Handbook of Public Pedagogy
Education and Learning Beyond Schooling
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Introduction

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Readers of this anthology might believe that because its title bears the terms “feminisms” and “pedagogy,” that the issues addressed here are exclusively about gender and teaching. This is not the case. Feminist theory and research have expanded exponentially in recent years both in diversity of inquiry and theorizing. That work, it seems to me, has made it abundantly clear that gender identity and relations cannot be apprehended or theorized on their own abstracted terms. That is, sex, gender, or femininity needs to be studied and theorized in its constitutive relationship to other sociocultural significations, economic and political histories, hierarchies, and discourses.

I use the term feminisms, therefore, to signify a collective orientation, albeit diverse theoretical positions, among this group of authors exploring issues of pedagogy. In that regard, each of the essays here provides only a partial take on aspects of identity politics in relation to parts of the pedagogical project of everyday life. Similarly, “pedagogy” cannot be conceived of as an isolated intersubjective event since it too is fundamentally defined by and a product of a network of historical, political, sociocultural, and knowledge relations. Let me begin, then, with an anecdote to illustrate how concepts and meanings, in this case of pedagogy, are products of historically and culturally situated social formations.

On a visit in the summer of 1994 to the Institute of Pedagogics at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia, I was invited by Valerija Vendramin and Eva Bahovic to give seminars on feminist pedagogy. In the many informal and formal discussions that followed my presentations, I was certainly prepared for debate about my own assumptions, those underlying feminisms, and feminist pedagogical models more generally. However, what I had not anticipated was a reluctance, among academic staff and students at the institute, to use the term pedagogy, particularly its use to name any distinctly Slovenian, post-independence educational model. We came to that particular intellectual and cultural encounter from very different sociohistorical political contexts. Our conceptual assumptions and visions of political practice—whether through feminisms or models of education—were grounded in radically different experiences. For Slovenian academic educators, the term “pedagogy” was tied to two historical educational models, both of which remain affiliated with ideologically rigid mechanistic transmission models of education. The first was modeled on nineteenth-century Prussian didacticism under Austro-Hungarian rule and the second under Tito’s communism. Generations of Slovenians have been subject to
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pedagoski—a centralized national curriculum and pedagogy of indoctrination, via nineteenth-century Prussian and twentieth-century communist models, which many Slovenian educators and intellectuals in Slovenia wanted to change in the public mind and all educational theory and practice. One way to achieve this transformation, they believe, is to rename education, to refuse reference to the term “pedagogy” in public and scholarly educational discourse in order to begin theorizing and implementing educational practice, to articulate a new vocabulary untainted by the traces of a colonial and authoritarian educational system.

But this particular aversion to the term should not suggest that what we in the West have called pedagogy—at the levels of institutional education in schools and universities, and of mass education through media and popular culture—are not hotly debated and central to visions of “the new order.” For instance, a then-recent billboard ad in the city center of Ljubljana, featured close-up shots of five female posteriors clad only in a g-string thong. As a sign of “new times,” it generated academic and public debates about the political and moral ramifications of such public pedagogies—lessons in mass-media advertising, consumption, and the objectification of women. Dealing with these new issues of representation in newly emergent, hybrid, and local discourses of capitalism clearly raised many questions and contradictory solutions about reeducating the public.

Wary of terms such as pedagogy or critical pedagogy, the phrase of choice among my Slovenian colleagues was “democratic education.” This, they argued, characterized new ways of thinking about education in a post-independence age. While we struggled over meaning, so to speak, of terms such as culture, feminism, and pedagogy, we had lengthy debates over the implications of calling any educational practice “democratic.” In my view, liberal democratic education has always managed to construct itself as egalitarian, inclusive, and as valuing and rewarding individual ability within what many feminist and educational scholars consider a rigged and discriminatory meritocracy. Throughout this and the last century, democratic principles enshrined in the meritocratic ethos of competitive schooling, selective curriculum, and standardized testing, have managed to maintain and legitimate themselves through the mechanisms of credentialing, rigid class, gender, and race divisions. Arguably, in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, no other public institution has managed to do so as effectively. Under the liberal rhetoric of democratic participation, schools have long functioned as a selection and certification mechanism whereby the politics of exclusion and inclusion are institutionalized under the guise of equal access (to unequal competition) and measurable merit based on individual potential and achievement.

