘dissident-subject’ within a discourse of supervised illegality, and one that will even speak on its own behalf.

So embedded is this constituting discourse that individuals enter into modes of self-regulation voluntarily, embarking on a voyage of self-discovery with the psychoanalyst
Foucault: Discourse, Power and the Constituted Subject

which further embroils the subject in disciplinary power - and all in the cause of 'liberating' the 'inner truth'.

Clearly, for Foucault, the idea of a progressive emergence of an 'always already there' repressed sexual-identity is denied within this conceptualisation. Commonly-held assumptions about how for centuries our 'true' sexual 'selves' have been restrained and repressed by dominant bourgeois belief-systems only to be discovered and unlocked by the combined forces of psychoanalysis and the liberating consequences of 'human progress' are rejected. At the end of the day it is only from within an understanding of sexuality as 'repressed' that we can conceptualise it as a kind of primal, driving instinct that can only be held back by external restraints. As will be seen in Derrida's post-structuralism, Foucault rejects the 'naturalness' of such so-called 'instincts' and looks to the cultural, more specifically the primacy of the cultural over the apparently natural in constructing our sexual identity. Freud's acclaimed 'discovery' of the sexual origin of neuroses is but one more episode in the production of a discourse of sex, and one in modern times which science, specifically psychoanalysis, dominates. It is the constructed notion of the repressed sex-drive, seen as a product of the capitalist bourgeois work ethic which appropriated all human energies towards industrial production and required a moral framework within which sexuality could be controlled, to which psychoanalysis comes to the rescue. In a society in which surveillance and regulation were increasingly individualised and where the emergent human sciences had created a condition in which it was self-reflection, observation, training and treatment which regulated, defined and enabled the subject-position, it is not surprising that it is the physical body within which the sexual self is located. By constructing the sexual 'instinct', science was able to move in on sexuality as a new arena for control; first by 'discovering' it and reducing it to biology, then, later, and in apparent opposition by liberating it through the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis, which, for Foucault, is just another discourse within which sexuality 'makes sense'. Sex in modern society is eminently cultural; located at the core of what we understand as our
'discovered' identity, something irrefutable about our 'true' selves. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "sexual behaviour is no longer constrained under the notion of sin; instead it is constrained under the notion of the abnormal, the pathological" (Harland: 1987:160). It flows from the biological conception of the body as 'container of instincts' wherein pleasure is incidental to the 'true' function of sex as reproduction. Thus, although the discourse at its most liberal accommodates the deviant, even with open arms, it is only able to do so from within that self-same conceptualisation of what is deviance.

In all of this what Foucault points to is the power of the body as signifier in resisting scientific imposition whilst at the same time being shaped and moulded, 'regulated', 'managed' by such discourses. It is the very availability of the body for appropriation into a multiplicity of discourses, to signify freely, that is its power; in contrast to disciplinary practices, discourse is thus much more productive, resistant, self-validating and positive as well as self-regulatory. The History of Sexuality to this extent is as much about the production of subject-identities in general and the organisation of modern society as it is about sex or sexuality. In a society concerned with the life-processes, sex and sexual practices acquire a particular and a generalised significance. The 'disciplinary' society requires the body 'physical' to be regulated as well as the societal body - the population as a whole; in this way the government of 'biological' needs (or rather what they signify) is the defining feature of modern society. This is not the flesh and bones of the body but the body as signifier; this is not power as impositional and uni-directional but power as multi-faceted, generative, expansionist, positive. Thus that which is experienced as most instinctual, primal and natural can as easily be conceptualised as cultural. The fundamental suppositions which are intended to prop up the nature/culture opposition collapse in upon themselves and subvert the very logic that sustains them.

Implications for a study of Social Work

The discourse(s) of social work are constituted and perpetuated through processes of negotiation, accommodation and differentials in the exercise and flow of power
throughout society (for example, between 'family' and 'state', individuals, groups and institutions); it is only out of these processes that norms and standards can be determined on the basis of those who fail to meet or conform. Within this kind of conceptual understanding, social work is one of the means by which individuals are not simply controlled but drawn into processes of social and self regulation as active participants. In this way, social work undertakes a unique role in mediating between the 'excluded' or marginalised and the mainstream of society. Jacques Donzelot (1980), drawing on Michel Foucault's ideas, argues that in the late nineteenth century a new 'conceptual space' was opened up between the private and public spheres. In particular, the bourgeois family became a more private institution in an increasingly commercialised and industrial world where state power was beginning to shift from intensive to extensive modes of regulation. Since that time this 'social space' located between private and public has come gradually to be occupied by the 'expert' - the doctor, the lawyer, the social worker amongst others. Donzelot traces historically the emergence of various philanthropic institutions and their subsequent absorption into state functions mediated through the new professions, interventionist at the point of deviance. Similarly, Harris (1990) describes how, historically, French foundling hospitals raised the profile of child protection and transformed the meaning and function of 'family' not only by accommodating the abandoned child but by also stimulating a demand for similar ventures by virtue of their very existence. In the twentieth century the 'experts', even if only by default, set new standards of behaviour for the individual and implicitly police family behaviour.

In particular and in contrast to most other professions, social work also sets out to articulate the subjective status of objective categories, for example, advocating or representing the individual experience of people in the 'mental illness' category, the child or the 'learning disabled'. Giving 'voice' to the marginalised or unheard requires the social worker to draw on interpretative, subjective experience; it is in part in this way that the exercise of power may be generative, proactive and creative as well as repressive. Further,
this study sets out to show how social work, as a set of practices/ texts (discourses) serves to constitute what childhood and the family *is*, and in turn, the discourses of childhood which it variously articulates, are constituted through the multi-faceted operation of power in society.

Signifiers (the 'body', 'text', 'child', 'family' etc.) are infinitely variable and always open to challenge, change and redefinition. Meaning, then, is dependent on the discursive relations of 'context' (historical and cultural location). These 'discursive fields', as described by Foucault, are a way of making sense of the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power. The discursive field of 'child welfare' is one therefore that 'makes sense' of residential care for children, normalising exclusion, reconstituting difference in a way that is palatable, necessary. By 'opening up' the field of signification it is not intended that all that is 'describable' must now be described; Foucault in particular suggests that it is 'statements', the 'enunciative function', the articulation of signs (Foucault: 1991) that are effective in discourse formation, in part through their repeatability that should be selected. However, repetition here does not need to be formal or self-identical but must be regular and in correspondence with other signs; a statement is a 'form' of knowledge that is not necessarily a linguistic or grammatical 'unit', (though it may take this form), rather it is a signifier that contributes to the particular; it is not knowledge 'itself' but one of the markers that point to the parameters of what 'is' knowledge (albeit often taken as knowledge). The 'repeatability' of statements is in referring to other corresponding signs, repetition as a function which requires a differentiation, and which may occupy a 'subject-position' (doctor, psychiatrist, social worker, patient, 'service-user', parent, child) within an associated field of signification.

The associated field...is made up of all the formulations to which the statement refers (implicitly or not) either by repeating them, modifying them or adapting them, or by opposing them, or by commenting on them; there can be no statement that in one way or another does not reactualize others.

Foucault: 1978: 98
By examining the methods and practices, the ‘statements’ of dominant discourses, those which are repeated and hold common currency in our thinking, we can see how groups are reconfigured, relocated and positioned in particular ways, not by virtue of some kind of conspiracy or other but through the construction of knowledge and understanding. This kind of repetition is one which occludes alternative forms of knowledge. In saying this, no discourse can reveal the ‘truth’ about whatever its claims might be; they can only work to classify, regulate, ‘treat’ and organise; in doing so shut out other possibilities in terms of ‘thinking’ about them. Power is constituted in and through the subject, not exercised upon the individual. ‘Texts’ do not bring forth authoritative interpretations in and of themselves; nor does the subject as reader of the text give themselves over to the authority of the text; both inhere in each other and are productive, generative within the discursive field. The exercise of power in society is one of discursive relations, that between, rather than within the discursive field; not exercised by but through the constitution of subjects in discourse. It is in this way autonomous, it is in the playing out of discourse that power is exercised; it is not possible therefore to identify it, locate it, analyse as such since it is ‘within’. We can, however, observe its operation within the relations of discourse.

For example, Foucault (1972) suggests that where madness is concerned, all of the statements in the discourse of psychopathology, which may be different in form and dispersed in time, cohere if they refer to the same object, in this case madness. Madness was thus constituted by all the statements that made it up and differentiated it. The object may be broken down into sub-divisions, e.g. neuroses, melancholia, but in turn each of these discourses constituted the object; it was never ‘there’ but was ‘discovered’ as it was constituted in and through the discourse. This study will come to illustrate how childhood may also be seen as similarly constituted and reconstituted throughout history and within the present; moreover, following chapters will show how, as an ‘object’, children have a particular prominence for Modernity as a ‘fulcrum’ within a wider nexus of familial and
social relations in contemporary discourse. Again, despite appearances, ‘unity’ (that is, in this case, our very ‘taken-for-grantedness’ about childhood and children’s needs), is constructed not on the certainty of the ‘object’, but on the space between other signifiers in the field. It is an active, generative play of signifiers, within the discourse (the space between signifiers) and between other discourses (the space between discourses) meted out in daily practice, law and policy which circumscribes and delimits the ‘object’.

Foucault suggests we may further examine the coexistence of heterogeneous and dispersed statements and seek that which governs their division, interdependency and determines what they exclude (what cannot be said about the ‘object’); we should acknowledge that discourse ‘unity’ is arrived at not in the coherence of concepts themselves but in their simultaneous or successive emergence (again, the ‘space’ between them); and analyse the interplay of appearance and dispersal. Finally, we should account for unitary forms and study their identity and persistence of ‘themes’; against a ‘totalising’ history. Out of all of this Foucault aims to map the role and operation of different subjects-in-discourse; seek the conditions of ‘birth and disappearance’ of historically definitive discourses; looking at practices and the conditions that make these acceptable in a given time and place.

Objects may be diverse, contradictory and multifarious but will have a correspondence to each other; it is the conditions of possibility that allow reference to be made to the object or objects. ‘Statements’ are related to neither grammar nor logic but must operate within a domain of coexistence with other statements; they allow a ‘subject-position’, a thematic ‘identity’ which is given the appearance of a ‘history’ and ‘evolution’ a ‘progress’ towards and awakening ‘truth’.

These are all matters that will be comprehensively explored further in this study; in particular how in both the ‘textual’ and ‘historical’ fields of signification a discourse of needs comes to constitute childhood. For now, it will suffice to suggest an analogy between this notion of childhood as having some kind of coherent, structured, natural,
prefiguring adulthood and, within Modernity, 'history' itself, or rather, the idea of a progressive, 'totalising' history; that which transports and imparts to us the 'present' within our very sense of self and time and place.

Conclusion

To reiterate: post-structuralism insists on cultural and historical specificity; meaning is never definitive and universal but is generated out of the discursive field of a particular historical and cultural location. Meaning arises and is read 'in context' so that behaviours acquire a symbolism specific to the context in which they arise. The discourse is a means of constituting the subject within a historical and cultural location. Within any discursive field, a number of discourses will offer alternative states of subjectivity and identities. However, some will be more legitimate than others and will validate the 'status quo'; others will challenge dominant interests. Those discourses which are most dominant will have powerful structures in society to support them whether within law, medicine, education. For Foucault, the local and particular are always inserting their differences; this requires that we avoid giving primacy to the subject; the subject in history and the subject as historian, theoretician, of ideas.

Those less dominant discourses, subjectivities, identities are likely to be marginal but will be crucial in defining what is dominant, central and 'mainstream'. Within bodies of knowledge and their related institutions there are competing interests; different subject-positions allow for the accommodation of diverse and contradictory interests and resistance to the predominant discourse.

For the purposes of the study, constructions of childhood, child maltreatment and child abuse are seen as operating within interdependent discursive fields; the idea of the child as innocent, pure, sexless, is what enables the infringement and contamination of this purity to be constructed as abuse. Such understandings are dependent upon a particular,
relatively recent interpretation of children's behaviour, articulated in theories of child
development and achieved on the basis of adults determination of what children's rights,
needs and responsibilities are (Parton et al :1997). To this extent the opposition
adult/child is one we cannot take for granted or assume that it is a 'given'. The ever-
shifting relationship between the state, family and child across time tells a very different
story about childhood to that which conventional wisdom today might hold as 'truth'. It is
from our stated conceptualisation of discourse, power and genealogy of knowledge that
the discussion will examine 'child' as constituted within the various discourses which
constitute 'childhood'; look at some of the 'fragments' that coalesce in contemporary
understandings of the 'meaning of childhood'.

The assertion has also been made that it is differentials of power as knowledge or
'truth' which through discourse constitute the subject-identity. These processes make it
then possible to conceptualise and address individuals and groups as a 'problem', whether
sympathetically or punitively, depending on the social and political milieu of the time.
Whether in the prison, the hospital, the school, the institution, or the family, social
regulation is variously manifested. Thresholds for how individuals and groups are
constructed as 'outside' the mainstream are determined out of these norms and standards,
setting a trigger for when matters like 'concern', 'risk' and 'need' provoke the state 'help'
or censure. However, despite appearances, it is the very precariousness of constructions of
family and childhood, their 'instability' as signifiers that serve to perpetuate the discourse.
Thus, whilst on the one hand the "modern, obsessively legislating, defining, structuring,
segregating, classifying, recording and universalising state reflected the splendour of

---

5 This ambivalence in the construction of childhood has become problematic when it comes to determining children as
victims of child sexual abuse; it is argued that 'innocence' may be a source of arousal and fascination for adults who
may then be inclined towards abusive behaviour (Kitzinger: 1990). As 'innocent victim', showing all the traits of
passivity, silence and unknowing may incur a particular response to the child as 'abused', the 'knowing' child, who
fails to fit the stereotype may go unheard. By determining that there are particular signs and symptoms of abuse
which characterise the construction of 'victim', children may be going unseen or unheard. Further, Kitzinger (1990)
suggests that even where children are seen as 'victims', forms of resistance presented by children as active, positive,
resilient, powerful are rendered pathological by the processes which intervene to 'rescue' the child reformulated as
'post-traumatic stress' syndrome or other psychological/emotional dysfunction.
universal and absolute standards of truth” (Bauman: xiv:1992), this ‘splendour’, derived from a ‘centred’ presence in Modernity and the Enlightenment project holds within it the seeds of its own de(con)struction.

In this study, this very celebration of certainty is itself the warding off of uncertainty and instability about childhood and family; that is, in realising the ‘splendour’ of absolute truth within Modernity, instability is paradoxically acknowledged as its very possibility. In other words, it is the sight and the possibility of the ‘other’ (non-child, non-family) that circumscribes family and childhood. Driven by the fear of chaos and fragmentation, the signifier is thereby regulated, proscribed and ensured. In Foucault’s terms, this is reason enough to characterise the ‘problematic’ and excluded and those that transgress the norms variously as a threat to social order and stability, requiring better control, policing, regulation and ordering or, (and perhaps more often in the case of children), characterised as an ‘object of concern’. In the first characterisation, the excluded can experience something close to a ritualistic catharsis of popular fears (see the vilification and subsequent moral panics and debates around the ‘nature’ of childhood following the death of Jamie Bulger in 1993) in the second, ‘concern’, even outrage at the hand fate has dealt is cause for campaigning, promotion of children’s rights and civil liberties and episodic displays of emotionalism. Such fears and concerns are compounded and given added impetus in the context of a neo-liberal, market-orientated, consumer-driven economy (see Bauman: 1999). It is the regulatory, circumscribing and excluding operation of discourse that is the concern of this study; no where is this more exposed or more keenly felt than within public care for children, where those who are not of the family must signify for what the family and child of nature should be.

6 Writing of excluded groups (including children), Bauman suggests that such fears are compounded further where, for example, the idea of the poor as an army of ‘labour in waiting’ is no longer sustainable and that the unemployed are ‘structurally redundant’; i.e., there is no return; the idea that ‘there but for the Grace of God’ becomes all the more resonant; fear and pity combine effectively to ensure marginalisation and exclusion (see Bauman: 1999:22).
These are matters for elucidation in later chapters. The next chapter sets out to refine the conceptual framework further by correlating what Foucault has to say about the 'body' as signifier with what Derrida has to say about the text.
CHAPTER THREE

DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTION

What, therefore, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms;...truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions...coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.


Introduction

The work of French philosopher and post-structuralist Jacques Derrida appears more explicitly focused on language than that of Foucault. This linguistic strand to poststructuralism, specifically ‘deconstruction’, was first presented in 1967 with the publication of three books - *Speech and Phenomena; Of Grammatology;* and *Writing and Difference* and represents both a movement from structuralism and a wider critique of conventional theories of meaning. Derrida’s basic contention is that a text has multiple meanings beyond those of the author’s intentions; meaning is indeterminate - as are the contents of the author’s intentions; further, it is suggested that a text may indeed subvert or contradict the intended meanings of the author. This contention is further extended by Derrida to formulate what amounts to a critique of the Western philosophical tradition whole - which is based, as Derrida sees it, on an assumption of the determinacy of meaning or, put another way, a ‘centred’, self-presence to thought.

Later sections of this chapter elicit the key themes from Derrida’s work that are applicable to this study and which in combination provide the ‘tools’ for subsequent
Denida and Deconstruction 67

deconstructive readings of selected social work texts. However, it is essential to begin by briefly describing the grounding Derrida's post-structuralism has in Saussure's work on language which has formed the basis for modern structuralism. The chapter then describes the movement Derrida's work represents from structuralism to post-structuralism, paying some attention on the way to the early work of Roland Barthes, before focusing on Derrida's deconstruction and beginning to discuss the implications for this study of childhood.

Saussure's Structuralism

The work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) on language lies behind much of modern structuralism in paying explicit attention to the way in which linguistic features may be analysed in terms of structures and systems. As well as introducing the concept of a system, structural linguistics takes as the basis of its analysis not terms or linguistic features themselves but the relations between them in order to discover general laws which operate the system. Language is seen as a system of signs; each made up of two components; the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the acoustic component; the sound image 'dog' for example, and the signified is the idea or concept. It is the structural relationship between signifier and signified which constitutes the sign. Its meaning is determined by its context and its relationship to other signs. For Saussure, the meaning-value is only acquired within the context of a differential relationship within the system of signs.

Further, language itself is divided into langue - the structure, system, theory and rules - and parole, the use of langue in spoken language. With language the relationship between structure and the 'event' of speech is crucial and for the structural linguist it is language, not speech that warrants attention. Both speaker and listener must have internalised the principles of langue in order for language to signify. It is the differential relationship

---

1 For the social scientist this means looking at those structures which generate the phenomena that are being studied.
between what is and what is not signified that gives language its informational value. Consciousness itself can only be rationalised within the context of having internalised language. Any attempt at evaluating the relationship between the acoustic component (signifier) and signified is somewhat futile since any such evaluation is already and always dependent upon having internalised the system.

The system of language is therefore not fixed, but rather one of relations between various constituents each defined by difference. It is this difference that gives language its meaning-value - “the important thing in the word is not the sound alone but the phonic differences that make it possible to distinguish this word from all others” (Saussure:1959:118). This is the sense in which this study will extrapolate an understanding of concepts of ‘social phenomena’; in relation to other concepts and at the point at which they differ. Language is a means of generating an abstract reality; signifying sounds or marks on a page only have value in relation to the system of which they are a part - as long as the structure of formal relations between signifying sounds or marks on a page remains intact and the speaker and listener understand the system. For example, a quietly spoken sentence may still be comprehensible over a lot of non-signifying noise since we may still differentiate the pattern of relations as meaningful. Equally, the sounds of the pattern themselves may vary considerably as in the case of different vowel sounds in local accents but as long as the pattern obeys the rules of the system it will still be intelligible. Moreover, the signifieds are seen as obeying the same principle of differentiation. Signifieds are not mental images or concepts of ‘things’ as such, “the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not” (Saussure: 1959:117).
Barthes and Semiology: *Myth* and the Naturalised Sign

Although the early work of Barthes is highly structuralist, his insight develops the idea that the sign is always a product of historical and cultural convention. Barthes's semiology has a relevance for this discussion in two main of ways. First, 'myth' is a useful concept which, whilst essentially structuralist, is somewhere 'on the way to' post-structuralism; it powerfully illustrates the idea of meaning as multi-faceted, 'loosens' meaning and signification in a way that begins to pave the way for Derrida's deconstruction. Second, and more pertinently, Barthes stresses both the 'emotive' quality of signification within his mythical system and the 'naturalising' effect signification can take when signs take a particular form.

For Barthes, cultural phenomena are revealed to have multi-layered meanings, general meanings that stand for a shared idea that may have a socially unifying effect, just like meanings in langue. In *Mythologies* (1957/1993) Barthes reveals these mythological meanings; myth is a mode of signification motivated by the concept represented and yet holding within the potential for multiple representation. Mythical systems thus enable other meanings to transcend the initial semiological or linguistic system. Barthes offers the example of a student of Latin grammar examining a sentence from Aesop: quia ego nominar leo (because my name is lion) (Barthes: 1957). The sentence has a first order meaning, 'I am a lion, my name is Leo', this is its immediate, literal, face value meaning, but in the context in which it exists (that of learning grammar) it has a second order meaning as a grammatical example of the rule of the agreement of the predicate. Both semiological systems co-exist although the second order meaning demotes the first order meaning to near insignificance; neither meaning requires stating, but the system works to convey the primary message. The same relation between signifier and signified exists just as in structural linguistics. But here the signifier does not simplistically express the signified, but
unites to generate the correlation, the second sign, constituted by the \textit{totality of association} of signifier and signified. Another example:

Take a bunch of roses: I use it to signify my passion. Do we have here, then, only a signifier and a signified, the roses and my passion? Not even that: to put it accurately, there are here only 'passionified' roses. But on the plane of analysis, we do have three terms; for these roses weighted with passion perfectly and correctly allow themselves to be decomposed into roses and passion: the former and the latter existed before uniting and forming this third object, which is the sign. It is true to say that on the plane of experience I cannot dissociate the roses from the message they carry, as to say on the plane of analysis I cannot confuse the roses as signifier and the roses as sign: the signifier is empty, the sign is full, it is a meaning.


What Barthes calls 'myth' is a \textit{second order signification}, constituted in part by the first order sign which then becomes the signifier in the mythological system. Again, the content of the first order, the linguistic component, is relegated from its primary status where myth takes hold of it and constructs its own meaning. It is the \textit{form}, as opposed to the \textit{content} of the signification which may hold the myth within, sometimes as a delusion, sometimes as an alibi, sometimes as a symbol but always as standing for something other than that which is immediately present. Barthes uses this approach to reveal the ideological implications behind cultural interpretations of everyday things from wine to soap-powder, wrestling to the face of Garbo; in mythological terms everything is an example not only of what it 'is' but also of something else and something more; the 'something more' often being that which has some shared, socially unifying effect. In this respect, Barthes is placing emphasis not only on the ideological implications of myth, but also the 'emotional weight' that signs carry. This is of particular relevance to this study since many of the signs within the field of social work are highly emotive - 'child', 'needs', 'protection', 'abuse' etc. We can draw from Barthes analysis the idea that signs carry with them a 'knowledge' of the past, a memory, an emotion, but that this 'biography' is put 'in parenthesis' in order to receive the full meaning in the movement from a linguistic sign to a mythical signifier. In the case of the innocuous example of Latin grammar given above (because my name is lion), we can say that the first order signification, which is linguistic,
holds within it a 'biography' of the lion (it signifies a history, geography, an idea of the power of the lion etc.); however, as a grammatical example, this biography recedes and is subordinate to this second order signification. In the following section we can explore some of the implications of myth for this study.

**Mythical Childhood**

For the purposes of this study, the ‘dangerous’ sign is the one that presents itself as ‘natural’ when it is essentially ideological; the sign functions to naturalise any ambiguity and chase off any possibility of alternative reading; simply perceiving the sign as reflective and expressive denies the constructive and creative character of the sign. Meaning is constructed, and then made to appear natural. Myth is a means of ‘naturalising’ historical and naturalising intentions; the social world is seen as a signifying field, a network of intersecting signs.

In order to analyse social institutions, professions and their activities in this way requires a deciphering of the multiple meanings behind how they are played out in practices. The question is: what does the concept or idea mean or ‘stand for’ in terms of a socially unifying, collective experience? For Barthes, “myth hides nothing; its function is to distort, not to make disappear” (Barthes: 1957:121). Whereas in language, Saussure’s contention was that the sign is arbitrary (the sound-image ‘dog’ is not automatically compelled to an associative relationship with the concept ‘dog’; it does so through its differential relationship with other elements of the system), in myth there is a dynamic between meaning and form, a drive toward an interplay between the two components.

Let us consider ‘child protection’ as a sign; we are at first caught up in its ‘face value’ meaning; keeping children safe from ‘harm’, securing ‘welfare’, the innocence of children, the abuse of power by adults, the very worthiness of the message ‘protect children’. The configuration of this particular sign is highly emotive but immediately captures and chases

---

2 Where ‘form’ for Barthes is the sign within a second order signification.
off any possibility of disputing the worthiness of 'protecting children'; the 'biographies' of 'child' and 'protection' are immediately put into parenthesis for child protection to take up its mythical signification. All of this happens before we can even begin to challenge some of the suppositions that 'prop up' child protection as a 'good thing'. (For example, that children occupy a state of natural incapacity and innocence, that 'harm' surrounds them, that they are not able to consent in the same way as adults, that there is assumed 'knowingness' about children's welfare) Clearly, the motivation for this denial is also derived from either a sense of our own childhood (and how it signifies for us today, in the present) and /or (if a parent) a sense of our 'own' children's childhood and how that, too signifies crucially for adults. In this way it seems an unquestionable, 'natural' imperative to ensure the welfare and safety of all children. But as well as conceptualising the need to protect children as unquestionable, 'child protection', as a myth, can also be alternatively deciphered/decoded as an 'alibi' for controlling the family, a way of ensuring and legitimating access to the private and autonomous arena of 'family'; a feeble disguise for 'control of the state'. However, if child protection is regarded as a dynamic relationship between the 'protect' (as a first order signification) and 'control' (as a second order signification) imperatives, it becomes not something else, but something more altogether. The debate can continue to rage about family autonomy versus liberation of the child; myth allows for this, is driven and motivated by this very dynamic. If child protection were purely and simply about 'saving children', then it would be hardly such a contentious issue, no-one would argue about it in terms of class relations, state interference, the rights of parents or the infringement of civil liberties. It all too obviously means something else as well. And yet, revealing (as if we were naive) the controlling aspects of child protection is equally insufficient; if child protection were purely an alibi for state control of the family, a conspiracy against the working class, an imposition of bourgeois values on the masses, then it is an exceptionally ineffectual one, hardly worth bothering with. The point is, Myth is not in the business of deluding, conspiring or concealing hidden truths; it
accommodates alternative interpretations and works them together in a dynamic relationship. It does so at that crucial interface where differential meanings of state and family come together; where they define themselves, not once and for always, but constantly changing, working and reworking themselves out in a relational dynamic. Conceptually, child protection is neither a first order signification about saving children, nor in a second order signification about state control, the two combine to generate the mythical meaning of child protection; a socially unifying concept which is able to bring together a variety of disparate causes and contradictory political identities beneath a common banner.

In a similar way, 'childhood', as a sign, has itself acquired 'mythical' qualities within a discourse of liberal professionalism that social work inhabits. In later chapters the study will describe how social work knowledge is necessarily eclectic, and thus occupies somewhat ambivalent territory; somewhere within a coalition between 'psychological' and 'sociological' theory. Here, discourses that constitute the natural child, enable childhood to transcend any potential contradiction. It is in this way that we could say that 'childhood' is a 'mythical signifier'. Its significance in this respect will be discussed in the following chapter.

Driven to either unveil or liquidate an historical concept, myth sidesteps the issue and naturalises it, projecting it out of paradox or contradiction. In this way, Barthes structuralist semiology develops ideas that Derrida subsequently pursues to the extreme and provides for this study a 'way in' to the critique of meaning that post-structuralism represents. In particular, this study will return to an examination of the 'naturalised sign' in social work discourse from the perspective of Derrida's deconstructive approach. First, we should begin by establishing the movement in Derrida's thinking from structuralism to post-structuralism.
Structuralism and Post-structuralism: Some continuities and discontinuities

The discussion has thus far shown that for Saussure, systems are understood in the present, not in terms of an evolutionary process; for the post-structuralist, this divide between the historical and the conceptual is a priority that is pursued to the extreme and represents a significant shift away from not only traditional thought, but from modern structuralism, particularly in the work of Foucault and Derrida.

It is Saussure's positing of a pre-given and fixed structuring of language prior to its actualisation in speech or writing that makes his linguistic analysis 'structuralist'; Derrida, however, rejects the notion that there is anything 'behind' or prefiguring language. In structuralism, a sense of the 'naturalness' of things was ultimately retained; for example in the attempt to universalise and generalise a theory of the human mind through the structuralist anthropology of Levi-Strauss (1966).

In structural linguistic analysis the sign is arbitrary, its meaning is not predetermined or 'God-given', but is established through its use in relation to other linguistic signs but from within an enclosed system. Post-structuralism looks at the variability, the cultural-specificity, and the arbitrariness of meaning, particularly in language; this symbiosis between signifiers and signified is more fluid, less certain; one does not necessarily correspond to the other. Indeed, for Derrida, the relationship between sign and signifier is not just less certain; it is not certain at all. In this sense, language can refer only to itself, from within itself with no external points of reference that we can 'hang on' to at all. In structuralism, there is at least a sense in which we can say that meaning somehow lies 'behind' the sign; the sign is a sign of and for the meaning intended and received; it retains an 'objectivity' about it. Even though the sign is arbitrary and it is only through common usage and its differential relationship to other signs that its meaning makes any sense, this implied 'externality' gives an objectivity to meaning. Although the distinction between the historical and the conceptual was well made by structuralism, for Derrida it loses credibility.
in attempting to establish universal truths about the systems it espouses. The post-structuralist project is not to demolish one set of apparently universal truths in order to reveal something more 'true' within, beneath or behind (it is here post-structuralism parts company with structuralism), but to reveal the instability, non-universality of all truth and logic and the infinite play of significations in the social field. Derrida argues that there is no 'original', natural, unsupplemented state of things, pointing out that Saussure's theory of language as a system of signs ultimately reverts to a discourse which assumes a 'centre' or 'logos' to thought by suggesting that speech is the 'truest' form of language and writing the most 'unnatural'. Whilst Saussure emphasises the pre-eminence and purity of speech over writing, Derrida shows that when he comes to explain the 'nature' of linguistic units he ironically returns to writing to illustrate the point. This is a tendency which Derrida sees a symptomatic of the whole of the Western philosophical tradition. However, despite this 'fatal flaw', we should not diminish or underestimate the significance of Saussure's contribution:

Saussure set the terms for a development which passed beyond the grasp of his explicit programme but which could hardly have been formulated otherwise. By repressing the problem which his own theory of language all but brought into view, Saussure transcended the express limitations of that theory. The very concept of 'writing' was enlarged through this encounter into something primordial and far removed from its traditional place in usage.

Norris: 1991:31

What all of this means is that as far as language is concerned, we can no longer see beneath the surface or get behind the meaning since there is nowhere to go, no 'core of things', no celestial city, at which to arrive and stay forever after. Put another way, language does not only construct the social world that we inhabit; it constructs our very 'selves' within it. This is a crucial point to which we shall return; one which particular implications for this study in respect of the ways in which 'child' and childhood in public care are constituted through the language and, by extension, the discourses that constitute social work practices. In order to fully appreciate the movement from structuralism to post-
structuralism and the practice of deconstruction which emerges from that movement, it is necessary to explore further some of the key ideas and concepts in Derrida’s thinking alluded to above. These ideas and concepts can be seen as comprising an overall critique presented by Derrida of what he calls the ‘metaphysics of presence’ - a critique which challenges not only the precepts of structuralism but also other conventional understandings and theories of meaning and signification which have characterised Western thought.

**The Problem of ‘Presence’**

I’ll have said it, I’ll have said it inside me, then in the same breath outside me, perhaps that’s what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that’s what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel, myself vibrating, I’m the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don’t belong to either.

*The Unnameable* Beckett: 1958: 343

i. *Logocentrism, Presence and the Indeterminacy of Meaning*

It will be clear that the idea of meaning as ‘grasppable’ in its entirety and fully present to us in our minds is being undermined by post-structuralism. The ‘illusion’ of fully present meaning is one which Derrida regards as deeply embedded in Western culture and philosophical thought in that it assumes an area of ‘knowingness’ in presence that is solid and irrefutable. This tradition towards a ‘metaphysics of presence’ relies upon the idea of a centre or ‘logos’ to thought - characterised by Derrida as ‘logocentrism’ - and is manifest as a commitment to the belief in the ultimate ‘word’ or truth which must, as a founding principle, exist ‘outside’ of all signifying systems. Western philosophy has assumed a core of meaning to everything; that things have an origin and essence; “the belief that the first and last thing is the Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the self-presence of full self-consciousness” (Sarup: 36:1993). However, as Derrida points out, notions of ‘truth’,

3 Derrida (1982) also makes use the metaphor ‘tympanum’ in describing presence, undermining the idea of the ‘interior self’ and the exterior ‘real world’.
'certainty', 'identity' etc. are all centred via the exclusion, suppression and marginalisation of multiplicity, ambiguity and difference - there can be no concept that is not subject to this 'play' of signification. Without the transcendental or independent signifier no one sign can refer unequivocally to a particular signifier; at the same time, there is no 'outside' to the realm of signification; therefore, Derrida concludes there can be no unqualified presence or originating meaning. For example, we can argue that in Western culture 'family' signifies as an 'origin', something upon which a whole plethora or other signification rest and are centred (about the sanctity of childhood, the respective childrearing capacities of women and men, the 'thread' of 'nature' that family signifies). This is in spite of the actual diversity of family forms, the proliferation of lone parent families and fears of moral decline as a consequence of a fragmentation of traditional family configurations. Throughout, 'family', as a signifier is not subject to, but transcends the play of signification that surrounds it. Alternatively, 'originating' meanings or signifiers can be characterised as the goal within a teleological way of thinking that drive ideas of progress, (as within Modernity the 'project of Enlightenment' or the strive for 'universal emancipation': see Chapter One) either way, both teleological and logocentric 'thinking paradigms' rely on the transcendental signifier and fail to account for the multi-dimensional and retrospective dynamic of signification.

In this way, Derrida rejects the various strands of linguistic and non-linguistic theories of meaning that precede post-structuralism. First, and most obviously, 'literal' meaning is no longer guaranteed (as in for example, the standard linguistic dictionary definition). There is no tidy unity between a signifier and a signified (linguistic or otherwise); meaning is emptied from one before it reaches the other. By looking up one word in a dictionary we are referred to another, and so on. But not only is meaning escaping just at the point of arrival, there is also no real distinction signifiers and signified; one signifier bows out to the next before the signified can ever become fully present.
At the same time as undermining the structuralist linguistic notion of meaning, Derrida allows no escape from language in to the 'real world'. Meaning is not either 'external' to the 'self' in the sense that our experience of the world can be taken for granted and in which names for 'things' are simply 'labels' or where words 'stand for' things that correspond directly with the real world, for there is no access to this world except through meaning. Meaning cannot be fixed either by the intention of the speaker or author; it is neither 'somewhere in between' the former or the latter (the study returns to this in the following section). This means that theories which suggest that meaning is derived where the intention of the speaker or author coincides with 'literal' meaning, or where intention is seen as shaped by 'public', linguistic meaning but ultimately is independent of it, or where a combination of individual (psychological) and social/cultural linguistics coalesce to constitute meaning, are all rejected. For Derrida, there is no unmediated experience in the world since there is no meaning outside of language and signification; all meaning is always and already in a process of constant change; it is therefore indeterminate, context-specific and produced through a process of repetition or iteration, a concept to which we shall shortly return.

ii. **Speech and Writing: The Structuring of 'Presence'**

We can see that for Derrida, language is seen as constituting meaning, rejecting the notion that there are prior ideas which are merely expressed in language. In a traditional, metaphysical reading of a text, meaning is more than what the words on a page mean, it is understood as the meaning that the author intends for them. Language is thus dependent on the self-knowing, subjective author and by inference the purist form of expression communicable is speech. For Derrida, however, philosophy cannot rely on the assumption of a known, given, taken-for-granted certainty, or self-present consciousness from where all our investigations of the social world, past and present can derive a foundation of truth. This logocentrism is manifest in the way in which speech is seen as closer to truth
than writing. Derrida suggests that rather speech is dependent on writing and that language reveals this paradox form when it is at its most distant from its 'origins':

But consider an analogy: the case of a growing tree. Ordinarily we tend to imagine - even when we know better - that a tree rises and flourishes by virtue of some deep and inwardly hidden source of life. We tend to imagine some single essential centre which was there in the earliest stages of growth, and which has remained constant under all later increments. But in fact, of course, a tree lives on the outside, by the circulation which flows through its green bark and sapwood; and its centre is mere dead heartwood, endlessly supplanted and left behind.

Harland: 1987:129

When applied to the meaning of texts this analogy rejects an authoritative meaning originating in the subjectivity of the author, and replaces it with a conception of meaning as an ongoing process, produced on the surface, by a text in particular environments.

In Of Grammatology (1976), Derrida suggests that it is the assumption of presence that has meant writing has been seen as an appendage or even a corruption of speech, indicative of the broader tendency toward metaphysical thought-systems (logocentrism/phonocentrism) which depend on a core, or logos. Such thought-systems are dependent on what they exclude: presence/absence, 'Being'/nothingness, good/evil, speech/writing and the priority of the former term over the latter.

These binary oppositions traditionally are seen as obeying a principle of contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, and are crucial to metaphysical thinking since it is the opposition of subject/object upon which objective description depends. Binary oppositions represent a way of seeing things; of ordering the world along ideological lines of what should and what should not be. Deconstruction aims not just to challenge these oppositional categories but to take apart the conceptual framework that makes them possible at all. It is a means to show how texts can undermine their apparent logic. Derrida suggests that there is no unsupplemented 'original' of anything to which to return in order to find out the truth about things. In each and every binary opposition the first state depends on the 'present absence' of the second. How ever far structuralism seemed to go
in challenging existing understandings about the 'nature' of things it ultimately reverted back upon itself, caved in, collapsed and made 'non-sense' of itself in pursuing invariables which as though they reflected something about the 'nature' of humankind.

Against the priority of speech over writing (phonocentrism) in the Western tradition, Derrida argues that rather than be seen as derivative of speech, writing is in fact a precondition for all speech. It is because of the assumptions of metaphysical thought that a priority has traditionally been given to speech over writing; fundamentally that the 'voice' is seen as closer to the origins, closer to the presence in the present, certainly as close as one can get to self-conscious intention, thought and meaning. "Voice...is a metaphor of truth and authenticity...writing destroys this ideal of self-presence" (Norris: 1991:28). The fact that this seems so logical and common-sensical is precisely the point; common-sense, the 'familiar', the taken-for-granted must here be subverted. Derrida argues that we must see writing as a precondition for language and therefore as prior to speech.

How can this be? For a start, marks on a page do not always anyway represent the phonetics of language; in Egyptian hieroglyphic and Chinese ideogrammatic scripts the written sign signifies independently of an equivalent spoken sign. So there is no universal, automatic relationship between the written and the phonic. Of course, Derrida does not argue that in the development of a child, speech comes before writing and "recognises that the fact of writing follows from the fact of speech, but he none the less asserts that the idea of speech depends on the idea of writing" (Harland: 1987:129).

This preference for speech as the authentic 'voice' and self-presence pervades all of Western theory and can be traced in the linguistic theory of Saussure, despite his exposition of language as a system of abstracted differences. If speech is assumed 'presence', then writing is the 'absence' of 'presence', in other words, writing is therefore that upon which speech depends for its very sense of presence. Again, Derrida is challenging the assumption that the most basic, rudimentary form of something is necessarily closer to the origin or the truth about a thing. Metaphysical thought is that which always depends
on a foundation, a certainty. Such certainties, as we have seen, are defined not by what they are, but by what they not; that is, in a relation of binary opposites. Writing works in a way that speech cannot because of its delusion of authenticity and truth. Writing is the infinite removal, replacement and dislocation of meaning and of meaning of meaning that determines language and places ‘truth’ forever one step beyond our reach. In terms of discovering universal laws, generalities about the social world we are in the disconcerting position of being unable to say what we mean, or indeed to mean what we say:

By a hardly perceptible necessity, it seems as though the concept of writing - no longer indicating a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general (whether understood as communication, relation, expression, signification, constitution of meaning or thought, etc.), no longer designating the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, the signifier of the signifier - is beginning to go beyond the extension of language...There the signified always already functions as a signifier. The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they enter the game. There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitutes language.

Derrida: 1976:6-7

Derrida gives no special precedence to the mind and argues that in the case of writing there is no precedence of mind over meaning. Even in the very act of writing itself, meaning is 'discovered' by the writer-as-reader: “before me, the signifier on its own says more than I believe I meant to say, and in relation to it, my meaning-to-say is submissive rather than active” (Derrida: 78:1978). In *Speech and Writing* (1973), Derrida places priority on the relationship between the text and the reader; a relationship that is seen as active and generative wherein the text rather than ‘complete’, ‘passive’, or ‘finished’, no longer coheres directly with ‘marks upon a page’. “The new movement implies a shift from the signifier to the signified: and so there is a perpetual detour on the way to a truth that has lost any status or finality” (Sarup: 1993:3). Whereas structuralism regards ‘truth’ as lying ‘behind’ a text or sign, post-structuralism emphasises the productivity of interaction between reader and text and is highly ambivalent about (though equally indebted to) Saussure’s confidence in the unity of the stable sign. ‘Truth’ is therefore forever elusive; signification and meaning are, in this way, a permanent ‘detour’ to truth.
iii. Differance, Iteration, Presence

Against the idea of an interior ‘self presence’ or language, the concept of meaning is that of a repeatable (iterable) ideality. It is the temporal quality to iteration that ensures that meaning is never static. Whilst it may be self-evident that repetition is necessary to signification (otherwise there would be nothing to refer or defer meaning to or from), with iteration this repetition is not self-identical simply because meaning is not fixed; temporality erodes meaning with each repetition; this is part of the very identity of the sign, a mark of its instability and absence; it is here that language becomes a much less consistent and determined phenomena than structuralists tended to consider. It is also here that because meaning is the result of a division, a ‘non-presence’, such repetition can also be transformative⁴.