The discourse of democratic schooling claims that individual difference of intellectual ability, processed through allegedly fair and equal access and participation in the competitive game of schooling, will “logically” produce unequal outcomes. How the cultural, gender, and class bias of curriculum texts and tests, pedagogy, and policy, work to transform the discourses of equal access and equal participation into unequal material outcomes and the reproduction of class, gender, and race divisions is not part of the official promise and ethos of democratic education.

So, as an educator, I skirt the term “democratic” as cautiously as my Slovenian colleagues skirt the term “pedagogy.” For them, the term democracy promises genuinely new potential: both discursively and in the political agendas they now set themselves in establishing a new nation-state. After four decades of communist rule, preceded by Austro-Hungarian colonialism, democracy is a new, unknown entity and a conceptual and political possibility. As a “naming,” it does not carry the same historical baggage as is the case in North American and other Anglo-liberal democracies. Our debates about feminism(s) shared similar but different concerns over meaning.
But what this account illustrates so clearly, and what feminist and cultural studies scholars have long argued, is that meaning is never guaranteed, fixed, or unproblematically shared among social agents. Terms such as pedagogy, on first glance, might appear to mean more or less the same thing to most people involved in the educational enterprise. Yet because they are embedded in substantively diverse cultural and historical contexts and experiences, appeals to a common meaning become problematic, debatable, if not altogether impossible.

Why Pedagogy?

My own life-long experiences of having been object and agent of pedagogical practices have led me to conceptualize pedagogy in very different ways than those commonly forwarded by educational theory. I have chosen pedagogy as the operant term for this volume for several reasons, all of which are tied to the fact that I engage in, construct knowledge and relations around, and am myself constructed by pedagogical encounters. But this choice is not based on the exclusivity of my own personal experience. Rather, the many personal and professional relationships I have formed in the process of becoming an educator and writer, have repeatedly taught me about shared educational experiences among women of all ages and from different cultural backgrounds, working in diverse disciplinary areas and countries. These shared experiences have revealed patterns of how we were taught to become girls, then women; how we learned to become academic women; how we learned to teach students and teach colleagues about ourselves as scholars and women. These have been long apprenticeships, often both difficult and rewarding. Yet they have profoundly influenced how we teach, what our research, theoretical, and methodological choices are, how we manage our institutional relationships, and how we negotiate our political agendas through diverse community activism, scholarly networking, the university bureaucracy, and the building of professional and personal friendships with other academic women.

At the core of all this, is our labor as academic teachers, and “common” histories of having been objects of countless pedagogical regimes. These common histories do not imply identically shared experience but acknowledge that we have been formed in socially and culturally unique ways through the common experiences of schooling, growing up with television, learning from our mothers, “othermothers,” childhood and professional peers, partners, and friends. It is this expanded sense of the term pedagogy that I have used to frame this volume. I wanted to put together a book that would reflect the many pedagogical dimensions of everyday life implicated in the constructions of gendered differences and identities.

Pedagogy in strict educational theoretical terms variously refers to the “art” or “science” of teaching, the processes and practices of imparting knowledge to learners and validating students’ knowledge through evaluation and assessments. Within that definition, pedagogy refers to both intentional teaching and measurable learning, both of which are assumed to take place in formally named educational institutions. However, conventional definitions have generally failed to acknowledge the power/knowledge politics at the center of all pedagogical relations and practice:

Pedagogy refers to culture-specific ways of organising formal teaching and learning in institutional sites such as the school. In contemporary educational theory, pedagogy typically is divided into curriculum, instruction and evaluation: referring respectively to cultural knowledge and content, classroom interaction, and the evaluation of student performance...Pedagogy entails a 'selective tradition' of practices and conventions...[and] insofar as such selections serve the interests of particular classes and social rela-
My own experiences as a girl in schools and a woman in university have taught me well both the selective tradition and the politics of selection. As girls in schools during the 1950s and 1960s, we didn’t see ourselves in the curriculum other than in silly and stereotypical roles. Ten years at university completing three degrees also taught me quite clearly about which authors and what kinds of knowledges are ruled in and which are outside the canon of what Elizabeth Grosz (1988) calls “phallogocentrism.” The gendered politics of classroom encounters—at school and university—have taught me and so many other women about the politics of voice and silence, even though we didn’t always have terms or theory to talk about how pedagogy can function as a silencing device.

I have worked in the field of sociology of education for the past decade, and so my own academic and intellectual labor is centrally focused on questions of pedagogy and the sociology of knowledge. And, not insignificantly, the common experience of academic feminists—in fact, all academics—is that we all teach or at least have taught at some point in our careers. Yet for the most part, the politics of authority and knowledge which structure pedagogical relations and workplace culture of the academy have not received much theoretical or analytic attention in feminist theorising other than by feminist educators. Questions of curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and assessment have been addressed primarily by academic feminists in the discipline of education which, in my view, limits the theoretical scope and possibilities of rethinking pedagogical and knowledge relations from different disciplinary and subject positions.

Feminist practice in the academy takes many forms: women combat sexist, patriarchal, and phallocentric knowledges at many different institutional levels and sites (Luke & Gore, 1992). Yet we all teach in one way or another: whether it is in the form of research training and supervision, writing for publication, or delivering lectures and conference papers. But how our labor is contextualized in the specificity of diverse institutional settings, the particularity of our student composition, and the disciplinary areas in which we work, profoundly influences how and what we select to teach, how we teach, and how we locate and construct ourselves in the subject position we occupy as the signifier “teacher.”

I believe that our labor as teachers exerts critical influences on our institutional and personal identities, on scholarship, theoretical choices, and how we interpret and enact the pedagogical project of teaching to enable learning. And since what we teach we have ourselves learned, we are by no means, to use Gayatri Spivak’s phrase, “outside in the teaching machine.” We read books and journals, deliver conference papers, exchange and debate ideas, all in efforts to learn so that we can engage in the academic business of institutionalized scholarship: the (re)construction and (re)production of knowledge. The same process holds for teaching: we learn in order to teach and thereby are doubly located in the knowledge production and reproduction equation.

Academic labor requires that we select and develop curriculum, teach it, and assess student learning. We not only teach the scholarly word in print, but we teach with and about the world which scholarly work attempts to theorize. We interpret through instruction the course readings and related materials and, finally, appeal to certain criteria to assess what we determined as learning outcomes. Selection, interpretation, and evaluation of knowledge are the core relations of exchange between teacher and student, and these are fundamentally embedded in intersubjective—but institutionally constrained—relations of authority, desire, power, and control.

For feminists, these relations often entail substantial moral and ethical dilemmas because “feminist pedagogy” has long claimed that it refuses traditional authority and power in teacher-student relations and, instead, claims to construct pedagogical encounters characterized by
cooperation, sharing, nurturing, giving voice to the silenced (e.g., Culley & Portuges, 1985; Gru- met, 1988; Pagano, 1990). The feminist classroom, as Jennifer Gore (1993, p. 88) puts it, is marked by “the rhetoric of freedom, not control.” In these alleged spaces of freedom, teacher authority is often disavowed and the sexual politics of institutionally authorized feminine authority and power are generally not debated or questioned (Gallop, 1994; Gallop, Hirsch, & Miller, 1990; Luke, 1996; Matthews, 1994).

For feminist academic educators across the disciplines, these are issues of considerable theoretical and practical significance in relation to the still important feminist agenda of a politics of transformation. For all of us, regardless of our diverse subject positions, identities, historical trajectories, or disciplinary locations, pedagogy is fundamental to our everyday work in academia, much as it has been a central feature of all our lives in the shaping of our knowledge and identities.

Teaching/learning encounters begin in infancy, and range from learning letters and numbers from Sesame Street, concepts of home and family from the 1980s Roseanne or Family Ties, 1970s Brady Bunch, or 1950s Father Knows Best, concepts of femininity from Seventeen or Glam- our. They include “things my mother taught me,” culturally different protocols we learned at our friends’ homes, and years of lessons of what counts as knowledge derived from decades of schooling and, for many, college or university education. Informal pedagogies begin with toilet training, the instructional toys parents buy for their children, parental lessons about hot stoves, crossing the street, or how to ride a bike and tie one’s shoes.