Derrida attempts to defer the logocentric theory of the sign where the sign marks an ‘absent presence’. In doing so, he uses the term differance, meaning to both differ and defer, or postpone. In French, the verb differer has both these meanings; phonetically there is no difference in the ending ‘-ence’ and ‘-ance’; the difference is only apparent in writing. The silence of the ‘a’ in the neologism reminds us that writing is not necessarily phonetic, it only ‘works’ phonetically by the insertion of non-phonetic instructions (punctuation, spacing, etc.). “Even within the graphic structure, the perfectly spelled word is always absent, constituted through an endless series of spelling mistakes” (Spivak: 1976:xliii).

Differance is a word ‘suspended’ between two meanings, reflecting the resistance of the signifier to a stable, reductionist meaning. Since in writing there is an endless deferment, postponement, present-absence, Derrida argues that it undermines even the possibility of

⁴ For more on ‘repetition’ from a post-structuralist, psychoanalytic perspective see Julia Kristeva (1981, 1982). Kristeva draws on Freud and particularly Jacques Lacan’s (1977) notion of the ‘symbolic order’. Kristeva argues that repetition is a means of constituting the ‘subject’ through an ‘occlusion’ of the ‘other’, but it can also be used ‘positively’ to subvert the symbolic order and ‘transform’ meaning. Similarly, Elisabeth Bronfen (1992) sees repetition as a narrative tool which can be both destructive (‘complete’, self-identical repetition) and constructive (repetition which is similar but non-identical, therefore emphasising difference and transformation).
Devida and Deconstruction 83

an underlying 'structure' to language, or anything else for that matter; structure assumes foundation, something solid at the bottom upon which everything else is built. In the absence of this, signifiers endlessly differ and defer to and from each other, always and forever referring to the absence of the 'other'. "Difference produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible" (Derrida: 1976:143). Difference is what makes the 'being present' possible; it is not just that presence is constituted by difference and deferment (differance) but the 'subject' that perceives 'presence' itself so that 'thought' (the 'thinking' of perception) is a differance of perception. Difference is used by Derrida as a metaphor for all signification since, as we have seen the 'sign' stands for meaning/referent, representing the 'thing' (or 'presence') in its absence.

Whether written, verbal, political or social, signs defer our encounter with the 'thing' itself so that signification is the 'differance of temporization' (Derrida: 1976). The referent itself is secondary and provisional; differance creates structure and produces 'concept' in the absence of 'presence'. In this way, differance produces difference as a concept. There is no promise of 'arrival' here; 'displaced' presence is not waiting, somewhere else, to be ultimately discovered once and for all; it is always already suspended; postponement/deferment is both its character and its destiny. Differance ensures our relationship with a 'structure' which enables our construction of the social world on the basis of oppositional constructs.\(^5\) It is polysemic but characterises the functioning of all language as differentiation and deferral; without the ideas and concepts constituted by the iteration of signs we could not identify, for example, 'cat' as 'cat'; all meaning is derived from this differing/deferring play of signifiers.

\(^5\) In Speech and Phenomena (1973) Derrida reads differance in Freud's analysis of the unconscious where the 'normal' and the 'neurotic' are defined in relation only to each other. It is through understanding the action of an 'economy' (Spivak: 1976) of opposing instincts such as the pleasure principle and the death instinct, never by one or the other operating alone, that we can begin to understand the human psyche and the way in which the unconscious works: "Following a schema that continually guides Freud's thinking, the movement of the trace is described as an effort of life to protect itself by deferring the dangerous investment, by constituting a reserve. And all the conceptual oppositions that furrow Freudian thought relate each concept to the other like movements of a detour, within the economy of Difference. The one is only the other deferred, the one differing from the other." Derrida: 1973:150.
"Differance" makes the opposition presence/absence possible; the desire for presence out of absence, 'being' out of 'nothingness' is carried within the notion of differance, without which presence is inconceivable; indeed it is not possible to conceive of presence as conceivable without differance. If speech is 'natural', immediate, self-proximate, it is only so with the addition of the supplement of writing, that which ensures the sense of presence encapsulated within speech, as unnatural. As an addition, a substitute, a supplement, writing (or any supplement) does not add to a positive presence but fills up an emptiness with a representation of presence that ought not to need supplementing (as something natural, full, complete, essential):

Immediacy is...the myth of consciousness...the concept of origin or nature is nothing but the myth of addition, of supplementarity annulled by being purely additive. It is the myth of the effacement of the trace, that is to say of an originary difference that is neither absence nor presence, neither negative nor positive. Originary difference is supplementarity as structure. Here structure means the irreducible complexity within which one can only shape or shift the play of presence or absence; that within which metaphysics can be produced but which metaphysics cannot think.

Derrida: 1976:166-167

The idea of the 'now-ness' of experience is in this way supplanted by the experience of what already has been; the 'trace' inscribed on consciousness. Thus, "writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself" (Derrida: 1978 224).6 Immediate experiences, a sight, a sound, an exchange are not direct experiences of the world but a contact with a trace of what has already been; our experience of the 'real world' is, to this extent, 'indirect'; experience is preceded by the trace of what has gone before, of endlessly deferring signifiers. This is an unnerving circumstance in which to find ourselves; what we think of as 'now' is gone just before we arrive, we can never be in the nowness of our experience of the world, we always arrive late in the sense that perception is displaced and removed from the felt 'realness' of things in the world outside of us. What we perceive, we can only see in the past: "pure perception does not exist; we are written only as we write,

---

6 As in Freud's theory of the psyche there is a clear affinity here with the unconscious mind and the idea of there being different meanings lying beneath the surface of our idea of self-presence. "The unconscious mind underlies the
by the agency within us which always keeps watch over perception” (Derrida: 1978:226).

_difference_ is an attempt to displace the binarism of logic, suggesting that any appearance of fixed meaning is merely an ‘effect’, a temporary deferring and differing of meaning. This process serves to undermine the appearance and effect of textual coherence and meaning. The sign ‘itself’ is, in this way, not a substitute for an ‘absent presence’, on the way to an ‘origin’, rather any ‘sense’ of origin is derived from _difference_. However, in saying this, we should also be careful not to imply _difference_ as the true and only origin (in place of presence) but, if we like, as that which creates the ‘conditions of possibility’ for signification to emerge.

iv. ‘_Being_’ under Erasure

Derrida also points us to Heidegger’s use of the term “sous rature” or ‘under erasure’ (Heidegger: 1959) as a way of exposing the presuppositions of words but without denying ourselves the precomprehension that the words provide us with. Put another way, the inaccuracy of words is exposed without denying their necessity. Writing ‘under erasure’ is a mark of consequence when we examine the familiar and come up with unfamiliar conclusions. The word is written, but crossed out. For Heidegger, the crossed out word was _Bing_ since he felt that _Bing_ is always indefinable, transcendental in the sense that defining the ‘nature’ of anything in itself assumes that things can ‘be’. Writing _Bing_ in this way is intended to prevent us slipping back into the habit of imagining that _Bing_ can stand alone, in and of itself. It is seen as better than the creation of a new word, which might mean that understanding becomes obscured or forgotten. A new word might also mean that the ‘understanding’, the ‘word-meaning’ is lost altogether as we imagine that it no longer exists and become too familiar with the presuppositions of the new word-meaning to even notice them as presuppositions anymore. With usage comes familiarity, with familiarity comes presumption and ‘taken-for-grantedness’.

conscious mind, and the unconscious mind exists in the form of writing. This is writing as ‘arche-writing’, a
To illustrate, it is useful to think of the 'dead' metaphor, literalised into everyday language. For example, the word *decide* began as a metaphor, where in Latin *decidere* meant to *cut through* something, presumably to arrive at a solution. *Solution* is itself a dead metaphor from the Latin *solvere*, meaning to unfasten. The old meanings are subsumed and lost in the new word-meaning; no longer infused with metaphorical value, they are metaphorical only in the sense that they are 'dead' as metaphors. We can see how in this context it becomes problematic to even use the term 'dead' metaphor when all language is essentially metaphoric and all meaning is ultimately provisional; we can see a parallel here with the idea of the naturalised sign where usage and familiarity mean that any immediate sense of metaphoricity is lost.

Derrida's use of 'under erasure' is expressed through his use of *differance* (sometimes what he calls the 'trace') and is really one of the 'tools' for deconstruction. Whilst we have seen that the sign-word, thought-object and 'thing' never become as one, it is the *differential* relationship and the absence (deferred presence) that we make sense of. Although our 'self-consciousness' is not thought of in relation to other signs, 'presence' can itself only be conceived of in terms of 'non-presence'. Thus, any immediate sense of self-presence, self-knowing, (i.e. consciousness) in the 'here and now' is dependent on non-presence, non-knowingness; the sign is dependent on the absence of the 'other'. The sign must always be understood therefore as 'under erasure'; always and already inhabited by the trace of the 'other'.

v. *Metaphor and Presence*

The analogy of opposites is the relation of light to shadow, peak to abyss, fullness to void. Allegory, mother of all dogmas, is the replacement of the seal by the hallmark, of reality by shadow; it is the falsehood of truth, and the truth of falsehood.


For Derrida, the secondarity of writing to speech is symptomatic of a similar fear of the fundamental script or hieroglyphics written upon the matter of the brain" (Harland: 1987:142).
diffusion of knowledge through the explicitly metaphorical activity of writing. The authority of speech, rooted in the philosophy of Socrates, is explored further by Derrida in his examination of Plato’s thought. Further to the opposition speech/writing, Derrida locates the opposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ writing (Derrida: 1977). One is seen as ‘truth’ inscribed on the soul by the laws of reason, the other the literal, crude and intruding script. The truth ‘written’ within, assimilated in the Middle Ages with the spiritual script in Christian terms is thus described metaphorically in terms of writing itself, the supposed supplement of the origin. Here the figurative and rhetorical is not only given precedence, but is seen as closer to truth, as more accessible, immediate. What is written inside the soul, the logos, the core of meaning can paradoxically only be described metaphorically; for Derrida the point being that this is its only existence; that is, as a delusion, a fantasy, since it is but an inversion of non-being. In Derrida’s view it is not “a matter of inverting the literal meaning and the figurative meaning but of determining the “literal” meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself” (Derrida: 1977:15). In a broader discussion of the role of writing as metaphor (Derrida: 1976) also shows how literal writing is often contrasted, without any sense of irony, to writing as metaphor:

Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand,... writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine and living writing, is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of conscience as divine law, to the heart, to sentiment, and so forth.

Derrida: 1976:17

We can see the paradox at work in the Bible: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (St John ch. 1, v. 1). The ‘Word’ is venerated but secondary, mere artifice to the ‘truth’, the ‘presence’ of God; yet simultaneously that truth is itself represented as the Word, the transcendental signifier: The construction of presence relies on the idea that empirical, literal writing is subjugated, rejected as derivative from presence in the ‘absence’ of the author at the same time as it is validated, accepted as a metaphor for ‘presence’.
In part, Derrida aims to debunk the myth of philosophical superiority where metaphor is seen as one step away from truth, a deferred meaning which can, by some ultimate and grandiose philosophical exercise be unmasked to reveal the 'origin'. It can sometimes seem that whenever philosophy posits an ideal order that is appropriated by a theoretical discourse, along comes Derrida and shows how the same is always already contaminated by the very delusions that philosophy is trying to escape. From Aristotle to Plato to Kant to Hegel, the workings of metaphor have been seen as explicable at some deeper, yet undiscovered level that might be accessed by reference to some other more rigorous, reliable 'truthful' kind of language. Clearly, there is an affinity here in the suspension of metaphysical thought and the positing of a theory of the multiplicity of interpretations available. Here, there is no literal truth; we have discussed how describing a concept or thing can only be done in terms of its differential relationship. Metaphor is the means of establishing a meaning to something by virtue of its dissimilarity and difference to something else.

In this way, any sense that we sometimes have of the truth of meaning, the 'real thing', lying in wait, ever elusive, just there behind language is a delusion; reality is thus an illusion afforded us by the power of the metaphorical and metonymical operation of language.

Thus, no distinctions between literary writing and other kinds of writing can be drawn. Philosophical, scientific and critical forms of discourse are therefore just as metaphorical as for example, poetry and other forms of literary and creative discourse. There can be no demarcation between creative writing and criticism, theory and poetry, fact and fiction. Since language as metaphor has no foundation of solid meaning where metaphor can be unmasked and truth revealed, it can only perform the expression of dissimilitude in all things. It is where metaphor is at its most seductive, alluring, apparently truthful that it is therefore at its most deceitful; the less explicit the figuration, the more hidden the deceit. It is to Derrida's practice of deconstruction which, within a logocentric discourse, undermines the metaphorical and metonymic structure of the text to expose a multiplicity
of 'truths', that the study now turns.

**Supplementarity and Metaphor: Introducing Deconstruction**

Derrida's deconstructive readings expose the inverted meanings within texts, showing how the figurative and the rhetorical are revealed as crucial to the logic and functioning of philosophical thought from antiquity to modernity. For example, in Derrida's readings of Nietzsche (Derrida: 1972, 1976, 1978), the 'will to power' is the human condition, that which requires us to create a semblance of order out of 'nothingness', a collection of nerve stimuli, chaos. 'Truth' is name given to the figurations afforded to these nerve stimuli, a camouflage which masquerades as the primary signified and from which all other interpretations or metaphors flow. This 'interpretation' or process of figuration then, is not a deciphering, translating or transforming of meaning in the everyday sense of the word 'interpretation', but the insertion of meaning by figuration or 'sign-making'. This extrapolation of the notion of metaphor to the very limits of understanding and signification is not without paradox, however. By extending the process of figuration to the limits, the notion of metaphor itself becomes subverted since no longer is one signified substituted for another in order to create similarity, structure, and order out of dissimilitude and chaos; instead, the infinite substitution means that the sign is not metaphor but metonymy, where the sign stands for the 'whole'.

Is not Nietzsche's procedure here precisely to extend to every element of discourse, under the name metaphor, what classical rhetoric no less strangely considered a quite specific figure speech, metonymy of the sign [that the sign as "a part" stood for "the whole" meaning]?

Derrida: 1972:270-71

In part, Derrida's point is that we should avoid taking the notion of metaphor itself for granted, so that metaphor is, in effect, the primary signified. Thus, although figuration, as manifested by metaphor, is viewed simply as the form, appearance, guise of the 'will to power', the impulses of nerve stimuli, and is interpreted as 'truth', truth itself is but a substitution for metaphor, and vice-versa, for all significations beyond that of the primary
signified: 'metaphor'. As Spivak's preface to *Of Grammatology* suggests, Nietzsche could thus have more appropriately placed 'metaphor' 'under erasure'.

The question for Derrida is 'what is the extent to which some interpretations can be disregarded or invalidated on the basis that they allegedly misconstrue authorial intention?' Rather than react defensively to the threat to authorial intention, texts need to be understood as full of meaning and potential significance; they have a depth and breadth of meaning that is held not only within the text but also without the text and within the textual and intertextual setting, the con-text of interpretation and meaning of meaning.

It is a particular kind of reading that gives rise to alternative interpretations; "...we should think (as Derrida suggests) in terms of 'mimetic perversion', of a reading that can seize upon the text's various resources (of syntax, metaphor, structural economy) and bend them to its own purpose." (Norris: 1987:201). It is in this way that the 'meaning' of a text can signify its own inversion and is open to deconstruction.

Just as it is inadequate to see the figurative as concealing, deferring or representing a 'solid' meaning yet to be revealed, so it is also not enough to see metaphor in and of itself as some kind of truth in its own right. Thus Derrida opens up the possibility of the ultimate undecidability of metaphor and therefore of meaning within texts.

To this extent, metaphor, rather than a creative and expressive *supplement* is the very condition of language. 'Theoretical' understandings are thus conditioned by metaphor; it is the mechanism for the transformation and control of meanings. The possibility for metaphor is infinite; ultimately anything can mean anything else. Deconstructive criticism looks at the metaphorical structure of text, breaks through it in order to show that a number of binary oppositions are in operation which ultimately can be dismantled to bring out the marginal that is always already 'written' therein. It is in pursuing the notion of

---

7 More than this, to collapse the opposition completely we can also regard 'truth' and 'metaphor' paradoxically as synonyms and metonyms for each other in that they 'stand for' each other in the sense of alluding to each other (as the press for journalism or the Oval Office for the U.S. presidency) at the same time as signifying the 'same' 'thing' (non-thing), i.e. the absence/presence of each other. Metaphor points to 'truth' by finding the similitude in dissimilarity but in our reading, 'truth' is itself metaphorical.
being ‘under erasure’ and difference, that Derrida posits the idea of the logic of supplements against logocentrism where it is what is added on to something that comes to define the originating concept or idea. We have begun to see how structural oppositions can be seen in a relationship not of opposition, but of what we might call supplementarity, part of something much more fluid, amorphous, indefinite, less certain. It is this state and experience of uncertainty which, whilst on the one hand creating anxiety as the structure collapses from within, can also be a ‘freecing up’ of knowledge and understanding, not of new certainties, new structures, but of altogether different, contingent, interminable possibilities.

For the purposes of this discussion the significance of metaphor in determining our conceptual thinking about children, welfare and the state cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, use of metaphor has the ability to obscure, limit, constrain, conceptual understandings; on the other hand, a deconstructive method can help to unlock the undecidability of metaphor and of meaning. Deconstruction can reveal as fictions those metaphors that have on the surface lost their very status as metaphors, so interwoven have they become into our everyday use of language. In this way, new possibilities of understanding and of conceptualising the social world may be opened up.

The Practice of Deconstruction

We can regard deconstruction as bringing together many of the ideas presented by Derrida into a practice or a way of reading/ thinking about texts, concepts, suppositions and practices which can seem not only familiar and, to an extent, above or beyond a conventional critique, but also and more importantly, appear self-evidently to articulate a ‘common-sense’, logical, rational and unquestionable state of things. Whilst Derrida uses his deconstructive way of reading to scrutinise the texts of Husserl, Rousseau, Plato, Freud and others, the strategy can be applied to any text, or indeed to any ‘textual’ setting, any ‘con-text’ we might choose. In this way, despite a certain anxiety in losing the familiarity of
'knowing' our fixed points of reference, there can also be a kind of liberation; both in deconstructing the discourse of, for example 'social work' (via social work texts themselves) and in the con-text of social work practice (as merely another textual setting), we are able to explore the possibility of developing new ways of thinking about and working with what may have often seemed all too familiar.

It will be clear that this will have a particular resonance within the field of enquiry for this study i.e., childhood, wherein there are, indeed, powerful discourses, bodies of thought, theories and practices which are all too often taken for granted - for example, ideas based upon notions of the 'natural' family and childhood as a 'natural' state. Here, discourse is structured upon the opposition nature/culture. As far as 'family' is concerned we could also say, as Barthes indicates, that 'culture' has become so familiar, so 'naturalised' within the field of signification that 'family' figures, that it is all but indistinguishable from nature. Thus, the 'natural family', a construction naturalised through a series of other naturalised constructions about the relationship between men and women is rooted in the seemingly indisputable natural 'facts' of biology. Here a reductionism is able to operate which provides the base, the foundation of structure upon which the 'natural' family is built. Yet the powerful grip of the logic at work here can be subverted and contradicted in order to reveal entirely social and cultural forces at hand. For example, where the moral, religious, biological and psychological discourses predominate about the naturalness of the male/female reproductive role, sex itself can paradoxically be seen as derivative. Not just sexual behaviour that is seen from 'within' the said discourses as deviant, subversive or dysfunctional, but all sex, even that with the 'pure' function of procreation. Put another way, if reproduction (from within the said discourses) is the only legitimate purpose for sexual activity then artificial insemination can be seen as the 'purest' form of reproduction, an eminently cultural activity, devoid of any element whatsoever of deviation or mediation, and yet one condemned by some as perverse and against the 'laws' of nature. By pursuing the apparent 'logic' of nature to the very edge of reason, the nature/culture opposition
that props up the discourse has collapsed and is revealed as artificial.

The point has been made that language is ineradicably marked by the indeterminacy of meaning; as a consequence, when it comes to any analysis or interpretation, no-one or no one body of knowledge (e.g. philosophy) can lay claim to authority. Therefore, interpretation is always and already open to the play of signification. This ‘play’ describes the movement, the possibility of multiple interpretation that lies in the text. Deconstruction problematises the principle of reason within a logocentric discourse which presupposes meaning as existing within the presence of the self-speaking subject.

For Derrida, we cannot think of language as standing in relation of correspondence with the world; whilst deconstruction is not a denial of reality as such, it does require us to rethink the parameters to reality; that is, the relationship between ‘representation’ and ‘reality’. Deconstruction brings unexamined assumptions into question; it relies on a number of terms and ideas that resist definition as ‘concepts’ e.g. differance, but which nevertheless function like concepts. Differance in particular manifests the inherent instability of language and, by suggesting that all writing (as a metaphor) is marked by the operation of differance, indicates the instability of all signification. As an approach, deconstruction turns our attention to the ‘margins’ of discourse, marks the absence, the ‘Other’ in the very production of meaning and coherence in the text (discourse). Deconstruction aims to examine the founding principles of the text in order to expose the hierarchy of meaning that inheres within. The process one of incessant reflection and self-reflection which highlights the instability of apparent certain bodies of knowledge, indicates the suppression that is involved in the production of meaning by examining what is on the ‘other side’ since it is this ‘other than’ which serves to define what ‘is’. Deconstruction and Differance are highly significant in this study when we come to look at those groups of people or activities which are marginalised in society; it is often the case that the distinguishing characteristics of the marginal or excluded are the defining characteristics of the central object, activity or group. In this way, we understand what family ‘is’ on the
basis of what it is not. Those on the fringes of society, those who are deemed to warrant
the intervention of the state come to exemplify the ‘other’, non-conformity; in the same
way, certain behaviours, activities that are defined as ‘child abuse’ can tell us more about
what childhood ‘is’. As far as children in the highly charged and emotive arena of public
care are concerned, the study will come to illustrate how, both in terms of ‘signifying value’
(of what childhood ought to be), and in practice, their experience is fundamentally and
comprehensively characterised by difference and deferral.

Derrida and Deconstruction Critiqued: The Collapse of the ‘Centre’

The texts that carry the name ‘Derrida’ can be frustratingly abstruse, obscure; words
and terms are used temporarily, established by convoluted means only to be then
discarded, replaced by others, without warning. Yet in a sense the very desire for clarity
and certainty of explanation, concept, meaning, points to the ‘central’ thesis of provisionality
in these, and of course, all texts. Derrida’s use of difference, supplementarity, ‘under erasure’
is provisional, sometimes interchangeable (different words used to describe similar ideas);
his reluctance to establish the ‘is’ of deconstruction is perhaps intended to make that very
point. The reader is constantly working and reworking his/her understanding, meaning,
reading of the text, unable to take it for granted any more than fleetingly, momentarily, as
each signs defers and points away to the next. (As if there were any such thing as ‘plain
English’ - certainly a concept worthy of deconstruction). The kind of reflexivity that has
become one the characteristics of most movements that describe themselves as
‘postmodern’ and ‘post-structuralist’ (at least those within philosophy, literary criticism and
increasingly, social theory) is largely due to the critical shift of focus from the individual
‘subject’ to the ‘text’ eminently articulated and exemplified by Derrida’s deconstruction.

In any case, Derrida is aware that it remains crucial not to fall into the trap of
‘constructing’ deconstruction (or any critique or interpretation) as sovereign, final,
authoritative, a ‘closure’ to the text. This is always the danger and the paradox of the
deconstructive method; closing the circle in on itself; opening the circle towards an inevitable re-encircling and closure and again opening the circle - except that this is the point; it is both an entrapment and a liberation, a freedom of sorts. The activity, from within logocentrism can thus seem at best self-indulgent, at worst 'pointless' - but that the very desire for a 'point'; to defy the desire for a 'point' is what is being questioned in the sense of drawing us into a teleological way of thinking as if there were an 'ultimate 'truth' to be discovered. From a Barthesian perspective we might argue that this is the 'myth' of logic; that to defy it is to go against the 'naturalised' sign of logic. Subverting, opening and reopening, not towards an 'end' but as an intellectually, or even politically enabling act not so much 'in' but 'of' itself. In this sense deconstruction embraces its own critique; Derrida is just naming the game that we all play; all literature, all texts, all signifiers, for that matter, are deconstruction 'in progress' with or without Derrida's meticulous elucidation. In this sense and notwithstanding Derrida's anti-theoretical stance, it is perhaps possible to see deconstruction not as a rejection or denial of theory, but as a highly sophisticated and meticulous critique: "if every theory allows for its own critique, the authority of critique is itself theoretical...theory remains the critical condition of deconstruction. Derrida does not displace theory, he refines it." (Fairlamb: 1994:103).

One of the main problems with the idea that metaphor cannot be reduced to a single, tangible meaning is that there is nothing left upon which to 'hang' any definitive meanings or truths about the world. As discussed, there is not, in Saussurian terms, an independent signified, indeed the relationship between signifier and signified is itself seen as one of opposition; relying ultimately on the idea of a fixed origin. Texts therefore, cannot refer to anything outside of themselves, that is, anything than other texts. This is what is meant by intertextuality; the constant, generative and infinite interplay of texts. Derrida's post-structuralism deconstructs not only the text, but the self; any sense of stability of truth or meaning is lost and the self fragmented. 'Criticism' and 'philosophy' become uncomfortably blurred with the "collapse of the centre and the consequent
decentralisation of value” (Jenks: 1993:138) leaving us lacking the coherence of intellectual discipline and unable to hinge meaning onto anything. In response to this, it can be suggested that deconstruction offers a way of articulating the ‘subject’ within discourse - in the case of this study a way of talking about the child within childhood - but without inferring an underpinning determinism, ‘nature’ or psychological essentialism.

Terry Eagleton's criticisms (1983) of deconstruction are not directed towards Derrida as such, but rather some of those who would espouse the deconstructive strategy amongst mostly Anglo-American academics and literary critics such as Paul de Man (1979), Geoffrey Hartman (1987) and J. Hillis Miller (1982) whose often closed, circular texts, it is argued, bear little or no relation to anything outside of themselves whatsoever and in this sense may be judged as of no ‘value’ other than that of being an exercise in sophisticated abstraction. As Eagleton says, “such deconstruction is a power-game, a mirror image of orthodox academic competition” (Eagleton: 1983:147). The problem is with the undecidability of meaning and the extent to which it was Derrida’s intention to leave everything and anything open to multiple interpretation; a sort of apolitical cul-de-sac that leaves us with nowhere to go and nothing to do - a sort of blind arrogance so immersed in its self-importance that it fails to ‘see the wood for trees’. This is not the intention here.

Meaning may well be ultimately undecidable if we view language contemplatively, as a chain of signifiers on a page; it becomes ‘decidable’ and words like ‘truth’, ‘reality’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘certainty’ have something of their force restored to them when we think of language rather as something we do, as indissociably interwoven with our practical forms of life.

Eagleton: 1983:147

This is crucial; to see language as ‘something we do’; a theme that will appear in subsequent chapters and one regarded as fundamental to a post-structuralist approach to social work. In any case, in spite of the best efforts of some of the most ardent Anglo-American disciples of deconstruction it would not seem that for Derrida the practice was intended to be an apolitical impasse of self-reflexive interpretations; indeed, something closer to the reverse is true:
There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon - which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. To take one example from many; the metaphysics of presence is shaken by the concept of 'sign'. But...as soon as one seeks to demonstrate in this way that there is no transcendental signifier and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limit, one must reject even the concept and word 'sign' itself - which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification 'sign' has always been understood and determined, in its meaning, as sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified.

Derrida: 1978:280-1

Derrida's intention was to subvert the logic by which discourse is maintained in a 'history' of the unconscious thus revealing the alternative meanings and practices of thought-systems and thereby challenging some of absurdities, contradictions and exclusions that provide the 'truth', the unquestionable presuppositions of existing structures. To this extent, we may suggest that deconstruction can become an emphatically political exercise; that is to say that deconstruction is 'political' not in and of itself, but in the sense that we can 'read' the text with a 'political' intention; deconstruction does not inflict politics upon the text; it is always already open to appropriation in this way. We do not 'do' deconstruction 'to' it; the text (any text) deconstructs itself; we simply say 'there it is' and take responsibility for our part in constructing 'meaning' therein (an inherently 'political' exercise).

Conclusion

The challenge in the following chapters is to the supposition that any knowledge of the social world can be based upon a perceived 'direct experience' of it; that the concepts in which we think, the laws of reason we use to make sense of it are all formed from baseless notions of self-authenticating 'truth' structured out of the hidden metaphors of language. This represents a serious challenge to the centrality of empirical research in social work.
What is “familiarly known” is not properly known, just for the reason that it is “familiar”. When engaged in the process of knowing, it is the commonest form of self-deception, and a deception of other people as well, to assume something to be familiar, and give assent to it on that very account. Knowledge of that sort, with all its talk, never gets from the spot, but has no idea this is the case. Subject and Object, and so on, God, nature, understanding, sensibility, etc.,... (are) uncritically presupposed as familiar and something valid, and become fixed points from which to start and which to return. The process of knowing flits between these two secure points, and in consequence goes on merely along the surface.


We might say that Derrida’s post-structuralism is an attempt to go no longer ‘merely along the surface’ as Hegel puts it, but to try and penetrate a little ‘deeper’ and a little farther; moreover, to explore the possibility that there are no ‘fixed points’ from which to start and to which we return. In an applied sense, the aim of this study will be to look uncompromisingly at the possibilities of ‘not-knowing’ and the ‘familiar’, exposing the artificiality of the ‘known’ in order to open up new possibilities of thinking and ‘knowing’ about social work and of how we make sense of residential care for children.

What this means is that we can no longer take for granted either our ‘history of knowledge’ or our ‘knowledge of history’. Derrida’s deconstruction of the structuralist project was intended to show how its use of the metaphor ‘structure’ comes to ultimately subvert the very method being presented. “Structure is ultimately a reflex image of the visual or spatial metaphors to which Western thought has so often resorted in its quest for understanding” (Norris: 1991:80). The problem is of how to ‘think’ conceptually without the use of metaphor; Derrida’s view is that if we fail to deconstruct the metaphor we are trapped within the figuration and completely unable to see or think beyond it. It is in the transference from image ‘structure’ to concept ‘structure’ that meaning slips away, beneath the metaphor at the moment we would like to get hold of it. Of course, if we were able to not think logocentrically, we would already know that the meaning hiding behind the sign/metaphor/concept is nothing but a delusion anyway; the least (and the most) that we can hope to do, (before we slip into abject despair) is to subject the process of sliding from image to concept itself to rigorous scrutiny and unmask the uncertainties of the controlling logic at work in order to open up the ‘text’ (ourselves) to difference and transformation.
The themes drawn from Derrida relevant to this study then, are of subverting, provisionalising, unlocking the 'undecidability of meaning' that lies in the text, dismantling the oppositions that structure and presuppose a 'presence' 'centre' or 'origin'; seeing language as 'something that we do'. In Part Two these are themes that will be repeated (thereby constructing a theme) many times throughout the following chapters; a remembrance of the 'detour' we are in and an attempt to locate and give 'presence' to meaning that may be occluded in the text but which is always already 'there' - the 'other than', the excluded.
PART TWO

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK APPLIED
CHAPTER FOUR

A GENEALOGY OF CHILDHOOD

The idea of childhood does not make of the child a little angel to be coddled or a little devil to be tamed, a mini-adult, rational and calculating or a victim of passion, impulse and instinct, but any or all of them existing in dialectical relation to one another. Childhood is an accumulation of 'traces' which, if regarded separately, would indeed be contradictory but (...) which cannot be regarded separately without missing the point.

Harris and Timms: 1993:29

Introduction

This chapter examines childhood as an idea; that is, the very idea of childhood as being a distinct, coherent and universal phase of life towards full, rational adulthood. The chapter will describe the historical and cultural variability of childhood, suggesting that it is, indeed, a social construct that has a particular significance within modernity in structuring notions of 'family' and 'adulthood' and intersecting discourses of gender relations within the family, children's 'needs' and children's 'rights'. In short, the chapter will assert that it is 'biological immaturity' that is universal, not childhood and that as a social construct it should be regarded alongside other variables of gender, race, class in an analysis of welfare and public care, rather than regarded as a 'given'. It is only in this way that the discursive modes of exclusion in social and cultural practices within the family and in public care can be delineated and shown to maintain the 'natural child' as an icon of family life and the 'Other' child (needy, delinquent, dysfunctional, disordered, or in the extreme, aberrant) on the margins.
The chapter begins by locating childhood as a signifier within the matrix of discursive relations that surround the family; this explored further by deconstructing the prevailing discourse of the child as being 'of nature'. The chapter will then caution against any straightforward reinterpretation of childhood within a discourse of social construction before examining some of the historical variability of childhood and the wider context of an emerging welfare response.

Childhood as Signifier

By the nineteenth century childhood took a distinct shape and form but it is in the twentieth century that the child has become the object of particular scrutiny and in which psychology-driven empirical research has served to self-validate and universalise the 'natural child'. Thus, 'childhood' has become prominent as a signifier both 'of itself', in the sense of being seen as increasingly 'reliable' (for which read 'well-regulated unreliability'), 'self-verifying', 'universal' and also in the way it interrelates and is part of a wider nexus of discourse and field of signification about 'family', 'adult', 'welfare'. To this extent, what childhood 'is' has become the yardstick for constructing, measuring, differentiating and regulating notions of the 'needs' of children, 'rights', 'best interests of', 'paramountcy of the welfare', 'abused' child, the 'delinquent' child in professional discourse and facilitated the rise of such concepts as 'child-centred' practice. But more than this, childhood, conceptualised as an innately distinct and universal phase operates in structuring the 'presence' of 'family', 'adult' and 'parenthood'. It is the configuring of 'childhood' within the disciplines of psychology, medicine, psychoanalysis, sociology and so on which has ensured this prominence, not forgetting that anyway it is within and between these disciplines and related discourses that we have 'discovered' (constructed) contemporary 'childhood'. This 'discovery' is commensurate with and necessary to the idea of Modernity and 'self-presence'; that 'childhood' operates almost as 'pure' signifier, a lynchpin, fixed point of reference that is structured upon the opposition nature/culture.
and which as such generates, facilitates and permits an array of signification over the space it delimits. Even in the field of sociology childhood has been regarded as a presupposition, consigned until recently to the margins of sociological and anthropological study (see James and Prout: 1997) a ‘given’ around which other social, cultural and historical variables and ‘constructions’ may move and metamorphose. Whilst it is primarily in the twentieth century that disciplines such as psychology, psychoanalysis, medicine have entered this play of signification, in other times and places the same ‘object’ has been differently constituted; a different play has ensued, albeit one that always/already inheres in contemporary thinking about childhood.

This is childhood (or, perhaps more accurately ‘childhoods’ (Hendrick: 1997) as non-history; the coalescence of fragments, traces out of discontinuities towards an emerging ‘truth’. The forms of knowledge which constitute childhood are characterised by the appearance of linearity, continuity, progress; a conceptualisation of a ‘past’ from a ‘here and now’ that is itself a difference of past/present. These characteristics are not coincidentally also those of childhood ‘itself’ as we commonly understand it; linear, temporal, a ‘stage of transition’, a ‘development’, a continuous progress towards adulthood. The hold that this conceptualisation has on our thinking about childhood occludes resistance; how many people would disagree that we ‘know’ more about childhood than we did, say, fifty or a hundred years ago? Converging elements e.g. psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, take up the fragments of what can always/already be ‘said’ about childhood to form what we regard as ‘common sense’ in the ‘present’. Childhood signifies in the field of play around family, state and welfare; it relies on, requires a totalising history of itself and all that ‘surrounds it’ to fill the space with meaning and resonance with the ‘present-social’. So embedded and expansive has this thinking about childhood become within the discursive field that resistance to the signifier, exploring the ‘unknowing’ finds little space to be heard.
The Family and the Child

Children's lives are almost entirely organised and articulated by adults, and uniquely, to a greater or lesser degree, by all adults. This is part of what sets them apart both in social and cultural terms, but also in respect of any proposed study of children. To this extent, no 'history' is more hidden than that of childhood. The biological facts of life, of both what is recognised as cognitive and developmental psychology have dominated understandings of children's total experience of childhood and inhibited, sometimes prohibited, an understanding that locates children as 'active' within their own socio-cultural context. Further, nowhere has the 'theory' and 'practice' of psychology and other related scientific and professional discourses been more successfully or extensively bridged; it inheres within the fabric of 'successful' family life and 'common-sense' notions of 'good parenting' (see Boyden: 1997, cited in James and Prout (1997)). Implicit in the idea that childhood should be a time of innocence and happy, carefree pleasures is the potential threat posed by adults as abusers and/or 'bad' or inadequate parents, thus requiring the regulation of childhood in the nursery, the school and, of course the private household and family (preferably with enclosed yard or garden). When barriers are breached, whether physical or psychological the law also requires the protection of children from further 'significant harm' or the likelihood of it (Children Act 1989). What all of this reflects is not only a fear of adults and the harm they may cause children, but a fear of children and young people as potential delinquents, street gang members, football hooligans (or worse), and by extension a fear for social and moral order. Put another way, these are also fears for childhood, that children will somehow, collectively 'escape' a regulated childhood which both centres and intersects with discourses of adulthood and family. And for those that stray, or deviate or disrupt there are supportive interventions in the form of parenting programmes or therapy and public care for those children that still fail to acquiesce, where 'childhood' (as defined) as a social experiment is unequivocally in the child's 'best interests', a 'good thing', inscribed in the mind of the trained child care worker and
reflected in the very structure of every standardised case file format and care plan (always available for inspection).

It is then, not just children's 'biological immaturity' that has largely excluded them from a more active participation in any study of childhood but the fact that childhood is largely taken for granted - and for particular reasons - so that:

whilst thinking about women and the family has been revolutionised by feminist critiques, thinking about childhood remains relatively static, like the still point at the centre of a storm...

James and Prout: 1997: 22-23

A study of this kind is, therefore, incomplete without this recognition of how powerful the discourse of family is itself in constructing childhood, the family household being what Leonard (1997) describes as childhoods' 'material and discursive location', the place where the constructed 'neediness' and 'dependency' of children is instrumental in securing power differentials of age and gender through accepted parenting practices, health care practices, the media and consumption. Herein, and despite the prevalence of multiple variations, notions of the idealized, Western nuclear family and idealized childhood remain largely intact with the concomitant elevation of the nurturing role of women and eminently judicious subordination of children, evidenced in debates about family and welfare policy and the extent to which these may weaken or strengthen 'family values'.

The Child of Nature: Rousseau's *Emile*

The nature of childhood may be seen in Foucault's terms as a 'regime of truth', succeeding as it does in articulating the 'whole' of what it is possible to say about childhood. Related and intersecting discourses of 'family', 'adulthood', 'welfare', and so on, self-validate and universalise the child's nature through the discursive practices of psychology and sociology, no more so than in the idea of child development. The 'irrational' child, prefigures the 'rational' adult, and childhood is a naturally determined stage between the former and the latter. In this way, childhood constitutes children as
A Genealogy of Childhood

'adults-in-waiting', enabling childhood to become universalised and the 'child' to be spoken for and on behalf of within discourse; it allows children to become the object for concern, scrutiny and investigation, rather than self-determining, active 'subjects-in-discourse'. In short, their 'needs' can be taken for granted since they are universal; indeed it becomes possible to constitute the child as having 'needs', creates the conditions of possibility, in Foucauldian terms, for a 'needs discourse' to emerge. The structuring of 'development' over the opposition child/adult not only constitutes a psychological discourse, but also permeates a structuralist/functionalist sociological discourse of childhood in which 'socialisation' induces children into the underlying cultural and social rules and norms. This opens the way for a whole plethora of conceptualisations about children who either 'fail' to socialise or are neglected by family or in some way failed by welfare institutions now deemed responsible for their socialisation. For example, Bowlby's (1953) theory that children 'attach' to one adult figure in the early days of development and that this a prerequisite for future mental health, must be seen in the context of a society which places emphasis on maternal care in the nuclear family. In the first place, other cultures demonstrate different, multiple attachments (see Weisner and Gallimore's (1977) description of the high profile of sibling caring in some African societies), suggesting it is not straightforward to translate Bowlby's attachment theory into a prerequisite for mental health. Further, even when such psychological theories are contextualised within the environmental, social and cultural circumstances of the child, the practices of social workers and educators still emphasise the need to adapt, adjust and socialise into constructed, normative and culturally-specific arrangements (see the discussion of policy and practice documentation discussed in Chapters Five and Six). In this way it is these practices themselves which play a part in the construction of concepts of 'maladjustment' and 'delinquency'. The point is, children's behaviour, social interactions, activities are all viewed within the signifying field, read as symbolic and in terms of their development; that is, as a measure (developmental milestone) of an increasing and evolving rationality on the
way to full, rational adulthood. In this way, children themselves do not need to appear, they can be spoken for, represented universally. Even in sociological accounts of child-rearing, the evolutionary model prevails with models of ‘socialisation’, implying a ‘nature’ that requires appropriate, progressive socialisation, a nature that is distinct and different to that of the adult.

In the context of the nineteenth century, where social evolutionary thinking prevailed, the idea of the child of nature was consistent with scientific, progressive and evolutionary models of society; such ideas dominated much of twentieth century thinking. Rousseau’s earlier work Emile was thus celebrated as seminal, not least perhaps as a suitable metaphor for social progress. It is to this child of ‘nature’ that the study now turns, drawing from Derrida’s reading of Rousseau.

It has long been a subject of enquiry whether there was ever a natural language common to all; no doubt there is, and it is the language of children before they begin to speak. This language is inarticulate, but it has tone, stress and meaning... Let us study children and we shall soon learn it afresh from them. Nurses can teach us this language; they understand all their nurslings say to them, they answer them, and keep up long conversations with them; and though they use words, these words are quite useless. It is not the sense of the word, but its accompanying intonation that is understood. Emile: p451

When children begin to talk they cry less. This progress is quite natural; one language supplants another... When once Emile has said, “It hurts me,” it will take a very sharp pain to make him cry. Emile: p59

In Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s Emile (Derrida: 1976) we are pointed to the ‘space’ occupied by childhood where Rousseau describes the ‘natural’ voice of the child, un tarnished by formal language. Through structuring the opposition nature/culture the pursuit of origins is manifested as this ‘natural’ voice of the child, pre-linguistic, yet beyond the primeval, animal ‘cry’; an unsupplemented, therefore natural ‘language’. A space is located between the ‘animal’ (non-man, ‘other than’) and ‘man’ (the ‘centre’, ‘essence’, ‘presence’); a space that can only be defined in terms of its impossibility but which makes possible self-presence. In childhood then, “two contradictory predicates are united: it is a matter of

---

language uncontaminated by supplementarity" (Derrida: 1976:247). Childhood is the primary manifestation of the natural voice and is in this sense a difference of ‘presence’.