What girls learn about femininity and sexuality from their mothers, other girls, and magazines, boys learn from other boys in the playground and locker-room. Lessons in manhood, as David Morgan (chapter 4) explains, are constructed in ways significantly different from how girls learn and relate over issues of identity, sexuality, and gender relations. Morgan writes of growing up male in England in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In that particular historical and cultural context, he recalls how boyhood and consequently manhood was constructed through models of male heroes in popular culture, and through male bonding in the “rhetoric of [sexual] experience.” Having taught at university for over three decades, his encounter with feminisms in the 1980s has led him to reconceptualize his own boyhood and adolescent experiences of learning to become a masculine subject. Morgan’s chapter speaks to the pedagogical project of reconstructing one’s theoretical position on the basis of new learnings (feminisms) which led to a reconceptualization and, importantly, “rewriting” of parts of his own historical trajectory into discourses of masculinity.

Public Pedagogies of Everyday Life

Learning and teaching, in my estimation, are the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life. They exist beyond the classroom, are always gendered and intercultural. I have taught and been taught in many different kinds of educational institutions on several continents. As a girl, I was taught in Sunday school, Saturday-afternoon German-language school, English in a special school for immigrant kids, and so on. My domestic education entailed relatively formal lessons from my German mother and grandmother (sewing, gardening, and cooking “German”), my Canadian girlfriends’ mothers (cooking “Canadian”), and my Chinese-American mother-in-law (cooking “Chinese”). I have learned from and have been taught by popular culture, peers, parents, and teachers, as a girl and as a woman. It is this broader (cross)cultural and social dimension of pedagogical practices—of teaching and learning the “doing” of gender—which shaped the focus of this book. That is to say, it is about the teaching and learning of feminine identities.
Pedagogical regimes of subject formation begin in infancy. Before an infant is even born, most Western working-class and middle-class women consult not only other women, but pregnancy, birthing, and infant care books and magazines, teaching themselves about the ABCs of early childcare (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1993). Most parents attempt to teach young children the fundamentals of literacy, even if that literacy comes in the form of alphabet fridge magnets or playdough letters. In Western culture, parents induct the young into the sociocultural order and teach them culturally relevant moral lessons from folk and (often gruesome) fairytales in storybooks. Parents who can afford it, buy developmentally appropriate instructional toys in order to enhance their children’s motor-skills, perceptual, and cognitive development.

As I show in my own chapter on children’s popular culture as public pedagogies, computer games teach, and so do comic books, magazines, billboards, television, Barbie’s Malibu Fun House, Voltron, Transformers, or the “multicultural” Power Rangers. Theories of play historically have been premised on the assumption that hands-on experience with manipulable objects are the basis for all learning. Yet psychological descriptions of play and pedagogy have tended to treat the sites, practices, and objects of play as individuated and nonideological. Children’s toys and popular culture market not only desires and consumer behaviors, but cultural discourses, meanings, and values. Miniature tea-sets, little ironing boards and stoves, kiddie make-up sets, baby dolls, little cribs, and mini-strollers were the foundations of girls’ play, learning, and “doing” femininity among the girls I grew up with and, as research continues to demonstrate, this discourse has changed little (Kline, 1993; Willis, 1991).

The social relationships generated around children’s popular culture are centered on teaching and learning skills and values, and larger sociocultural and political lessons about class, gender, ethnicity, social power, family, good vs. evil. So, for instance, playing “house” or Barbie enables gender-specific social relations among girls and, of course, between individual girls and their toy objects. Boys’ toys enable similar gender-specific relations among boys, and it is through these early gendered commodity discourses of play that kids are taught and actively learn about social power and relations, gender and race-identity formation. However, this is not to say that all children acquiesce to the play strategies and social relations implicitly prescribed by gendered toy commodities (see chapter 5). There is no simple and unmediated correspondence between, for instance, the lessons of children’s popular culture, girls’ or women’s magazines, or even the more explicitly didactic lessons of schooling, and the formation of subjectivities and social identities. As most of the authors in part II argue, contrary to traditional social theory, culture industries do not produce a seamless hegemonic discourse which construct identically “duped” and experientially impoverished social subjects. Yet it would be equally naïve to suggest that popular cultural texts and practices, or mass schooling, enable a boundless deferral to difference in the politics of meaning, reading positions, and identity formation.