‘Nonsupplementarity’ here is the language used by children prior to a formal acquisition of language as culture, where words are used but without any ‘rational’ application; an ‘inarticulate’ language, but one that has ‘meaning’; “he [the child] has language but what is lacking in it is the power of replacing itself, of substituting one sign for another, one organ of expression for another” (Derrida: 1976:247).

But the ‘centre’ is at once derivative; supplementarity (culture) arrives before any ‘absence’ or ‘lack’ in the originality, the natural, has been established. A deficit, absence, is the precondition of the ‘centre’, the ‘natural’. “Without the summons of the supplement, the child would not speak at all: if he did not suffer, if he lacked nothing, he would not call, he would not speak. But if supplementarity had simply been produced, if it had really begun, the child would speak knowing how to speak. “The child speaks before knowing how to speak” (Derrida: 1976:247). Paradoxically, the child’s ‘lack’, that which causes him/her to speak is that which distinguishes him from the articulate world, marks a deficit, at the same time as signifying the ‘natural’ and ‘pure’. He has no language because he is unable to substitute, supplement one sign with/for another. But he demonstrably has language; pure, unadulterated yet simultaneously deficient, singular, inarticulate; signifying ‘absence’ at the same time as ‘presence’. In short, simply ‘signifying’.

Where, we might ask, in all of the ebb and flow of Derrida’s intricate reading of Rousseau, lies the pertinence to own discussion? What we begin to see emerging out this paradox and complexity is a ‘concept’ in its very ‘conceptualisation’; out of an arrangement, combination of metaphors emerges a figuration of ‘child’ and ‘childhood’ that resonates powerfully with contemporary discourse, one which is ‘placed upon’, in Foucault’s terms, a ‘totalising’ approach to ‘history’, one which is commensurate with and

---

2 In Foucauldian terms, these are some of the aforementioned ‘conditions of possibility’ that enable the ‘birth’ of a particular discourse of childhood and permit a structuring of child/adult to take place.
amenable to conflicting 'statements', discourses, 'perspectives' on childhood; one which allows, facilitates and enables variable signification, transformation, so that 'fragments' cohere, adhere and 'centre' themselves.

To pursue the point; the child's expression of discomfort may be through crying or indiscriminate body movements; crying is not yet substituted for by the use of speech and language which enables deferment and differentiation of meaning; to constitute meaning by supplementing and substituting one sign from another, to "enter the order of the supplement...the human order: he will no longer weep, he will know how to say "I hurt"" (Derrida: 1976:248). All at once childhood is 'natural', 'pure', 'original', 'good' because he/she 'speaks' with the unsupplemented 'voice' of 'true presence', uncontaminated by 'language' (culture); at the same time childhood is a 'lack', without the supplement of 'man', the 'knowledge' of 'speech'; the child is inarticulate, 'unformed', disorganised, chaotic, 'dangerous', 'not good'. As Derrida puts it: "Whence the regulated instability of the judgements on childhood: for better and for worse, it is sometimes on the side of animality, sometimes on the side of humanity" (Derrida: 1976:248). It is this 'regulated instability' that characterises and constitutes the 'concept' of childhood; that which is closest to the 'origin', the 'truth' of 'presence'; that which must signify accordingly for 'presence', necessarily, a metaphor for presence; that which must also be regulated, structured; the ambivalent sign (like any) whose ambivalence must be structured for presence to be 'centred'. The very ambivalence of the sign is that which enables such a structuring in order to regulate the 'dangerous' sign, without which 'presence' slips away, defers, 'deconstructs'. Thus 'child' as innocent, pure, natural, uncontaminated - the 'centre' and 'child' as 'depraved', amoral, ungodly, perverse, delinquent - the 'threat' (to the 'centre'; the threat to de-centre without the instability of the sign regulated). Childhood as a metaphor for a 'totalising' history where history is remembering, giving precedence to continuity over discontinuity whereby constructing the 'present'.

A Genealogy of Childhood

109
The ‘Natural’ Child ‘In Need’ of the Supplement

Inspired in part by the (almost literally) revolutionary impact of *Emile*, the ‘natural’ child in state of incapacity seems to have been one which took hold in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. The notion fused elegantly with the notions of the innocence and purity of childhood so central to the Romantic revival at this time, situated as they were somewhere between the rationalism of the eighteenth century and the industrialism of the nineteenth. Thus, as Laurie Magnus writes of Wordsworth “childhood was the time when instinct had spontaneously arrived at the same truths which reason should subsequently discover by the process of interpreted experience” (Magnus: 1897:92).

O joy! That in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
what was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest -
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast-
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise,
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day...

William Wordsworth (1807) Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood

It is in childhood that the ‘obstinate questionings of sense and outward things’; ‘high instincts’ that are the ‘uninterpreted truths’, ‘worlds not realised’ which in adulthood we come to rediscover through reason but have lost the immediacy, the sense of wonderment, awe and intimacy with nature associated with childhood, so that we are left
as adults with 'shadowy recollections' which are, nevertheless, the 'fountain light of all our
day'. 'Truth' is uninterpreted experience, the province of childhood; 'reason'; that which
interprets experience, paradoxically removes itself from a communion with nature by
virtue of the very process of 'reasoning' (interpreting) experience: hence, from the same
poem, "The things which I have seen, I now can see no more"

This 'distinctive' childhood, partly derived from the 'Rousseauesque child' was one
whose 'nature' had emphasised 'purity' and 'innocence'; however, in so doing an
opposition was also structured; it held within the possibility of depravity, of nature itself as
corrupting and dangerous. This literary expression of ideas that formed part of the social
and political milieu anticipated, albeit 'unknowingly', concerns that emerged at the end of
the eighteenth century about child labour from a 'child welfare' perspective. Until this
time, it was still possible to construe child labour as 'useful' in instilling ethics of work and
discipline within the wayward child which were compatible with Evangelical moral
concerns about child depravity.

Here, to educate the child is to reconstitute 'nature' by systematic substitution (Derrida:
1976:145). To inculcate, 'moralise', 'normalise'; within the nursery, the school, the
institution, the family, the criminal justice system; the acquisition of 'knowledge' of that
which is 'natural' where paradoxically the supplement is against what is by nature 'good',
'innocent' and 'pure' and is yet at the same time what 'rescues' the sign (the child) from
chaos. Childhood is the manifestation of the deficiency in nature which calls for
supplementation. As Derrida asks: How can childhood therefore be possible? The
supplement is what makes possible the 'natural', organises the possibility of progress and
Reason at the same time as progress is itself the possibility of a corruption of nature.
Reason is incapable of thinking this double infringement upon Nature: that there is lack in Nature and that because of that very fact something is added to it. Yet one should not say that Reason is powerless to think this; it is constituted by that lack of power. It is the principle of identity. It is the thought of the self-identity of the natural being. It cannot even determine the supplement as its other, as the irrational and the non-natural, for the supplement comes naturally to put itself in Nature's place. The supplement is the image and the representation of Nature. The image is neither in nor out of Nature. The supplement is therefore equally dangerous for Reason, the natural health of Reason.


First the child is 'natural', but at the same time requiring supplementation; the regulation of ambivalence in the sign. In educating the child, the child uses signifiers in order to imitate the adult world; but only to imitate; if the child were possessive or generous not with his/her toys but with what they signify he/she would no longer be a child. The child is that which is 'elsewhere', has a non-relation to the signified. Thus “vice or perversity would consist of not attaching oneself to things that are naturally desirable but to their substitutive signifiers” (Derrida: 1976:204).

At the point at which the child no longer imitates, is in a relation of education, regulation, the sign is corrupt, the child crosses the line and is no longer a 'child', is either an 'adult' or somehow 'other than'. Imitation is designed to form habits; it is within the sphere of the natural to imitate in the 'absence' of 'real' experience. But within inheres duplicity; to get outside of 'oneself' when 'self' is quintessentially a characteristic and constituent of childhood; that which should not require or demand supplementation and yet which is supplemented by regulation. The child can only acquiesce in order to remain 'a child'; he/she can only 'play', benignly, innocuously with substitutive signifiers. To threaten to go 'outside' of oneself as a child is to threaten 'childhood'; 'safe play' is the play of substitutive signifiers. Childhood must be constructed as a non-relation to the signified, a deferment, postponement. To do otherwise is undermine 'childhood as presence' or that which allows presence to be constituted in the 'adult' even though 'child' is the process of centring 'presence' in the 'adult'. Where transgression takes place, this must be characterised as, for example amorality, rather than immorality, an absence or lack, where imitation is 'natural' as an attribute but in 'society' perversive. The case of the two children
convicted of the killing of Jamie Bulger in 1992 is a case in point where the two children convicted were seen as having being influenced by ‘video nasties’ and characterised by much of the media as ‘monsters’, demonstrating unregulated, but ‘natural’ depravity, in having a natural disposition towards imitation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the victim, Jamie Bulger came to signify all that is pure, innocent and vulnerable about ‘child’. Here, the instability threatened to boil over; a possibility that could only be assuaged by the demonisation of the perpetrators of the crime; making them ‘other than’, aberrant.

It is through the ‘nature’ of childhood and family, which rely upon each other, that anything ‘other than’ is necessarily derivative, secondary, ‘less than’ the ‘fullness’ of nature. Not only does the ‘natural’ family assume a particular set of gendered relations; it renders any substitute, supplement as secondary. Since ‘childhood’ and ‘family’ are natural, complete and whole, whatever comes to supplement, substitute or replace cannot emanate from ‘nature’; in this way it is not only inferior to nature but also alien to it. And yet ‘knowledge’ (culture) is at the same time the means by which, through Reason, we discover how to constitute nature in the most natural way possible. ‘Family’ is in all manner of ways propped up, regulated, supplemented, substituted, amended, adjusted; this can only point to a deficiency in nature which requires supplementing but which is, in nature, impossible. ‘Childhood’, as the locus of ‘parenting’ manifests this deficiency in nature as the ‘unstable signifier’; it must be regulated, ‘hooked’ into family but still ‘bobbing about’ it, like a tethered balloon, in order to preserve its nature. Language, ‘child-rearing practices’, education, welfare policies, public care - all supplement, substitute for what is lacking in nature. To our question ‘how is childhood possible?’, we can answer that ‘in nature, it is not’.

Childhood as a Social Construction

The discussion has begun to infer that far from being of nature, childhood is a social construct; however, it may be clear that for the post-structuralist there may be similar complications in ‘discovering’ childhood within a social constructionist discourse as there
are within a 'nature/needs' discourse. For example, Hendrick (1997) argues that whereas in 1800 there was 'ambiguity' about the meaning of childhood, this was 'resolved' by the early years of the twentieth century and that a "recognisably 'modern' notion of childhood was in place: it was legally, legislatively, socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalised" (Hendrick: 1997:35). Hendrick suggests that childhood went through a series of constructions and reconstructions before this 'identity' was 'determined' (Hendrick: 1997:35). Whilst the approach to this analysis is social constructionist and there is much with which this study can concur, there is still a tendency towards a sense of 'discovery' here, if not of the 'biological nature' of childhood, as discovered by the psychologist, then of a 'social nature', discovered here by the sociologist/anthropologist. There is still a sense, though not explicit, of saying 'here we are at the end of the twentieth century, at last getting close to the 'reality', the 'truth' about childhood as a 'social construction'. Now, although the ambiguity of childhood in the sense of being a 'distinct' phase may well have been established and institutionalised in the way Hendrick goes on to describe, the 'meaning', 'signification' of 'childhood' could not, from our own perspective, continue to be anything other than ambiguous and ambivalent then, now, or at any other time. The inference that childhood has somehow 'settled down' 'in the present' tends towards effecting a 'closure' on childhood as a 'social construction' that is now, once and for all 'definable'; although social construction analysis takes account of some of the discontinuities and allows for the notion that meaning arises in the context of discourses which change, there is insufficient account taken of the extent to which all past 'childhoods' inhere in the present; none are 'left behind'. The 'discovery' of childhood as a social construction is no more a 'discovery' (or a 'truth') than that of the 'natural' child. Establishing the 'ambiguity' of childhood may still tend towards a presupposition of a conceptualisation of childhood as a distinct phase; as if 'prior' to this there is little to be ambiguous about. It is only out of the 'present' that ambiguity and ambivalence about the 'meaning' of childhood in the past/present can arise. What is perhaps more certain and
determinable is the regulation of this ambiguity, of the 'space' that 'childhood' has come to signify, what Derrida (1976) calls the 'regulated instability' of the sign, represented by Rousseau in the 'natural child' as a need for 'well-regulated liberty' (Rousseau: [1762] 1905:57).

In the following section we aim to explore historically (the past in the sense of being 'of and through discourse of the present') and textually some of the discontinuities that 'hover', inhere and coalesce over the 'space' that is 'childhood' today; like a 'Magic Eye' picture which holds more than one image; there, but not there at the same time, depending on how it is viewed. In our pursuit, we are emphatically not aiming to 'discover' the 'child' somewhere, somehow, but to think deconstructively and ask simply; 'How is a child possible at all?'

The History of Childhood: a Metaphor for 'Progress'

In setting a premise for the possibility of various constructions of childhood, it is necessary to establish its historical and cultural variability, and indeed the child's variable siting 'within' the family. In this respect, we can speak cautiously of a gradual emergence over centuries of children from the locus of the family where children were the property of parents to an ambiguous and somewhat vulnerable status as 'citizens' with qualitatively different rights and responsibilities deriving from shifting and highly charged notions of childhood. That, however, is not to say that this 'gradual emergence' should be read as signifying a progression, or greater awareness of childhood as a 'discoverable', universal phenomenon, but that there has been a coalescence of 'fragments' in the present, or rather in the constituting of the present that shapes contemporary discourse. As for the treatment of children in history, the fact that in the pre-industrial age there was no embodiment of children's rights or protection in law should not necessarily indicate a de facto absence of either. The somewhat extreme view that even well into the nineteenth
century indifference and systematic maltreatment were the predominant characteristics of family life (Shorter: 1975) or that "the further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized and sexually abused" (de Mause: 1976: 124) is not one subscribed to here. 4

Whilst for some sociologists the contemporary family (at least in its idealised, nuclear form) has a vital function which has been seen as biologically determined in the cohesion and integration of society (Parsons: 1956), in the past, the family in all its variety, has served a multitude of other purposes:

it functioned as a defense organisation, a political unit, a school, a judicial system, a church and a factory. Over the centuries these functions have been surrendered one by one to the great external institutions of modern society; the state, the church and industry

Gies: 1987:7

Drawing on Foucault's notions of the disciplinary society, Donzelot (1980) argues that in the pre-industrial age the family formed the basis of a wider network of obligatory and dependent relations in the context of 'community'. This social organisation was expressed via the head of the family in a contractual relationship whereby in return for taxes paid, the supply of labour and social order, the father was granted discretionary power over family members in order to secure the 'état' (Donzelot: 1980:48) (status derived from trade or profession). Those excluded or displaced from this network of relations acted as "disturbers in the system of protections and obligations" (Donzelot: 1980:49). Dependent on charity and/or placed in public confinement they were maintained as an excluded population kept preferably out of sight and mind. As in Britain, for the orphaned or abandoned child a community obligation seems to have been extended; those that were placed in medieval hospitals were often wet-nursed and returned to the community (see Heywood: 1978). Emphasising this contractual relationship between family head and state,

---

3 So called 'Magic Eye' pictures are computer generated images where a field of repeated images and colour are transformed into another 'always/already there' third image.

4 Perhaps significantly, Linda Pollock (1983), reviewing literature of this 'evolutionary' genre pointed out that at the end of the period each writer studied, things suddenly take a turn for the better; further, that when other writers had
Donzelot points to the use of 'lettres de cachet', whereby those family members who failed to meet community obligation were detained by the state at the request of the father. This legal device is indicative of the threat to individual family interest and public order posed by those who rejected familial and community expectations (whether religious, feudal or moral), demonstrating that in order to ensure public order “the state relied on the family for direct support, trading indiscriminately on its fear of discredit and its private ambitions” (Donzelot: 1980:50). Whilst the family was in this way both an 'object and subject' of government and to that extent, a definable, cohesive unit, it was not dependent for that unity on a construction of childhood as necessarily distinct, natural or universal. The family was at once public and private, tied and integrated into a network in which it actively negotiated exchange, status and obligation. Whereas today ‘childhood’, in a variety of ways provides the ‘way in’ for state regulation (via the need to ‘protect’ the child, promote the welfare of the child, meet the ‘needs’ of the child etc.) this was not how it signified in the pre-industrial age; it simply did not need to.

Phillipe Aries’ seminal work L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Régime (1960/1962) argues for the historical variability of childhood; indeed that “in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist” (Aries: 1962: 128). This contention has been widely criticised (see Pollock: 1983). However, Aries’ point seems to be that the ‘idea’ of childhood signified differently then; not that it was non-existent (see also Harris and Timms: 1993). Using evidence from the thirteenth century onwards of paintings, diaries, the portrayal of children as 'small adults' and the absence of portraits of children, Aries describes how childhood (in the contemporary sense of the term) was created, mostly from the sixteenth century onwards and that prior to this the collective life of the community took precedence over any notions of the ‘private’ family. Here, there was little distinction between community, work and family. Indeed, community life

---

studied a short time period and used primary sources for research the attitudes to children appear to contrast sharply with those of the above and children were generally seen as well cared for. (Pollock: cited in Gies: 1986: 12).
carried along in a single torrent all ages and classes, leaving nobody any time for solitude. In these crowded, collective existences there was no room for a private sector. The family fulfilled a function; it ensured the transmission of life, property and names, but did not penetrate very far into human sensibility

Aries: 1962: 411

That, however, is not to say that children were necessarily maltreated, or that in the absence of ‘childhood’ as we know it they did not receive affection, rather, the period of dependency was minimal and the child was absorbed into adult culture in terms of work, dress and social life as soon as he/she could live without the “constant solicitude of his mother.” (Aries: 1962: 125).

An awareness of childhood as a distinct phase is seen as emerging amongst the property-owning professional and bourgeois classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where children first become seen as a source of amusement and affection and with a revival of interest in education from reformist and Calvinist conceptions of children as ‘depraved’ and in need of moral guidance. As the family became a more private institution it assumed a moral and educative guardianship, enhancing the development of a space between the child and adult worlds. The social machinery of feudal life became increasingly inadequate as the organics of community life were weakened and the family became less able to guarantee both the upkeep and consequent control of its members. Further, increasing numbers of poor needed support, some of whom banded together creating disorder. In Britain, vagrancy became seen as much more of a social problem: for example the Elizabethan Poor Law 1601 gave parish officials the right to apprentice the begging child compulsorily. Moreover, industrialisation and urbanisation began to create a much greater problem in terms of destitution and dislocation from the rurality which came to inspire a much greater social control response from the state; problems which were compounded by the transition towards a more structured division of labour within the
family away from traditional feudal formations. As community ties weakened, family ties, and a consciousness of the separateness of childhood within, were strengthened.5

By the time of the revolution in France the ‘lettres de cachet’ had acquired a symbolic incongruity with revolutionary aspirations, demonstrated in the number of complaints to the civil tribunals of the Revolution (C.f.A. Douarde, *Les tribunaux civils a Paris sous la Revolution*, 2 vols. (1905-07): cited in Donzelot: 1980). In taking the Bastille (wherein many confined by lettres de cachet were held), the ‘liberation’ of the displaced, excluded and poor signified the end of a collusive relationship between the state and the family in which paternal authority had been endorsed.

Contemporaneously, the increase in the number of poor houses and general hospitals provided a means by which familial indiscipline could be punished. For those whom the existing social order failed to accommodate these events amounted to an ultimatum to the metamorphosed ‘state’ about how, in a transformed accommodation of family and state relations, social need could be addressed.

Gradually, this notion of the separateness of childhood facilitated processes of intervention, protection, education and regulation within the social space between the increasingly private family and the public spheres. As notions of citizenship within the emergent liberal state take hold, so the vulnerability of the child as citizen becomes seen as requiring public intervention, whether from churchmen in the seventeenth century or ‘experts’ in the twentieth century at the same time as the privacy and autonomy of the family is prized as the bastion of the liberal economy.

---

5 For some (see Thane: 1981) Aries’ weakness lies in his failure to take sufficient account of socio-economic changes and their impact on family life. Thane sees an emergent capitalist economy as central to changes in family life and notions of childhood. Here, those with wealth and property sought to secure their inheritance by tightening control of their offspring. Frost and Stein (1989) present two other areas widely regarded as problematic in Aries’ analysis. First, the emergence of various welfare institutions which eroded, at least to some extent, the traditional family/community functions is somewhat neglected. In this sense, the emerging private family had a more specific role than Aries suggests. Second, that it was a shift away from ‘organic’, (Gelis: 1986) community living towards greater individualism which in fact served to emphasise the health and welfare of the individual child above that of the community.
Aries' thesis is problematic in its linearity and presentation of a chronology of events with smooth transitions (see also Harris and Timms: 1993); the evidence he provides tends to suggest the kind of progressive history we are seeking to avoid. That said, we are provided with sufficient evidence to verify a notion of the variability of childhood in history which would throw into question some of the 'once and for all' certainties that conventional understandings offer, particularly when it comes to considering psychological theories of child development, upon which, as we shall come to see, much of the discourse of child welfare and children's 'needs', 'rights' and 'responsibilities' is based.

Welfare Responses to the Child in Need and the Delinquent

In Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century the state initially took a broadly laissez-faire approach to the family. As and when problems arose, the perception was very much in terms of deprivation as moral failure. There was little precedent for intervention and the 1843 Poor Law aimed to reassert principles of family responsibility. Voluntary charitable responses intervened amongst the 'deserving' whilst the disreputable were to have their loss of status as 'family' ensured in the oblivion of the workhouse.

Poverty was no longer held within a dialectic of humiliation and glory but in a certain relation between order and disorder which surrounds it with guilt... it will become in the world of state - controlled charity complacency in itself and an offence against the good workings of the state.

Foucault: 1971:70

The reform movements of the mid to late century, whilst drawing attention to the needs of the neglected child made little or no distinction between abuse and poverty and consequently did not address the behaviour of adults in this context. Children were often placed in penal-type institutions designed to ensure their moral well-being. As the child

---

6 The significance that Aries attaches to the absence of medieval portraits of children has been criticised by Frances and Joseph Gies (1987) on the grounds that the first portraits of anyone, other than tombstone effigies do not appear until the fifteenth century, these being of kings and queens and the 'family portrait' does not emerge until the seventeenth century. Further, Linda Pollock (1983) offers an alternative view of history which argues for a greater sense of continuity of relations between parents and children using 'private evidence' not intended for publication such as diaries and autobiographies as well as newspaper reports to show similarities in terms of affection shown and concepts of the separateness of childhood over the last four hundred years. In Pollock's view, historians, by concentrating too much on cases of child maltreatment, fail to recognise the continuities in family life. However, at
became 'of the family' in one respect (innocent, dependent, open to educative and moral inculcation) the 'other than' became the depraved or delinquent child. It was a type of "preventive penology" (Pfohl: 1977:325) which was to characterise the various philanthropic movements. Donzelot identifies two main strands to its somewhat insidious operation. First, 'Moralisation' is seen as the means by which material assistance was given to the deserving poor insofar as it enabled the transmission of moral advice in order to encourage towards 'righteousness':

> advice is the act that evinces the most equality since it follows at the same time from the desire to influence in the one who gives it and from the perfect freedom of the one who receives it. Wherever the exercise of political rights is lacking, it is difficult to get the poor man to understand that the advantages of the rich give the latter no material power, but rather a legitimate moral influence.


Greater surveillance is thus enabled by this type of philanthropy in order to first distinguish the deserving from the non-deserving and second to establish the ability of the family in question to accommodate the needs of its members. That is, to establish the autonomy of the family in order not to undermine, but reinforce its responsibility as distinct from the traditional allegiances whereby charitable endeavours affirmed a loss of autonomy. The underpinning theme is clear: by such means the family is represented as both the location and guardian of autonomy, "based on the following alternative: control its needs or be controlled by them" (Donzelot: 1980: 70)

Second, 'Normalisation' constituted a strategy by which norms could be spread throughout society, usually by legislation and particularly legislation concerned ostensibly with protecting children and also through schooling and various ventures which promoted health and welfare. Again in part it represents a response to the worst excesses of industrialisation and urbanisation but was also borne out of fears for the preservance of social order. Whereas moralisation redirected a challenge to a new political order by reconstituting the notion of family responsibility and autonomy, normalisation

---

least in the case of Aries' work we know already that the absence of childhood did not preclude affection for children, nor did it necessitate maltreatment.
transformed a challenge to economic imperatives into a problem of family authority. Here, delinquency and pauperism become seen not primarily as effects of economic and capitalist demands, but as a failure of family to instil appropriate ethical values. Schooling is the mechanism by which appropriate values could be inculcated and various measures to protect children in the workplace, to educate and promote welfare certainly alleviated the often dire conditions in which children found themselves. Simultaneously, however, they served to constrain the unpredictability, mobility and disquiet which characterised this period, often associated with the weakening of traditional community relations.

Both of the above techniques thus invite individuals to subscribe to a liberal morality and ethic; by adhering to particular, mostly bourgeois notions of respectable behaviour families are able to keep at bay pervasive intrusion or, if they subscribe and still warrant attention they become more likely to receive ‘supportive’ rather than coercive interventions. In Britain, the emergence of child-saving movements such as the Charity Organisation Society (1869) need to be seen against this backdrop. The C.O.S. argued for an ‘assessment’ to precede any charitable intervention in order to distinguish the deserving from the ‘residuum’ and reintegrate ‘rescued’ children into the respectable and productive working class. Philanthropy was able to exploit the internal oppressions of the family by colluding with its weaker members - “Just as in diplomacy the enemy of ones enemy may be ipso facto a friend, in these domestic, emotional and physical spaces, the enemy of ones oppressor may be in a position to help” (Gordon: 1985:22).

Once embraced by the state, such processes take on a surveillance role aiming to anticipate deviance. Failure to acquiesce to scrutiny may be regarded as suspicious in itself, indicative of moral inadequacy and possible subversion.

The seemingly intractable problem that needed, nonetheless, to be resolved was of confining abandoned children without encouraging parents to abandon their children to charitable organisations and then sometimes ‘reclaim’ them at a later stage only to return them to a life of vagrancy. Further, how to ensure an educative function and inculcation of
norms where parental authority opposed intervention by voluntary means. Here there emerged an embodiment in law of those situations in which compulsory intervention should take place. The problem became one of ‘children as victims’ versus ‘children as vagrants and disrupters’; of how to address the potential for ‘delinquency’ without either subjecting children to unnecessary punishment or condoning their activities or allowing working class families to abdicate responsibility (either by seeing the child as ‘better off’ or the family as ‘well rid’).

Donzelot (1980) argues for a concept of ‘tutelage’ which combines the idea of children in danger with the idea of ‘dangerous children’ (delinquents), thus encompassing the dual signification of childhood as both ‘innocence’ and ‘depravity’. Whilst it is primarily a preventive intervention it includes a coercive element where the processes of normalisation and moralisation have failed. In Britain, at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was little differentiation made between the ‘criminal’ child or adult with children regularly - though not quite as frequently as some observers suggest - sentenced to death or transportation. This gradually began to change towards the middle of the century and the 1840’s saw a series of legislative measures which were to improve the working conditions of children. The Reformatory School Act 1854 and Youthful Offenders Act 1857 in particular established a clearer differentiation between children and adults, while also acknowledging the bourgeois concept of the ‘dependent’ child.

By the mid-nineteenth century legislation had embodied in law the idea of the delinquent child as ‘other than’ and reinforced childhood as a distinct phase in which children were no longer free agents but requiring control, first within the family, but failing that, within the emerging notion of public ‘care’, to prevent future delinquency. Here, ‘care’, signifying ‘control’ as much as anything else, could not be presumed to reside exclusively within the family, despite its promotion as the ‘natural’ sphere; thus from its inception, public ‘care’ or ‘accommodation’ carried within and signified a regulatory imperative that continues to inhere therein.
Tutelage constituted a form of external supervision to address the above dilemma in three phases: first, the child was ‘judged’ and became the responsibility of the penal administrators; second, the child was sent to a protective society; third the child was returned to the family as and when deemed appropriate on condition that in the absence of adequate familial supervision they could be returned to penal care (Donzelot: 1980).

So, in return for the provision of adequate care and control the family avoided becoming itself an object of surveillance and intervention. As well as the instilling of behavioural and attitudinal norms and control imperatives, the tutelary process offers ‘betterment’ and a new future at the same as reducing family autonomy. That very provision, however, carries with it a new ultimatum: that where such opportunity is offered (to avoid incarceration), to reject it is construed as a moral offence in itself. Therein lies the power of the tutelary process and of supervision; that of a choice “between subjection to norms and an orientation to delinquency that is difficult to reverse” (Donzelot: 1980:80).

Delinquency, a concept that became part of the discourse of child welfare in the nineteenth century, marked a crucial conjuncture between the ‘criminal’ and the ‘deprived’ where the child is to be both punished and reformed. This de-politicisation of crime is a functional necessity which locates the delinquent “precisely within the law, produced and maintained there. We live in the universal reign of the normative, a reign inaugurated by the spread of the carceral continuum (…) which (…) both objectifies and subjectifies individuals” (Boyne: 1990:118).

The construction of delinquency, its very possibility, came to open the door wider to universalising notions of childhood; indeed it is what makes it possible; by setting parameters to the ‘space’ signified by ‘childhood’ the instability of the sign (the child) was

---

7 It is within that volatile ‘space’ wherein the parameters of family autonomy are defined and external forces loom that the transposition of medicine, psychiatry, juvenile law takes place and where philanthropy is incorporated into the juridical process that the activity of prevention combines with repression and assistance under the generic cloak of ‘welfare’.
further regulated. It was a small step from herein to legitimise the formalisation of schooling as compulsory in the Education Acts of the 1879's and 1880's; children could be justifiably returned from the labour market to the 'natural order' of things; labour, constructed as the 'adult sphere' now became a corrupting influence; fears of potential delinquency were to be avoided; childhood ignorance and irrationality was to be addressed; the 'dependent' child's 'needs' were to be met.

For Donzelot, the change we are describing is one from government of the family to government through the family whereby the meaning, purpose, rationale and very essence of 'family' is articulated in accordance with social imperatives. Tutelage serves to link bourgeois ethics with those of the working class family so that the legitimate act of protecting poor children facilitates an intervention which deflects resistance by offering the opportunity for 'betterment' and 'well-being' in place of political right.

Towards the 'Modern' Child: A Fusion of Disciplines

By the end of the nineteenth century schooling provided a captive population for the scientific scrutiny of children (see Hendrick: 1997), an exercise which came to facilitate a growth in knowledge of childhood conditions and their development. In addition, the relevance of children to the national interest was increasingly realised; that is, of children as holding the promise of the healthy, efficient and educated nation.

Hendrick (1997) argues that the 'psychological child' emerged through various strands of child psychology in the first half of the twentieth century, most notably and visibly in the development of Child Guidance Clinics of the 1920's and 1930's. Here, the idea of 'treating' the 'maladjusted' child was propagated within a discourse increasingly aligned with medicine. In a conjunction destined to shape the social welfare programmes practised by social workers, health workers and psychiatrists, 'welfare' itself was becoming reconfigured to include the mental dimension. Childhood was appropriated into the inner psyche of human consciousness as a fragile interior that prefigured the 'intact', present,
rational adult. As such, it became susceptible to 'damage'; it was legitimately and necessarily the focus of professional scrutiny and attention as its 'true' nature was 'discovered' to be psychologically, socially and physically a distinct period of vulnerability that warranted 'management', 'treatment' and, where necessary, correction or adjustment. Childhood had now conceptually come to extend into the unconscious; it had an unconscious 'nature' of its own, one that was contextualised and constituted within the sphere of relations in the 'natural' family. It could not be taken for granted that 'parenting' would ensure the development of the psychologically normal adult so expertise, advice, guidance, counselling and therapy were thus permitted entry into the private sphere of the autonomous family. Further, the new technologies of the 'psy' professions permitted the imperatives not only of personal mental hygiene but of its political concomitants, security, stability and regulation, to reach not only the home and hearth, but into the inner world of the child's mind.

The modern child; an artifice of middle class domesticity, defined by virtue of psychological, educational, criminal and medical jurisdiction; a closure successfully effected on 'childhood' as distinct and discrete. However, where primarily it had been the 'body' as signifier that had, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, exercised the attentions of science, philanthropists, moralists, churchmen and the state (albeit with a significant element of concern about 'mental health'), in the mid twentieth century it was the child's mind, imagination, dreams and fantasies that became the preoccupation of psychological and psychiatric endeavour. The linkages that psychology made between the child and the family, more particularly, family relations was to further secure the 'natural' child within an economic, sociological and psychological discourse from which, arguably, it has yet to emerge. In childhood needs and nature became synonymous; 'needs' are at once what calls for the supplement and are the primary manifestation of nature in childhood; as the supplement, their 'way in' to childhood is in and through nature by being of nature; the
paradox had the appearance of resolving itself; there was no longer any question; childhood was naturalised.

'Mythical' Childhood

It is somewhere within the coalition, commingling, between psychological and sociological theory that social work is immersed. This is despite the fact that this fusion falls upon the fundamental presuppositions of psychology; that there is a coherent, unified subject anterior to the social which is shaping, 'constructing' it. Here, one set of beliefs come to prop up another that might otherwise at first appear to be in contradiction. Just as psychological theory might become problematic for liberal professionalism, social constructionism rescues it, qualifies it, supplements it, softens it and in doing so strengthens and naturalises it. Equally, just at the point where a broadly sociological perspective might become problematic in denying the individual, psychodynamic/developmental dimension to 'child' and 'family', psychological theory intervenes to rescue it, supplement it by drawing a line between the 'natural' and the 'cultural' so that the sociological is also paradoxically 'naturalised'. By allowing and accounting for the 'sociological', discourse renders it obsolete in terms of transforming 'child' from the sphere of the 'natural' where it remains, untouched, 'freely' signifying but always/already in terms that can be 'read' within the parameters of the discourse. These are some of the tensions, contradictions and dilemma that social work theory, policies and practices articulate (albeit unconsciously) and it is to these difficulties, inherent in social work texts and practices that subsequent chapters turn.

Determining 'childhood' as a social construction becomes one of the functions of 'what can be said' about childhood; it is at once a challenge to other conflicting or contradictory 'statements' within the discourse but not one which transgresses or transcends the discourse. 'Knowing' that childhood is a social construction, adhering to a set of beliefs that constitute 'constructionism' as the 'truth' about childhood is no more 'transformative'
or 'transcendental' than 'knowing' that childhood is biologically and psychologically-determined developmental phase on the way to full maturity. We could say that 'childhood' is a 'mythical signifier' (Barthes: 1993) in this sense. Both 'truths' occupy the same territory; it is 'childhood' that is 'naturalised' as a sign, not the manner in which we then go on to conceptualise or theorise about it; it is already too late, 'gone'... This mythical quality to childhood is transformative: "myth is depoliticized speech" (Barthes: 1993:143), that which transforms history into nature. Here, Barthes is referring to the speech act whose function is simplification. In this way, far from avoiding, concealing or disguising a potentially problematic subject, myth works to talk about it, repeat it, anywhere and everywhere, reducing it to a factual 'essence' to the point at which it is simplified beyond contradiction; it becomes self-evidently 'true'.

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but of a statement of fact.

Barthes: 1993:143

Myth serves the dominant discourse(s) that produces the myth by naturalising the 'message' it carries; that childhood 'is'. There is then, after all, a 'transcendence' of sorts; that of the conventional distinctions between the various disciplines and discourses that surround and fill up childhood. Childhood is, to this extent, a transcendental signifier; where disunity may have threatened, childhood comes to the rescue. The child 'in need', is a 'child indeed'; her needs are the shroud and the essence of her childhood; her needs come before her in her state of natural incapacity, they speak not only for her but for all children. They speak before she begins to speak; when she speaks, only her needs are heard; they prefigure her speaking. She is a universal icon, a symbol. Her childhood is a place (a space) where the world is centred, easy and ordered. It is the place where adults 'find' the child within themselves, the child who, being 'of nature' is able to lead them to the 'truth' about who they are, a way out of the chaos of existence to the centred Being.
Conclusion

Subjects operating within discourse are operating ‘freely’ but in the very act of constituting as ‘subjects’ do so within the limits of various ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault: 1977). This self-validating ‘truth’ works to occlude other forms of thinking; for the subject-position ‘child’ there is a further consolidation because of its relation to ‘mother’, ‘father’ and ‘family’ and ‘adulthood’. Children thus become both the subject and object of both personal and scientific identification and scrutiny; it is not possible to ‘think’ outside of the discourse of childhood without deconstructing all that surrounds it and, moreover which relies upon it in order to structure itself, - that is to say ‘family’, ‘adulthood’ and ‘presence’ itself. The danger may be that in studying childhood post-structuralism is misread as social constructionism because of the similarities; as if deconstruction were simply social construction in reverse; what should not be forgotten is that social constructionism is just as susceptible to a teleological, logocentric, structuralist interpretation as anything else; it prefigures the subject. As James and Prout themselves say:

...ways of thinking about childhood fuse with institutionalized practices to produce self-conscious subjects (teachers, parents and children) who think (and feel) about themselves through the terms of those ways of thinking. ‘The truth’ about themselves and their situation is thus self-validating. Breaking into this with another ‘truth’ (produced by another way of thinking about childhood) may prove difficult...the resilience of socialization as a dominant concept rests partly on the way in which notions of childhood are embedded within a tightly structured matrix of significations binding childhood with, and positioning it in relation to, the family.

James and Prout: 1997:23

Moreover, the ‘matrix of relations’ (which is, of course, itself self-identical, self-validating, self-constituting) is extended further still beyond the family and in relation with the full, self-present ‘adult’; ‘presence’ ‘itself’; that which ‘sociological thinking’, ‘psychological thinking’ and other disciplines are structured upon.

However, for this study the application of a Foucauldian theory of discourse to childhood is not to say (as James and Prout seem to suggest) that the ‘fact’ of biological and physical immaturity and the ‘body’ itself are all no more than a ‘social construction’;
rather we need to understand the 'body' simply, completely, utterly, as a signifier; it is no more or no less a signifier than the text, and no more or less 'full', or 'real' or 'true' for being so. It 'is', simply, signifying.\(^8\) All of this is this is nowhere more keenly felt than in the shifting sands of 'social work'; that which is charged with delimiting the matrix, setting the parameters, 'materialising' theory into practice. And it is to practice that the study now turns.

---

\(^8\) The 'biological facts' of childhood are no less contingent than, for example the 'fact' that children learn to speak before writing; 'writing', however, precedes speech as previously discussed. In the same way, the facts of biology are always/already within the signifying field and taken up into discourse. More on this in relation to children's needs in coming chapters.
CHAPTER FIVE

‘BEING’ IN CARE: DECONSTRUCTING RESIDENTIAL CARE

What is meant by ‘reality’? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable - now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech - and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is.

Virginia Woolf: 1977:118 A Room of One’s Own

Introduction

This chapter embarks upon a textual, deconstructive reading of residential care. The main focus of the chapter is the Guidance and Regulations: Volume 4: Residential Care, a document produced by the Department of Health to assist those carrying out duties on behalf of the local authority in implementing the Children Act 1989 (hereinafter the Act). However, the chapter begins with a wider consideration of some of the terminology and metaphors used in the Act in relation to residential care, in particular the terms ‘in care’ and ‘looked after’. The study brings into play many of the concepts discussed in previous chapters; iteration, differance, supplementarity, illustrating how, for example, the iteration of signifiers such as ‘care’, ‘home’, ‘family’, ‘system’ and others creates a dynamic play of meaning within the text and through the ‘intertextual dynamic’ of discourses (of family, childhood, child development). In this way, the study will aim to show how the text works to bring together as a coherent ‘whole’ conflicting imperatives. On the one hand, the primacy of family autonomy within a liberal democracy and a ‘naturalised’ childhood that lies within that family, and on the other, state intervention (at its most interventionist with
regard to the family) in the form of residential care as a not only necessary but, in the words of the Guidance, a ‘positive and desirable option’. The reading will aim to show that the effect of all the above is to secure the subject (the child ‘in care’) within a particular framework of understandings and presuppositions, which, through a dynamic play between ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ imparts to the reader a division between the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘margins’. In the other words, that it is through the processes, practices, policies that constitute a childhood in ‘public care’ that the ‘natural’ child in the ‘natural’ family is itself constituted - and, more importantly, that this is necessarily so within contemporary discourses of welfare, family and child.

A Note on Deconstructive Readings

Before turning to the material in question, it is worth reiterating that the study represents a reading, rather than a critique, a version of the text that is always already there, not hidden, but not read (or read and taken for granted) either by the intended audience of practitioners, managers and policy-makers. Towards this end, the aim is an undoing of the oppositions that lie within; those upon which ‘knowledge’ is constructed. Not as a ‘way out’ of the ‘enclosure’ of course, for such would arguably be impossible, but to point to the couplings, and in particular to the difference and deferment between such couplings as ‘interpretations’ - for, in our reading, this is what they are, for by no means are they fixed entities which establish certainties about the social world. Deconstruction, in the sense used here, is best described as a style of reading, one which sets out on the premise that only interpretations exist and to subsequently corrode the fixture which holds together particular interpretations as if they were ‘truths’ or ‘origins’.1 It is, as Norris has amusingly said, a “positive technique for making trouble; an affront to every normal and comfortable

---

1 This ‘play’ towards instability and uncertainty is one Derrida not only uses but also sees as a motif in the work of Nietzsche (Derrida: 1976). Nietzsche uses the term ‘active forgetfulness’ (Nietzsche: 1964) to describe the process by which the philosopher acknowledges the enclosure within which he/she operates but does not take for granted the fixtures that that hold ‘knowledge’ in place. “...far from remaining simply...within metaphysics, (Nietzsche) contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified, in whatever sense that is understood. (Derrida: 1976:19)
'Being' in Care: Deconstructing Residential Care

The discussion begins by examining perhaps the two most powerful signifiers in residential care - 'in care' and 'looked after'. The term 'in care' is full of meaning; so much so that understandings of the phrase extend well beyond the parameters of professional discourse and into common usage. It embodies, incorporates and consolidates something about the 'whole experience' and meaning of public care; both about those who are 'in care', as well as the nature of that experience - without even having to specify the former or the latter. 'In care' and 'care' will form the focus of both this discussion and a subsequent examination within the field of signification within the Guidance. 'Looked After', however, is, at least as yet, different. It was prescribed in the Act as a term which describes both children subject to care orders and those accommodated under voluntary arrangements with parents that extend beyond a period of 24hrs. It is, to this extent, synonymous with 'in care' but no doubt intended to disassociate with some of the more negative connotations that 'in care' carries, holding within the possibility to dismantle the idea of being 'in' or 'out' of care. After all, being 'in care' had come to signify a particular

Not, then, a critique in the sense of taking what is written as it stands and analytically evaluating it at face value. Not arguing against it as such since the meaning deconstructed is already held within the text. It is not that things could have been done differently, or that the material studied presents inadequate information, poor analysis, weak syntax or, in the case of the Guidance, that it fails to offer 'guidance and regulation'. It does, and does so effectively. Deconstruction is not against the text but may show the text to be against itself:

To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed. Deconstruction in a nutshell

Spivak: 1976:lxxvii

Children 'Looked After' 'In Care'

...
type of institutional life, regime and experience which emphasised all that is negative about not living within the 'natural' family

Being 'In Care'

Within the term ‘in care’, the sign ‘care’ acquires entirely different possibilities of meaning than its positioning within other signs used in relation to ‘care’ commonly have. For example, the words ‘love’ and ‘care’ are closely related, often used in the same context, each an intrinsic component of the other. The term ‘in love’ conjures up images of a warm, caring, nurturing relationship; however, by placing ‘in’ and ‘care’ together, a converse set of possible meanings and images are apparent: images and meanings of rejection, institutionalisation, of not being loved or cared for in the ‘conventional’ sense. Care, in the ‘in care’ context might be seen as reflecting something that is not just about the lived experience of ‘care’ but also about the relationship between the state and children, more precisely about what childhood itself ought not to be (and therefore what it should be); there is indeed a discomfiture in usage of a term in this context that is elsewhere so intrinsic to notions of ‘normal’ family life, transformed into something oppositional in meaning to the sign ‘care’ in any other context.

It is not just that coincidentally being in care has evolved or turned into a negative and stigmatising experience by itself; the sign works to generate particular notions and ideas about childhood, family and the state. It arises within discourse. It is therefore, generative, creative, powerful in defining and determining what family life ought to be about and therefore ‘necessary’, in the sense of being active and serving a purpose. But not fixed. It is, therefore, self-defeating to deconstruct the ‘in care’ term without challenging (deconstructing) other widely held assumptions and fixed notions of what it means to be a ‘family’ or a ‘child’. From within discourse, legislation, Guidance and procedures can go

\textsuperscript{2} It is, in fact not possible to deconstruct the sign ‘in care’ (at least in the Derridean sense of deconstruction) without deconstructing interlinked terms associated with childhood and family since, as is now perhaps clear, one sign leads to another, ad infinitum. The sign ‘in care’ does not, cannot, operate in isolation since in and of itself it is empty of meaning; its ‘sense’ is only in relation to other signs and what it is ‘not’.
some way to ensuring a better standard of care and provision for 'looked after' children but without a wider analysis of the dynamic between the state, the family and the child, the child 'in care' remains secured within a discourse that is part of the social construction of delinquency, childhood and family, however benevolent and liberal in expression an intervention might be. This is why it becomes relevant to look at how signs, social phenomena, discourses work, rather than just asking why. For example, a political history of class and gender relations, industrialisation, urbanisation, the economic and social subjugation of those who do not hold property or land historically might inform a view, a perspective on why residential care for children is regarded as second best, and why children in care are often regarded as 'problematic', 'threatening' or dangerous (unless passive victims). However, none of the above will tell us how residential care works to ensure a particular ordering of the world and children's place within it. That is, in broader terms, how the excluded and the marginalised are crucial in defining the central and the 'mainstream'.

What are, then, the meanings, understandings and connotations that 'in care' carries? For the social work professional it reflects the legal framework within which they operate and describes the legal status of a particular group of children; it may also signify something about these children in relation to their families, their contact with statutory services and the degree of intervention it denotes in relation to 'other' children. It may also even denote a child's physical location to professionals, either within a residential home, a foster placement or, within the family since some children subject to statutory care orders do remain within the family. For professionals, 'in care' may also denote something beyond legal status about what it means in 'actuality'; that is, in terms of the disparity between theory and practice, intention and effect, need and resources, demand and supply. No doubt some ambivalence would be expressed about the value of being 'in care' in terms of 'rescuing' the child from an 'abusive 'environment' in order to place them within environments which may sometimes be construed as equally 'abusive', institutional,
debilitating and generally negative in terms of a child's overall 'welfare' and 'social and emotional development'. Further, for children and young people who are, or who have been 'looked after' 'in care' would likely elicit a similarly ambivalent response, perhaps most particularly with regard to the stigma attached to being 'in care' for many young people which may have reinforced and compounded feelings of rejection, not belonging, not being valued. Hence the emergence of rights-based groups such as the 'Who Cares? Trust' which provides information and newsletters for children 'in care'. In its chosen name the group adopts, subverts and reclaims the sign with irony and indignation. And yet, in doing so the converse meaning of the sign is reaffirmed.

The Power of Metaphor: 'In Care'

The notion of being 'in' or 'out' of care also infers that 'care' takes place when you are 'in'; that is, 'in care', in some form of state administered environment and that when you are 'out', you are well and truly out; not just out of the environment but out of the realm of any kind of obligation towards your welfare. If you are 'out' of care, the care is finished with, done, over with, or at least that is the inference. Whether your experience of being 'in care' has been good, bad or indifferent is largely irrelevant; continuing support, will still be framed in terms of an addendum, an extra, usually founded on the individual goodwill of your previous carers and probably based on the fact that you have been seen as co-operative, grateful, needy and conforming to a particular caricature of the child 'in care'.

Now, none of this is an argument for saying that by changing the language and metaphors of social work structural inequalities and oppressions will somehow evaporate, but that doing so may be part of a creative and progressive way of beginning to open up thinking and practice in relation to public care and children’s experience of it. Perhaps a little more contingency, provisionality exercised in language will itself mean that 'thinking'...
and 'practice' is less 'compartmentalised', the 'lines between' some children and all other children are less clearly drawn, that the operation of a system of public care is seen not as a sign of family failure, but a legitimate means of supporting children within a familial and community network of support. After all, the Act explicitly requires the provision of supportive services under Part III to 'children in need and their families' and many local authorities now provide family centres, short-break care, day care in this capacity. The problem lies when children and families reach a perceived threshold for a more interventionist approach and/or legal proceedings; that is, when a 'line' is drawn and children enter the care system, for what may well be sound reasons. Being 'in care' is both metonymic and metaphoric within discourse; it 'stands for' all that 'public care' (buildings, social workers, legal frameworks, procedures, separation from the family etc.) entails at the same time as it is re-presenting something familiar (familial), known, 'close to home' (care). At once, the 'familiar' is marked by an 'absence' (what 'in care' is 'not') as meaning retreats from the space. Metaphorically, the metaphor extends, overflows and withdraws at the 'moment of its fullest extension' (Derrida: 1987). Having 'privileged' status within the discourse of 'public care', metaphor sits unchallenged, taken for granted; but through its very usage it is eroded; despite a "presupposition of continuity" (Derrida: 1987:109) it is subject to a regular semantic loss and erosion. So, whereas 'care' may inhere within 'family', here it is, 'standing in for', and, at the same time explicit, prescribed and as close to its 'self-presence', metaphorically, as it can get. And as such it immediately absents itself, by trying to 'become' itself, it replaces and defers to itself, leaving only the mark of its absence, a 'space' that is open to the supplement; regulation as 'care'. Within a metaphysical discourse (of, say, childhood) a 'concept' of Being (of 'Being' (being) 'in care', constructed out of metaphor) can only be exceeded by and through a withdrawal of metaphor (the singular and the 'concept' of metaphor 'as a whole'). At this withdrawal, discourse is simultaneously uninhabitable (there is nothing to say 'in relation to', to contrast the familiar with the unfamiliar) without the return of metaphor at its retreat. This
withdrawal cannot have a literal sense (Derrida: 1987) since it is not ‘something’. The question of Being (and ‘being’) ‘in care’ is one of proximity, familiarity, what is ‘close to home’ in relation to the unfamiliar, the unknown. Towards the unknown, metaphor withdraws in expanding its limits. ‘In care’ retreats as meaning erodes itself; metaphor returns (as ‘in care’ or transformed, as ‘looked after’) to occupy the space. Derrida suggests metaphor as an ‘economy’ (Derrida: 1987), a ‘shorthand’ to somewhere known. To understand the role of ‘public care’, to be clearer, less ambiguous, more ‘literal’ we rely on familiar metaphors that, being within a metaphysical discourse correspond to a withdrawal of ‘presence’ in their signification and in which presence is constantly re-presenting itself away from but only ever in relation to the familiar (or familial in childhood). Again, this is true for childhood ‘everywhere’, but where it is most prescribed and regulated is also and inevitably where the ‘presence’, the ‘being’ of being ‘in care’ is at its most absent, empty and derivative. ‘Being’, being absent can only ‘appear’ as a withdrawal, as something counterpoised and supplemented for the ‘essence’.

The use of the term ‘Looked After’ may be seen in this way as a response to negative connotations of ‘in care’ that were not only inconsistent with liberalism (over-zealous intervention in the family) but threatened to expose an instability (that ‘in care’ had become too different from ‘care’, too punitive, stigmatising, intrusive to be seen as legitimate). ‘Looked After’ offered a more inclusive way of thinking about the task in hand; first in avoiding notions of being ‘in’ or ‘out’ of care so that ‘care’ is freed up from the idea of institutionalised care that takes place in a particular building for a particular duration and then ends; second, in that an individual can feel and have a sense of being ‘looked after’ in a variety of different settings and receive such a sense from a wider based community of professionals and people and without the ‘in’ or ‘out’ of ‘care’ stigma. In this way ‘Looked After’ represents a dispersal of regulation and a metaphorical ‘return’. Arising a it does ‘within discourse’ to supplement and prefix ‘in care’, meaning immediately begins to slip away and erode the metaphorical ‘value’. Like ‘in care’, it begins to acquire different
connotations to those in general usage; it becomes associated with the same negative notions that ‘in care’ acquired, as a cynical euphemism for a particular type of state intervention as well as an innocuous depiction of part of the state's statutory role in relation to children ‘in need’, depending on the perspective of the reader; both perspectives are, however, embraced within the discourse. Here, changing the metaphor (from ‘in care’ to ‘looked after’) reflects a progressive understanding of children’s experience in public care. However, this is an understanding articulated on the basis of a constructed childhood through discourse, thus effecting a closure and reaffirmation of the discourse. This means that the need to prevent damaging experiences for children ‘in care’ and raise their quality of life, address the institutionalisation of children, increase the opportunities for supporting families and reducing the numbers of children statutorily ‘looked after’, are all achieved through a better understanding of children’s needs in childhood and how to meet these needs, by primarily increasing the capacity to regulate childhood in terms of systems, policy and practice. It is not then, how we understand children and childhood that is thrown into question, but our ability to understand them better, as they already are, in nature. How this is meted out in current practice forms part of the analysis in this and the following chapter. For now, the study turns to the Guidance.

Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Residential Care: A Deconstructive Reading

The above text forms part of a series of volumes produced by the Department of Health providing guidance for local authorities in implementing the Act. The document is produced under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities “in the exercise of their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State” (Guidance and Regulations: p.iii: 1991). In these terms the Guidance and Regulations does what it sets out to do. Its intention, as prescribed by the Act is to ensure the care and welfare of children in residential care and the efficient running of
children's homes within the parameters of the Act and the principles of good practice embodied therein. What follows is not a critique of a 'bad' piece of 'social work literature' that needs to be improved upon. Indeed, it would be difficult to improve upon it within the current discourse of child welfare. It fits, neatly, comfortably, reassuringly into the everyday framework of understandings, values and principles of social work practice. It is exemplary in its precision, political correctness, 'contempororiness' and attention to detail. There is, at face value, little to disagree with, indeed, within an array of often conflicting and competing social work perspectives and literature which view social work variously as benign, controlling, policing, liberating, empowering there is much which lends itself more easily to sociological critique than this apparently benign document. And yet, for the post-structuralist, something lingers here that disconcerts somehow, its very perfection seems paradoxically to be the flaw. If it were all so straightforward - follow the Guidance by the letter, deploy staff and resources accordingly, why is residential care what it is and always has been; last resort, second best, an institutional apparatus that still carries within it, almost imperceptibly, like a whiff in the air, a residual vestige of the Victorian Workhouse?

It is here that a post-structuralist finds fertile territory; from a Derridean perspective such a text is over-ripe for a deconstructive 'methodology' to be applied. The very self-assured tone, taken-for-grantedness of the Guidance and Regulations is cause itself for further meditation and deciphering of the text. The 'common sense' it espouses, its authority as the emanation of a Department of State, its resonance with liberal, 'mainstream' values and its accommodation of a variety of perspectives on childhood that in any other context would appear contradictory are all cause for the post-structuralist to question and ponder the multiple workings of the text. Just as Foucault's questions about the prison transcended micro-level concerns about retribution and deterrence, taking as a starting point their spectacular failure in such respects and asking why, given this failure, they continued to seem so necessary, desirable even; so may we ask not why we need residential care for children (to provide alternative accommodation following 'family breakdown'),
but *how* does residential care work (to maintain a difference, an ‘otherness’ of childhood that defines, constructs and maintains variable notions of family, child and their relationship with the state). The *Guidance and Regulations* *regulates the difference*, make it plausible, palatable, sensible, necessary. They not only consolidate and clarify the divide but ‘smooth it out’, make the sharp edges soft so that its message is not only amenable but laudable. They make sense of the difference, pacifies the conscience and articulates the order of things. Beneath, behind and within which lies waiting the absent, the deferred, the unspoken, the disenfranchised voice of ‘otherness’.

**The Text**

**The Preface: Authorship and Mythical Signification**

Since considerable attention is given to the first paragraph of the Preface of this document, it is reproduced here for ease of reference:

... (This) is the fourth volume in a series designed to bring to managers and practitioners an understanding of the principles of the Children Act and associated regulations, to identify areas of change and to assist discussion of the implications for policies, procedures and practice. It is not intended that any one handbook should be read by people in local authority social service departments, and others carrying on children’s homes, as a discrete entity. The Children Act was conceived as a cohesive legal framework for the care and protection of children. Each volume of Guidance should therefore be read on conjunction with the others in the series and cross-references are entered where appropriate.

Guidance and Regulations: Vol. 4 p.iii

As is usually the case with official publications of this kind, there is no author named, other than the Department of State concerned, in this case the Department of Health. This anonymity adds to the authority of the text. One does not imagine some nameless civil servant feverishly tapping away at the keyboard to meet a deadline; or a committee of multi-professional worthies sitting monthly for a year in Richmond House to produce contradictory positions to be smoothed over in the final document by the classical prose of their pin-striped secretary; rather, it is as if the ‘government’ or ‘state’ produced it abstractly by sheer, almost Nietzschean force, or willpower, as if it just grew out of nowhere, on demand. It stands alone, detached, aloof, superior, authoritative. How would
it be if the civil servants and advisory experts who produce such documents were named, with some brief biographical details and list of previous publications? Probably it would seem irrelevant, unnecessary, even silly. It would certainly detract from the authority of the text if we knew the personal details and political persuasions of the author. This is not a text that is open to debate; it is closed, final, definitive, until the next piece of legislation displaces it. That is its intention; to appear final and definitive as if it is saying, ‘this is where we are now and here is where we are staying; God knows it took us long enough to get here’. Its authority is achieved via these seemingly benign details regarding its source, its anonymity, the use of language, its form and structure. The point is not that these details reflect or represent its authority, they constitute it. We are reminded here of an early Barthesian reading of signs in deciphering a ‘mythical’ signification here (Barthes: 1957). The Guidance is a sign of first order signification and a signifier of the second order in a mythological system. In its ‘literal’, first order meaning it is guidance for the implementation of the Act, constituted by the language, the words on the page. This is the ‘raw’ material that myth takes hold of in its entirety, not in its literal, particular meaning but in its global signification. When it takes hold “everything happens as if myth shifted the formal system of the first significations sideways” (Barthes: 1957:115), it builds a ‘metalanguage’ (Barthes: 1957) in which the first sign, the linguistic schema is of account only inasmuch as it lends itself to the second order mythical meaning or metalanguage. The authority of the text is the greater, mythical, second order signification which is co-extensive with the language itself. Myth is motivated, dynamic; that is its power. For the mythical signification ‘state authority’ to get hold of the Guidance (what it says) and subsume it within its myth it must have an identification and relationship with it; in this case the ‘alibi’ is the ‘need for guidance for the effective running of children’s homes that


5 By the authority of the text we mean not only in the sense of its source (the state) or in what it actually says in a literal sense, but also what is left unsaid, present by its absence about defining the state in relation to children in residential care and our relationship with both the former and the latter.
ensures the care and protection of children'. A noble cause. Now, the Guidance can be read in three ways. The first sees the Guidance in its simplest, literal sense and take it for what it appears to be. Here, the Guidance is the form that the need to regulate residential care takes, in a sense a symbol for that need. Second, the Guidance can be read sceptically; the reader can take a view about the political motivations and imperatives behind the Act and expressed in the Guidance. We can agree or disagree with them, we can take cynical view about the Guidance, offer a critique which unmask suspeted 'hidden agendas' or a 'subtext' within the document. Finally we can read myth as a dynamic whole; the Guidance is neither a benign interpretation of legislation nor an alibi for state control; it is the 'very presence' of state authority. Neither our first or second reading detracts from the power of myth, quite the reverse, they are its very life-blood. Myth encompasses all signification, 'naturalizes' it, gives it an unquestionable status. Received naively, the Guidance is a straightforward prescription for the implementation of the Act; received cynically, it is a tool of the state, poorly concealed:

...either the intention of the myth is too obscure to be efficacious, or it is too clear to be believed...myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion....Threatened with disappearance if it yields to either of the first two types of focusing, it gets out of this tight spot thanks to a compromise - it is this compromise...driven to having either to unveil or liquidate the concept, it will naturalize it"

Barthes: 1957:129

From a Derridean perspective there is not such a neat correlation between signifier and signified, or indeed, a convenient semiological system upon which to establish the 'concept' 'myth'. However, this early Barthes resonates powerfully with post-structuralism and deconstruction in its recognition of the ambiguity of signification, particularly in language. Mythical deciphering is perhaps deconstruction in progress, one of the 'necessary detours' on the way to post-structuralism.
Family Autonomy vs State Intervention: "understanding", "cohesion", "care and protection"

The Preface states the intention of the document as being "to bring to managers and practitioners an understanding of the principles of the Children Act and associated regulations, to identify areas of change and to discuss the implications for policies, procedures and practice" (p. iii). Not just guidance and regulations then, after all, but bringing 'an understanding' too; a particular understanding of the principles of the Children Act, perhaps the understanding intended by the Act, rather than any unintended understanding? Already it is as if the Act could be misinterpreted, as if the 'accommodation' forged between competing interests, lobbyists and political imperatives in producing the Act might crumble away without the Guidance and Regulations to hold it together and bring to us the 'understanding' needed. As if misunderstanding were presupposed or inherent in the Act! Which begs the question: do the Act and its associated Guidance work in ways which are not made explicit or which may not be intended or even 'known'? In other words, how does the guidance (or residential care) work in maintaining the marginalisation of particular groups of children (and families), especially when everything it 'says' is seemingly intended to ensure the normalisation of children?

Further on in the Preface the reader is reminded that the Act "was conceived as a cohesive legal framework for the care and protection of children". Cohesive, care and protection draw the attention here. 'Cohesive' seems a sensible enough idea; we shall then look for coherence in the body of the text; or perhaps marks of incoherence, where the edges fray, where whatever it is that is being 'cohered' attempts to break free, burst out and demolish the coherence. Maybe this expressed need for coherence has some correlation with the need to 'bring an understanding'. Two indications already that all may not be as it appears. Noteworthy too that 'cohesive' is not, in fact, in relation to the care and protection themselves but to the legal framework for the care and protection. Is it that
the care and protection was previously non- or in-coherent or just that the legal framework was? It may be deduced that since there is an apparent need for coherence to the legal framework, the care and protection would themselves be non- or in-coherent without it. If they were coherent, in what sense? 'Held together', "logical and consistent" (OED), or both? If, in either sense, care and protection were coherent, would a 'cohesive' legal framework be needed anyway?

Perhaps it is that having wrenched 'protection' out of 'care' and thrown it into the public arena it now has to be legitimately stuck clumsily back on again, reconstituted as on the one hand, a discrete activity which the state has a part in determining, and on the other, retaining an almost embarrassed association with 'care', a meandering offspring, escaped from the rest of the brood that is 'care'. 'Coherence' then, may express the need to explain the absence of protection from care where 'care' (of children) in the liberal state should be the cornerstone of the 'family', and 'protection' should inhere therein. In this way, the Guidance is operating at two levels; first in relation to the running of children's homes and second, in the process of doing so, being required to justify itself in relation to what 'ought' to be; i.e.; that despite the paramountcy of 'family autonomy', the state is still required to undertake certain activities that should fall within the sphere of 'parental responsibility'. This dilemma is at the core of the Children Act (Harding: 1991, Parry: 1992, Parton: 1991). Hence the need for 'coherence'; not only in terms of what should happen in residential care, but in defining, constituting what family life should be.

Since this is Preface - that part of a book which presages what is to follow (for *prae fatus* means, precisely, 'speaking before'), we no doubt anticipate that the body of the text will make explicit reference to this care and protection of children. We shall see. Further, given that this volume pertains to residential care the reader might also expect to see more references to 'care' than 'protection' since other volumes relate more specifically to

---

6 Our references to 'family autonomy' throughout are, of course, qualified and refer to a perceptual, rather than a legal or 'actual' sense of the term
'Being' in Care: Deconstructing Residential Care

protection. Each volume in the series begins with the same Preface, amended according to
the area it covers. It is not intended that each volume is read as a “discrete entity”, since,
as we have already noticed, the Act aims to bring coherence to the legal framework for the
care and protection of children. It is especially noteworthy that ‘care’ and ‘protection’ are
posed as mutually distinct activities; it is not then assumed ‘care’ encompasses
‘protection’, or that ‘protection’ is a component of ‘care’. (One of the dictionary
definitions of ‘care’ is ‘protection, charge’ (OED)). Protection, then, is clearly an issue and
presumably, in an alternative universe we might just as easily have observed a different
coupling, like ‘care and dietary needs’ or ‘care and understanding’. These, however are
presumably immersed within the generic term ‘care’ in this particular context. Protection is
clearly not. Nor is the reader (at this stage at least) informed as to what we are protecting
children from. (Perhaps this is a little unreasonable since this only the Preface after all).
However, given that ‘care’ cannot be taken for granted in that it has been defined (if only
in part) by what it may exclude (protection), can it be safely assumed that the remainder of
its demonstrably provisional meaning includes ‘dietary needs’ and ‘understanding’? If the
Guidance is going to start by implying the provisionality of meaning, is the reader supposed
to infer the provisionality of all meaning in the text? It is, after all, just as possible to ‘care’
for children without meeting their dietary needs (see the families ravaged by famine in the
majority world) or understanding them (see parents of any 13-year old) as it is to care for
them without ‘protection’.

Who is the Guidance for?

Now, accepting the fact that the Guidance is intended for a particular, informed and
receptive audience of child care professionals working in the field of the ‘care and
protection’ of children it has assumed a certain level of knowledge and understanding here
about terms and definitions. That is, that there exists a working knowledge and
understanding about language within a professional discourse that allow a series of
presuppositions to be made that obviate the need for such pedantry. That leaves then, a
remaining question. When and where were the terms defined to enable such linguistic and semantic shorthand? Where is the origin, the defining moment in which all child care professionals arrived at a consensual, shared understanding of the terms of reference of the 'social work' discourse, the linguistic schema and 'non-arbitrariness of signification' therein? Looking to the Act itself in Part XII (Miscellaneous and General: Section 105: Interpretation) in a glossary of terms used in the Act, protection, although appearing on numerous occasions throughout the Act is not defined other than in relation to other terms e.g. emergency protection orders. Plenty of room for interpretation here then, as to the meaning and form of 'protection'. 'Harm', often appearing in the Act in relation to protection is defined in Part IV, section 31 (9) as

- ill treatment or the impairment of health or development;
- (where) "development" means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development; "health" means physical or mental health; and "ill-treatment" includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical.

Apparently it is not to the law that we can look for certain knowledge. The point is that despite the presuppositions made within the Guidance, and indeed in its application in practice, the meaning and signification of the Act, of guidance, of policy is not quite as clear as it appears to be, even for those who inhabit the discourse.

The Guidance gives the impression and appearance of 'knowing' what it is talking about and to whom it is talking. The targeted audience is assumed to be informed differently and more particularly than a general audience. Which it is, but not in a way that necessarily makes it 'any the wiser'. The difficulty is that, despite necessary appearances, the understandings and interpretations are no more fixed, determined and certain for those who inhabit social work's professional discourse than for those who do not. 'Protection', 'harm', 'risk' are all matters in day to day practice which are worked out, reasoned and speculated upon (see Parton et al:1997), rather than determined definitively and in a much more arbitrary way than the prescriptive and authoritative tone of the law and the Guidance would lead us to believe. It is not 'law' anyway that provides such certainties, since it "is
not the fount from which social actions spring but is in itself a social product, and by no means the most influential" (Harris and Timms: 1993:31).

The Guidance is but one source from which actions spring, nor is it necessarily any more definitive than any other for being 'official'. We have already begun to unmask the provisionality of meaning within the document and can perhaps begin to see how it works in a way which signifies authority but is much more ambivalent when it comes to precisely what this means in practice. As soon as the Guidance begins to describe the form its authority takes in practice things become much more uncertain as each sign begins deferring to the next as soon as we try to pin down and hold on to the meaning. What we 'know' is that it is this interpretation of interpretations that we should adhere to; that is its authority. And beyond this, that it is this interpretation that we may then go on to interpret (albeit differently) in practice.

Of course, the Guidance 'speaks' to child care professionals in a particular way that 'makes sense' and in this way it is what it says it is - Guidance. The landscape is familiar, it connects with what we feel we know and resonates within the milieu of social work practice and academia. But for it to do so requires an acknowledgement of a whole series of presuppositions about the nature of childhood and family, meanings of 'care', 'protection', 'residential care', 'children', the law and the Guidance itself, about which the reader has no means of verifying or 'knowing'. It refers to a known terrain; to deny this reference would be to 'dislocate understanding' in a way which leaves the reader “adrift on an unknown sea” (Trefusis: 1988:39). In a context where the unknown, rather than an exploratory, expansive terrain, full of different 'subjectivities' is seen instead as dangerous, (by inferring the fallibility of the family, the state and of the discourse in which the imperative is to provide the appearance of certainties), this is a fearful place to be. The possibility of difference emerging supreme, victorious is too much to contemplate. And

7 This literary reference is from Violet Trefusis' novel Eros in which the author minimizes the role of a meaningful linear plot and narrative in order to explore the possibilities of a different subject position outside of a univocal, unified text.
yet, the absence of difference is ever present. Noticed by its absence. Even though we may be steeped in the language and metaphors of 'social work', we are just as unable (and often unwilling) to get behind it and secure any sense of certainty than any one else is. This might suggest the futility of even trying to do so, but that would be to miss the point. The state, professionals, policy-makers, legislators, managers and the wider, incessant renegotiation betwixt and between, define the territory, mark out the parameters which, because of the need for some kind of certainty, fixture, location, are taken for granted since the alternative is untenable; constant, infinite self-reflexivity. But here it can be exposed, made known, marked out, say it is there and thus create an expanse of creative possibility, of change, of difference.

Demarcating Residential Care

Before looking at these references, it is worth establishing the Contents page as distinct from the Preface. This is vital, for reasons that are not made explicit but which will become clear. The reader is made aware that in the Preface that it is common to all of the volumes of Guidance relating to the Act, aside from one or two distinguishing amendments which indicate which volumes in the series are most relevant to read in conjunction with the one being read. In this case (Volume 4), it is Volume 3: 'Family Placements', which pertains mostly to foster care, that is cross-referenced as the most appropriate: "for the convenience of users who have responsibility for, or are responsible for, or share in the responsibility for, or otherwise work in, children's homes, most of the content of Volume 3 (Family Placements) is replicated in this volume slightly amended where appropriate, given that this volume is about residential care" (Preface: iii). For this study, this 'aside' is significant on a number of levels. Given that apart from where there are 'slight amendments', the Guidance for family placements has much in common with that which is

---

8 Here, a greater light is shed on the aforementioned need for coherence. Whilst the Preface states the need for a 'cohesive legal framework', inferring the incoherence of what has gone before, we might begin to see that the Act or guidance is perhaps less likely to provide in practice any more coherence than previously since we know that law itself is no more likely to 'ensure certainties' about social relations than any other social action.
provided for residential care, the assumption might be that residential and family placements have a lot in common. But in what respect? They are not similar enough for one volume to apply to both, nor are they different enough to warrant any more than 'replication, slightly amended'. Whilst there may well be some apparently obvious and specific requirements of, for example, foster carers in relation to looking after children who are 'accommodated' under section 20 of the Act, these would presumably not be substantial enough, in and of themselves, to warrant a separate volume since the amendments are only 'slight' and not substantial.

Conversely, there are apparently very substantial reasons for there being specific requirements and regulations of residential homes for children, not least because of some of the malpractice and abuses of power that have emerged from inquiries into children's homes (see Kahan B., and Levy A., (1991), also The Utting Report (Utting :1991) and The Warner Report (Department of Health: 1993)). Is it that the Guidance is signifying here the similarity of treatment and care of children in both residential and family placements, or the similarity of the children themselves, or, by providing a separate volume, signifying the differences between the children and/or the 'care' in either setting? Institutional care is particular care, peculiar and unique in its difference to the normative arrangements for the care, welfare and upbringing of children. 'Family' is not; it is the normative arrangement. Things are taken for granted about 'family care' that are not taken for granted about residential care.9 'Family placement' however, is somewhere else, somewhere in-between and perhaps more indeterminate than the institution or the family. That said, to place 'family placements' within an arena of ambiguity between 'institution' and 'family' would be an inadequate conceptualisation from the point of view of this thesis since it implies the certainty of 'family' and 'institution' as social phenomena.

9 Although what is and is not 'taken for granted' about 'family' and what it signifies changes over time and place, (almost to the extent that little, if anything can in fact be 'taken for granted') as we have already indicated.
Further, whereas regulation of the ‘family’ might be seen as achieved via a variety of individual and social activities and arrangements to the extent of accomplishing ‘self-regulation’ (see Donzelot: 1980, Parton: 1991), the institution, not conceived of within the natural state of things, is regulated through more explicit means, e.g. Guidance and Regulations. ‘Family Placements’, as a composite arrangement, requires guidance to the extent that it marks out the difference between what can be taken for granted about the family and what cannot be assumed about the institution. Thus it is able to replicate substantially the Guidance for residential care, whilst appending slight amendments that pertain to family placements. Without a rigorous, comparative reading of both texts, it is not possible to ascertain any of the above and it is not anyway the focus of this discussion. Suffice to say that perhaps the very status and relationship of Volume 3 (Family Placements) to Volume 4 articulate some of this ambivalence. Perhaps it is worth reiterating that in any of the above, the argument is not against the ‘need’ for regulation and guidance of both residential and family placements, but that the form and manifestation of this need for guidance is signifying something about the status of family in relation to the institution that lies within the texts and the intertextual relationship.

**Contents Section (pages v-x): ‘Care’ as the institution**

Turning to the Contents page, the document is divided into 9 sections: 1: Children’s Homes; 2: Arrangements for Placement of Children; 3: Review of Children’s Cases; 4: Contact; 5: Representations Procedure; 6: Independent Visitors; 7: After Care - Advice and Assistance; 8: Secure Accommodation; 9: Refuges For Children at Risk. The final section is followed by an Annex of regulations. Each section is subdivided under headings. The sub-headings are numerous and cover a range of activities pertaining to residential care. In this section as a whole, what is striking is that in a document designed to offer

---

10 It should be clear that ‘family regulation’ is achieved in a variety of ways which include the more explicit and direct means like the law and guidance documents but in the sense of what is said indirectly or what is not said but held already within.
guidance in the implementation of an Act concerned with the care and protection of children, references to care are so few and far between.

Having pointed out that the Preface is largely common to all volumes (though marginally yet significantly different at the same time), the Contents page, not surprisingly, is not. Here, straight away, ‘care’ manifests and signifies differently in the turning of a page. In the Contents page and in the remainder of the document, care acquires a much more specific meaning that arises purely out of it being placed in a particular context. Whereas in the generic Preface ‘care and protection’ seemed to denote some generalised notions about the activities, roles, understandings and realignments of ‘state’ in relation to ‘family’, here different connotations emerge and take precedence. Previous significations defer, slip stealthily, surreptitiously away, as if the ‘word’ itself arbitrarily arrived here in order to create some kind of artificial continuum, not of meaning, but of language (of word as meaning, as if it were meaning, non-arbitrary, neatly connecting signifier to signified in a systemised way). This difference (of signification) is not announced in any way, explained or reasoned. But somehow it is understood. Within this discourse, the iteration of care is transformative, taking not only the meaning of ‘care’, but all that surrounds to another place altogether.

Here, within the table of Contents, care denotes the institutional, residential arrangements for the ‘looking after’ of children. It is not that this is made explicit, or that ‘care’ appears in numerous sub-headings, on the contrary, it appears but 10 times (significant, perhaps, in itself) in the whole of the Contents section which is broken down into numbered paragraphs with sub-headings covering one or more paragraphs. In all, there are 242 paragraph headings in the whole document. Not even then, as one might expect, does care appear in any particular context where images of warmth, nurturing, understanding, supporting, ‘meeting of needs’ is suggested, inferred or implied. It is taken for granted that we have now entered a different place. The same, but different. And it is in the very ‘sameness’ of the language that this difference is articulated. This is a
subterranean level of meaning; everything is the same along the surface but what is beneath the crust is ‘differently understood’.

The headings which include direct references to ‘care’ are as follows:-

- (paragraph(s)) 1.12: Short Term Care
- 1.49-1.53: Organisation of Care in Homes
- 2.23-2.29: Health Care
- 4.45-4.46: Contact with Children in Care
- 4.21-4.22: Residential Care (this paragraph relates to contact)
- 4.26-4.30: The Restriction of Contact with Children in Care:
- 7.48: Principles Underlying Preparation for Leaving Care
- 7.19-7.27: Local Authority Written Policies on Leaving Care
- 7.57-7.63: After Leaving Care
- 8.18-8.21: The Restriction of Liberty of Children Accommodated in Residential Care Homes, Nursing Homes, or Mental Nursing Homes

Of the above, it will be noted that three settings for ‘care’ are in the context of leaving it behind or preparing to do so, three are in relation to contact with children in ‘care’, or the restriction of it and of the remainder, one refers to the organisation of care, one to the restriction of liberty of children ‘in care’, one to short-term care and one to health care. With the possible exception of health care, it is clear that we are now within a context where ‘care’ denotes the institution, control and the arrangements for the former and the latter. Ironic that in this of all texts it is not in the ‘doing of’ ‘caring’ that ‘care’ is prominent or presented in positive context (at least in the Contents page), indeed ‘care’ is signifying differently here, and not in a way in which one might usually recognise if we
were not within 'Guidance' i.e., associated with the innocence and vulnerability of the child or in a way that resonates with 'family values' and 'care' within the family as a haven of nurturing, warmth and security. 'Care' is most prominent in the sense of leaving it behind or controlling the contact of children 'in' it. Moreover, references to 'children' are in relation to contact and the restriction of contact and liberty; 'care' figures here only in defining their status as in local authority accommodation, as shorthand for that status, a mark of that difference. Now, importantly, it is again not that the Guidance omits references to those activities that might more normally be affiliated with the 'care' of children where 'care' signifies all of those qualities exemplified by the ideal, naturalised representation of 'family life', indeed there is within both the Contents page and the main body of the text, extensive prescription for this. For example, in section 2: 'Arrangements for Placement of Children' there are several paragraphs devoted to the welfare of the child, his/her education, consent to treatment, his/her race, culture religion and linguistic background. But by this stage traversed from the discourse of 'family' to another territory; the landscape is mapped out, meaning is delineated, reconstituted and difference marked out.11

The fact that the Guidance goes to great lengths to detail meticulously all of those activities that should be associated with 'good practice' in child care does not simply mean that 'care' is there in all but name. Even though it is ('literally' speaking), it is not, all at once, at the same time. It is not that but for the sake of a few semantic idiosyncrasies there is no difference in signification of 'care' here as opposed to elsewhere; these seemingly innocuous details about where and how 'care' is positioned in the text, peripheral,

11 Our use of spatial and other metaphors here and throughout is both deliberate and problematic; it is also in contrast to the guidance itself which strains itself to sound 'literal' and precise in meaning. Its metaphors are those are those that would be otherwise regarded as 'dead', but we would regard as very much alive. For our own purposes, we aim to surmount the problem by embracing and exemplifying it; since all language is metaphor we make creative use of it. How else to articulate the arbitrariness and provisionality of meaning? Crowther (1996), in discussing the idea of 'self-presence' has noticed a similar difficulty to the one we face here: "Self-consciousness is not self-presence. It is rather distributed somewhere in and between the field of language and other sign-systems, with which we engage with the world. My use of the spatial metaphors 'somewhere', 'between', and 'field' here is symptomatic of both our inability to articulate the self in purely abstract philosophical terms and, also, how unnamable the self is to our
marginal, almost imperceptible, are where language is fraying at the edges and the text begins to subvert in meaning. If ‘care’ and caring signify those activities linked to child rearing, here those same activities are described at length, but care itself has been shifted to the sidelines; it is as if its meaning has been emptied out, reconstituted. ‘Care’ is not the sub-heading beneath which everything that it entails is defined and described, it is divorced from all of that, emerging instead on the margins, and left to denote only the institution. ‘Care’ has been disembowelled, laid out, its internal workings displayed; the carcass ‘care’ has been discarded, demeaned, devalued, no longer carrying anything of value it is now consigned to the margins.

And yet, because of the attention to detail in the Guidance, its thoroughness, its regard for the minutiae and particulars of ‘residential care’, the marginalisation of ‘care’ itself seems an irrelevance; to problematise it seems like a tedious exercise in preachy didacticism. But it is there, ‘care’ does only appear ten times out of two hundred and forty two sub-headings and its appearance is marked by a deferred signification of meaning and difference. Without a deconstructive reading of the text this is not even seen, let alone questioned. What this means is that if language is constituting ‘reality’ as opposed to reflecting it, then as far as residential care is concerned a different reality is constructed for us and by us and that we are active as readers of the text. It is when we are not expressly dealing with ‘care’, when the ‘parentheses are closed’ on the subject that the field is then open for deconstruction. “Then one realises that what was chased off limits, the wandering outcast of linguistics, has indeed never ceased to haunt language as its primary and most intimate possibility” (Derrida: 1976:44).

Derrida’s reference is to Saussure’s study of linguistics (1959) where it is asserted that it is at the point at which the parentheses are closed on ‘writing’ that the ‘field’ is open. In Derrida’s reading of Saussure, it is writing that is the ‘wandering outcast’; we can use this as common-sense way of thinking about it - as some underlying substance in which our different moments of consciousness inhere” (Crowther 1996:27)
a metaphor in this study for the relationship between ‘care’ and its textual setting (social work discourse) within this document. Where ‘care’ is on the margins, the Guidance begins to articulate the particulars of its signification. By marking out the difference, ‘care’ as the signifier is chased off to the margins, the ‘wandering outcast’, and yet paradoxically it is what is relied upon, i.e., the ‘signified’ of ‘care’ that is then elsewhere articulated. Whilst ‘care’ sits on the fence, the Guidance uses its content and substance to describe and explain the activity of ‘residential’.

Chapter One: ‘Children’s Homes’; ‘Care’ as supplement to the institution

The introduction to Chapter One states that:

Residential care is a positive and desirable way of providing way of providing stability and care for some children which they themselves often prefer to other kinds of placement. Homes should set out to treat each child as an individual person and to promote and safeguard his welfare in every way. In part this will be achieved by planning and review of each child’s case as required by the Guidance and Regulations covering Arrangement of Placements and Review included in later chapters. But homes themselves must exercise the concern that a good parent would by providing a safe environment which promotes the child’s development and protects him from exposure to harm in his contacts with other people or experiences in the community.

and further on in the introduction:

Placements are frequently of short duration and some are made at critical times when other arrangements are changing or have broken down. Changes elsewhere in the care system such as the efforts to reduce the use of custody for young offenders, may also have an effect on the use of children’s homes. Children’s homes are provided for a range of purposes: some are a long-term base for a child growing up; others provide accommodation for a period while specific tasks are achieved. Some of the children have suffered the most distressing life experiences and working with them calls for skills of the highest order.

In the construction of the first sentence in paragraph 1.1, residential care and ‘care’ are not necessarily synonymous; the ‘care’ in the term ‘residential care’ is not then the same as ‘care’ in the sense of ‘stability and care’. Otherwise, presumably residential care would be called ‘residential stability and care’. In creating a differentiation through sentence construction, the first sentence allows the inference that residential care needs to be flagged up as a positive and desirable way of providing care and stability.
Moreover, 'residential', as in where one resides, denotes the place itself, the institution; it features prominently as a fixture in the 'way of providing care and stability' that the Guidance describes. The 'care' itself then, does not inhere within 'residential care' in the way that it does within the sign 'family', for example, but is added on, supplemented, albeit at great length and in much detail. It is the 'residential' that is prominent, primary; the place having precedence over the activities that ensue within, even though the bulk of the text is given over to a rigorous explanation of the supplementary activity of 'care'. Whereas 'family' might be seen as denoting everything that the Guidance tells us that residential care stands for, we do not generally associate 'family' in the same way with a place, building or other fixture.