The lessons of life are always simultaneously hegemonic, contradictory, and enabling of difference and diversity. But such tensions and contradictions can be particularly complex for children from dual-culture households who can experience diverse and often ideologically conflicting sources of formal and informal pedagogies that often add both a special burden and a unique complexion to identity formation (Luke, 1995; Reddy, 1994). As young parents, we made endless searches in toy stores and bookstores for culturally inclusive books or toys which would teach our child about interracial families and cultural diversity. Much as my parents went to inordinate lengths to teach me about my cultural heritage, and to counterteach against the anti-Semitism and anti-German sentiment which was somewhat rampant in small-town Canada in...
the early 1950s, I too as a parent in an interracial family ended up having to learn how to teach my own child about bicultural identity, and to counteteach so much of the racism and sexism that came home from school and peers.

As a six-year-old immigrant girl, I spent hours in front of the television at my friend’s house trying to learn English pronunciation and for years during my childhood, my parents sat me down almost weekly to learn and practice reading and writing German. In addition to language and literacy instruction at home, I was sent to Sunday school and Saturday-afternoon German school. Many of the Asian and European migrant kids I grew up with had to endure the same kinds of extra schooling we all hated. But what became more difficult as we grew older, was coming to terms with the tensions and contradictions between the cultural lessons of home and those we learned at school, from peers and popular culture about gender relations, career aspirations, and feminine identity. The lessons in Seventeen magazine were a lot more important that the lessons on femininity I was taught by my mother, the church group, or the girls’ guidance teacher at school. Then, as today, girls studied teen magazines intently, wanting to learn everything we could about boys, dating, sexuality, how to be a young woman, how to cope with parents, and so forth. And, as Kerry Carrington and Anna Bennett argue in chapter 6, much of what has been condemned by first-wave feminist analyses as politically suspect and hegemonic constructs of normative femininity in such magazines, can in fact provide positive counterdiscourse to traditional concepts of femininity.

Cultural clash and dissonance, cultural difference and cultural diversity is a lived reality for millions of bicultural children and adults. It was the texture of everyday experience for me and for the kids I grew up with in the many neighbourhoods where migrants invariably start out from (cf. Tizard & Phoenix, 1993). My generation was a product of postwar modernist schooling, the first to grow up with television and mass-media culture, yet a generation marked in large part by our generation of parents who themselves grew up before World War II in a radically different cultural sphere. Moreover, many of that generation were dislocated and relocated as a consequence of World War II, just as many of the previous generation drifted to the “new world” as a consequence of World War I. In fact, what is now widely conceptualized as the “postmodern subject”—one constituted by multiple discourses and local sites, and continually reshaped through travel along and across life trajectories and cultural zones—is a condition of subjectivity not that uncommon to entire generations of mobilized groups following high modernist events such as industrialization, “hot” and “cold” wars, or the breakup of empires. Growing up mobile, crossing boundaries, straddling cultures, learning the “old” and the “new,” profoundly shape a lived sense of gendered bicultural identity, ways of knowing multiplicity, diversity, difference, and a provisional sense of place. And it is this struggle for place, identity, and, indeed, survival—this learning to make the self in relation to the overlapping, sometimes congruent and often contradictory discourses that variously combine to constrain and enable subject positions and identities—that is the very substance of everyday life for most people in what are now called postmodern conditions.

Relations of learning and teaching, then, are endemic to all social relations, and are a particularly crucial dimension of parent-child relations. The authors in this volume argue that pedagogy is fundamental to all public/private life and all communicative exchanges, from the nursery to the playground, classroom to the courtroom. Social agency in the world is about learning from and reacting to multiple information sources, cues and symbol systems. In chapter 2, for instance, Elisabeth Porter develops an analysis of women’s friendships. She makes the case that learning about others’ desires, life narratives, needs, and goals is a prerequisite of identification with a concrete other in order that one may reciprocate with appropriate care, respect, and responsibility in the building and maintenance of women’s friendships. We learn
from others and we teach others about ourselves, our viewpoints, and our understandings. This volume, then, is an attempt to explicate the experiential and representational texture and political parameters of some of those everyday sites where gender identities and relations are taught and learned.