Might this be a moment where the text is opening up to other significations? Is this where there is the state leaves a mark of difference pointing to segregation as the priority, the relocation and at the extreme, incarceration of the 'other', the potential delinquent, the 'problem' child? Is it there, despite the saturation of the text with positive, affirmative, liberal and paternalistic remonstrations about the needs and welfare of the child? This precedence of place, of physical location which requires, by its very nature, at least some form of segregation over the supplementarity of caring, may be read as a metaphor for the marking out of 'otherness' and of difference within the discourse of child welfare. However, this potential for ambivalence is promptly assuaged in the same sentence by the affirmation of the 'positive and desirable' opportunities residential care provides for 'care and stability'. This needed to be said, lest the mask slip. Significant too, perhaps that it is 'to other kinds of placement that some children prefer residential'. Other kinds of placement? This is an odd turn of phrase in a context where the provision of care and stability are presented as something that can be provided in variety of ways, as though this was an open territory where the priority was the care and stability and its quality, rather than the form it takes.
Clearly then, in this context, when being guided in the ways of providing positive care and stability it is in a particular way, one which relies on form and location as much as anything else. Residential care, we infer, can be a positive preference for children only amongst a range of other particular choices, not as a positive opportunity for care and stability per se, or as good as any other child rearing/caring context, for example and most obviously, the family. We are, of course, assuming that ‘other kinds of placement’ is not intended to imply the family; or at least not the ‘autonomous’ family, since as we have already noted, ‘family placements’ do exist where the state has assumed an interventionist role for reasons of non-conformity. Otherwise, we are most unlikely to think of our ‘own’ children as ‘placed’ with us. Parents do not normally discuss with their children whether they are satisfied with the ‘placement’ (not in these terms anyway) and whether or not they would like to consider the range of alternatives (at least not unless the state is already assuming some responsibility for the goings on of a particular family). ‘Family’ is not one of the placements on offer in amongst the ‘other kinds’. What, also of these ‘some’ children for whom residential care is a “way of providing stability and care”? To be sure, it is not all children for whom residential care may provide stability and care on the basis of their preference (the preference of each and every child), but some children for whom it is there and who may then, and only then, express a preference for it. This sentence ‘sounds’ child-centred and ‘rights’ orientated if the reader is seduced by the language. However, it is not (or not only, and then only just) saying that ‘children are citizens and have the right to at least express a preference for one of a range of equally valid care ‘settings’; far from it; it is before (not after) we even reach the ‘choice/preference’ element of the sentence that ‘some’ children are already set apart and only then that the preference may be expressed. Who are these children? What sets them apart? Is it their statutory care status or their section 20 (‘accommodation’ under the Act) status? What, if so, are the sub-divisions within these categories and on what are they based? These are unanswered questions but again, what
is clear is that difference is being marked out. Whilst articulating the possibility of 'choice' for some children, the Guidance is also allowing the reader to deduce that such choices are only obtainable once a line has been drawn between the normal and the marginal. Here, the notion of children-as-citizens with active rights and choices is flagged up in a way that it is not for all children with reference to the form that their care and upbringing takes (although it may be in other contexts).

Despite the point previously made that the Guidance is speaking to an informed audience for whom it may well be clear that we are talking in the context of children who are either 'accommodated' or in statutory 'care', the point still stands; that notwithstanding the positive packaging of residential care in the Guidance, it is only 'positive and desirable' i) beyond the primacy of family and ii) inasmuch as the 'residency' has precedence over the caring, no matter how strenuously the latter is promoted. That is, the Guidance expressly and explicitly promotes, endorses and prescribes a positive approach to residential care whilst at the same time ensuring its secondariness, its subordination, its difference and difference (postponement), emphasizing the institution, for which we can read the control, regulation, organisation, inspection and arrangements (this is the language of the Guidance) for the care above the care itself and thus subverting the central tenet of the thesis it proposes.

This idea of residential care as a 'positive choice' is one of the catch phrases of contemporary social work that is and has for some years been expounded widely (see Wagner: 1988). It is indeed one of the eminent ironies of the discourse since it is invariably preceded by statements which assert the primacy of the family as the 'best' place for children.

'Home' as somewhere 'Other than'

Returning to the selected text, the second sentence begins: 'Homes should set out to treat each child as an individual person...'. Again, our reading begins by resting awhile on a seemingly innocuous, even benign sign, in this case, 'homes'. First, 'homes' is situated here
in a particular textual and intertextual setting; it does not emerge in a vacuum and has no finite meaning; there is instability along the surface in the very structure of the text, and the meanings held within are subject to subsidence. It is upon this shaky ground that 'homes' is situated.

_Guidance requires that 'Homes should set out...'; already this evocation is not of 'home' as the place to which one returns for perhaps, sanctuary or escape or as an 'inner sense' of 'well being', 'where the heart is', but as something externalized, instrumental, in this case, the institution._

'Home' is conventionally defined as 'the place where one lives; the fixed residence of a family or household' (OED), or 'members of the family collectively, one's family background (OED), or 'an institution for person's needing care, rest or refuge' (OED). Here, where 'home' is defined as the residence of the family, it is to the physical site of the family's residence that home refers or to the family itself; the residence of the sign 'family' in which are presumably subsumed the qualities and characteristics made explicit in the third definition 'institution for person's needing care, rest or refuge'. Imagery in literature reflects this notion of home as sanctuary and as engendering a sense of belonging and refuge:

_The folly of people's not staying comfortably at home when they can!...five dull hours in another man's house, with nothing to say or to hear that was not said or heard yesterday, and may not be said and heard again tomorrow...four horses and four servants taken out for nothing but to convey five idle, shivering creatures into colder rooms and worse company than they might have had at home._

_Jane Austen (1816): *Emma* ch.13_

_Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in. I should have called it Something you somehow haven't to deserve._

_Robert Frost (1914): *The Death of the Hired Man*_
Even where there is ambivalence expressed about 'home', it is in terms of a positive and affirmative notion of what it ought to be:

Lingering he raised his latch at eve,
Though tired in heart and limb:
He loved no other place, and yet
Home was no home to him.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1798): *The Three Graves* pt. 4, st. 1

Family life and 'home' can be good, bad or indifferent, as can residential care. However, positive valuations of 'home' are rendered provisional in the context of the Guidance. Thus, "It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home" (Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* Ch 14 1861) where home is not all the things we expect; 'home' is idealised, imbued with positive significations, whatever the 'reality'. The point is that the sign 'home' is only regarded as provisional when its status is qualified, e.g. 'home' as the 'institution' in the dictionary definition can no longer be relied upon to assume 'care, rest and refuge'.

For the most part then, home is almost synonymous with family where 'family' is almost synonymous with 'care, rest or refuge'. What is implicit in the first two definitions is made explicit in third. Noteworthy, then that in the Guidance (as part of the discourse of child welfare) it is the Home itself, not the persons who reside (or work) therein ('family' or otherwise), that should 'set out to treat each child as an individual person and promote and safeguard his welfare in every way'. Whereas 'residential care' signifies primarily the institution and segregation, 'home' is not primarily denoting the 'site' (whether 'literal' or metaphorical) within which care is provided but is itself seen as actively treating each child as an individual and promoting and safeguarding the child's welfare. 'Home' in the 'everyday' sense of the term as the place to which one belongs through familial or other affiliation is thus transformed. Of course, we are aware that at the level of the 'informed' reader, this may seem too manifestly obvious (even pedantic, facile) to be worth stating since within the Guidance we are clearly in the business of setting up and providing 'care' by the local authority where 'home' in any sense of being associated with family life has been
undermined. The point is the same one made throughout; that the 'informed' audience is one which is simply informed 'differently'; that is, despite appearances, not bestowed with any greater degree of certainty about what actually 'is' than anyone else. To this extent, any 'reader' becomes equally a player in the game, a participant in the discourse since the boundaries are artificial, uncertain and open rather than 'real', fixed and closed. In this way, all that the sign 'home' does (by causing us fleetingly, if at all, to reflect that obviously it is signifying differently here) is to point to the difference (the mark of 'otherness') and deferment (differance - the 'postponement' of the 'non-absence' of 'home'), effectively, very effectively, placing it under erasure (Heidegger: 1959), almost (but not quite) imperceptibly. Put another way, we take for granted that 'home' is signifying differently, see this as unproblematic and as such, it is, in the same moment given over to a 'higher authority', in this case the state. Again, there is no conspiracy here, the reader is active in reconstituting meaning and cannot do otherwise since we inhabit the discourse that we are describing; but we can point it out, say it is there, give it a name.

'Home' as an Instrument

The fact that the Guidance, having transgressed, has to immediately compensate for the loss of meaning by pointing out what would, in any other context, be taken as read (that 'home' is the metaphorical or physical place in which one's welfare is promoted and safeguarded) means that something else and something more is being signified here. In describing what the 'home' should 'set out' to do, 'home' is being attributed with specific functions. Since these functions are variable, (which they must be or the Guidance would take it for granted and not need to state them), they are secondary, supplementary to 'home' in describing not what 'home' 'is' but what it 'does'. In other words, by needing to prescribe the function of homes, we learn what homes are not, not what they are in the context of local authority care. What they 'are' is indeterminate anyway, since meaning cannot be fixed. In the context of the Guidance we are unable to take for granted that which seems patently obvious. In place of 'home' as 'sanctuary', haven, a site of intimacy,
warmth, security, imbuing a 'sense of belonging'; here, home is both institution and instrument; the private and autonomous substituted by the public and regulated.

Where 'home' points to 'family'; care, refuge etc. are embraced within the meaning; where 'home' is in part synonymous with 'institution' and in part an 'agent' itself delivering the 'promotion of welfare', other connotations absent themselves. Even though welfare, care and individual treatment are immediately spelled out as activities that the home undertakes, this is already too late; the sign 'home', (like 'care' previously) has been emptied of meaning and rendered barren and momentarily bereft, only to be then reconstituted as 'instrument of the state which delivers care and the promotion of welfare deemed necessary'. This happens through both the grammatical use and construction of the sentence, as well as in the signification 'home' acquires. 'Home', is the institution in action, not simply the place within which care and the promotion of welfare are provided by persons. Despite making explicit the need for children to be treated as individuals, the manner in which this is to be achieved is through the process of following guidance and procedures - that is to say impersonally, via the systems of the institution and devoid of reference to the persons providing the safeguarding and promotion of welfare. And it is achieved, at least 'in part' by the 'planning and review of each child's case as required by the Guidance and Regulations covering 'Arrangement of Placements and Review'.

'Exposure to Harm': Identifying potential disruption

The second half of the same paragraph goes on to qualify the role and function of the home:

But homes themselves must exercise the concern that a good parent would by providing a safe environment which promotes the child's development and protects him (sic) from exposure to harm in his contacts with other people or experiences in the community.

Again, this seems straightforward enough. Here, as well as following the Guidance, homes are given a degree of autonomy in the exercising of concern (that of a 'good parent') and in providing a safe environment for development and protection from harm.
Whereas it is the 'home' (de-personalised and instrumental) that must show the concern, when it comes to the 'harm', it is other 'people' (not society in general or elements within) as well as experiences from which the child must be protected. Within the volume as a whole, references to the individual subject are scant. It is as if there are no individual 'actors' in the provision of care; throughout the text, references to those who work within residential care are to 'staff' as a homogenous group (see para. 1.28: Establishment Numbers' as an example). In the context of potential harm, though, it is 'people' who emerge incongruously from the text, out of place somehow; in the 'wrong' context. The 'wrongness' and incongruity of this particular word-sign serves to emphasise the necessity of containment and regulation of those within the institution. Its presence within the text is as a metaphor for the relationship between the state and the individual. In a text that seems to pride itself on the use of 'official', 'departmental', 'government-speak'; de-personalised, institutionalised, bureaucratic, this seems a telling lapse, a chink in the armour. When the care and protection come from the state, exposure to harm comes from contact with other 'people'. Moreover, exposure to other people as a positive component of the child's development is not mentioned. All that is safe, positive, certain comes from the institution; the spectre of harm materialises in the contact with the outside world, 'people' or 'experiences in the community'. It is not even a particular group of 'other people' that is identified, just 'other people' in general. Is this all people, or just some? Since harm comes of contact, maybe the 'people' referred to are those with whom the child is deemed likely to have contact with, otherwise why make the reference at all? Those with whom the child has perhaps had former association with; family, friends, members of the same community or group to which the child previously belonged. Perhaps it is those who also present a threat not so much to the child as to the institution or even the state. Those who might incite the child to rebel or rekindle the embers of delinquency or deviance. Although common sense (however uncommon) tells us that at one level the child will need protection from harm to ensure his/her welfare, it is in the
inter-textuality, or if preferred, the 'second order signification' (Barthes: 1957) of the Guidance that something else and something more is signifying. At 'face value', the protection from harm is both appropriate and laudable, it is also what is not 'said'; that which is present by its absence which inheres in the meaning.\(^{12}\)

For this study, this is not some peripheral, marginal, semantic weakness or idiosyncrasy in the text. Whilst the Guidance is what it says it is, a framework for the running and regulation of residential care for children, it is also a 'playing out' of residential care itself, an active, live participant in an incessant interpretation and re-interpretation of what residential care 'stands for'. It is 'open', 'fluid', amorphous, as 'empty' as it is 'full'; rather than shifting or in some way 'progressing' the status of residential care it inhabits and is accommodated by the discourse of child welfare. Even in its very use of the metaphor 'framework', it infers structure, fixture and certainty where there is none; something more dynamic and nebulous is at work. Inasmuch as change may be effected, in the sense of achieving 'better' regulation or even measurable improvements in the quality of care provided, this is incidental to the Guidance which is but one player in the field of signification, albeit a prominent one.

'A Positive and Desirable Option'? 'Placements', Care System', 'Specific Tasks'

Turning to paragraph 1.3, the second selection of text cited above, the reader is able to discern more clearly the same thematic paradox and contradiction that runs throughout the Guidance, undermining and subverting it at every twist and turn. Here, the way in which homes should be 'used' (para.1.3) is described in more detail. The pronouncements made previously about residential care as a 'positive and desirable way of providing care and stability for some children' now begin to seem less likely to be realised in practice. Further within the text now, away from the sweeping rhetoric of the opening paragraph, the

\(^{12}\) To draw a visual analogy; we can look through a window at the street outside, the buildings opposite and the cars parked on the roadside. But if we concentrate on looking at the window, the street outside is still there and we are still looking at it; equally if we concentrate on the street outside, we are still looking at the window, even though we would say that we are looking through it; one inheres in the other, regardless of where our attention is drawn.
shadows cast begin to take on a more discernible form.

Without even a line by line reading, certain words and phrases begin to catch the attention which point the reader to multiple, often oppositional significations, always already held within the text, 'hidden', but not concealed, ripe for deconstruction. Examples are; 'placements', 'care system', 'base for a child growing up', 'specific tasks'. Only a very residual notion of 'home' in the usual sense now remains. 'Home' is not somewhere first and foremost to simply 'live' or even 'stay' temporarily (although it might be secondarily or incidentally, it is not the primary function); it is where one is 'placed' as the object of concern (concern both for the child as innocent 'victim' of circumstance and about the child as potential or actual delinquent). 'Placements' have both duration and specific purpose; nothing wrong in this per se, but it is a distinguishing feature of this particular signification since duration and purpose of 'home' are not normally spelled out in this way, even if both are features of it. In residential care, duration and purpose are particularly significant, so much so as to warrant being mentioned. They have precedence over other, more familiar characteristics of 'home' that are in this context, subjugated. With a close reading, the statements 'placements are frequently of short duration and some are made at critical times when other arrangements are changing or have broken down' and 'Changes elsewhere in the care system...may also have an effect on the use of children's homes' signify how the care system is to be used two main ways.

Firstly, the idea of residential care as 'positive and desirable' seems increasingly unlikely where it is a response to 'critical times' or where 'arrangements' have changed or broken down. 'Arrangements' (broken down or otherwise) implies public care arrangements (presumably fostering), as opposed to 'family', in which case residential care may be likely to be perceived as the 'depository' for foster placements' failures, rather than a positive alternative to family life. On the one hand, Guidance is beginning to define more clearly the 'some children' (para.1.1) for whom residential care can be a 'positive and desirable' (para. 1.1) option, whilst at the same time somewhat ironically allowing the inference to be
drawn that the route into residential care is likely to be negative and earmarked for those already within the sphere of public care when other, more 'positive' alternatives have failed.

Whilst it should be emphasized that this does not preclude the possibility that in the 'real' world, residential care is not a first option in some cases, or that this cannot be a positive choice or experience for the individual child, the point is that this text 'works' as a metaphor for the way in which the 'system' of residential care also 'works' - to ensure a particular role for residential which places value, by virtue of what it does not say as much as what it does, and with subtlety but sureness, on a particular social ordering which relies on the exclusion of some in order to define the 'mainstream'. Language here is not reflecting or neutrally describing what is going on in the world 'outside', it is wholly, entirely, down to the last letter, active with the reader in constructing the 'social'. Metaphor itself becomes almost a misnomer here, it is more than that; we do not 'expertly' read the hidden metaphors within the text in order to then turn our attention back into the social world, as if it were somewhere else; it is all here; any distinction between the literal and the metaphoric has collapsed, dissolved; it was never 'there' in the first place. Deconstructive readings must seek to unlock the metaphoric structure of the text since

metaphors are not reducible to 'truth', their own structures "as such" are part of the textuality (or message) of the text", thus "we come back simply... to the awareness that both literature and its criticism must open itself to a deconstructive reading, that criticism does not reveal the "truth" of literature, just as literature reveals no 'truth'.

Spivak: 1976: lxxv

Secondly, we note that children's homes are subject to the impact of 'changes elsewhere in the care system'. Once more, this points to homes as part of the overall system, changes in which have primacy in the structuring and ordering of those who are subjects of the system over the subjects themselves. An example of the sort of changes we might expect to effect the 'use' of homes is given as 'the efforts to reduce the use of
'Being' in Care: Deconstructing Residential Care

custody for young offenders'. Here, the previous reference to care as positive and desirable for 'some' children is further clarified; in reducing the 'need' for custody, children who offend may be accommodated within the 'care system'. This group, then, of children and young people will presumably be directed by the courts to reside in the care of the local authority and it might therefore be likely, or even desirable that this is seen, at least to some extent, if not entirely as an explicitly punitive measure, despite the 'positive and desirable' ambitions in the text. We can read this change in the use of the care system as an indication of greater humanitarianism as easily as it can be interpreted as a different way of controlling, managing and regulating delinquency; a way, perhaps more compatible with the current discourse of child welfare and delinquency. At the same time as the Guidance stresses in great detail the need for homes to take account of individual needs and preferences it always does this in such a way as to emphasise the use of the care system in ordering, classifying and regulating 'groups' of children, sometimes openly identifying certain groups e.g. offenders, but most of the time by marking out in the 'language signs' that it is regulation, institutionalisation and containment that have precedence over and beyond the individual.

The example of a reduction in the use of custody is but one example of the changes that can have 'an effect on the use of children's homes'. It is, however, the only example that we are given. Whatever the other changes are, they are changes in the system; the system is the 'given' here, a changing system to accommodate a changed legislative framework for the care, welfare and protection of 'some' children. Shifting, changing, multi-faceted, dynamic; a complex interchange of meaning, and of meaning of meaning.

Children themselves do not seem to figure in all of this change. The final two sentences of the paragraph do, however, go on to explain further the range of purposes for which children's homes are provided: 'a long-term base for children growing up; ...accommodation for a period while specific tasks are achieved'. So, where residential care does have a role that resonates with a conventional understanding of 'home', - 'long-term'
- it is as a long term 'base'; here, would it not be a prime opportunity to 'set the record straight' and establish residential care as, simply 'home' for some children? Instead, where long-term arrangements are required, 'homes' are provided for the purpose of a 'base' for the 'child growing up'. When 'home' in the text gets as close in meaning as it probably could to commonly -held understandings of 'home', it is immediately distanced. Even though we are no longer talking placements for long-term arrangements, we are still not talking 'home', but institution. This is verified further by the reference to the provision of accommodation in order to achieve 'specific tasks'. Here, home is no resting place, escape or sanctuary but the place of instruction, training, treatment and preparation for what is to come. It is temporary, functional, purposeful and transient; never the place where "when you go there, they have to take you in... something, somehow you haven’t to deserve" or to which, once left, you return.

Statement of Purpose and Function of Children's Home (para. 1.16-1.21):

Regulation in Practice

This further selection from Chapter One of the Guidance relates to Regulation 4 which 'requires the responsible authority to compile and maintain a statement of the purpose and functions of the home' (para. 1.16, p.5-6).

Paragraph 1.17 (p.5) begins to set out the main requirements of the statement and is reproduced in full below:-

As regards the purpose and objectives of the home it may be helpful to note that, in general, children no longer spend a large proportion of their childhood growing up in residential care. Increasingly, homes have adjusted to meet the particular needs of children during a phase of their career in care and have adopted various approaches to the care of children. For example, some homes work with children to prepare for a definite goal in a task centred manner; other homes attempt to reproduce family life and support children into adulthood; certain homes attempt to create a therapeutic milieu and work with children psychologically damaged by abuse; still other homes are geared to addressing a child's unacceptable behaviour by means of a systematic behavioural regime. The statement of purpose should describe what the home sets out to do, but should not unduly restrict the possibility of development of good practice. It is hoped that an increasing variety of imaginative and positive approaches to the residential care of children will develop.
In this section, the heading itself is noteworthy; it is beneath the bold heading ‘Regulations’ that the statement of ‘purpose and function’ is positioned, immediately constructing a particular way of thinking about the home that catches the attention because of the incongruent juxtaposition of ‘home’ with ‘purpose’ and ‘function’. Not until this point in the text has this requirement been made quite so explicit. Even on the page itself, the word ‘home’, at the end of the sentence ‘Statement of Purpose and Function of Children’s Home’ (N.B. not ‘the’ Children’s Home) and beneath the yet bolder heading ‘Regulations’ ‘looks’ (appears, ‘reads as’) somehow ‘chased off’ to the edges, not central, but peripheral, almost lost, abject, ‘other than’. The confidence, self-assuredness of ‘regulation’, ‘purpose’, ‘function’ emphasise and play into perhaps already ambivalent notions of ‘home’. ‘Outside’ of the Guidance any such ambivalence about ‘home’ may be assuaged by highly charged, emotive but generally positive connotations with ‘family’, ‘security’, ‘autonomy’, etc.; here within the text ‘home’ is loosened, left free-floating in anticipation of a reckoning with ‘purpose’ and ‘function’.¹³

‘Home’ is signifying differently and in spite of the Guidance’s previously declared intention to ensure the welfare, care and protection of children in residential. And again, at one level, any informed professional will doubtless acknowledge the need for advice and instruction given that in the absence of either the history of children’s homes is blighted by incidents of institutionalised abuse, oppressive regimes and the abuse of power by adults left to their own devices (Pindown and Frank Beck are among the most obvious of the many available examples). However, none of the above diminishes the authority the Guidance exercises in constructing and informing a wider nexus of negotiation within the milieu of the ‘social’. By taking on the mantle of care and protection of vulnerable

---

¹³ If we pause for a moment and imagine Governmental Guidance being sent to every home in the land prescribing in such explicit terms that each family home shall have a ‘purpose and function’ it would, no doubt be met with indignation and outrage, a threat to democracy and family autonomy. In this context, however, the effect is merely of a questioning, a resignation and an anticipation of the apparently ‘necessary’ advice to follow.
Guidance can legitimately exercise a degree of regulation and control that would, in most other contexts, be regarded as unacceptable in a liberal democracy, an affront to self-determination and 'freedom'. Instead, within the text, regulation is 'read' as necessary, appropriate and as ensuring welfare and protection, even 'rights' in prescribing the need for children to exercise 'choice' and have a say in decision-making (see particularly Chapter 2: Arrangements For Placement of Children, para. 2.47: p.48).

The point is that the Guidance works in such a way as to regulate all of the above; in articulating choice, the Guidance prescribes choice, in articulating care, protection and welfare, the Guidance serves to regulate notions of childhood and adolescence; not controlling as such but regulating, defining the limits of, setting parameters. The Guidance works opportunistically, it seizes upon the otherwise unacknowledged but always already absence/presence of the sign and fills it with meaning - provisionally, temporarily, contextually. Thus 'home', elsewhere imbued with signification in plenitude, is, simply by virtue of its textual (context) setting, unproblematically 'open', empty and amenable to reconstituted meaning.

Problematising Children 'In Care'

Paragraph 1.17, regarding the 'purpose and objectives' of the home, suggests that it is 'helpful' to note that children no longer spend a large proportion of their childhood growing up in residential care. To the lay person, it might be inferred from this statement that children spend a shorter period of time in public care than previously, and are, for most of their childhood, looked after within the family. Whilst this may or may not be empirically true, the inference is swiftly rendered irrelevant in the following sentence: 'Increasingly, homes have adjusted to meet the particular needs of children during their career in care and have adopted various approaches to the care of children' (my italics). So,

---

14 Vulnerable, it might be added, not only by virtue of falling outside of the protection of what 'family' should be, but also, more significantly, by virtue of the status of being in the care of the state as evidenced by the aforementioned abuses of power within state 'care'
whilst children spend less time in residential care, we infer from the somewhat bizarre notion of 'career in care' that when not in residential they are still in some form of public care (presumably foster care primarily but perhaps also in other arrangements, for example subject to care orders but living within the family, or in secure accommodation). After all, residential now forms part of a 'career' in care as opposed to temporary or short break respite arrangements where children are still living within the family. We can only infer this, since it is not made explicit, but it seems that once a child is 'in care', whatever the individual circumstances a 'career' has been embarked upon, the child is 'marked out', once and for all as falling within the remit of the Guidance.

In any case, homes have 'adjusted to the particular needs of children' accordingly; not, it seems, to the particular needs of some children or the needs of particular children; all children experiencing residential 'care' are thus marked out as different, regardless of how diverse the circumstances by which they arrive at that experience. So, we might argue, residential care is not just identifying groups of children as different, but certain families as well that fall within the regulatory framework of Guidance, even (or so it seems) those families that might enter into 'voluntary' (Section 20 'Accommodation' in the Children Act 1989) respite-type arrangements where residential is being presented overtly as a form of support to the family which retains primary responsibility for the child. This reading of Guidance would seem to be compatible with the idea that beneath the guise of 'support', a seemingly benevolent state is permitted to draw more families into widening spheres of regulation and surveillance.

Paragraph 1.17 goes on to give examples of the 'various approaches to the care of children' that homes have adopted. In the previous section pertaining to paragraph 1.3, it is the 'function' of residential over and above the idea of 'home' simply as a place to 'be', a refuge, that has precedence. Whether it be through processes of 'normalisation' ('reproduce family life'), 'reform' ('systematic behavioural regime') or 'therapy' ('work with children psychologically damaged by abuse'), the home here is indeed defined as both
purposeful and functional. It is clear that *Guidance* is in the business of classifying, categorising, treating, reforming, addressing the apparently multi-various ‘needs’ of children as much as it is about accepting children and providing any semblance of what would be commonly understood as ‘home’.

What all the examples *Guidance* offers have in common is a view of children in residential care as problematised; constructions of ‘needs’ which are often individualised or pathologised and where the emphasis of ‘home’ is on ‘function’ and ‘purpose’, segregation, adjustment, treatment, rather than acceptance and inclusion. The examples serve to inform and negotiate an understanding of ‘childhood’ in which ‘children’ are silent as the objects of concern and attention, absent, yet constructed conceptually by a variety of referents, by ‘reference to’, in their absence, other signs. The examples are all at once lucid, relevant and intelligible to the discourse *Guidance* inhabits in articulating a construction of children’s needs whilst simultaneously infiltrating the sign ‘home’ with such dissociative meanings that we can by now do anything but take ‘home’ for granted, indeed, this ‘message’ and weighting of ‘home’ ensures our continued attention to *Guidance*; we need to know more, are now relying on *Guidance* (rather than our own intuitions, experience or knowledge) more than ever to elucidate on what children’s homes are ‘for’. The reader is drawn, unassumingly into reconstructing ‘home’, and crucially in a way that is not in the least challenging, threatening or which warrants question. Quite the reverse: we are reassuringly led into the arena of ‘meeting children’s needs’ wherein there is a familiar, comforting play of signification about notions of childhood and children as variously ‘innocents’, ‘victims’, ‘potentially delinquent’ etc. but all ‘in need’ of some form of ‘moulding’, ‘shaping’, ‘reform’.

Although we arrive at this renegotiation of our own volition, through a reasoning and exchange with the text itself (intertextuality), we are *guided by* the text and we take on and construct ‘home’ in a way that in other ‘textual settings’ would more likely be met with resistance. Further, this received ‘knowing’, ‘emptying’ of the sign ‘home’ (as if it were ‘full’
elsewhere) as something that, at our peril, we 'take for granted' is subsequently and continually played out and replayed in practice, in the context of children's experience of residential care in such a way that they too will need to understand that 'home' is conditional, provisional, purposeful and functional, not to be taken for granted. In this way, the Guidance and Regulations Vol.IV is as much about the guidance and regulation of groups of children themselves as it is about 'children's homes'. This is where the state is operating on one level at its most exposed and explicit in relation to the marginalised. In marking out difference it is able to legitimate, prescribe and classify in a way that, if attempted in respect of those further in from the edges and towards the mainstream 'social', would necessitate a much more subtle, not to say delicate, approach if controversy were to be avoided.

Having said all of the above, paragraph 1.17 seems to be indicating that some purposes and functions are more likely to be successful than others. Whereas some homes 'work with children to prepare for a definite goal in a task-centred manner' or 'are geared to addressing a child's unacceptable behaviour by means of a systematic behavioural regime' and are apparently already in the business of achieving these functions unproblematically, other homes only tentatively 'attempt to reproduce family life' or 'attempt to create a therapeutic milieu and work with children psychologically damaged by abuse' (my italics).

Why the sensitivity and uncertainty here and not with other purposes of homes? In our reading we cannot simply dismiss this feature of the text as inconsequential, arbitrary, incidental and peripheral, on the contrary, this is precisely what should attract our attention. Noteworthy that the purposes about which there is no expressed doubt are those which pertain most explicitly to controlling and regulatory aspects of the regime of residential care. Maybe there is doubt about home's ability to work in a 'task centred manner towards definite goals' or to establish a 'systematic behavioural regime' but why else qualify two of the examples of purposes with the Preface 'attempt' and not the others? After all, without the Preface 'attempt', doubt would never have found a way
through the text in the first place. It is Guidance that raises the possibility of doubt, which then casts a shadow elsewhere. As it stands, it is beneath the shadow of doubt that some purposes will be 'attempted'.

Perhaps here again the text is subliminally, inadvertently and 'against itself' acknowledging the implausibility, possibly even the undesirability of homes actually 'reproducing family life' completely. How far could this 'reproduction' go? A 'copy' of family life in its entirety, including the reproduction of offspring? In the first place, Guidance would first need to know what family life 'is' in order to offer Guidance to facilitate such a reproduction. More to the point, given the (decon-) structuring of meaning in the text so far, is not any 'attempt' in this capacity more likely to reproduce or represent what family life 'is not' than anything, and by the same logic, paradoxically, the more any such attempt tried to get close to what family life 'is', the further away it would find itself? The etymology of 'attempt' lies in the Latin temptare meaning 'tempt', it also has a less familiar usage as 'an attack, assault' (OED); perchance in these deferred significations in the text there is a tempting to or of 'family' life, an aspiration towards what is 'not', absent and deferred, pointing outwards to where 'family' 'ought' to be and inwards to what it is resolutely not.

Conceivably, it may be reasoned that in the interests of 'balance' Guidance would wish to offer a set of examples of 'purpose and function' that reflect (construct) a whole spectrum of 'needs' children may have. Not weighting the balance too far towards the controlling, regulatory aspects of 'care' (with terms like 'prepare for a definite goal', 'task centred manner', 'addressing unacceptable behaviour', 'systematic behavioural regime'), Guidance

---

15 As we pursue our line of enquiry of this text we can begin to see more clearly how the text 'unfolds' before us in such a way as to show that the 'Guidance' and the 'text' are no longer synonymous. One inheres in the other, and in terms of the physical inscription on the page they are one and the same, word for word, page for page, but the text also unfolds autonomously, often away from and against what we are 'naming' the Guidance. In this conceptualisation, 'Guidance' is but a reading of the text, one which fits into the discourse of social work, whereas the text opens itself out interminably to intertextuality, undermining and working against the 'logic' of the 'Guidance'. N.B. Although this conceptualisation is a structuring itself, based on the coupling Guidance/text, it is one that is immediately susceptible to collapse; the primacy and centricity of the Guidance is shattered by the always/already deconstructing text; 'we' do not 'deconstruct' the text, it deconstructs itself.
includes examples that are connotative with notions of children as vulnerable, passive and innocent ('reproduce family life', 'support into adulthood', create a therapeutic milieu) whilst making them provisional. At the same time as Guidance 'guides' towards purposes of the 'home' that are benign, inclusive, responsive, appropriate to a liberalist understanding of children as 'in need' in a variety of ways, it also brings in alongside and, more critically, gives precedence (by saying what some purposes will be while others will only attempted) to those purposes which emphasise control, reform and regulation. All of this happens in a way which seems eminently reasonable; it is only with the contextual insertion of 'attempt' that the text begins to fray, little by little at first, and only at the edges, but inevitably loosening the meaning sufficiently for the text to deconstruct itself. 'Attempt', no longer marginal and almost inconsequential to the grammatical structure of the paragraph, is central and pivotal in elucidating 'meaning'.

The contention that within the given list of examples there is precedence of some over others is underscored further into the section headed 'Regulations'. 'Systemised behavioural regimes' come to feature again in paragraphs 1.82 - 1.90 under the subheadings 'Good Order and Discipline', 'Disciplinary Measures - General', 'Permitted Disciplinary Measures' and 'Prohibited Measures'. Unlike the other examples of purposes listed, 'systemised behavioural regimes' are the subject of extended discussion in the above paragraphs. Nowhere else in this chapter, or in the whole volume are managers, policy-makers and practitioners offered any further explicit Guidance about the purposes cited as 'reproduction of family life' or 'therapeutic milieu'. There is Guidance relating to areas that might be seen as components of the said purposes, such as 'Health' (1.92 -1.104), 'Education' (1.115 - 1.120), 'Welfare' (2.5), 'Consultation' (2.45 -2.46), but none of these are contextualised within 'therapeutic milieu' or 'reproduction of family life' purposes or placed under headings pertaining to the former or the latter. Whilst health, education etc., may clearly also form a part of a systemised behavioural regime, it is this particular purpose that apparently warrants further explanation and Guidance and is singled out over and
The Precedence of the System

In paragraphs 1.82 -1.90 it is the word-sign 'system' ('a complex whole', 'organised body' 'principles of procedure or classification' are amongst the OED definitions) and its repetition, threading throughout the text and echoing 'systemised behavioural regime' in paragraph 1.17 that ensures its primacy even where it is in the context of offering Guidance to ensure the welfare of children. For example, 'Difficulties in control will arise where the objectives of the home are not well defined and consequently not well understood by staff or where children do not understand the reason for their placement. Systems of control and discipline cannot be divorced from systems of management and systems of care practice and planning within the home' (paragraph: 1.82, my italics) and further on; 'there should be a system of rewards (commendations, extension of privileges etc.) as well as sanctions' (paragraph 1.90). In the end, then, all homes should subscribe to 'systemised behavioural regimes' of some kind or another, regardless of whatever their 'attempts' may be in terms alternative 'purpose and function' or the extent to which that purpose or function is consistent, contradictory or in conflict with the 'system'. 'System', then, along with all the signifying regalia that goes with it, is the prescribed common denominator, not by virtue of Guidance explicitly saying that residential care shall be about the systemised regulation, scrutiny, control, classification of groups of children and to an extent, their families, but by not saying it and expressing all of those characteristics that are positively, reassuringly associated with care, welfare, protection, etc., in terms of and as a function of 'system'. In order to necessarily differentiate, construct difference, fill the void, the absence of 'family' with a 'presence'.

And yet, notwithstanding all of the above, in the very same paragraph (1.90) and in the face of this elevation and pre-eminence of system, we read the following:- 'Children in homes are likely, because of the system to be confronted as to the consequences of their actions by numerous adults; this often serves merely to compound misbehaviour and
undermine the child’s esteem’. Here, the role of staff is to limit and compensate for the acknowledged ‘deficits’, or the worst excesses of ‘system’ as the invariable, inevitable constant at the same time as the system is being promoted and endorsed as the appropriate means by which unacceptable behaviour and ‘acceptable’ behaviour (‘system of rewards’) is to be addressed. This is in spite of the fact that the reference is to the ‘numerous adults’ (who will work on a rota ‘system’) as part of the system of running the children’s home, not the behavioural regime itself. However, it is still the ‘system’, (not the number, behaviour, attitudes or values of the ‘adults’ themselves) that will result in children being confronted by the consequences of their actions in a way which ‘serves merely to compound misbehaviour and undermine the child’s self esteem’. To this extent, it is in the design of the system to compound misbehaviour and undermine the child’s self esteem, the very opposite of what the Guidance is simultaneously supposed to be ensuring against. This ‘trace’ (Derrida: 1976), a ‘mark’ of what is always already hidden, flickering in the shadowy recesses of the text serves to generate an occlusion of meaning through repetition (Bronfen: 1992).

Here is the construction (between the text, reader and ‘discourse’) of the system as a necessary evil (or, possibly more accurately, simply ‘necessary’) which Guidance aims to ensure is implemented within a context of current understandings of childhood and children and the consequent need for a balance between ‘care and control’, discipline and reward. It must be sufficiently liberal, but not excessively punitive; humanitarian, progressive, but all within the necessary system and with due regard for its limits. In the process of exhaustively describing the need for disciplinary measures and ‘rewards’ to be

16 The repetition that succeeds perfectly is destructive, according to Bronfen, because of is an “occlusion of approximation and difference”. (Bronfen: 1992:325) For our purposes, the approximation and distance afforded to ‘system’, (that which allows it to signify differently) is through the description of all of those activities designed to ensure care and welfare (as against the ‘pure’ system or perfect institution which organises, proceduralises, classifies and has precedence over the ‘individual’) but is obliterated by the repetition of the term which eventually unmasks as self-identical. This contradiction in the text, the perfect repetition (which is destructive, resulting in occlusion) occurs, albeit momentarily, at the sentence “Children in homes are likely, because of the system, to be confronted as to the consequences of their actions by numerous adults; this often serves merely to compound misbehaviour and undermine the child’s self esteem” (paragraph 1.90)
fair and reasonable and what those measures should be, the presuppositions which 'prop up' the 'system' both in the text and the context of residential care (in practice) are taken for granted, unexplained, assumed and therefore 'necessary'; indeed it is the 'system' itself which becomes almost synonymous with all that is fair, reasonable and just; all the more so for acknowledging its limitations in ensuring the latter.

The Simultaneous Promotion and Marginalisation of 'Good Practice'

There is a resonance here in the final two sentences of paragraph 1.17 which follows the list of examples of 'purpose and function'. The paragraph ends: 'The statement of purpose should describe what the home sets out to do, but should not unduly restrict the possibility of development of good practice. It is hoped an increasing variety of imaginative and positive approaches to the residential care of children will develop'. The 'statement of purpose' itself, is 'outside of 'the possibility of...good practice' which is evidently only a 'possibility' anyway. It should clearly take account of and not 'unduly restrict' good practice but it has primacy over it and it may, by implication at least, duly restrict it where circumstances require. It must describe what the home 'sets out to do', what it must achieve inasmuch as the parameters of the text allow for this; i.e. to the extent that certain functions, as indicated above, have precedence over others and within the space, the territory that is marked out by the text.

The notion of 'good practice' emerges latterly in the text, as an adjunct, an 'accessory' to the alleged purpose, whatever that might be. 'Good practice', that which Guidance proposes to ensure, is situated somewhat redundantly and not elucidated. Its status is as an appendage, an afterthought, something to be given due consideration beyond and beneath primary functions. It is, again, the 'home' that will 'do' and what it will do will not 'unduly restrict', but will determine the possibility of good practice. Now, we might safely assume that if the purpose did restrict unduly the development of good practice this would meet with disapproval and that accordingly most statements will accommodate it; indeed many will be immersed in the signifying paraphernalia of 'good practice'; but this is to
misconceive the subtlety of regulation whose power lies in a proficiency to furnish itself with the emblems and insignia of 'good practice' at the same time as retaining particular, regulatory imperatives.

Hence, it is only 'hope' that is left as far as 'imaginative and positive' approaches to the task are concerned: 'It is hoped that...'; a yearning, longing that on the margins of what must be, what is always already, a necessary absence, 'good practice' will linger, driven to the edges:

What is hope? nothing but the paint on the face of Existence; the least touch of truth rubs it off, and then we see what a hollow-checked harlot we have got hold of.

Byron: cited in Marchand: 1975

In a text that reverberates and resounds with certainty, sureness, self-confidence, authority, there is more than irony in the prefacing of 'imaginative and positive approaches to the care of children' with 'hope'; that which is contemplative, frail, expectant, anticipatory. It is only here that the text 'gives way' to the uncertain; the need to guard against the uncertain is exemplified by this textual positioning; fear of non-regulation, the unrestrained articulation of otherness, outside of regulation, the 'voice' of exclusion. Not that 'good practice' itself gives voice, but that it holds the possibility to concede to the other, points outward, entertains that possibility; that concession must be restrained, ordered, expressed in a particular way that is secondary to the regulatory imperative which must itself be sufficiently imbued and 'dressed up' with the language of 'good practice'.

It can only be hope (as opposed to certainty) that figures (that which is figured) in order to assuage the fear of collapse where the construction of the 'other' is deconstructed; without the need first and foremost for regulation, classification etc., difference (differance) no longer holds up. Even though, on one level, that of a common-sense understanding, the Guidance is about ensuring good practice, it says no more on how to ensure it in the context of the necessary Regulation and Guidance, much espoused but ill-defined, indeterminate and subordinate and not extrapolated. 'Practice', as a playing out of
theory, the application 'in reality' of theory, procedure, legislation demands a 'presence', one which will inevitably rely upon the day-to-day interaction and relationships between staff and children; the reasoning, understanding that takes place in that exchange and in the shared experience of children and adults who live and work in that context. All of this is deferred; the weakness in the text is that in being 'hoped for', it is relegated against all the prescriptions that Guidance does offer explicitly, even though all that is other than 'good practice' is framed unambiguously, manifestly, in the same terms.