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Postscript

Books, which Foucault called “manifest discourse,” constitute a textual unity, a textual archive, a set of knowledge truth-claims and narratives that circulate through and are authorized by discourse communities as authoritative units of knowledge. Anthologies, in particular, usually claim that the individually authored narratives are bound together by some common vision, shared epistemic standpoint, or topic of inquiry. They are somewhat like postmodern families—social hybrids and eclectic, provisional and strategic alliances. I do not wish to impose any such unity on the diversity of subject positions, research interests, and theoretical orientations here. Rather, I take the position that each discursive event is a unique formation and interplay of differences which are never reducible to a seamless unifying principle, despite the fact that “commentary” or critique is always contained, and thus unified, by the inevitable repetition and reappearance of its referent—that is, its object of critique. I would defend, therefore, the openness of this text, its theoretical divergence, standpoint and subject differences, and multiplicity of commentary on its reference point, that of pedagogy: the disciplining and normalizing regimes that write the possibilities of the subject, the social, and the relations of difference among them.

Looking back over the volume, two thematic referents among the diverse voices in this volume are those of difference and textuality. I suspect that it is indicative of feminism’s current historical and theoretical juncture that questions of gender regimes, sexual politics, and identity no longer hold analytic center-stage. Instead, as nearly all the chapters illustrate, engagement with various intersections of gender/race/ethnicity/sexuality is emblematic of the making of a new kind of gendered subject. Another shared focus among all the chapters, and one not elicited by me, is the textual turn. Almost all the preceding chapters have begun from or focused exclusively on textual analysis in one form or another in order to expose how social subjects and groups are subjected in and by textual regimes.

Yet textualities and pedagogy, in Western contexts at least, are analogous. Thus, how law, media, (post)colonial policy, or educational theory conceptualizes and shapes hierarchies of difference, the normative subject and social relations, is fundamentally an educative process in text-based power-knowledge regimes, enacted across a network of diffuse events of social and self-disciplining. I would like to close with some comments by Foucault (1972) of the pedagogical function of all discourse, mindful that he was speaking of and for a social order and epistemology rooted in Western, print-based logocentrism. Of education, he writes (p. 127):

What is an educational system, after all, if not a ritualisation of the word; if not a qualification of some fixing of roles for speakers; if not the constitution of a (diffuse) doctrinal group; if not a distribution and appropriation of discourse, with all its learning and powers? What is ‘writing’…if not a similar form of subjection, perhaps taking different forms, but nonetheless analogous? May we not also say that the judicial system, as well as institutionalized medicine, constitute similar systems for the subjection of discourse?

The will to knowledge and the will to “truth” historically have been invested in pedagogical institutions and relations, and are as “foundational” to patriarchy as to feminism. And this
will to knowledge, this struggle and tension between truths of modernist discourses and feminism’s project of destabilizing those truths, “relies on institutional support; it is both reinforced and accompanied by a whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book-system [and media], publishing, libraries [and electronic networks]…and laboratories today” (p. 219). Foucault talked about the will to knowledge in the “great mutations of science” throughout the modern age. We are now undergoing similarly profound and radical mutations in knowledge, technology, political and social organization, modes of inquiry, inquirers, and the objects of inquiry (i.e., cultural “others,” women, cyberspace). At the same time, we are repositioning the will to knowledge in historically different institutional sites and relations: in popular culture, media, new age counseling and therapy, in emergent electronic information and social networks, in bedrooms and courtrooms, in boardrooms and on the streets.

The feminist project of writing and teaching difference, of contesting universalisms and hierarchy, of deconstructing the legacy of women’s collective but uniquely shaped subjection, occurs on new and established frontiers, on old institutional grounds (such as the university classroom), and in newly formed social or electronic collectives, newly formulated hybrid genres and narratives of dissent, assertion, and subject formation. This anthology is part of the feminist project of revealing the powerfully insistent hegemony of public discourse in maintaining hierarchy and inequality, and of contesting identities of the same and rewriting difference, albeit from the old institutional ground of “the book-system, publishing.” Insofar as the teaching machine of the institutionalized scholarship is still the primary venue for differentiating, qualifying and authorizing speakers to speak authoritatively within and of a discourse, this book—this unit of discourse—is part of the “habit-change” or ways of thinking things differently within established ground. It emerges from those gaps, endemic to all discourse, which are neither stable, constant, nor absolute.

References