Conclusion

To the anticipated rebuttal that Guidance is 'all about' good practice it is possible to respond in the affirmative; that is the point; 'good practice' is regulation, but as soon as the term itself, the sign, 'stands alone' (appears as a physical inscription in the text itself, rather than being alluded to, inferred or assumed to 'be' what the Guidance is 'about') it begins to point outwards and signify differently in a way that is dangerous and must be curtailed. Indeed in an earlier reference in the introduction to this chapter (paragraph 1.5), Guidance provides for itself something of a disclaimer in that "(t)he Regulations and Guidance are designed to provide a framework of practice for the running of children's homes which emphasises the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of individual children. They are not intended to be a detailed guide to good practice" (my italics). First, it is a framework 'of practice' (that which 'constitutes the substance' (OED) of the framework); second, it is a framework which 'emphasises', rather than one which is exclusively 'for' the safeguarding and promotion of welfare (allowing other 'non-emphasised', perhaps more subtle constituents of the framework to also ensue); third, the safeguarding and promotion of welfare is in relation to 'individual' children, acknowledging that the needs of the institution may (perhaps must) override the needs of the individual. It is because of this necessity that Guidance must offer a 'framework' which compensates for the deficits in care and welfare that it itself incurs; it is in this way self-generating; creating what it must proscribe, necessarily. Thus, concurrent and in contradiction to the above, the Guidance is
not a ‘detailed guide to’ (no longer ‘of’?) good practice which is subsequent and secondary. This abdication, relinquishing of ‘good practice’ is at odds with all that has gone before and comes after.

The fact that the Guidance does not set out in the first place to be a detailed ‘practice manual’ is not the issue; in fact it is the alibi. As an alibi, it operates in two ways; first, by saying that detailed advice on good practice should be sought elsewhere, Guidance contradicts itself in also saying that it is providing a framework ‘of’ good practice and steeping itself throughout in the rhetoric of the latter; second, by positioning itself as that which precedes but is also ‘of’ good practice ensures that other imperatives prevail, suitably tempered, indeed justified by the established need for good practice. Promoting and safeguarding welfare are not, in the text, primarily and centrally ensured by ‘good practice’, but by the Guidance and Regulations which precede it. They are emphasised, but concomitant with other, unspecified, but palpable imperatives and realised in the first place anyway, through the framework, not the practice. It is in part the historically demonstrable vulnerability of children in ‘public care’ that permits this otherwise untenable and paradoxical position to seem entirely reasonable and necessary. In this way ‘good practice’ is proposed and espoused whilst simultaneously marginalised and ultimately relinquished at the moment that the sign becomes too exposed and demands a ‘presence’ by appearing ‘literally’ in the text. This slip in the logic of the text is rendered almost imperceptible by a swift resolution as the Guidance goes on, further on in the same paragraph to advise the reader to seek detailed advice on ‘good practice’ elsewhere. Any imminent anxiety about the absence of good practice is accommodated and placated by the reassurance that this void will be safely occupied, not here, after all, but somewhere else. And so we end up with a series of textual contradictions transmogrified into abundant ‘common sense’; first the framework, then the detailed advice on practice which will occupy that framework. The Guidance even helpfully points us to a particular document that will begin to provide us with the ‘detailed advice’ on practice we are lacking: “The National Institute for Social
Work (NISW) has been commissioned to produce with the Wagner Development Group further Guidance along the lines of “Home Life - a Code of Practice for Residential Care”. And yet already, before we even reach a text that is beyond the scrutiny of this reading there is a trace of what may be to come...we note the word ‘code’ in the title: ‘Code’ - a system of words, figures or signals used to represent others for secrecy or brevity; a system of pre-arranged signals (OED).
CHAPTER SIX

CHILDHOOD POSTPONED: METAPHOR, DIFFERANCE, REGULATION IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

“What do you see, my boy?” Padre Emanuele asked Roberto, who, still lacking eloquence, replied, “Fields.” “To be sure, anyone can see Fields down there. But you well know that, depending on the position of the Sun, the color of the Sky, the hour of the day & the season of the year, those fields can appear to you in varying Guise & inspire different Feelings. To the peasant, weary after his work, they appear as Fields & nothing more. Similar is the case of the savage fisherman terrified by those nocturnal Images of Fire sometimes visible in the Sky & frightening to behold: but as soon as the Meteorists, who are also Poets, dare call them Crined Comets, Bearded & Tailed, Goats, Beams, Shields, Torches & Thunderbolts, these figures of speech clarify for you the clever Symbols through which Nature means to speak, as she uses these Images as Hieroglyphics, on the one hand referring to the Signs of the Zodiac & on the other to past Events. And the Fields? You see how much you can say of Fields & how, as you speak, you see and comprehend more: Favonious blows, the Earth opens, the Nightingales weep, the leaf-crowned Trees swagger, & you discover the wondrous genius of the Fields in the variety of their strains of Grasses nourished by the Streams that play in happy puerility. The festive Fields rejoice with jaunty merriment, at the appearance of the Sun they open their countenance & in them you observe the arc of a smile, & they celebrate the return of the Star, intoxicated with the gentle Austral kisses & laughter on the Earth itself that expands in dumb Happiness, & the matutinal warmth so fills them with Joy that they shed tears of Dew. Crowned with Flowers, the Fields submit to their Genius & compose subtle Hyperboles of Rainbows....There, my son: if you had said simply that the Fields are pretty, you would have done nothing but depict for me their greening- which I already know of- but if you say the Fields laugh, you show me the Earth as Animate & reciprocally I will learn to observe in human Countenances all the refinements that I have perceived in the fields...And this is the office of the supreme Figure of all: Metaphor. If Genius, & therefore Learning, consists in connecting remote Notions & finding Similitude in things dissimilar, then Metaphor, the most acute and farfetched among Tropes, is the only one capable of producing Wonder, which gives birth to Pleasure, as do changes of scene in the theater. And if the Pleasure produced by Figures derives from learning new things without effort & many things in small volume, then Metaphor, setting our mind to flying betwixt one Genus & another, allows us to discern in a single Word more than one Object.”


Introduction

Having established in previous chapters the cultural and historical specificity of childhood and its ‘mythical signification’ within discourse, this chapter begins by examining the relationship between children’s needs and children’s rights within contemporary professional discourse. Specifically, the discussion sets out to illustrate what can be described as the ‘naturalising trick’; that is, the ways in which, within contemporary
discourse, any potential for contradiction between the duality of ‘needs’ and ‘rights’ is effectively circumscribed and assuaged through universalising notions of the child’s nature. In this way, contrasting characterisations of the child as, on the one hand, ‘needy’ in nature, one who must be spoken for, pivotal to the natural family, and, on the other hand, a ‘rights-owning’ citizen, holding within the potential for autonomous decision-making, are both encapsulated within the same ‘whole’. Naturalisation is thus an effect of discourse; the study aims to show how this trick is pulled off across apparently diverse discourses by the very structuring of discourse-making. Any potential for disruption (for example, that the autonomous decision-making child with rights might undermine the child of nature) is effectively neutralised, making it impossible to ‘think differently’ about childhood. ‘Rights-promotion’ becomes enclosed within; there may be an extension of decision-making and civil liberties, but only to the fullest extent that discourse reaches, and not beyond. Put simply, in striving for children to have more of a say, they paradoxically have less of a say since what more can be said is all the more circumscribed by discourse. It is in this way that rights become self-validating principles for children ‘as citizens’ of the liberal state within, and only within, childhood.

This Chapter also returns to the Guidance and Regulations as well as introducing other practice and assessment materials to explore some of the other characteristics of a naturalised childhood that have special resonance in public care; its temporal quality; the idea of progress and development towards adulthood and how, through policy and practice the former and the latter have the effect of deferring the ‘here and now’. The discussion will suggest that for the child in public care childhood is effectively deferred or ‘postponed’, and arguably, that this is necessarily so in order to maintain the idealized natural family. Further, the study will set out to show how children in public care constitute a ‘captive population’ for the imposition of a regulated childhood which should otherwise be ‘of nature’. It is through their exposure to this implicitly ‘unnatural’ environment that within the theories, policies and practices of social work, childhood is
itself most exposed in its 'purest form' and most explicitly regulated. It is also commensurate with the culture of 'performance measurement' in social work and the need to measure outcomes based on developmental theory which is itself assumed to reflect the child's nature. Not, of course, that this means that children are necessarily better cared for, more able exercise self-determination, which might seem, perhaps naively, like the logic of this circumstance. On the contrary, the discussion will propose that in spite of the strenuous efforts of policy-makers and practitioners to provide/substitute for the childhood that should have been, or as close to it as possible, the effect of the increasing implementing theory and practice which prefigures, presupposes and sees children in a state of transit is, ironically, to further remove them from the sphere of the 'here and now', with less of a presence in determining 'themselves'. Importantly, the argument throughout here and throughout this study is not that by deconstructing 'presence' in the text or the 'self-present' adult, exposing it as a myth, a construction, this means it is meaningless or without 'value', as if we could do without it. Far from it, to be able to articulate a presence, not 'outside' of 'discourse' (which would be impossible), but in such a way as to transform, reconstitute, reconstruct makes it full of alternative possibilities. The metaphor 'presence', as something contingent, negotiable, not taken for granted, makes it all the more available, full of possibility and in this way all the more crucial for children in public care in undermining some of the monolithic truths that surround this particular childhood.

Principles of 'Good' Child Care Practice: Unity in Contemporary Discourse

The idea of childhood as a universal, wholly 'knowable' 'thing' requires discourse to hold together its own logic in order to achieve a 'unity' from dispersed and often contradicting 'fragments'. This coherence can be seen at work in a document designed to accompany the Guidance and Regulations for the Children Act 1989, The Care of Children -
Child care principles have developed over a long period and have many roots. These roots include legal concepts; belief in the intrinsic value of each individual; knowledge from child development, psychology and psychiatry; practice wisdom; social research; prevailing community values.

Here, then are laid out some of the disciplines that come together, not to 'discover', but to constitute contemporary childhood; the parameters of a 'discourse', of 'what can be said' by and about 'childhood' and the constituting 'subject-in-discourse' or 'object', 'child'. Whilst there is a kind of proud, liberal eclecticism here in terms of the range of perspectives (which may elsewhere, perhaps be regarded as sometimes in conflict or contradiction) that go to inform principles of good child care, this does not mean that 'knowledge' within this, highly particularised context, is always provisionalised or qualified. On the contrary, there is an implicit 'truth' to be derived out of the coalition that arises. For example, note that whilst part of what informs principles of child care is a belief in the intrinsic value of each individual, when it comes to child development, psychology and psychiatry there is no equivocation; it is knowledge - what is 'known' about the 'nature' of childhood - that underpins its execution.

Child development, psychiatry and psychology are here irrefutable bodies of knowledge providing indisputable 'truths' about childhood. This leads us into a number of difficulties: for example, the cultural specificity and ethnocentricity of much of this knowledge are initially glossed over, although later on in the same text, when the principles of child care are listed, account is to be taken of differences arising from precisely ethnicity, culture and so on. Indeed this very area is a headline requirement; 'Principle One' of 'Good Child Care Practice': "Children and young people and their parents should all be considered as individuals with particular needs and potentialities" (p.7); it is qualified by the following; "...All regulations, policies, Guidance and procedures should take into account the wide
This ‘taking into account’, however, is not really ‘Principle One’ at all, but demonstrably secondary and supplementary to the ‘real’ Principle One, which is already established on the basis of ‘knowledge’ of ‘child development, psychiatry and psychology’. The ‘taking account’ is a (no doubt) sympathetic and well-intentioned, as well as politically sensitive, deviation from the principle, but decidedly not the principle itself. This liberal approach to difference is one of tolerance and accommodation, but structured upon the premise of precedence of a prevailing culture-specific (Western) discourse of ‘childhood’ and its interrelatedness with other discourses of ‘welfare’, ‘needs’ and ‘family’ which are equally ethnocentric and historically variable.

Moreover, the differentiation between belief (in the ‘intrinsic value of each individual’) and knowledge (of child development, psychiatry and psychology) works in two ways. First, it establishes a context in which a value-judgement is recognised for what it is - context-specific relative to the culture and community it represents and in this sense indicative of a discourse which is ‘self-aware’, ‘knowing’ and therefore sensitive to alternative ‘beliefs’. Within the discourse of ‘liberal professionalism’ it might almost be seen as self-congratulatory in that even though this particular belief is widely concurred with, we are not so naïve, so culturally insensitive, as to take it as a truth universally acknowledged. Secondly, by provisionalising a value that borders on being a truism, (‘intrinsic value of each individual’) in a way that seems almost unnecessary, the ‘knowledge’ gained from child development, psychiatry and psychology - or, more accurately, the status of such knowledge, is actually strengthened, consolidated and therefore all the more unquestionable. By setting itself out as ‘open’ to question and difference this text (discourse) thereby paradoxically serves to occlude difference or other forms of knowledge.

diversity of ages, needs, ethnic origins, cultures and circumstances that lies behind general categories…” (p.7).
in the very act of ‘taking account’. Becoming ‘tolerance in action’, the very exemplification of the values which it claims to laud.

The belief in the value of each individual is, in this very precise sense, one redolent of Isaiah Berlin’s celebrated equivocation over the merits of tolerance itself, compatible with the value placed on individual identity, autonomy and responsibility in the liberal democracy. It is in part constituted by and through a symbiotic relationship with ‘knowledge’ of child development, psychiatry and psychology in contemporary society. This ‘centred’, whole, complete and autonomous individual requires the ‘needy’ child, variously constructed in order to ‘be’ ‘self-present’; the ‘needy’ child makes it possible, it is the ‘history’ of the ‘intrinsically valued’ individual which must be written before the individual is complete either by the child’s needs being met contemporaneously with the ‘childhood’ or, where childhood is interrupted, in retrospect by recourse to psychoanalysis, ‘talking treatments’ to ‘reclaim’ the ‘past’.

The ‘Naturalising Trick’: ‘Needs’ and ‘knowledge’ of Child Development

Children’s ‘needs’ then, are at the centre of a discourse of childhood; in policy and in practice presuppositions to ‘needs’ are effectively ‘side-stepped’ to present an apparently progressive, and more pertinently, universal approach to children, childhood and child welfare that is constructed out of and between interrelated discourses and psycho-social disciplines. However, this does not mean that there are not ‘in fact’ some ‘universal’ requirements for children’s well-being; that is not at issue here. Rather, language is so saturated here within the discourse of ‘needs’ to render ‘what can be said’ indissoluble

---

1 This ‘taking into account’ or ‘talking about’ subjects that might otherwise be regarded with ambivalence or as problematic resonates with Barthes idea of myth (1957) as depoliticized speech, an idea we return to later, and the notion of ‘repetition’ in Kristeva’s writing (1983).

2 In the above discussion, we might equally regard ‘child’ as the object and ‘childhood’ as the discourse. However, it would be just as accurate to call ‘biological immaturity’ the object and ‘child’ the discourse. Equally, we can regard ‘childhood’ as the ‘object’ and ‘developmental psychology and psychoanalysis’ the discourse; the point to remember is that the boundaries are artificial; there is no ‘starting point’ or originating concept or ‘thing’ upon which to ‘construct’. There are only terms and conditions of emergence, coexistence, correlation; spaces between which signifiers differ and defer.
from the discourse. As soon as children’s needs are spoken about, language takes us (the speaker: the parent, the child, the social worker, the policy-maker, the theorist) into the realms of ‘what can be said’, the place inhabited by ‘childhood’. Certain needs seen as inherent to the nature of childhood tend to be derived from a biological/psychological understanding of human nature e.g. the need for food. Other needs, however are formulated upon a different kind of knowledge base and superimposed on childhood nature. ‘Needs’ for warmth, security, new experiences etc. often assume a particular outcome which may be desirable but which can only be achieved in a particular way. This teleological basis for constructing needs and childhood experiences is crucial in determining adulthood as the manifestation of the fully formed adult ‘self’. Children’s ‘needs’, whatever they may be, are taken up in the maelstrom of discourse in such a way as to occlude other ways of thinking about childhood and with the effect of mystifying, diminishing and obscuring ‘the child’.

Further, advanced liberalism’s emphasis on children as ‘citizens’ raises the possibility of ‘rights’ arising out of those needs, raising further complexities and contradictions. Woodhead (1997) has begun to analyse this apparently innocuous and benign way of thinking about childhood, citing the following example from the first report of the House of Commons Education, Science and Arts Committee on the subject of educational provision for the under-fives:

Young children need to be with adults who are interested and interesting, and with other children to whom they relate. They need to have natural objects and artefacts to handle and explore. They need opportunity to communicate through music and imaginative play...These needs can only be met if an appropriate environment is provided with adults who understand something of child development and are ready and able to listen, encourage and stimulate para. 5.1: HMSO:1988

Woodhead’s point is that ‘needs’ provide a kind of ‘shorthand’ which glosses over uncertainty and potential disagreement about the universality and timeless nature of childhood and that ‘need’ is “endowed with a more complex meaning structure”
(Woodhead: 1997:66) than other phrases such as ‘want’ or ‘should have’; any possibility of contention is thus ruled out. For this study, there is also significance in the passage suggesting that the ‘needs’ upon which the hypotheses are based can only be provided with adults who have an understanding of ‘child development’, that being the very theory upon which the ‘known’ needs are based. The theory of child development is thus self-verifying and in this way constitutes children’s needs as self-evident; the theory can be applied retrospectively to validate the ‘truth’ of children’s needs which are themselves formulated on the basis of developmental psychology. Further, how is this understanding of child development acquired, by whom and what implications does this raise for those who do not have “something of an understanding”?

Clearly, anyone involved in child-rearing practices outside of a predominantly Western culture is ruled out for a start. But in the context of the Report (the provision of public services for the under-fives) is it only those people employed in the delivery of under-fives services who will need this ‘understanding’? If so, what of the rest of us? Is it assumed that this knowledge is somehow inherent within the families to which under-fives return having spent time at the nursery or in day care? On one level, this is, perhaps not an unreasonable assumption to make given the plethora of literature about child rearing available to parents and the amount of material foisted upon them in the media and in ante-natal classes, but does this mean that those families who are able and willing to access such knowledge are more able parents than those who do not? If so, how ‘natural’ can the family be as the ‘best place’ for children’s needs to be met when so much is prescribed and supplemented? Now, it is not that the orthodoxy should be completely abandoned, just that it becomes increasingly difficult to ‘think’ anything else when childhood is so effectively and resolutely naturalised and closed, to the extent of shutting out other possibilities. So closed off is this

---

Woodhead uses a formula, X needs Y for Z to follow to show how Z is rarely made explicit - it is constituted through a shared understanding between author and reader. He argues that this construction obscures the individual and the cultural towards an objectified, empirical understanding of children. What is understood is what is inferred: "concealed beneath the apparent simplicity and directness of ‘need’ statements is a highly condensed combination of both empirical and evaluative claims" (Woodhead: 1997:67)
territory, so clearly marked out that to challenge the orthodoxy can be regarded as disreputable, irresponsible, even dangerous.\footnote{This is especially true when it comes to childhood sexuality and the idea of consensual adult/child relations; here we are well out of bounds and a kind of self-censorship operates despite the fact that it is only relatively recently that a redefinition of such relations as abusive has been conceptualised.}

Moreover, this characterisation of childhood as universal and of the child as ‘needy’, not only places particular responsibilities on those undertaking the role of child-rearing, driven by a moral imperative to ‘get it right’, lest there be dire consequences for the child, it also endows the state with the necessary moral authority and legitimacy to intervene where such needs are deemed not to have been adequately met. In law, ‘who’ might need the supportive interventions of the state to supplement family life seems to be implied: In the Act, Part III, s.17, local authorities have a general duty to:

(a) safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their own area who are in need; and

so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children within their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children’s needs

s.17: sub.s.1

In addition, a child ‘in need’ is defined in the Act if:

(a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority...

(b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or

he is disabled.

s.17, sub. s.(10)

On this basis, then, a child will not be in ‘need’ when all of the above are met within the family which has access to and an understanding of those provisions required on the basis of knowledge of child health and development and of what the normative standards are as derived from the various disciplines that inform the discourse of childhood. Thus, despite being the natural sphere for child-rearing, what is required to supplement the family to meet the child’s needs is likely to be available to the most economically and
educationally 'advantaged', who will not have or require recourse to state provision.6 All children are 'in need', even within the family they remain so, but in the terms of reference of the Act, supplementary support from the state will be provided for some, but not others for whom it is assumed that there will be alternative measures to ensure provision is made.

Since 'knowledge' about 'child development' must be acquired in order to meet the child's needs, families must either voluntarily engage with the discourse by using whatever resources they have (and to varying acceptable degrees) to consult the 'experts', provide an 'appropriate' environment, buy 'age-appropriate' toys, read the right books, attend antenatal classes. Or, if they cannot or will not do this, they must accept the possibility of being subject to state intervention. Thus, while it may be represented as a 'non-stigmatising', supportive welfare provision for which they may well be grateful, will inevitably draw them into the net of greater surveillance and more intrusive interventions if a failure to ascribe to normative practices is subsequently 'identified'. The fact that most families enter of their own volition into the discourse of 'childhood needs' via either of the above arrangements is beside the point which is that there is no other way to even begin thinking about doing it. What is an apparently naturally occurring phenomenon (the 'child' as needy in nature) is shown to be anything but; childhood, conceptualised within the context of 'needs' is eminently cultural, social and public; the means by which we are able to constitute, not reflect, relations between the state and the family. The 'inside' of 'family', what centres it as a 'natural' sphere for meeting children's needs and child rearing, is at the same time the outside, the public place where the 'is' of childhood is constituted and renegotiated. Only 'needs' can do this for the family and the state; it is what allows, through discourse, the supplement to appear unproblematically within (without) nature, resolving the contradiction at the same time as it is the contradiction.7

---

6 Unless, that is, the child is disabled in which case support is universally available.

7 Thus, the 'supplement' is (under erasure) the 'centre' (see previous discussion in Chapter Three).
Promoting Rights, Affirming Needs: Circumscribing Children's Rights and Entitlements

More recently, in the context of an increased emphasis on liberalism and autonomy, children’s rights have entered the discourse, requiring a new accommodation which ‘squares the circle’ and alleviates the potential tension between the child as ‘rights-owning’ ‘citizen’ and the child as ‘needy-in-nature’. A ‘rights discourse’ has been constructed which has come to encompass both the child as ‘citizen’ and the child as ‘vulnerable’.

The way in which needs and rights discourses overlap and circumscribe each other can be seen at work in statements that differentiate between what ‘should’ or ‘must’ happen in relation to the care of children in the ‘looked after’ system and where ‘rights’ and ‘entitlements’ are explicitly mentioned and where they are not. The need to establish a ‘right’ may arise out of either the universality of the ‘need’ itself or where the meeting of that need is regarded as being intrinsic to the period of childhood for the development of the rational adult i.e. where childhood is characterised as a period of dependency, vulnerability, development, learning and transition.

In *The Care of Children* (Department of Health: 1991), Chapter 2 sets out ‘Principle 3’ of ‘Good Practice’ in relation to individual children and their families.⁸ Principle 3 (p.7) states

> Children are entitled to protection from neglect, abuse and exploitation... Young People’s safety cannot be assumed just because their care-givers are known to the agency and social workers who are responsible for children must remain alert to potential risks.

The issue here is not whether we concur with the principle but that this entitlement is associated with a universal need for protection from harm provided and determined as such by adults in authority. The matter is closed here without qualification. Other principles, however are less clear-cut. ‘Principle 13’ (p.9) states:

> siblings should not be separated when in care or when being looked after under voluntary arrangements, unless this is part of a well thought out plan based on each child’s needs... a child’s needs should not be sacrificed in order to meet those of a sibling.

---

⁸ My italics throughout all of the following citations of text quoted from the said document.
Here, the child's needs are paramount and overrule the possibility of any entitlement to avoid separation. The imperative to meet the child's needs 'in childhood' has precedence over the 'need' to avoid separation where maintaining siblings together is judged by those who decide to be damaging.

It is possible to extrapolate that non-separation from siblings is not a universal requirement for childhood, (though it may often be desirable) and that the judgement for making such decisions is to be based on the 'needs' (as judged by others) drawn from the various knowledge bases which constitute a 'healthy' childhood, which are themselves assumed to be consistent with the child in question. That is, regardless of whether the child wishes or feels differently. No room for rights or entitlements here; needs take the moral high ground, silencing any 'alternative' 'knowledge'.

Moreover, Principle 9 (p.8) states:

If young people cannot remain at home, placement with relatives or friends should be explored before other forms of placement are considered. Research has shown that placements with relatives are usually more successful than those made outside the family circle. However, family relationships can be negative and placements with relatives should not be made without adequate exploration and discussion nor as a way of saving money or keeping 'in care' figures low.

This seems odd; why should and not must explore placements with relatives and friends? (The document is rigorous in its use of precise language so this is most unlikely to be a grammatical error). If the evidence is that placements with family and friends are more successful than 'in care' placements and the agency is sure that necessary checks and guidance exist (which it does) to ensure such placements are as 'safe' as is possible to know, why not, on the basis of such evidence, require their exploration? Particularly given the numerous examples of systematic abuse in the looked after system, why all the tentative 'qualifiers' ('can be negative', 'should not be made without...' etc.) about family placements and none expressed about 'in care' placements? Is the mask slipping here, ever so slightly? Is there a veiled suspicion of all the friends and relatives of a child who 'cannot remain at home'. If so, is it any more warranted than a suspicion of the 'looked after'
system, given the evidence? Perhaps it is even that despite the evidence 'public care' is
deemed more appropriately suited to meeting the needs of these particular children, who
cannot remain at home and who come from these particular families, who have 'failed' to
meet their child's needs.

Finally, Principle 19 (p.10)

Every young person needs to develop a secure sense of personal identity and all
those with parental or caring responsibilities have a duty to offer encouragement
and support in this task. All children - whether living at home or not - are entitled to
expect information about their personal and family history and need to understand
their past as well as their present situation. They also need opportunities to develop
independence and see themselves as competent individuals.

This principle is one which is not afraid to express its applicability to both children in
public care and those living at home; we are in universal territory here; an entitlement can
be afforded to children since they need information about their past and present in order
to 'develop a secure sense of identity', and 'independence', and become 'competent
individuals'. Childhood, as a period of development towards the fully rational adult, must
have a past of which to 'make sense' out of in the formation of the adult. This is essential
for the development of the 'independent', 'competent' individual in adulthood. Thus, a
right to information can be established, a right which far from challenging the orthodoxy
about childhood, will serve to strengthen it as the child 'comes to terms' with what may be
a 'difficult' history with the support and Guidance of the 'psy' experts. They can 'find'
'themselves' in childhood through the discourse. This temporal quality to childhood is
fundamental to developmental psychology and the idea of children as 'becoming adults'; it
is also, nonetheless, socially and culturally constructed and as such cannot be taken for
granted in any study of childhood.
Temporality, Transition and \textit{Differance}

Time exerts sets of constraints upon our biological selves, which are interpreted in different cultures as different 'times' of life. Western societies, for example, might be thought of as constructed out of the following sequence: childhood follows infancy and is succeeded by adolescence, adulthood, middle age and old age. Each 'time of life' is understood to confer particular qualities and attributes upon its incumbents so that cultures can have their own periodizations and draw such boundaries differently.

James and Prout: 1997:230

Time is culturally constructed and embedded in the very 'sense' of 'Being' within each period of life; the phrase 'having the \textit{time} of your \textit{life}' epitomises this concept. Whilst each period of life denotes its own characteristics, James and Prout (1997) explain how the passage of time in life, expressed through 'age' has particular significance in childhood, shown through the obsessive curiosity about how old children are when at other times of life this would be regarded as intrusive and discourteous. Not only are themes of transition, development and sequencing 'at one' with a construction of the passage of time as 'natural' in childhood, but also and more crucially, they are what enables the structuring of the fully 'present' and rational adult.

Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.
Nobody that matters, that is.

Edna St Vincent Millay (1934) 	extit{Childhood is the Kingdom where Nobody Dies}

There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.

Graham Greene (1940) \textit{The Power and the Glory}

The relationship between childhood as 'time past' (that upon which 'adulthood' structures presence through a variety of means) and 'time future' (as the period of 'investment' towards the fully present 'adult') is one that is mutually referential and dependent (James and Prout: 1997). Either way, children themselves are effectively 'projected' somewhere else altogether, 'out' of time, into the imaginings and fantasies of adults, within a 'sanctuary' and haven which transcends the ravages of the 'real world',
Ch9dhood Postponed. - Metaphor, Differance, Regulation in Residential Care

universalises their needs. They are not 'in' but 'of childhood', a place defined and determined on their behalf which prefigures, and then defers their 'presence' within it. “Like primitive man, the child as primitive adult is in harmony with nature, set free from the ravages of the time driven modern world. It is an attractive ideology which casts children into a mythical past or a magical present…” (James and Prout: 1997:242).9

One way or another, children themselves are subjugated and deferred to the 'presence' of adults (how often are children asked; 'what do you want to 'be' when you grow up?'); this has been true of adults as 'subjects' in 'relation' to children directly (as parents, teachers, relatives etc.) and as anthropologists, sociologists, theoreticians of 'childhood'. In the 'public sphere', for those on the margins, the potential for instability and disruption (of the sign in language/discourse, of the child 'in care), regulated through childhood, is most vulnerable and most exposed; transposed from the relational dynamic of accommodations and re-negotiations within and between the state and family and the child (and the various discourses that constitute 'subjects' within) to the 'external', imprecise, 'homogenising' machinations of the state, and all in the 'best interests' of the child 'in need' who is 'looked after'.

In childhood, then, temporality becomes the means by which regulation is itself 'naturalised'. Nowhere is this more manifest than in the public care of children. It is here that through the playing out of theory, policy, procedure and guidance (the written) the 'non-presence' of childhood 'everywhere' is most susceptible to deconstructive readings (at the 'other side' of what childhood 'ought' to be). Temporality is indicative of childhood as 'postponement' (of presence), 'deferment' (to the fully present adult), compounded and 're-enfolded' in public care as a postponement of the 'natural' childhood within the 'natural' family to which it must also defer, be supplementary to and in a relation of secondariness:

9 James and Prout go on to cite Ennew's depiction of A.A. Milne's Christopher Robin as "the archetypical innocent childhood whiled away in complete isolation in the Hundred Acre Wood, accompanied by sexless woolly animals"
...the 'a' of difference also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation - in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present, the reference to a present reality, to a being are always deferred. Deferred by virtue of the very principle of difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future in an economy of traces.

Derrida: 1981:26

In public care this 'referring to another past or present' (we cite what Derrida writes about difference to illustrate metaphorically what is 'literally' the case in public care) is uncompromising, relentless; deferment is ubiquitous, omnipresent; its 'raw' presence/absence is there for all to see. It is necessarily, essentially, characteristically, how the Guidance is worked out in practice. In public care, postponement and deferral (difference) become exposed and through a construction of childhood which relies upon them, are most acutely realised within the 'lived experience' of 'looked after' children. Temporality is the primary manifestation of difference, articulated in discourse through metaphor; in 'practice' this can be illustrated from the moment of inception of the intervention (the child's removal from the family) right down to the minutiae of daily life.

The Child 'in waiting'

First 'family life' is deferred and postponed; the child is 'looked after'. Being 'looked after', the resumption of 'family' is deferred and postponed whilst 'work' is undertaken to secure 'rehabilitation' or 'restoration'. (The experience of young people who are not returning home is examined shortly). The child is 'in waiting', in anticipation of this resumption. Second, decision-making about the length of placement needed, the 'nature' of the placement, the contact arrangements with family, the 'needs' of the child during the placement are all deferred and postponed to the 'planning meeting' or 'review'. Third, decisions about things like how much pocket money, clothing, what time the child must come in at night, where the child can go and who with may, in general terms,


10 A reminder this metonym (looked after) for public care is necessary since, unlike in 'family', 'looked after' does not inhere in, for example, 'state administered accommodation'; it is, therefore standing for something else, an absence as well as a possible 'presence'
be decided at the review but any flexibility or change on a day to day basis is likely to be delegated to the homes manager or an allocated 'linkworker' (as suggested by the Guidance); these decisions will thus be deferred and postponed until the appropriate member of staff is on duty; if they are on duty at the time a request is made, they may still prefer to consult with colleagues first and ask the child to wait. Fourth, where disagreements arise between children or young people about perhaps the most trivial of matters - who goes to bed at what time, say, or who uses the washing machine, who needs to use the bathroom first, any resolution is likely to be deferred for discussion either amongst the staff at staff meetings or by young people in residents' meetings. Meal-times, supper-times, times for cleaning bedrooms may all largely be dictated by the organisation of the home; a spontaneous request to stay the night with a friend will need to be 'risk assessed', checked out, before it can happen 'in the future' thus deferring 'spontaneity', opportunism - a sense of being present in the present.

These are all measures which secure a deferral and postponement; the 'condition' of childhood which in public care is manifested as 'necessary' regulation; 'necessary' for the 'well-being' of the child and the smooth running of the home (as it often may well be; that is not the issue here). But these 'deferrals', particularly about all the 'little things' in daily life arise so easily 'in context' (sometimes with neither rhyme nor reason) that they are taken often for granted; or at best regarded as unfortunate but necessary constraints. This is because they are consistent and self-validating within a discourse that absents children from the self-occupying present. In public care, discourse consumes everything; filtering, diffusing, deferring presence through and to a 'logic' of its own that can sometimes mean any 'sense' of 'common-sense' is disoriented, forfeited in the very pursuit of meeting the 'needs' and protecting the 'welfare' of the child.

Listening to Children: 'Age and level of Understanding'

Given the above, it is not surprising that when it comes to the requirement to 'listen to children' it is only inasmuch as hearing what can be said about childhood and in terms
which are age-specific. For example, Section 1 of the Children Act states that when a court is determining any question with respect to a child's upbringing, welfare is the paramount consideration. One of the particulars listed in determining welfare in this respect is "the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his age and understanding)" (S.1(3)a)). Note that it is age that implicitly determines both the ability to make 'rational' choices and the extent to which that ability is 'ascertainable', that is, as something to be found out as a 'definite fact' or to 'get to know' (OED), where 'knowing' is the realm of adult rationality. Note too, however, that age is qualified by 'understanding'; at first glance, a reassuring recognition that perhaps age alone cannot only relied upon. However, by linking age and understanding in this way, although allowing for the possibility that (presumably) a younger child than might be expected will occasionally have the necessary 'understanding'; the inference is that 'understanding' remains essentially something that is correlated with 'intellect', if not always chronology, where 'adulthood' as the fully rational state of being. So, what the child 'understands', whatever his age, is constrained and particular; it must make 'sense' in the context of the discourse, it is a specific understanding that will be heard and that permits entry to the discourse as an active subject, not any alternative 'understanding' that is discontinuous with the discourse, with history and with the structuring of adult/child.11 'Wishes and feelings' and 'ascertainability' are thus located and constituted within the realms of what it is 'possible to say'; even if what is 'found out' or said does not coincide with the responsible authority or is contrary to the views of that authority, it will be 'heard' within these terms i.e. of what 'children' can say within the discourse.12

---

11 That is not to say that children do not or cannot 'say' challenging, disruptive or 'discontinuous' things; they obviously can. The point is that they will be either disregarded, accommodated within the discourse in a way that 'neutralises' them, or construct the child within an alternative discourse.

12 This means that even if what is said is contrary to the 'welfare' of the child in that, say, the child expressed views incompatible with their 'welfare' as determined by the and through the discourse, they would still be heard, but reconstituted, reconstructed as, for example, (and obviously depending on what was said) 'immature' or 'dysfunctional', 'disaffected', or located within an interrelated discourse of say, psychoanalysis, criminal justice etc.
Further, in the *Guidance and Regulations* it is stated that

the social worker should be aware and acknowledge that there may be good reasons why the child's views are different from those of his parents or the responsible authority. *The more mature the child, the more fully he will be able to enter into discussion about plans and proposals and participate in the decision-making process.*

Ch.2: para. 2.47:p48 (my italics)

Again, the more mature the child, the closer to full, rational adulthood he is, the more likely he will be able to 'enter the discussion' about 'plans and proposals'. (For this read 'enter the discourse'). The terms on which he or she will be 'heard' (in being commensurate and consistent with the discourse) are already being set before the child has even spoken, as are 'who' can speak (the mature child, ready and willing to enter the discussion) and what can be said (within the parameters of the discussion about 'plans, proposals'). The whole is structured upon a regulated 'emptiness' of what 'child' is 'not' (unwilling or unable to enter the discussion upon these terms). They will enter the discourse about plans and proposals within the context of and parameters set by the *Guidance* (which, because it goes on subsequently to detail what should constitute appropriate plans for the child, leaves little room for manoeuvre here). Maturity, linked to proximity to adulthood, but only defined as such where the child is one who will be willing to enter the discourse, take on a 'subject-identity' as the child 'in need'. Not entering is a non-option; that of either the immature, inarticulate, irrational child or the 'non-child'. The discourse of 'needs' is inextricably linked to this temporal condition; 'needs' in childhood and in child development (*as temporal*) binds childhood to nature, obscuring the normative 'subtext' in the discourse beyond 'recognition'. In the public sphere, 'regulation' must therefore take a particular form and shape; to elucidate these matters we must 'return' to the text.

*Leaving Care*: 'Coming to Terms' with the 'Self'

In this section issues of temporality and transition are examined in relation to the preparation of young people for 'leaving care', detailed in Chapter Seven of the *Guidance*
Childhood Postponed: Metaphor, Differance, Regulation in Residential Care

Regulations 'After-Care: Advice and Assistance'. This chapter is selected for scrutiny because it deals with those who are on the point of transition between childhood and adulthood; they are on the 'edge' of care; on the margin of the margin so to speak; what the Guidance has to say here will say as much about how the local authority is to deal with all children who are 'looked after'.

Chapter 7 deals with the duty of local authorities to:

prepare young people they are looking after for the time when they cease to be so looked after and the powers and duties of local authorities to provide after-care advice and assistance to such young people...

p.97: para.7.1

At the sub-heading 'Principles Underlying Preparation for Leaving Care' paragraph 7.18 states that:

Services for young people must take account of the lengthy process of transition from childhood to adulthood, to reflect the gradual transition of a young person from dependence to independence. The support should be, broadly, the support that a good parent might be expected to give.

p.101: para.7.8

Despite the duties of the local authority under the Act to provide 'after-care advice and assistance', we note in the sub-heading that the principles established in the Guidance are underlying 'preparation for leaving care'. Is this leaving care, 'as we know it', in the sense of 'being 'in care', the institution, the metonym for 'public care', a particular type of intervention, form of child-rearing and regulation? If so, does this not undermine all of the pronouncements, reassurances and principles articulated in the Guidance up to this point about continuity of care and the role of the local authority as a 'reasonable parent'? On the one hand, Guidance 'says' throughout that 'care' should not be regarded negatively, as a euphemism for institutionalisation and control, but as a benign signifier and in practice as a 'positive option' (albeit, as previously discussed provided for particular children and in a systemised way); on the other hand, children are now required to leave it behind and to prepare for doing so. Perhaps what children are really preparing for is to leave the 'discourse' of public care, to prepare for a shift in meaning and signification where regulation no
longer (or not necessarily) inheres in 'care', preparing for a place where regulation no longer needs 'care' as an alibi, where 'care' may signify differently in 'fully present' 'adulthood'.

Remember we are not leaving 'the home' here, the individual physical and metaphorical place where, good, bad or indifferent, children may have been 'brought up' or 'looked after', but 'care'. From child-in-childhood, where 'best interests' can be provided for if not in the family, then 'in care', to young person-in-young adulthood; 'semi-present' adult, where 'rational choices' are becoming the responsibility of the 'self-regulating' individual.

Now the 'care-leaver' (as they are often designated) must leave 'care' behind and take responsibility; this is, in the words of the Guidance “the culmination of a young person's experience in being cared for by a local authority” (p.97: para. 7.3). This is despite the fact that the support must be 'what a good parent might be expected to give'. To leave care behind? Would not the 'good parent' be more likely to be emphasising the continuity of care, despite the transition from child to adult, home to elsewhere?

Further, it is 'services' that will be provided to reflect the 'transition' of 'childhood' which is from dependence to independence. What presence does the child have here, contained within this process and where, in what space, is the qualitative 'relationship' with any care-giver validated, other than within the 'corporate body' acting to provide the support of the 'good parent'? 'Services' must take account, not of the young person, but of the process of transition from dependence to independence, a process which precedes the child and which will no doubt enable the agency to measure and assess the appropriate nature and level of support to facilitate this prefiguring transition from child to adult.

Measured against this scale, and no other, children and young people's 'presence' will be determined, their proximity to fully rational adulthood will be commensurate and consistent with the quality and level of support given.

This emphasis and structuring of childhood, of its characteristics of temporality, development and transition towards a mythical 'independence', objectifies childhood as a determinable 'truth' and therefore manifests in practice in the only way it can; as regulation
(and in the *Guidance, only then*, as we shall see, accounts for 'differences' of a 'recognisable' kind, of disability and culture). Whereas in other settings children's resistance to this progression (perhaps in a child's family, community or, indeed any other 'non-signifying' network of supportive relations) will not necessarily be accepted, but may, at least hold the possibility of being in some way positively accommodated, even validated, here it will more likely be individualised or in some way interpreted problematically. By attempting to facilitate a smooth, supported transition from childhood to adulthood, by even espousing the need, *Guidance* may have the reverse effect, effectively propelling them inappropriately, unprepared into a 'mythical' sphere of 'independent', 'rational' adulthood with detrimental consequences that may well maintain young people after leaving care on the margins, reproducing and reconstituting their exclusion as adults. This seems all the more concerning when it comes to the nature of the 'preparation' that is required.

**Preparing for 'Leaving Care' Behind**

At one level, the *Guidance* does give due consideration to many aspects of young people's lives, albeit in the context first of transition towards 'independence' and second, in preparation for 'leaving care'. These are so embedded in thinking about childhood in public care as to seem hardly worthy of consideration, they can seem like 'inevitable' realities; to debate them at all the vagary of the theorist, removed from the realities of the world. But it is not just that 'contexts' delineate and circumscribe, it is also that in public care, even where an 'holistic' accounting is taken of young people, the 'system' will favour 'measurable progress' and some measures over others - those which are most amenable to 'measurement' - and will facilitate the 'process', that being 'leaving care'. Thus whatever mitigation *Guidance* offers, this 'stage' of a life in 'public care' is irredeemably characterised as 'a process', one that is in correspondence with the 'natural' transition from childhood to adulthood as irreversible, inevitable. Having embarked upon the formalised process of 'leaving care' which corresponds to 'nature' not only is there no going back, but everything
must from then on be measured, assessed and judged in those terms; that is, how far, to what degree or extent the process is progressing towards its completion. Any deviation, disruption does not, therefore fit within this paradigm and can only be judged 'as such' - that is to say within the paradigm (discourse).

Paragraph 7.45 (p.105) of Chapter 7 sets out 'three broad aspects' to preparation for leaving care: "enabling young people to build and maintain relationships with others, (both general and sexual relationships); enabling young people to develop their self -esteem; teaching practical and financial skills and knowledge" (p.105: para. 7.4). In each of these areas, which the Guidance goes on to elaborate in turn, the study will now expose the precedence of transition, temporality and development which occlude 'presence', deferring it always to the 'future' formation of the fully present adult.

Area One: 'Enabling the Young Person to Maintain Relationships with Others'.

In the first area; 'build and maintain relationships with others' this capacity is recognised as:

> crucial to the future well-being of the young person. With such a capacity, he is much more likely to cope with the transition to adulthood and the special difficulties associated with leaving care.

p.105: para. 7.46 (my italics)

Again, the problem is not whether this is 'in fact' 'true', but that fact and truth are constructed out of a particular discourse of childhood which defers the 'presence' of children to their future as adults; this is where the investment must be made; in terms of the process of transition, towards an 'end'; 'now' is subjugated to this imperative and it is the process, not the child, that has precedence. 'Well-being' is for the future, or if it is in the 'present', is manifest in terms of the degree of 'preparedness' for this transition. Further, given the 'special difficulties' associated with 'leaving care' this preparation is all the more crucial. What are these 'special difficulties'? Perhaps the 'stigma' of being a 'care-

---

13 'Special Difficulties' may also include those associated with children coming into care in the first place, and which, by implication in the text may not have been (may not be able to be) 'resolved' at the end of the care experience.
leaver’, the likelihood of low educational achievement and difficulties reflected in the over-
representation of care leavers within the unemployed, those on low incomes, the prison
population and mental health institutions? What of the possibility that these ‘special
difficulties’ which, after all (as the Guidance itself admits) arise out of an association ‘with
leaving care’, are to do with the ‘process’ itself? ‘Special difficulties’ may arise in a context
where the ‘natural’ ‘transition’ from childhood to adulthood is expressed in its ‘purest’
form (as regulation) and where the process itself takes precedence over the individual.

In taking account of the ‘needs’ of children in childhood, relying on professional
‘knowledge’ and theory to determine the ‘best possible’ ‘care’ that a ‘good parent’ might
provide in public care, the state may, albeit inadvertently, more effectively maintain
children who are ‘on the margins’ as adults who remain so. The more ‘knowledge’ that is
acquired, the more certain we become about the ‘needs’ of children and young people
within a constructed state of ‘transition’, the more likely, paradoxically, some children and
young people will be maintained on the ‘other side’ of what ‘is’ ‘childhood’, or
subsequently ‘adulthood’. In this way, a narrow and prescriptive pursuit of aspirations and
expectations (however laudable these may be) for children that may be inconsistent with
what children either want or may be able to achieve may mean that they become more
susceptible to the scrutiny and intervention of the state if their actions and behaviour are
not consistent with expectations both within the present and into adulthood.

Further, it is noteworthy that since all of the Guidance towards building and maintaining
relationships is subordinate to the process of transition in which ‘building and maintaining’
inheres, it is expressed in terms of what ‘should’ happen, not what ‘must’ happen. In other
words, the process must prevail, one way or another; it may be subject to some delay or
postponement, no doubt depending on the ‘age’ or ‘level of maturity’ of the child (or may
indeed be speeded up a lack of co-operation disrupts the system) Ultimately, however,
young people must move on since they do not have a ‘presence’ here other than that of
‘diminishing childhood’ (diminishing ‘needs’ that can be met in childhood), a ‘transitory
status', if they are to occupy the 'future'. This also means that the emphasis, in terms of 'preparedness' will be on the quantifiable, what can be 'seen' and measured, what is done rather than 'how' it is done. In this circumstance, the 'building and maintaining of relationships' will be desirable, but difficult to measure; moreover the youthful objects of attention may well (probably will, even) resist the advice as to what constitutes an 'appropriate' relationship anyway, and form relationships regardless. As an area for preparation then, there is limited value here, the practitioner may well be drawn to more 'fruitful' and quantifiable endeavours with the young person, such as 'teaching' 'skills' for 'independent living' such as cooking, budgeting, to arrive at some 'measures' of preparedness.

Area Two: 'Enabling the Young Person to Develop Their Self-Esteem'.

The second area for 'preparation', 'enabling young people develop their self-esteem' begins with the following paragraph which is reproduced here in full for reasons that will become clear:

Many young people who are being, or have been, cared for, have described feelings of shame about being cared for. These are frequently compounded by misunderstandings on the part of others, e.g. that most young people being cared for have committed criminal offences, or that there is something wrong with them, or that their parents are inadequate and unable to cope. It is therefore all the more necessary to encourage young people, from the day they begin to be cared for, to value themselves; to regard their experience of being cared for without embarrassment; and to be able to explain calmly to other people why they are being cared for and how they feel about it. p.107: para. 7.51 (my italics)

What seeks scrutiny here? A deconstructive reading must "...search within the signifying phenomenon for the crisis or the unsettling process of meaning and subject rather than for the coherence or identity of either one or a multiplicity of structures" (Kristeva: 1981:125). First and foremost there is the use of the term 'cared for'. It appears six times in three sentences. Whereas elsewhere in the text phrases like 'in residential care', 'in the care system', 'for the duration of the placement', 'care placements' proliferate, not to the total
exclusion of 'cared for', but more frequently and as interchangeable with it, here they are noticeable by their absence, as 'cared for' is noticeable by its sudden appearance.

Unlike the aforementioned designations, 'cared for' requires that we are firmly and securely located within the text, within the discourse, in which 'cared for' can signify the particular in a particular way. To read the text otherwise, to remove the paragraph from the Guidance completely and place in front of us 'decontextualised', makes somewhat alarming, incongruous reading. (Reading the paragraph as if it were talking about 'family life', for example makes for startling reading). It does not appear to 'make sense'. It must be read 'in context'. This incongruity is immediately 'chased off' within the body of the text; it 'makes sense' once again.

There is more here, though; even from 'within' we can read it in the Guidance in two ways. If 'cared for', in its 'literal' (metaphorical) sense, signifies 'benignly', a positive 'cared for' arrangement equal amongst others, standing for the benevolence of the state, freely given, without qualification or judgement, without 'signifying' anything else but this, why on earth the 'shame', 'misunderstanding' and 'embarrassment'? Would this not be a mark of ingratitude on the part of the young person, hardly warranting the empathetic tenor of the surrounding text? For the sign to 'make sense' within discourse we must know that it is signifying differently here; its metonymic and metaphoric condition must, can only, mark an absence. It does not 'mean' what it 'says', even though it 'says' what it 'means'. It is, in this 'sense' (if we can keep hold of it) signifying everything that 'cared for' 'is not'. The sense of 'cared for' as familiar, 'close to home' is both necessary and necessarily displaced at the same time. It has to be to 'make sense'. At the point where meaning is 'breaking out' discourse reasserts itself determinedly, firmly, even reassuringly, effecting a 'closure' on this particular subject ('in care is 'cared for') and achieved through iteration. In acknowledging

14If we tried for a minute to substitute 'cared for' with, say 'subjected to a childhood regulated by the state' (not that it is as simple as that, but for the sake of argument) the paragraph begins to make a different sort of sense; one that would indeed seem consistent with some of the stated characteristics of the 'leaving care' experience e.g. low self-esteem, stigmatisation, isolation etc.
many of the negative connotations of care, Guidance must establish, re-enfold, circumscribe the possibility of a disruption, of a rupture in the text. Meaning must be immediately 'closed off'; as readers of the text 'cared for' requires us to 'batten down the hatches' of discourse at the possibility of an impossibility; the text achieves this through the stark juxtaposition of 'cared for' with 'feelings of shame', 'misunderstandings' and 'embarrassment'. In trying to describe this we recall Derrida:

I skid and I drift irresistibly. I am trying to speak about metaphor. To say something proper or literal on the subject, to treat it as my subject, but through metaphor (if one may say so) I am obliged to speak of it more metaphorically. To it in its own manner. I cannot treat it (en traiter) without dealing with it (sans traiter avec elle) without negotiating with it the loan I take from it in order to speak of it. I do not succeed in producing a treatise (un traité) on metaphor which is not treated with (traité avec) metaphor which suddenly appears intractable (intraitable).

Derrida: 1987: 103 (Derrida's italics)

Moreover, these 'feelings of shame' do not 'originate' in 'misunderstandings on the part of others', but are derived from 'being cared for'. Does this mean that 'being cared for' is, however regretfully, intrinsically 'shameful'? Apparently not, given the misunderstandings. But what about what is not apparent? The text states that feelings of shame are compounded by (not 'originated in') certain misunderstandings, e.g. that most young people being cared for have committed criminal offences, or there is something wrong with them or their parents are inadequate or unable to cope. Leaving aside 'inadequate parents' and what may or may not be 'wrong' with those being cared for, is the reader left to infer that those young people who have committed offences should feel ashamed, if not about offending then about being 'cared for'? Do we also infer that those young people being cared for whose parents feel they cannot 'cope' should also feel a sense of shame? Who is deserving of this sense of shame? If 'being cared for' carries within it a degree of shame, as the Guidance seems to be inferring, how is a young person to know whether it belongs to them or not. What of the young person who is being cared for because his parents are deemed 'inadequate' but who subsequently offends? These 'other than' (what childhood 'ought to be') 'misunderstandings' of 'others', articulated in the way they are in the text, seem more likely to ensure a sense of shame than alleviate it. Perhaps that is why, ultimately, these
feelings of shame cannot be counterpoised, qualified or remedied in the text; they do indeed derive from 'being cared for'; they can, however, be compounded and it is this, and only this, that the guidance will ensure against. This is why it becomes necessary to encourage young people to 'value themselves', to accept their destiny and to be able to 'explain calmly' why they are being cared for. Above all, to explain calmly, to have acquiesced, to have entered the discourse, to have unproblematically inherited the 'shame' that inheres in being 'cared for', in a place where you 'ought not' to 'be', where to 'be' is deferred, postponed, left only with all that 'being cared for' 'is' 'not'.

Finally, in this area of 'preparation' advice is given as to how young people may achieve this sense of valuing themselves:

In doing this [referring to the preceding paragraph] it is particularly helpful if young people are told as much about their family background and about all aspects of their cultural and individual identity, e.g. race, language, culture, sex, religion and any physical or mental disability... A young person's individual identity and his cultural background should be presented to him in a positive light and not as something about which he should feel defensive.

p.107: para. 7.52

Remember that much of what lies in the preparation for 'leaving care' so far is as an investment in the future, displacing the possibility of childhood as 'present' and advancing children along an unstoppable route to 'independence' in 'adulthood'. Here, in relation to the formation of the 'present' adult; the 'sense of self', of 'identity' is to be found for those at the point of transition in the past. 'Being' 'in care' is again deferred to the past, the temporal quality of childhood is what requires this; collecting up the past, whatever fragments of knowledge about family, culture or whatever, in order to 'discover' as the emerging adult an 'identity' and 'culture'. But this is not only a journey of 'self-discovery'; the young person's 'individual identity and culture' is to be presented to him in a positive light and not as something to feel defensive about. Signs of the fear of instability. 'Identity' is not

---

13This bleak scenario urgently needs qualifying. Of course, many practitioners, many children, even managers and policy-makers resist and work against this imperative (which is of regulation) and many children and staff may find the experience of residential care consequently positive and rewarding. The point is that it is 'there' to work against; not as some residue of the Workhouse but alive and well in the Guidance that is the very means by which 'progress' out of history is supposed to made.
'represented' to him or even 'presented in a positive light', but presented to him; it is a
'present' (as in gift) of sorts. 'Identity' is constructed, on behalf of the young person out of
the information given to him and what he is 'told' about all aspects of family background
and 'cultural and individual identity'. In one sense at least, this 'identity' then, is ready and
waiting; it must simply be told, and told in a particular way ("the use of life-story books
may be helpful") (para. 7.52). Aspects of cultural and individual identity are listed as race,
religion, language, culture, sex or any physical or mental disability; these must be
accommodated within the one identity, the self-present self. 'Differences', whatever might
disrupt the cohesion of this identity must be 'smoothed out', accommodated, made to
cohere for the young person to 'value themselves', to be of value as the 'adult'. Above all,
the young person must not be made to feel defensive, but not just, it seems, about
individual identity, but also about 'cultural background' (not cultural identity, not family
background, but cultural background).

Why is this singled out in this way? Why should the young person be likely to feel
defensive? Perhaps because any difference (not previously validated) must be made
amenable to the identity which is being presented, manifested as 'coming to terms' with
one's 'past' and 'cultural background' lest differences provoke instability, fulfill the potential
for disruption; a fear, possibly, of 'racial tension' arising in the adult. How to master all of
these aspects that constitute 'identity' in a highly regulated environment which 'presents'
'identity' on their behalf? Not surprisingly, Guidance suggests that "some young people may
need considerable counselling before they do come to accept themselves" (para.7.53);
more 'specialist' knowledge may be required before the young person becomes fully
conversant with the discourse and is able to articulate 'themselves' as having a coherent,
constituted 'identity'.

Again, in this area as with the previous, the suggestion is not that all of this
'preparation' must have taken place before the young person is 'moved on'. On the
contrary, since determining things like 'identity', 'accepting ones self' and the like are
hardly susceptible to quantification, attention and focus for decisions for 'moving on' are more likely to be on the basis of, for example whether the young person has a job, the possibility of accommodation and suchlike. 'Identity' is not something tangible that we can point to; it is, of course, not 'there' to be found anyway. But this is not to say that children and young people will not be 'judged' in some way or another; the point again is that in the pseudo-scientific application of a 'childhood', the presence of children is obliterated (only arguably too strong a term); all that prevails is regulation, rigged and manicured in the attire of 'good practice' in the Guidance.

Area Three: 'Practical and Financial Skills and Knowledge'.

The Guidance has less to offer on practical and financial skills and knowledge (devoting less than a page to this area) but in doing so, perhaps says more. The Guidance begins by setting out a list of all the practical and other skills that are regarded as necessary for leaving care. These include (p. 108: para. 7.55): 'how to shop for, prepare and cook food'; 'Eating a balanced diet'; 'Applying for social security benefits'; 'Applying for housing and locating and maintaining it'; 'Registering with a doctor or dentist' etc. Here, the Guidance is concerned with what is more clearly measurable and ascertainable; perhaps then it is primarily these matters that will be attended to and on which emphasis is placed. Not that each and every skill will be acquired by the point at which the young person leaves, but that achieving 'independence' comes to define and characterise the experience of being 'in care' through the acquisition of these skills. 'In care', the young person is always 'in process'; practical skills are the tangible reminder that this is so. Guidance goes on to state that:

Some young people who are being cared for [note 'cared for' here; always a sign of something to come that will stretch the parameters of meaning], particularly those in children's homes, do not have the opportunity of learning such skills. It may therefore be necessary to change the regime [here's why 'cared for' was needed] at the homes concerned to give them that opportunity. Young people who are being cared for should - like any other young people - start to learn these skills at a basic level when in their teens and should be well advanced by the time they leave care.
'Like any other young people'; but not, precisely because they are 'cared for'. Not like other young people in that leaving care will statistically take place at a much younger age than the rest of the population will leave home and whose skills, even then, may be far from 'advanced'. Further, Guidance admits the possibility of care as institutionalising where it states that children 'do not have any opportunity of learning such skills' and 'it may be necessary to change the regime'. It is the regime that must change in order to advance firstly the proposition; 'like any other young people' as an affirmative (that is, 'like others' when it comes to acquiring skills towards 'independence', but not always; for example, when other children in say, a family, do not subscribe to a sequenced transition and contravene 'progression' by not acquiring these skills, with or without the approval/concern of the 'good parent'); and secondly, in order to place emphasis in the environment on a regulatory progression towards independence (thus also requiring the reinstatement of 'cared for' as a 'safety measure' to close off any possibility of regulation becoming too exposed, too 'raw' in its 'presence').

Of course, it is not that learning practical skills, building self-esteem and building relationships are not important things to 'do'; the issue is what is done 'in the name' of all of the aforementioned, how they are done and what happens 'by default' in the process as an unintended consequence.

Independence?

The idea of the developing child in care being constantly progressed and in some ways 'processed', ready for the day on which they can be 'discharged' is one which both constructs and is reflected in the way in which children and young people are 'looked after' within the residential setting where the focus is on achieving targets and goals, task-centred practice, emphasising linearity and progress towards the idea of 'full independence'. Because of the need to 'measure' such progress, the focus is on acquiring practical skills despite the stress on an holistic approach: how to cook, clean, shop, budget money.
Reluctance to co-operate with the goal may often be seen in terms of individual failure; a lack of interest between in adhering to prescribed targets often interpreted as indolence; active pursuit of other activities and interests, especially where those interests do not coincide with those prescribed may be more easily construed as problematic or even delinquent. Pressures on limited residential resources compound the sense that a young person may have of having 'outstayed their welcome'. Achieving any sense of being 'looked after' is thus conditional upon the degree of conformity a young person is willing or able to demonstrate according to the organisation. Demonstrating a degree of 'self sufficiency', in terms of holding down a job or employment scheme, making limited demands on the organisation and on the professionals within it is rewarded with the gradual withdrawal of 'support' and progression further towards the goal of 'independence'. In material terms, 'independence' may mean access to self-contained accommodation outside of the 'care system' where individuals are able to meet the criteria and win the confidence of professionals within and external to the organisation, or accommodation of a lower quality where it is felt that a young person still represents a degree of uncertainty with regard to their ability to conform.

'Independence' is the prize and the goal; anxiety expressed through unco-operative behaviour is not often met with reassurance and more time but with greater pressure to move on. Notions of independence, packaged into care plans and programmes are designed to prepare young people for the so-called 'reality' of life in the community but can be seen as achieving the very opposite. Who, after all, is independent? What does independence mean? How many social work professionals and policy-makers would regard themselves as 'independent'? It is more than possible that the very notion of independence, rather than 'enabling' and 'empowering' an individual to exercise greater control over their lives, increases anxiety and uncertainty about what the wider community is all about and their individual ability to cope within it. Most adults rely on a variety of individuals or groups both within their immediate familial setting and beyond in order to
achieve any sense of ‘coping’ with the pressures of living in the community. Young people in the care system are required to achieve a level of self-sufficiency and self-containment well beyond that which is expected of others. Further, where they are unwilling or unable to do so, they may be disregarded and effectively punished by the withdrawal of further support.

It may well be the case that young people ‘looked after’ often ‘know’ a very great deal about ‘independence’ in that they may have come from environments in which they have had to exercise autonomous decision-making or been faced with a degree of responsibility for themselves or for younger siblings which would not be the expectation of other children. To this extent, it may be more productive for the social worker to enable a child or young person to develop a degree of dependency and inter-dependency, rather than any facile and mythical notion of independence. Further, ‘independence’ may be associated with notions of not asking for help, that doing so implies failure, letting people down. The young person must strike a difficult balance; on the one hand full co-operation, despite any personal anxiety, will hasten a departure from a ‘looked after’ environment and is likely to result in isolation in a fully independent setting, on the other hand a lack of co-operation may stall the inevitable for a while, but if prolonged, and involving behaviour that is deemed problematic, this will also result in a hasty exit from care. Something in between, enough conformity to maintain the support and sympathy of the organisation for a while may postpone a move, but combined with intermittent wavering - but always ensuring that non-conformity does not include behaviour implying ingratitude or arrogance, or which threatens the smooth running of the institution. A step too far in the wrong direction may not only result in expulsion, but also criminalisation or a mental health categorisation. Young People ‘in care’ are thus caught up in a ‘double bind’, a ‘catch 22’, a Cuckoo’s Nest, which ensures that at either side of the fence (deserving/non-deserving, innocent/depraved, victim/perpetrator) they are enclosed within discourse and maintained ‘on the margins’, articulated on behalf of the ‘mainstream’, signifying the ‘is’ of
'family' and childhood that is otherwise non-present.

'Looked After' children are a captive audience; 'knowledge', expertise and theory (the more, the better) can be applied in a controlled experiment in the name of the liberal and benevolent state (where welfare is the means by which, the 'common humanity' of the community at large, is expressed). All that is 'known', all that has been discovered about childhood can be put into practice in order to ensure the 'best possible' care; here 'in childhood' children are the future; the investment and inauguration of the rational, 'surface competent' adult. It is this interpretation of 'good quality care', one designed to ensure the 'best possible outcomes' for children which is the aspiration of the 'Looking After Children' materials examined in the following section.

'Looking After' Childhood - The 'LAC' System

The 'Looking After Children' ('LAC' hereinafter) system (Parker et al: 1991) is designed to provide a range of materials (information-gathering forms, assessment forms, training, management and implementation guidance and materials) to improve "parenting experiences and outcomes for children looked after" (Management and Implementation Guide: DoH: 5:1995). Whereas the Guidance claimed "to provide a framework for good practice" in respect of residential care and was not "intended to be a detailed guide to good practice" (Guidance and Regulations: 2:1991), LAC provides for all 'looked after' children the possibility of introducing ideas "about child care outcomes into social work practice" (DoH: 5:1995).

For this study it has been argued that 'looked after' is not a straightforward sign; its abundance and repetition indicates that it is part of complex networks of meaning and signification, often justifying contradictory actions. Within LAC, the practitioner is not only working within a 'framework' (which can itself produce unintended consequences) but is required to implement 'knowledge' 'systematically', and in a much more explicit way than in the Guidance. In LAC, 'looking after' is not only in the sense of 'attending to', or
Caring for', but 'literally' 'looking' ('seeing') children 'after' (beyond children, childhood) towards 'outcomes', measured against the rational adult. As Garrett suggests "...this notion of results, and a more general preoccupation - even fixation - with quantitative analysis and the 'measurement' of 'performance', is one of the defining characteristics of the LAC systems 'outcomes discourse" (Garrett: 1999:30). On the basis of 'supporting research', (Parker et al (1991); Ward, H. (ed) (1995); Moyers, S. (1997); Ayres, M (1998)) a majority of local authority social services departments have now introduced the LAC system. By aiming to improve 'parenting experiences' (children's experience mediated through the particular, the child's experience of being 'parented' by the corporate body, not experiences 'other than'), children are more effectively manoeuvred into a childhood commensurate with their 'needs': needs which are articulated, unambiguously through the LAC system. Thus, the materials provided "set out a number of aims that a reasonable parent might be expected to hold for child...they also require that plans are made...and that these are rigorously acted upon" (DoH (1995):5: para. 1.2) and further, at paragraph 1.3:

> Used systematically, the materials also benefit the local authority...to produce an aggregate picture of the characteristics of children looked after...and the outcomes of their experiences. They also collect the data...to complete the SSDA 903 return required annually by the Department of Health

These 'secondary' benefits which coincide with a requirement to produce data further reinforce an emphasis, albeit unintended, on actions, rather than actors, on what is done, rather than how it is done, despite the stress in the materials against seeing LAC as simply a 'form-filling' exercise:

> Although responses to many questions (in the Assessment and Action Records) can be given by simply ticking a box, completing the Records is not intended to be a mere question-and-answer, fact-finding procedure. The questions encourage discussion about issues that are known to be important to the long-term well-being of children

p.27: para. 4.19

The main 'tool' provided in the documentation is the 'Assessment and Action Record' which is designed to assess children's progress, monitor care and plan improvements
across seven ‘developmental dimensions’. These are: Health; Education; Identity; Family and Social Relationships; Social Presentation; Emotional and Behavioural Development; Self Care Skills. The records aim to help practitioners to “assess all aspects of children’s development from birth to adulthood” (DoH (1995): p.9: para. 2.15) and within each dimension age-specific aims are identified “which carers should encourage children and young people to meet” (p.10: para. 2.17). A series of detailed questions will then establish “whether children are being offered the experiences which research suggests are necessary for their satisfactory progress” (p.10: para. 2.17). Experiences must be consistent not only with progress, but with aims that are age-specific; other experiences are occluded and children only occupy a kind of ‘present’ in a mythical space; whilst their actions and behaviours are ‘in the here and now’ as measurable manifestations of transition towards adulthood, they ‘themselves’, whatever ‘sense’ they make of all of this (and of ‘filling’ the ‘space’ of ‘presence’ with other possibilities) and the rest of the social world are ‘outside’ of time; relocated in a ‘childhood’ bereft of rationality; innocent but dangerous, of nature but requiring the supplement; their actions of observational value and ‘in’ childhood, their ‘selves’ rendered of childhood and of ‘value’ only inasmuch as they manifest ‘childhood’ (either as ‘complete’ or as ‘lacking’ in some dimension or other).

Whatever ‘outcome data’ is derived from the assessment can subsequently be used not to re-evaluate the presuppositions that may belie the system, or to ‘intercept’ the progress of the child through development (though it may make ‘improvements’ towards achieving this for the individual), but, on an aggregated basis for “evaluating the service provided” (para. 2.14). The Management and Implementation Guide goes on to state that the “records can ensure that children receive a standard of care that helps them achieve satisfactory outcomes wherever they are living” (p.12: para. 2.24). Does this mean that when children are living at home they are assumed to be achieving satisfactory outcomes, and that it is only wherever children are living ‘in care’ that the Record will ensure ‘outcomes’? The phrase ‘wherever they are living’ signifies ‘innocuously’, reassuring the
reader of the benevolence of the system in improving outcomes 'everywhere'. For a moment, an 'unqualified' configuration of signs allows a lapse into passive acceptance of the value and worth of LAC universally (this can only be a momentary lapse; just long enough to entertain the possibility of universal application, which must be swiftly dismissed before the implications can be realised). But the language seduces the reader, briefly, but necessarily, in order to continue thus: "When children change placements ... a copy of the most recent Record should follow them in order to preserve continuity of care" (para. 2.24). So it is, of course not 'children everywhere', but children in public care who are subject to a degree of observation and surveillance that would otherwise be unpalatable, even intolerable in the liberal state. In context, the system can signify benignly; out of 'context' it represents the excessive intrusion of the state into individual liberty and family autonomy.

This ambivalence and duality in signification is further manifest when the Guide addresses the arrangements for children receiving respite care; those situated somewhat more precariously between public and family care, where sensitivity to excessively regulatory processes is more acute and perhaps more likely to be challenged by the 'articulate', 'educated' parent, particularly where such care is normally provided in a 'purely' supportive and non-stigmatising capacity, e.g. for families with children who have a disability. Here, use of the Assessment and Action records "will be a matter for discretion" (p.12: para. 2.25); indeed, they "may not prove helpful for children who receive short and occasional periods of respite accommodation", but they are recommended where "children receive more than 120 days respite care within a twelve month period". Not to have suggested the use of the records in respite care would be too anomalous, too stark a juxtaposition of difference; again, LAC must represent itself as 'universally' positive, at the same time as targeting a specific group of children. In fact, in its implementation, many local authorities make only limited use of LAC in respite care, but this does not matter, the principle is already established; application is now appropriately a matter for 'discretion'.

The 'positive' value of LAC in either looked after or respite arrangements is not the question here; it is completely beside the point. This study is an examination of how LAC works as part of a wider process which differentiates and regulates particular children in a particular way beneath the alibi of the 'is' of 'childhood', child development, 'needs' and 'best interests'. Indeed, the very fact this study is required to qualify the argument all along the way is indicative not of its inherent 'weakness', but of the inherent strength and inclusive power of discourse; any challenge to the orthodoxy can be swiftly dismissed with derision as abandoning 'self-evident' imperatives about the need to improve standards of care and outcomes for 'looked after' children.

In addition to the Assessment and Action Records, the system provides information, planning and review forms to support the sequential assessment and review process; these comprise; Essential Information Record, Placement Plan, Care Plan and Review form, all of which, in combination, fulfil all of the requirements of the Children Act (1989) in respect of looked after children and those of the Guidance and Regulations. Overall, LAC represents a comprehensive attempt to 'get beyond' legal, policy and guidance 'frameworks' and into 'practice' 'itself'. It is as if the LAC system is appealing to our very sense of 'common sense' (that which is so often 'uncommon') by presenting a 'practical' approach to ensure all of those things that we should all aspire to for all our children; an appeal to liberal professionalism to 'get a grip' on 'childhood' and 'child care' on the basis of what we all really 'know'; to abandon any abstruse, 'esoteric abstractions' of childhood and provide a firmer footing in 'reality' (see also Garrett: 1999).

In auditing progress towards implementation (Moyers: 1997), it was thus:

...important to know whether and to what extent, the forms were being used in local authorities (so as to enable) audited local authorities to identify successful implementation...; identify and clarify issues that help or hinder implementation in order to make necessary adjustments; identify whether local authorities are likely to collect sufficient data about children that can be collected together and used as management information.

Moyers: 1997:4
There is a self-confidence here, an unqualified certainty about ‘what needs to be done’: the key lies merely in the effective implementation of the system. In one sense, ‘theory’ is no longer ‘theoretical’ (hypothetical, conjectural, suppositional, debatable), within a contested field of study and interpretation, but ‘actual’, truthful, authentic and most of all, verifiable (being based on ‘supporting research’), self-verifying within discourse and through the operation of the system. Within the LAC discourse, the fear of a disturbance, of the potential for instability of the signs ‘child’ or ‘childhood’ is thus regulated.

The Ubiquitous ‘Corporate Parent’

In Chapter Four the Guide describes LAC as a means of “setting down on paper the process by which ordinary parents make plans and monitor the progress of their children, (it) enables agencies to fulfil both their parental obligations and their statutory duties towards the children and young people they look after” (P.23: para. 4.3, my italics) and later (p.23: para: 4.3):

...research has shown that when responsibilities for care are divided between a number of people, important parenting tasks can be overlooked unless they are written down. If the materials are viewed as a bureaucratic exercise they will not be used properly; on occasions supervisors may need to encourage staff to think beyond the mechanics of form-filling to the dynamic process it represents. (my italics).

Encouragement to ‘think beyond’ form-filling not only retains the primacy of form-filling (that which must be ‘thought beyond’), it also displaces the presence of the child further, subjugating them to the ‘dynamic process’ form-filling represents. At the risk of bureaucratising the care of children, the system points the practitioner not to the child, but to the process that the system prescribes; ‘dynamism’ is encouraged between process and bureaucracy, not between ‘child’ and ‘practitioner’; process and bureaucracy prefigure both; it is the actions of the monitored and the monitor that find a ‘presence’. Further, by transcribing ‘parenthood’ into the corporate body, a central proposition of the LAC system, the sign ‘reasonable parent’ does not signify ‘freely’, but in a particular way; ‘nature’ and the supplement are ‘made one’; the ‘reasonableness’ of parenthood is in both
its compatibility and constitution within the discourse; 'reason' resides not in the 'parent' 'themselves', but in LAC and is to be meted out by the corporate body.\footnote{As discussed previously, this notion of the 'reasonable parent' was derived from the Children Act 1989 (s.31)}

The effect, as Garrett (1999) suggests, may be perceived as "marginalising, even disparaging a child or young person’s actual parent(s) with whom the local authority is supposed to be working in partnership" (Garrett: 1999:32). 'Reason' is not the property of the family of the child who is 'looked after', they are on the 'other side' (at the same time as managing to be constructed as 'partners'); as such they do not represent, but constitute the absence not only of 'reason', but of other signifiers in the text (discourse): 'family', 'care', 'looked after', and 'childhood'. This appropriation of meaning and signification is what allows all of these to signify 'other than'; and to signify this 'otherness' not only unproblematically (and 'unrecognisably'), but 'appropriately', above all, meaningfully (as in 'full' of 'other' meaning) within the discourse of public care.\footnote{In other words and 'in context'; they metaphorically and metonymically 're-present' the 'unfamiliar'.}

Indeed, their very potency and 'fullness' of meaning, their resonance within the text (discourse), becomes itself a mythical sign in the Barthesian sense of 'second order signification' (Barthes: 1957), not of excessive intervention and/or regulation, but of 'progress'. Such is the power of language. The 'dynamic process' referred to is in this way one of re-constituting meaning, reconstituting subjects within discourse.

It is in this way that the Assessment and Action Records are able to identify "the aims of a reasonable parent for a child at each age and stage of development" (p.26: para. 4.13), regardless of what an 'actual' parent might or might not do. The process will also ensure that the child in question is "being offered the type of experiences and quality of care which research has identified as necessary to long-term well-being" (p.26: para. 4.13). Quality of care and experience are inextricably linked with the aims of the 'reasonable parent' where reasonableness is derived from within the discourse and 'parent' is an alibi for the corporate body. 'Long-term well-being' is in turn the culmination of a particular
construction of childhood for which 'research', relying upon all of the same presuppositions of LAC, is able to identify the necessary 'care and experiences'.

The 'foundation' here, of 'reasonable parent' which arises in discourse, is thus further self-verified by the 'research' that subsequently and continually (through data collection and outcome measurement) goes to inform and validate the framework for LAC (see also Garrett: 1999). That this 'reasonable parent' bases child-rearing activity broadly upon 'developmental psychology' with an appropriate degree of accommodation/sensitivity/acquiescence to 'rights' (normally a nod towards the child as 'citizen'), cultural differences and the 'sociological' - just enough to remain 'within' discourse and 'on message', is hardly surprising. Structuring the Assessment and Action records around developmental areas and age bands "mirror(s) the teleological approach which characterizes developmental psychology" (Garrett: 1999: 35) and creates the risk (or, perhaps, necessity) of children being regarded more as 'human becomings' than 'human beings' (see Qvortrup: 1994: 4, cited in Garrett: 1999: 35).

A 'Meaningful' Conversation

We have already pointed to the stress placed in the LAC system on the need not to regard the process as a form-filling exercise. In the Guide this need is further explained: "Assessment and Action Records are designed to set an agenda for meaningful conversation between children and young people...in order to ensure that all the necessary tasks of parenting have been addressed" This 'getting beyond' the form-filling and 'beneath' the surface of paperwork, process and information-gathering towards what we might call a 'depth encounter' is, however, only meaningful in a particular sense, not least because any conversation will be 'meaningful' in some way or another; here, though the 'value', 'meaning' and 'presence' of conversation is in relation to the completion of 'parenting tasks' within the discourse of public care, and LAC in particular.
Any 'depth' then, is to be experienced not 'beneath' the surface or away from the system and towards the child, but 'upon' the surface (to extend the metaphor); it is structured upon the surface as a temporary refuge for the child to 'inhabit'. Just when the practitioner, weighed down by the paperwork, might feel a way 'out', the discourse anticipates and subsumes any encounter within its field of signification. By 'helpfully' encouraging the practitioner towards creative ways of 'engaging' the child, 'meaningful conversation' is particularised and circumscribed in ways that attach meaning not only to the conversation, but to the 'system', and thereby the discourse; meaning derived from the conversation is thus destined for appropriation to the production and sustentation (sustenance) of the system (discourse); it is its very 'lifeblood'. In this way, any 'appearance' of the 'child' at the 'centre' is only inasmuch as their constructed 'needs' present themselves and the extent to which the child's superimposed 'development' can be assessed, 'measured', 'addressed' in one way or another and subsequently 'inputted' 'on an aggregate basis' into the data bank of the Department of Health. We can see a possible modus operandi where the Guide proffers an example from the Assessment and Action Record relating to the diet of children 'looked after':

...the dietary questions could be answered in isolation, providing accurate information about the food offered to a particular child. However, those completing the records need to appreciate that the value of asking questions is the opportunity they create for exploring with a child or young person the nature and importance of a balanced diet, and for considering what new foods s/he might like to try. Such a conversation could take place between carer and child in an informal setting, perhaps while preparing a meal. The child could then help the carer transfer the conversation to the Record at an appropriate time. Responses about such issues will provide a live, snapshot picture of a child at a particular age.

p.27: para. 4.19 (my italics)

Perhaps it is significant that the Guide selects dietary questions as the example of an opportunistic use of LAC; not only because preparing food will be one of the regular occurrences in the daily life of the placement but also because the need for food, as an uncontested universal 'need' provides an innocuous 'way in' to the 'needs discourse'; where this extent of prescription about the nature and context of 'meaningful conversation' might seem excessive, overly paternalistic or too explicitly 'value-laden', here
it seems eminently reasonable and appropriate. The 'subject matter' of the conversation makes the form and context (LAC as the 'vehicle' for the conversation) more amenable to the reader. Indeed, later in the Guide, it is acknowledged that more 'emotionally charged' issues such as 'sexuality and contraception' will require preparatory work where supervisors may also need "to alert practitioners to local agency policies for addressing sensitive issues...before raising them with children" (p.29: para. 4.28). So the example relates to the relatively 'neutral' topic of diet explicitly (almost) to illustrate the extent to which it is anticipated that LAC will nevertheless infiltrate in all 'areas of development' the 'everyday', informal encounter between carer and child.

It is in the very fact of reaching into the minutiae of daily life, presented as a positive means of avoiding an over-bureaucratic approach that LAC occludes the presence of the child and 'fragments' the 'carer subject'. Again, 'interaction' and the 'experiential' are structured to the extent of rendering each and every encounter potentially devoid of spontaneity and creativity since the carer must, at all times, even in an 'informal setting' retain the possibility of filling in the form appropriately at a 'later date' and sensing whether or not to take a 'live snapshot picture of the child at a particular age', not unlike a photo-journalist always on the ready for the next event in the picture-narrative, anticipating, one step removed from surrounding events and people. The relationship with the child is not only mediated, filtered and diffused but constituted as such through the system - behaviour, action and events; 'what' is done becomes the 'presence' of childhood; one which is permanently and irrevocably recorded on the forms. Such is the productivity of discursive practices.

Moreover, the creative and the imaginative, far from being banished from the discourse, are also embraced within; thus, at p.27:para. 4.20:

experienced practitioners will use the Records creatively and imaginatively; they will discover that each question can stimulate a further 20...If the records are to used to maximum effect, each question needs to framed according to the child's understanding and stage of development...discussion should be allowed to move from one dimension to another in whatever sequence is most helpful to the child.
Far from subvert or challenging the system then, creativity and imagination can be used to extend the discourse further; ‘experience’ will enable the practitioner not to be guided by the child, but to use imagination and creativity to ‘helpfully’ enable the child to move sequentially through the landscape of their pre-determined childhood from one dimension to another.

‘Dumbing Down’ Child Care Practice

Where the role of the supervisor may have been one of engaging in an opportunity to discuss productively some of the uncertainty, relativity and situational condition of ‘theory in practice’, within LAC the Guide suggests that:

The Assessment and Action Records introduce a number of issues which supervisors should raise with staff. They give a comprehensive picture of child development with which practitioners undertaking child care work should be familiar. Social workers are sometimes so swamped by crises in a child’s life that they forget to monitor everyday matters. Moreover, their understanding of developmental norms may become eroded by unremitting contact with situations where standards of care are not reasonable.

p.28: para. 4.25

Certainly, a familiarity with ‘child development’ is pertinent to the practitioner, but the problem here is that what might have been ‘theories of child development’ (and, perhaps even other understandings and theories) are now singularised and made definitive; discussion is only about the comprehensiveness of the social worker’s ‘picture’ compared with that of the system; with certainty versus uncertainty, familiarity with unfamiliarity. The possibility of being ‘swamped’ by crises is cause to revisit the ‘everyday’ on the basis of this knowledge, to re-assert ‘truth’ and ‘monitor’, not to question how such crises, and the response to them may themselves be constituted in part by such knowledge. Again, the question might be asked how familiar the ‘reasonable parent’ would be with the comprehensive picture of child development presented by LAC? - and how, they too may be so ‘swamped’ by crises of one sort or another that they ‘forgot’ to monitor everyday
In the same section the reader is advised that "Moreover, their (social workers) understanding of developmental norms may become eroded by unremitting contact with situations where standards of care are not reasonable" (p.28: para. 4.25). This is just to confirm that we are within a discourse of public care; 'reasonableness' means something else here than it does elsewhere. Accepting that many children in many familial situations are looked after 'reasonably' who never come into contact with the social services and that within those situations many adults involved in child-rearing do not, in fact, have as extensive a knowledge of 'child development' as that provided by LAC, 'reasonable' must mean something else for these 'families'. However, once within the scrutiny of the local authority, 'reasonable' stands for the measures of developmental norms in LAC; an understanding of which may be eroded where the standard of care does not match up to these measures.

But perhaps it is the possibility of thinking differently about 'standards of care' that is eroded when 'reasonable' must signify the 'corporate parent' and the 'standards' presented by LAC. Other standards of care, reasonable or not, seem more likely to be judged on the side of unreasonable in this circumstance. This is the case particularly when the task is not to encounter the child or family on their own terms, or acquire different understandings of child-rearing activities, or to engage with differences of 'knowing' of or about childhood, but to measure, measure, measure, always guarding against the possibility of becoming desensitised to standards that may have slipped, or which, within discourse, are simply on the other side of reason. The presumption of 'unremitting contact' with 'unreason' is thus self-validating and may ensure that the most marginalised and vulnerable children and families remain characterised as such and that the social worker will inevitably see more and more standards of care which are 'unreasonable' the more that LAC is unashamedly driven into the 'everyday thinking' about the 'everyday matters' encountered by the social
worker. This is not only about an occlusion of differences arising from culture, class, race or ethnicity, but differences between any one child and the next, any one ‘family’ and the next, given the way in which ‘knowing’ and encountering each and every child and family is circumscribed by discourse.

Within LAC then, there is little space for alternative interpretation. ‘Re-readings’, whilst they always/already inhere in practice, will not find a place in the system. Whilst based on ‘theory’, LAC represents and constitutes an example of increased anti-intellectualism in social work by presenting child care work (and childhood) as predictable, determinable and devoid of contradiction, complexity and relativity despite occasional protestations to the contrary (see also Dominelli: 1996). In doing so within this ‘safe haven’ of childhood, it also lends itself to some of the anti-intellectual sanctimony of the ‘do-gooder’ (politicians and the like) set resolutely on securing children within a childhood that through the self-interest of some adults enables a particular view of the world to prevail. ‘Theory’ can be acquired in qualifying courses and then dumped on the doorstep of practice as the practitioner goes armed with a briefcase full of checklists, forms and outcome measures.

It is worth pausing to consider how would it be (however implausible) if the state required Action and Assessment Records to be completed on behalf of all children? What to make of an individual ‘childhood’ then, with it there, before you, displayed and dissected into areas of development, a new booklet for each developmental milestone? A ‘self’ disaggregated, appropriated into discourse explicitly, unequivocally, leaving nothing implied; disseminated into elements, mini ‘objects’, constituents of enquiry and assessment? Whence the ‘wild imaginings’ or the ‘obstinate questionings of sense’ of childhood (of adults about childhood) out of which the possibility of the ‘presence’ in and of the moment; of making a sense of ‘self’ out of a childhood that is public property? As a remaining vestige of the project of Modernity, LAC is inflicted experimentally upon some children and may consign them to the pursuit of a ‘presence’ as adults that is constructed out of a ‘truth’, a ‘childhood’ that was never really ‘there’ but superimposed upon them
much more explicitly, un provisionally and definitively than for other children; placing them in the unenviable position of always 'going against' and resisting, rather than 're-inventing' themselves 'freely'; either rejecting and defining themselves as 'other than' or accepting 'fate'.

Of course, LAC is not meant for all children, but some children in particular; those who represent, on behalf of all children, the threat of instability and disruption; those who must therefore, be irredeemably secured in childhood.

Moreover, given this comprehensive, all-embracing 'accounting for' of children's 'needs' in public care, what then of those who resist; the 'continuing-to-be' 'wayward' child, the offender, the care-leaver whose previously 'deserving nature' (in childhood) has not been matched as 'becoming-adult' by co-operation, conformity and 'gratitude'? Might they not be more resolutely, justifiably, 'appropriately' pathologised and/or contained (in their own and the community's interests) or otherwise excluded of their own volition (and therefore non-deserving)? And who, that will be 'heard' within the 'continuity' of discourse, in the absence of any 'depth' encounter, and in the 'presence' of all the 'evidence' (LAC) will say 'something else' about childhood; that it was not 'like that'?

Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that the temporal quality of childhood, characterised by postponement and deferral, has consequences for all children, but particular consequences for children in public care. Whereas in Chapter five, the study searched for the marks of incoherence in the Guidance, suggesting the arbitrariness of the 'truth' presented therein, this chapter has examined some of the particularities that are manifest in public care; the ubiquitous deferrals and postponements that are all the more accentuated for children 'looked after'. Paradoxically, by even striving for children in public care to have 'more of a say', they in actuality end up with 'less' of a say (or more, but more of the same thing), since 'what can be said' is all the more circumscribed by discourse. To this extent, the harder the well-intentioned practitioner tries to engage or include the child through the
further deployment of knowledge, expertise and social work 'tools', the less opportunity there is for the child to 'say' anything for themselves that is not either more of the same (a repetition that occludes difference) or different and therefore not counted. By imposing a quasi-scientific rationality to looking after children in public care, children are perpetually deferred to an 'other' presence; indeed, they may well be active themselves in this process. LAC can thus only ever signify a kind of self-generated absence as children constantly slip away to the margins and re-inscribed within discourse, only to again slip away. The purer the theoretical model of childhood that is imposed, the less it can be realised in actuality. We do not understand children by virtue of the knowledges that constitute the discourse of childhood; rather, we make sense of children retrospectively; that is, we view them retrospectively through the discourse of childhood which we as adults inhabit (albeit in the nano-second between experience and meaning). Children are somewhere else altogether, unbeknown to us, signifying freely.

On the other hand, LAC may ironically provide a prime opportunity; one that arises out of its very positioning and exposure; it leaves itself open, perhaps much more so than the Guidance and Regulations, to deconstruction; the possibility remains to engage deconstructively with the process, with children and with others responsible for 'looking after' children. After all, the LAC enterprise is an impossibility; it seeks to position itself in a 'social and economic vacuum' (Garrett: 1999:42) and sets itself down, centre stage for all to see, wearing the emperor's new clothes; without nuance or subtlety (so often the characteristic of regulation); what is often inferred is now made explicit; LAC provides for itself the opportunity for the 'incoherence' to 'speak for itself'. Competent practitioners may, with children, reverse the 'incoherence' in the text(s), away from the prospect of unregulated childhood that is the 'sub-text' of the LAC system, towards the system itself and thus positively and affirmatively assert 'themselves'.
CHAPTER SEVEN

POSTMODERNISM, NEO-LIBERALISM AND SOCIAL WORK VALUES

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to draw together some of the current themes and dilemmas this study and other postmodern/post-structuralist approaches pose for residential care and social work theory by setting the discussion of children's needs and rights against the political backdrop of neo-liberalism first set out in Chapter One. In particular, the contention posited by some social work academics that there has been an 'erosion' of values in social work which is itself an effect of the profession becoming inevitably caught up in "neo-liberal reactions against social action, communitarian values and state-led interventions based on the insights of the social sciences" (Howe: 1996:87) will be critically examined. Clearly, there is much within the deconstructive work of this study that would support the idea that values-based practice (that is, practice which emphasises a sense of mutuality between professionals and 'service-users', one that is based on a 'qualitative', relationship-based encounter, drawing on the social worker's interpretative skills and based on broadly psycho-social understandings of family life) has been marginalised in favour of outcome-orientated action and performance measurement; however, the study will challenge those analyses that suggest the way forward can straightforwardly be a reassertion of values within the profession. This challenge is made on two main grounds; firstly, that such critiques of neo-liberal welfare seem to imply that postmodernity and neo-liberalism can largely be regarded as synonymous (as if the former were an 'era', rather than a set of
Postmodernism, Neo-liberalism and Social Work Values

ideas) and secondly, as a consequence, the idea of a ‘return to values’ is flawed, as a nostalgic plea for the reassertion of certainties within Modernity (that is, a leftward swing back of the pendulum within the binarism of individualism and communitarianism) which would inevitably and necessarily maintain the ‘other’, the excluded on the margins. For this study, the legitimate reassertion of values-based practice can only have ‘value’ where values are not fixed, but open, negotiable and articulated in a context where uncertainty, ambivalence and difference are not resisted, but embraced.

Proceduralised Caring, Children’s Rights and the Invisibility of Values

To be sure, in residential care, personal interaction, discretion, creativity and the freely experiential have become increasingly restricted by proceduralisation, guidance and the professionalisation of the caring task; the encounter in this study with the Guidance and the LAC documentation is, of course, testimony to this. These are, however, only one of many other procedural documents that are required, by the Guidance itself, to have a presence in Children’s homes. Chapter One of the Guidance, para. 1.39 ‘Written Guidance’ requires that “staff in all homes should clearly understand their duties and should have, as a minimum, a written job description. In addition they should receive written guidance on important procedures” (p. 9). The Guidance goes on to list 30 separate areas for which such important procedures ‘may’ be required including:

- Admission and Reception of Children; Methods of Care and Control; Care Planning; Statement of Safety Policy; Child Protection; Care Practices towards children of the opposite sex to staff; Dealing with Sexuality and Personal Relationships; Arrangements for Regulating and Vetting Visitors to the Home; Dealing with Aggression and Violence; Risk Taking; Log book and Diary Recording. (p9-10)

Such a comprehensive regulation and proceduralisation that encompasses not only the purely administrative and organisational details, but also the interpersonal, inevitably means that any spontaneity or discretionary interaction or decision-making are, at best, inhibited, and at worst ‘administered’ and ‘proceduralised’ to the extent that they are rendered

---

'empty' of any 'common-sense' meaning. From the suggested list of procedure documents the Guidance provides (above) it is not only fire procedures and financial procedures that are covered but 'care practices towards the opposite sex', and 'dealing with sexuality and personal relationships'. The difficulty here is the same as that discussed in the previous chapter; that child-care practice becomes more about the rigorous and sequential implementation of procedures rather than the quality of relationships with the child. This is despite the fact that Guidance is supposed to ensure against this:

> Regulations and procedures have to be drafted in terms of the best interests of the child. However, children do not develop in isolation but through interaction with others. So whatever the specific purpose of a child care regulation or practice, it is always necessary to set consideration of an individual child's needs into a social context in which relationships are of central significance.


But it is already too late; setting the 'individual child's needs into a social context' (as if they could be seen otherwise) through the framework of Guidance becomes itself another procedure for which practitioners will require yet more guidance. The qualifier (individual child's /best interests) to Guidance and Regulations does not open the door to other possibilities but secures it all the more firmly. As in the previous chapter, where children themselves may have had 'something to say' they are, again preceded by their 'needs' which serve as shorthand for 'what can be said'. The 'individual' is at first accounted for in terms of the Guidance and second within the discourse of 'needs' and 'best interests', the parameters of which are based upon universalised presuppositions and then set out through discourse and by reference to documentation that surrounds the child in public care (i.e. Guidance, LAC and other frameworks of reference).

This, then, is an example of iteration, a statement repetition which acts as an occlusion at the very same time as it masquerades as 'progress'. Moreover, whereas what Guidance says is that the child should figure centrally and not peripherally in all of these matters, the effect is not to turn the attention of practitioners towards the individual child, but, ironically, away from them in order to 'find out' more about how to 'look after' them in the best way
possible; that is, to find out more about a construction of childhood that may, or may not bear some relation to children themselves. In a Foucauldian sense this is significant for this study in terms of how the Guidance is played out as 'discipline in practice'. In this case, a legitimate consensus about the need to regulate public care is the vehicle for further regulation of childhood; childhood, as a construct, transcends this, or any discussion, about the actuality of child rearing practices, rather than being itself the focus for a more open debate. It is knowledge about childhood (child development) that will help to resolve the problem of trying to see children as individuals within a regulatory framework; the practitioners attention is actively turned away from the child in childhood (i.e., as constructed out of 'needs', 'best interests', etc.), rather than towards the child 'in actuality', freely signifying, full of possibility, because the child as constructed is not, in fact, there; it must be visited via discourse to be seen for what it 'is' (not). To do otherwise may precipitate an incursion of the discourse.

Similarly, a preoccupation with children's rights in which the notion of children themselves as 'citizens' is given form and shape has enabled some of the aforementioned focus on action, rather than meaning, to be accommodated within the discourse of childhood. Whilst the logic of neo-liberalism was inevitably required to acquiesce to the child as citizen and recognise a legitimate 'claim' to rights, these have been expressed in a particular way. Children's rights have become something else that now can be said about childhood, but only inasmuch as those rights largely serve to reinforce and maintain the discourse. This study has explored some of the ways in which children's rights are articulated and constituted out of and in relation to their needs, embracing the spectrum of understandings and discourses about childhood, needs and rights, not contradicting each other, not cancelling each other out. Where needs are 'given', rights may be established without the threat of disruption. Any extension of liberty, autonomy and decision-making for children is mitigated and counterbalanced by emphasising 'needs' (where needs are universal and largely self-evident 'truths'); needs which, more often than
not will need to be met in a precise and regulated way (either through the family or through the state). Both needs and rights are thereby conceptualised within the same discourse, despite the inherent tension. What the inclusion of a rights discourse does is to codify and express needs and values in a way which is more amenable to a focus on measurable outcomes, rather than the less tangible 'quality of relationships', for example, which may be motivated out of a more holistic appreciation of the individuals' value and self-worth. "Rights, however, only serve as motivating principles in the sense that they impose a moral obligation to act, or in some circumstances, to refrain from action" (Smith: 1997:5). In this way, where rights constitute a codification of needs regarded as universal, and combine with an imperative for either action or inaction, the 'advancement' of children's civil liberties and of children 'as citizens' is further secured within discourse (within, not external to, the 'given', 'childhood'); it thus becomes possible to promote such rights without a threat of instability.

Problems with Seeking a Return to Values: a Post-Structuralist Critique

Certainly, rights are more amenable to being codified where, for example 'values' are not. Rights aim to ensure compliance; they fit within a proceduralised, legalistic framework which lends itself to quantitative measure. Smith (1997) argues that rights have consequently become 'dislocated' from values which are increasingly 'invisible' in practice where practitioners become, rather than autonomous professionals working with the 'experiential' and qualitative, more like technicians than engineers. The incorporation of a 'rights discourse' into social work is seen as commensurate with the shift towards performance measurement and 'outcomes' and the erosion of 'value-based practice'. Increasingly, and in the context of a new emphasis on individualism and autonomy, families on the receiving end of social care are encouraged through 'partnership', participation and 'empowering practices' to assume responsibility for their actions - to make the 'right' choices available to them, rather than focus on underlying 'causes'. For
social work practitioners, the role is one of collecting information on families in order to determine their eligibility as 'service-users', or identify and manage a variety of 'risk factors', acting as brokers or technicians in accessing services and measuring performativity and 'outcomes'. Thus, Howe suggests "it is the visible surface of social behaviour which concerns practitioners and not the internal workings of psychological and sociological entities" (Howe: 1996:88) and that this preoccupation with 'surface', rather than 'depth' considerations is consistent with a wider fragmentation and diffusion of long-established monoliths about the 'nature' of the 'social' and the 'psychological'.

Of course, there is one sense here in which values in social work have not been eroded at all; they are just different and differently expressed, implied and not explicit. They are those of 'action' and 'surface', performance, target-setting, outcome, quantification, procedure and codification and an emphasis not on how things are done but what is achieved. For Smith, it is argued that in finding the way out of this dilemma a "renewed commitment to values is essential" (Smith: 1997:12), expressed through personal interaction. In the context of residential care the trick for Smith is in getting the balance right between 'needs' and 'rights' through a reaffirmation of 'values':

Children may receive a formal recognition of their rights, but there is a danger that this will occur in an emotional vacuum which fails to meet their most significant needs. One way to avoid this potentially arid and damaging situation is to reaffirm the crucial importance of values to professional caring.

Smith: 1997:13

This return or reaffirmation is to be found in a re-negotiation of the rights and needs of children enclosed in childhood, between children as citizens and children 'in need' in the context of a changing social and political milieu. A plea for a return, against the excesses of advanced liberalism; a swing back of the pendulum that hangs between collectivism and individual responsibility. Moreover, for Smith, this re-affirmation is not naive, but constructed in the light of 'knowledge' and the recognition that 'rights' should have a place since an over-reliance on needs may lead "back to the original problem of discretion and
potential oppression in relation to making decisions for and about children" (Smith: 1997:13). The ‘original’ problem presumably being one of not sufficiently understanding, or actively ignoring the universality of children’s needs which in turn required the establishment of measurable ‘rights’. Smith’s aforementioned fear that children may receive recognition of their rights in an ‘emotional vacuum’ that fails to meet their ‘significant needs’, may be justified (and justification is not the issue here), but it also roots childhood back within discourse at the ‘moment of possibility’; that being of incursion. It is fear that drives us back within discourse, albeit with all the necessary amendments and caveats to assuage against an overstatement of ‘needs’. The ‘most significant needs’ that we may ‘fail to meet’, even where they may be as basic as for food and shelter or, in Kellmer-Pringle’s terms, ‘love and security, new experiences, praise and recognition’ (Kellmer-Pringle: 1975), re-route (root) us back, out of instability into recognition; the ‘self-evidential’ ‘truth’ of certain needs is what ‘in language’, not ‘reality’, steps into the breach and re-locates, secures, constrains and generates all that can subsequently be said about childhood. Childhood is thus constructed as an occlusion of ‘otherness’. It is not therefore, unfettered liberalism and an over-emphasis on rights which presents what Smith calls a ‘potentially arid and damaging situation’, it is the possibility of infraction and rupture of the discourse (of professional liberalism), that which contains and regulates the instability of the signifier (childhood). From thereon in, it is through the anchorage secured within the triangulation ‘values’, ‘needs’, and ‘rights’ that, in Smith’s terms, the ‘crucial importance of values in professional caring’ may (only) be reaffirmed.

In a similar way, Howe (1996) suggests that social work policy and practice have become caught up in a swing towards unfettered liberalism, away from communitarian values that characterised practice for much of the twentieth century, he seems to imply a link between this critique of neo-liberalism and a somewhat gloomy vision of postmodernity, as if it were an ‘era’ that we are now in, rather than a set of ideas or possibilities. For example, it is suggested that social work clients now arrive “without a
history" (Howe: 1996: 89) where only the present is pertinent and where ‘actions’ (how people respond to advice, support etc.) take precedence over ‘actors’ (social worker and client construct a narrative account of problems and look for causal explanations) and where there is a preoccupation with ‘surface’, rather than ‘depth’. This is seen as consistent with an increasing culture of performance measurement (what is done, rather than how it is done) in social work. There is much here with which this study would concur. However, in a plea for a return to communitarian values it is suggested that:

The stability of marriages, the rearing of children, the behaviour of adolescents, the morals of the successful and unsuccessful, the caring of others, and the integrity of the psychological self can all be upset in times of heightened anxiety and increased emphasis on the individual.

Howe: 1996: 95

Further, that at such times (of heightened anxiety):

violence and racial strife increase, more people seek personal counselling in an attempt to give their lives meaning, there is a revival of religious fundamentalism which delivers a social order, a sense of belonging, an ordained certainty and the removal of anxiety of being responsible for one’s own destiny.

Howe: 1996: 95

Now, whilst it may be the case that the “disembedded self corresponds with postmodernity’s recognition of the plural and diverse, the different and the contingent in cultural and political life” (Howe: 1996: 94-95), from the perspective of this study, this does not necessarily correlate with, for example, a lack of social cohesion, nor does it mean that some people will necessarily lose a sense of ‘belonging’. The idea that ‘depth’ has been neglected in favour of ‘surface’ is ‘within’ Modernity, not postmodernity (and not at all to do with post-structuralism). To this extent, contemporary concerns about an emphasis on surface ‘actions’ in social work, rather than ‘depth encounters’, are more symptomatic of neo-liberalism than any notion that we have entered a ‘post-modern era’. From a post-structuralist point of view, ‘communitarian values’ are just as inscribed in the ‘present’ as they were in the ‘past’. Moreover, notions of the integrity of the ‘psychological self’, ‘social cohesion’, ‘stable marriages’, ‘a sense of belonging’ etc., are simply ways of conceptualising
individuals and social problems in language that are no more or less ‘real’, fixed and/or contingent than the “disembedded self”, a ‘fragmented’ vision of welfare or a focus on the individual rather than the collective. This study has suggested throughout that it is the very pursuit of universal welfare, emancipation, truth and certainty, in either a communitarian or individualist guise, that requires the exclusion, subordination or disenfranchisement of some in order to achieve those goals. Put plainly, where there was consensus about ideas of welfare and a commitment to collective responsibility, groups and individuals then, as now, experienced exclusion in order to define the mainstream and the centrality of those very values. The ‘instability’ that may ensue in times of ‘heightened anxiety’ is thus articulated by leaning towards one side of the opposition which, again, may be characterised as communitarian values versus individual responsibility. Any resolution to the constructed disequilibrium implies, therefore, a return, one way or the other; a re-establishment of the ‘centred’ discourse which encompasses the neo-liberal and the communitarian. All that then remains is the need for an ‘adjustment’ on the basis of the contemporaneous social and political milieu which will, in turn, require a re-classification of the excluded, dysfunction, asocial or anti-social. This means that in Howe’s terms, things like ‘the stability of marriages’, ‘the rearing of children’ ‘the behaviour of adolescents’, ‘the caring of others’ and the ‘integrity of the psychological self’ will have always and will continue to be ‘upset’ and ‘de-stabled’. But they will be upset not by postmodernity, whatever we decide it is. In a sense, we could say it is what they are for (to be upset and destabled, that is); as calibrators (signifiers) for the moral ‘state of the nation’; the state of the ‘psychological self’, the state of the ‘child’, the state of the ‘adolescent, the state of the ‘married’, the state of the ‘others’ (who need caring for), all are there to give a measure of moral, social and psychological stability based upon presuppositions of what counts as ‘stable’, or ‘whole’, ‘complete’, ‘social cohesion’, ‘other’ and so on, within the frameworks of understanding and reference points provided by intersecting and constituting discourses (of which childhood is but one).
From the perspective of this study any possibility of a 'return' to values must be qualified when those values are based on universalising notions of childhood, and, indeed of parenting and the gender relations that inhere therein. The problem is not only one of a potential to fail to account for structural inequalities but of remaining enclosed within discourse and without a re-evaluation of, for example, 'childhood' as a culturally and historically variable concept. Whatever has happened in the past is only understood in terms of the present; that is, that childhood is the fixed invariable about which we now 'know' more than ever, and that it is only the actions, behaviour and understanding of adults that have to change in light of that increased knowledge. The question is reduced, within discourse, to one of merely stress and balance, rather than of beginning to think differently about childhood altogether; this never enters the equation, within discourse it is a non-possibility.

Conclusion

This study would resist the idea that 'postmodernity' is an 'era', or that postmodern thinking has become the dominant discourse of welfare, or that it is somehow an alibi for, even synonymous with, the rise of neo-liberalism. Rather, postmodernism is a set of conceptual apparatus, elements of which, it can be argued, work equally well for neo-liberalism. To characterise postmodernity (and here we regard the term as metonymic with post-structuralism) as commensurate to an 'era' of neo-liberalism and to react against it accordingly is to remain within metaphysics, as if 'postmodernity' were 'in opposition to' Modernity. If it were 'in opposition', it would not be post-modernity. It is not an historical claim or a reversal of modernity, but a 'suspension' (of teleological thinking). This does not mean that we cannot mitigate 'neo-liberalism', but that in doing so postmodern thinking would suggest that we resist a little a 'full return' (to 'values', 'truth', 'certainty') where what is on the 'outside' will remain as such (the 'other', the excluded), albeit articulated
differently. It is fear of instability that provokes a longing for the security of constructed ‘past’ in the ‘present’; a kind of nostalgia for a time when we ‘knew’ where we were going.

Whatever the future holds, it lies not in some transcendental schema which prioritises continuity over change, polarising progress and retrogression, an inevitable treadmill of history and logic in whose wake we can, at best offer a palliative amelioration until the next ineluctable resurgence. Rather, our ‘destiny’ may lie in our dreams; while we remain, ‘within discourse’, tiny, almost imperceptible acceptances and differences can be permitted and repeated; we can choose to decide these; to repeat, not to ‘occlude’, but ‘transform’ - and make a ‘world’ of ‘difference’.

The remaining question then, is ‘what place do values have in social work from a post-structuralist perspective?’. Clearly, emphasising values may well allow for the kind of ‘depth’ engagement (emphasising values of empathy, personal interaction, psycho-social knowledge) that Howe argues for, but the difficulty lies not only in determining exactly what it is which is worth placing value on; i.e., what is desirable (though this is itself highly contentious), but in what is then deemed ‘equivalent’; what it is that either manifests or is representative of the value or, in its absence, what can be represented by or may be substituted for that which is valued i.e. its very ‘value’. For example, the values that are generally espoused in these terms are those which will tend to hark back to a previous ‘era’ when, perhaps, there was greater a sense of collective responsibility and care, when ‘communities’ supported ‘their own’, when ‘family’ was the cornerstone of an inclusive and more caring society, a time before the alleged disintegration of ‘family’, where the sanctity of childhood was somehow better appreciated and more secure. The problem this presents from a post-structuralist perspective is all too apparent. Any ‘value’ must be measured by its worth in relation to what can be represented or substituted for it, otherwise it has no value. So, the value placed on an ‘intact’ childhood within the family which emphasises the essential attachments and developmental benefits for children derived therein, is substituted by public care which must, in turn, substitute for all of the deficits of the family it is replacing.
By aspiring to provide an ‘equivalence’ based on a perceived ‘lost’ value (in this case, the value of a natural childhood within the natural family) that is itself constructed and contrasted by and through what or who is excluded (what it is not), those subject to the equivalence or substitution (in this case, children in public care) find the absence of ‘the real thing’, their deficit, their ‘loss’, all the more accentuated. Indeed, at times of heightened uncertainty and anxiety about a loss of ‘values’ in society, they may be ironically all the more exposed symbolically, as an exemplary focus for what ‘good parenting’, ‘children’s needs’, ‘childhood’ should be and all the more vulnerable to the determined efforts to keep childhood ‘intact’ in the midst of a wider disillusionment and concern about an increasingly fragmented ‘vision’ of society, and all that this may entail. This is precisely the difficulty manifested in the Guidance and LAC that the deconstructive work in this study has attempted to convey. Put another way and in broader terms, it is not that sociological and psychological knowledge has somehow been ‘forgotten’ in social work, rather that it has become taken for granted, the ‘rational’ adult is, in a climate of neo-liberalism, increasingly expected to take responsibility for his/her own ‘psychology’ and ‘sociology’; the narrative has not been lost but is, in a sense, told for everyone, universally, unequivocally and especially for children. It is simply the weight given to certain values that has changed combined with a distinct absence of contingency about knowledge. The place for values must therefore be in finding ‘equivalences’ that are ‘other than’ those inscribed within signifiers that constrain and inhibit differences by deconstructing the taken-for-granted knowledge claims of discourse. This means values in social work are all the more important as open, negotiated, particularly if they are able to transcend the trappings of ‘needs’ and ‘rights’. If, for example, empathy, nurturing and personal interaction are to be valued in terms of the care of children, they must be reclaimed from the precepts of child development knowledge and the discourse of childhood which would locate the primary source for these within concepts of ‘attachment’, children’s needs and highly particularised maternal and paternal roles which mean that substituting with an ‘equivalence’ will always,
inevitably signify an absence and loss, despite good intentions. The ‘regulated instability’ of childhood must be renegotiated, the instability allowed to manifest itself; something different needs to be ‘said’ about childhood. As things are, much of what in discourse it is ‘possible to say’ about childhood not only diminishes children and their possibilities, it diminishes all of us.
CONCLUSION

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me (...) that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? - a feminine one, a masculine one, some? - several, some unknown which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars.

Hélène Cixous: 1986:85-86 *The Newly Born Woman*

- The problem this thesis has identified is that, in social work at least, childhood is invariably taken for granted as a fixed, universal period of transition with specific and definitive qualities and characteristics. This is especially true in public care where children are exposed to sets of practices, policies and ways of thinking that regulate their daily lives, decision-making and longer-term opportunities on the basis of an idealized version of what childhood ought to be, signifying this for all children and families. The effect of this, albeit inadvertently, is to ensure that children in public care are therefore marked out for the childhood they cannot have, in spite of, and paradoxically, because of a plethora of policy, guidance and practice materials which emphatically promote the needs, rights and 'best interests' of such children.

- The texts discussed work productively in a way which ensures regulatory imperatives, maintaining certain children 'on the edge' in order to define the 'centre', of what 'is' childhood. All of this happens not in spite of a discourse of public care which interrelates with 'needs', 'rights' and other discourses, but through and within the way in which they all intersect to construct 'thinking' about childhood, about what is, and what is not possible to say.
The text is not, therefore a self-enclosed system in which all signifiers point toward some transcendental signified, extrapolated from a sovereign presence or 'authorship', (where author is the 'originator of an event' (OED), sharing an etymological root with 'authority'), rather, the text is fluid, open, perforated, provisional. The logocentric orientation of the discourse espoused in the Guidance and Regulations was revealed in the attempt to cohere arbitrary elements which operate as signs in such a way as to correspond with constructed 'truths' about the world. In striving for such objective truths the text strains to avoid the metaphorical use of language; in failing in this project it is its very use of metaphor that undermines and reverses the logic that is at work within the text. The closure of a concept is then both arbitrary and contingent.

In this way, reading the text is as productive as writing the text; the text does not 'stand for itself', otherwise there would be no critique or interpretation, no 'writing'. Further, there is no 'primary' text, supplemented, added to by a secondary reading “the latter inserts itself within the interstices of the former, filling holes that are always already there...the text belongs to language, not to the sovereign and generating author” (Spivak: 1976:1xxxiv). That is, language in 'universal' terms, constituting the 'social' as well as particular 'language' or discourses which are subsumed within. There is no congruence of language with the world; no correspondence of presence to presence. The relationship is ever changing and shifting; in this way, metaphor as language 'as a whole' and in the particular sense warrants our scrutiny; not as discovering a 'detour' to 'truth', but in its very structure. The structure and form of metaphor is not then, an 'alibi' for 'truth' but part itself of what the text is 'meaning to say'. This is intertextuality; open, fluid; weaving/unweaving the fabric of 'liberal professionalism'.

To take a step 'beyond' the discourse means decidedly and explicitly positioning within a state of contingency and indeterminacy, moving alongside the text in order to

---

1 Or in the case of the Guidance 'non-authorship' (governmental authority).
“occupy the interspace..., the “without” that is also “within”... to acknowledge that one
never moves definitively beyond the limit’s of one’s own discourse, that one never arrives
at a point of absolute or final transcendence” (Begam: 1996:177). And in so doing,
paradoxically and out of the remaining ‘fragments’, reconstitute ‘thinking about’ social
work, childhood, family, etc.; move ‘beyond’ the ‘possibilities’ of ‘what can be said’ within
discourse to the possibility of ‘transforming’ thinking (discourse), towards that which is
always/already inscribed within the ‘discontinuity’. This means thinking other possibilities
and configurations that may not be new, but which are not validated within the prevailing
discourse.

• The aim of this exposition is not to promote ‘non-regulation’ of public care or to
suggest that in children’s homes, for example, a measure of ‘regulation’ in relation to
residential ‘care’ and children, (rather than childhood in the definitive LAC sense), will not be
required; rather, there should be more consideration of complexity and uncertainty of
knowledge and truth in devising regulatory frameworks.

• Further, more consideration could to be given to the relationship between intention
and effect in devising and implementing Guidance and Regulations. This is because, as the
study has shown, anticipated responses to presupposed ‘potential’ problems presented by
children in public care inhere throughout the Guidance, effectively reconstructing residential
child ‘care’ as ‘regulation’. For example, ‘systemised’ measures, whether explicitly (in parts
of the Guidance) or implicitly (in all of LAC) regulatory, may rarely achieve the desired
effect of making residential care a positive, non-stigmatising experience, or eliminating
‘unacceptable’ behaviour; indeed, the reverse may become more likely, arguably even when
aggregated outcomes are deemed ‘successful’ and the actual ‘quality’ of ‘care’ is raised. Not
only does locating and constituting children as ‘becoming adults’ on the margins actually
serve to keep them there, but also by prescribing what ‘ought to be’ without any sense of
contingency about ‘knowledge’, rather than eliminating ‘exclusion’, compensating for
'disadvantage', accounting for 'differences' and redressing the balance, inadvertently ensures each of these.

- Moreover, circumscribing and regulating behaviour in the very particular way described in the Guidance and the generalised way in LAC, may not only fail to provide for the best environment and/or apprehend behaviour deemed inappropriate, it may even initiate 'delinquency'. 'Knowing' that failing to adhere to prescribed norms or rules within a prefiguring and definitive childhood can lead to 'permitted disciplinary measures', ostracism or punishment is not necessarily a precondition for 'stopping' individuals behaving unacceptably; it may, however, be a precondition for starting. In other words, children will, one way or another, make a 'presence' felt, a 'presence' that will signify 'other than', that will say 'I am here' for themselves, if not for anyone else.

- It was suggested at the end of Chapter 6 that as far as LAC is concerned, there may, after all, be some positive opportunities to 'get beyond the form-filling' as LAC intended, if not with quite the same outcome. Whilst the greatest 'danger' with LAC currently is the degree of professional confidence and broad consensus that surrounds it and its central positioning in the theatre of 'public care', by setting itself self-assuredly on a pedestal, LAC may also become too exposed and vulnerable to sustain itself as complete, whole and 'self-enclosed'. Those working and living in the sphere of public care need to work to positively challenge the presuppositions (about 'childhood', 'family', 'adulthood') that lie therein, to actively subvert and transcend the closure it attempts to effect on childhood. Paradoxically, by making explicit what is often inferred or implied, LAC seems something of a crude and unsubtle attempt to almost 'catch hold' of 'childhood', borne out of widespread concern about the fragmentation of 'family' and mediated through the discourse of children's needs. As previously suggested, as soon as an attempt is made 'once and for all' to say 'this is what childhood 'is' definitively (as LAC does for 'looked after' children), it slips away, defers signification and becomes obviously, patently, conspicuously
Conclusion

'not', in a way that cannot be ignored for long. Here lies the fatal flaw that may enable LAC to be used as a tool not for 'securing' childhood, or children in childhood, but as a means of liberating and transforming both children’s experience and our own (adults) framework for understanding of their 'needs', ultimately causing policy-makers, academics and theorists to 're-think'. In other words, not to 'escape', or transcend but extend the parameters of contemporary discourse.

- Children too must be able to articulate a 'presence', however 'contingent' - that is, a presence 'outside' as well as 'inside' of any prefiguring 'theory' that imbues the environment in which they live. The 'fear of instability', that which causes the regulatory imperative to take a particular and occlusive form in terms of children's 'presence', must and can be 'confronted' by both individuals encountering children in public care and, ultimately, legislators and policy-makers. 'Risking' a little instability (in even small, almost imperceptible ways) may prove 'transformative' not only in terms of children's experience, but also for adults as they discover fears to be ill-founded, illusory, figments of the collective imagination of adults (about children).

- The study has also aimed to set the textual analysis against the backdrop of advanced liberalism and post-modern perspectives associated with a loss of confidence in the idea of 'progress'. Here, the failure to realise the ambitions of the welfare state, the fragmentation of social work and consensus about the role of welfare is seen as part of a more widespread undermining of some of the 'monolithic certainties' within Modernity. The effect in practice is for knowledge to become more diffuse and, at the same time, taken for granted, particularly where the focus for child care professionals is on determining eligibility, assessing needs, measuring performance and outcomes, where theory and knowledge are to be unequivocally applied, rather than critically analysed, debated or reflected upon. The LAC system was presented as a prime example of this. The problem is that from within modernity there is an inclination towards resisting ambivalence and a
tendency to stabilise uncertainty - at worst this is manifest by targeting those 'on the margins', or wherever 'instability' threatens, through the increasingly rigorous application of social-scientific 'knowledge', *in order to* secure 'stability' at the centre of things. This resistance and tendency - rather than an approach which might seek to embrace uncertainty as offering multiple, diverse interpretations which validate difference - has had particular consequences for children in public care. For the present, childhood remains, if anything, even more emphatically immersed in a 'needs discourse'; the imperative to meet such needs *in* childhood is all the more accentuated when the autonomous, rational adult is expected to assume responsibility and perform to anticipated outcomes.

- Whilst it may true to suggest that in social work narrative accounts of family and children's lives, offering 'causal' perspectives which draw on psycho-social understandings have been sacrificed in favour of a more episodic, action-oriented or task-centred approach, this study has argued that the solution to this difficulty cannot simply reside in a reassertion of traditional social work values of mutuality and communitarianism.

- Any return to values becomes highly problematic in childhood and especially so for children in public care where what 'stands in' for what is valued may place us back on a circular detour to where we started, and back again. In childhood, values underpin needs, they signify particular configurations and sets of social relationships that 'make sense' within discourse. Equally, in this context, rights, whether they be 'to protection from harm' or the extent of participation in decision-making are either derived directly from needs or indirectly compromised by the 'best interests' of the child, or some other such qualifier. This symbiotic relationship between needs and rights is thus self-validating and self-perpetuating; the issue becomes merely one of stress and balance.

- Whilst many would largely endorse a return to values in social work it is as if, they are at the 'origin', the start, as if they transcend and can be conceptualised 'beyond' the reach of discourse. Again, the argument here is emphatically not that we should abandon
Conclusion

'values', 'rights' or 'needs'. Indeed with values it would not be possible to abandon them, but they can be talked about, negotiated, made explicit in social work as part of the day to day playing out of law, policy and procedure and decision-making. Values must be at the fore of practice, they must be contemplated not on the basis of irrefutable 'truth' but through open and negotiated 'truths', where individual narratives are not abandoned, but pluralised, where uncertainty figures not as a threat to the order of things, but as part of human experience. It is through uncertainty that possibility arises, such possibilities have yet to be explored. Resistance to uncertainty is at both ends of the spectrum; it is the tension arising from this resistance that keeps discourse taut, coherent, 'making sense'.

- Rather than seeking to either deny, repudiate, disown or eradicate 'ambivalence' about 'childhood' (from either side of the culture/nature opposition) or, alternatively, acknowledge it but regard it as problematic, we should instead validate, even embrace ambivalence and, above all, risk a little instability. Policy-makers, parents, practitioners would be well advised not to begrudgingly accept, but to embrace a little 'self-distrust'; to 'open up' the discourse and perhaps avoid some of the 'cul-de-sacs' of thinking that come, in social work, from being a little too sure or certain about what is or ought to 'be'. To be able to say something about childhood within an alternative field of signification, and especially about 'children's needs'. It is only here that we may begin to think differently about childhood, family and 'child-rearing' and children may begin to speak about their 'needs' or 'rights' (or anything else) 'outside' of a childhood that is 'within' a discourse in which they are deferred to the structured presence and regulation of adults, and 'inside' a discourse in which they have a constituted 'presence' themselves. In turn, this may create the possibility of thinking about children in public care outside of a framework where they are marginalised to a childhood in families.

- This approach may also allow different understandings of, for example, the relationship between 'public' (state) and 'private' (family) child rearing arrangements to be
articulated. To try and illustrate think of ‘family’; of husband, wife or partner, son or daughter, aunt or uncle, grandparents. How ever ‘extended’ or ‘alternative’, truncated, abridged or condensed, ‘family’ remains ‘family’; thus ‘one parent’ family, ‘lone parent’ family can only be expressed in relation to ‘family’ signifying in a precise and particular way. ‘Affiliates’ to the family without a blood-tie may acquire the title ‘aunt’ or ‘uncle’ to designate a particular and qualitative relationship to family. There are no other words that appropriately denote the relationship so they are borrowed, reflecting an intimacy with the recipient that ties them in emotionally with the ‘real’ family. Beyond the networking of conventional ‘family’ ties terms like ‘friend’, ‘close friend’ even ‘best friend’ are outside of this family discourse, often highly significant but not regarded in or of themselves as substantial enough to sustain the cohesion needed for child-rearing or the ‘community'/society as a whole. Such relationships may provide all kinds of bonds and linkages with or without a child rearing component, with or without any kind of procreative or sexual relationship. But they will not find a language that reflects qualitatively the character of the network or which gives it recognisable shape and form within discourse, or, for that matter, within the spheres of the civic and the legal other than perhaps as ‘subversions’ of or ‘caricatures’ of family. Consequently, how ever strong and cohesive such networks may be they cannot be articulated within, sometimes not even by those who are part of them. They are always on the periphery.

- Within the liberal democracy, this lack of recognition, validation and articulation of the ‘other’ means that times of social incohesion are expressed in terms of fragmentation ‘of the family’ and all that it entails. Again, this may, ‘in actuality’ be true but the point is that ‘solutions’ are derived from a reinvestment in ‘family’, ‘community’ rather than ‘saying something else’; there is then, a reinvestment in continuity (where ‘family’ and ‘community’

---

2 An example of this at work in social work is the widespread use of the genogram, a diagrammatic ‘family tree’ used on case files and in case discussions to give the unfamiliar reader an understanding of a child’s relationships. Genograms rely on the blood-tie, regardless of their significance. There are no symbols to reflect friends, neighbours or other networks of relationships within the presupposing configuration of the genogram.
Conclusion

etc., far from being benign, signify particular social configurations of relations that not only shut out other possibilities that might be equally, if not more, 'socially cohesive', but necessarily rely on the exclusion of other lives as marginalised 'others'). It is out of the inherent tension between collectivism and individual autonomy that the liberal state is derived; instability and tension create the necessary friction which drives the discourse on. And as with family, so with childhood, children, children’s needs and children’s rights. A start would perhaps be to validate such configurations and networks that provide for children that do not presently 'count' as either 'family' or 'alternative family' - to 'think' these possibilities and articulate them, give them a 'presence' - not 'public care' or 'family' but somewhere else altogether, perhaps where the boundaries were more blurred between 'family and 'other than' - somewhere where the difference would not matter; not because it was not there, but because it was everywhere.

- It is indeed ironic that all of those procedures, guidance and regulation requirements set up to ensure the 'qualitative', the care of the child and performance of the practitioner, point the worker away from the subject (the child), the interpersonal, the discretionary and the subjective and towards the checklist and form-filling and the procedure. There is a sense here for the practitioner of fragmentation, of dispersal, diffusion along the surface, buoyed up by procedure which inhibits the spontaneous, 'here and now' encounter with the child. 'Presence' is deferred; the 'space' is one of 'constitution-in-progress' within discourse for both for the worker (as subject) and child (as object). A relationship defined by the professional context, constituted by professional knowledge and mediated through various procedures, guidance and frameworks for practice. As if childhood were almost 'pure science' where theories, rules and procedures are applied, reapplied and revised with each encounter and where any unpredicted event or incursion is 'risk assessed' and proceduralised. Here, childhood is at its most regulated; in one sense 'complete' and 'present' (as unqualified knowledge of child development), in another all too 'empty'. The
only way 'out' is 'in'; good child care practice is constructed as a series of encounters about
the 'terms of entry' (to the discourse), a negotiation which requires the child to
understand, apprehend and articulate the 'difference' (of 'not being' in childhood) in order
to arrive ultimately at their complete and fully present adulthood.

- Of course, the practice of deconstruction is, itself, in the moment that we speak,
taken up into the realms of what can be said. There is a centring of sorts going on here
that is 'centred' around the value placed on deconstruction by those who engage (and
indeed, by those who deride it) in the 'practice'. But nevertheless, pulling gently at the
loose threads of discourse can be reconstructive rather than destructive, offering the
possibility of validating different social and textual configurations. In social work at least,
the way 'out' of the impasse of Modernity is not a 'return' as such, but in part an
acceptance and in part a possibility, perhaps yet to be realised to articulate and validate
differences that are, as ever, always/already there in the past/present. In this way it is
possible to use deconstructive thinking not to reveal as 'truth' a self-reflexive 'cul-de-sac', a
'diverticulum' of meaning, but to free our 'thinking' up; where metaphor represses a lack
of coherence in the 'text' deconstruction can unlock the provisionality of meaning and
signification. Meaning may thus be reappropriated, knowledge may become 'open', rather
than closed on a subject. (In both senses; 'topic' and 'constituted subject')

- In giving way to deconstruction we can 'mean what we say' as 'something we do'
(and children 'do') and are engaged in. As such, meaning is not empty and vacuous, but
derived, always emerging and re-emerging; it is 'arrived at'; this is its very 'value'; the value of
meaning is in how it is derived; it always was; it is all the more 'valuable' for this being so.
Despite the ultimate provisionality of all texts; deconstruction is, itself as empty a concept
as it is full, as 'purposeful' as it is meaningless; but no more or less than any other
endeavour; it simply 'names the game' and allows, out of indeterminacy, the reconstituting
subject to take form and shape transformatively.
REFERENCES


*To give an historical 'location' to literary and other 'well-established' texts, square brackets [ ] are used to indicate date of first publication throughout this text.*

--------- (1953) *Child Care and the Growth of Love*. Harmondsworth: Penguin


References


References


References


References


