

PART ONE

EXPERTISE

AND THE

QUESTION OF YOUTH (AT-RISK).

CHAPTER ONE:

THE CRISIS OF YOUTH (AT-RISK)

Introduction

This Chapter will present an initial engagement with certain material and discursive relations and practices which mark the late 20th century as a (global) series of settings of Uncertainty and Crisis; and which work to construct the powerful truth that there exists a Crisis of Youth (at-Risk) in these settings. Narratives of Uncertainty and Risk are powerful elements in diverse intellectual, political and popular discourses about the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk). An important aspect of this thesis will be to demonstrate that these discourses are interconnected in various ways. There is, as Giddens (1984, 1990) would argue, a process of reflexive generation and (re)appropriation of knowledge about the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk) across and within diverse material and discursive spaces.

The first half of this Chapter sets out to examine the features which mark this Crisis of Youth (at-Risk) in a number of expert discourses. These discourses, about the behaviours, dispositions and *lifestyles* which position young people at-Risk, are structured by a certain quest for (intellectual) certainty about the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk) under conditions where the 'return of uncertainty' (Beck 1994 b) makes such a quest problematic. Further, these discourses of Youth at-Risk are framed by truths which construct Youth at-Risk in terms of *lack* and *deficit*. Such truths serve to (re)produce the phenomenon of a 'moral panic' around Youth as Delinquent, Deviant, and Disadvantaged. Youth at-Risk discourses, which construct Youth in terms of transition from (stable) Childhood to (stable) Adulthood, are also structured by the truth that Youth, itself, is characterised by Uncertainty and Crisis. In this sense *all* Youth at some time can be constructed as at-Risk. However, I will argue that processes of 'reflexive modernization' (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994) unsettle the apparent stability of (dependent) Childhood and (independent) Adulthood. The first part of this Chapter, then, represents the first stage in the process of rendering the truth of Youth at-Risk problematic.

The second part of this Chapter initiates an engagement with discourses of the *postmodern*. This engagement is structured by the significance which these discourses assume in contemporary Cultural Studies Of Youth. Here there will be a move to interrogate postmodern representations of contemporary material and discursive

realities; representations which foreground the impact of 'techno-culture' (Green and Bigum 1993) on transforming these realities and the processes of youth(ful) identity formation which emerge in these transformed settings. Postmodern Cultural Studies of Youth are useful in that they focus on many of the conditions, rationalities and sensibilities which provoke the construction of the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk). I will argue, however, that these discourses are limited in so far as they push into the background continuing concerns about the institutionally structured regulation of youth(ful) identities.

Constructing the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk)

Youth as Society's Miner's Canaries

Richard Eckersley's *Casualties of Change* (1988), *Youth and the Challenge to Change* (1992), and *Values and Visions* (1995) represent a consistent, prolonged attempt by one commentator to construct a view of Youth in Crisis.¹ In order to construct this view Eckersley (1992) outlines a context which, he argues, indicates that 'grave social and cultural problems confront Australia and other technologically advanced industrial societies' (p.v). More specifically;

the pressures Australia faces are common to the whole of the modern world - pressures of increasing urbanisation, industrialisation, centralisation, mechanisation, individualisation; of growing populations, increasing global economic competition and accelerating change; of a strengthening material and economic domination of our lives and a weakening spiritual and moral influence; of the development and employment of ever more powerful and complex technologies that diminish the individual's place in society and sense of control over his or her destiny. (p.18)

Such a litany is reminiscent of Giddens' (1990) 'risk profile of modernity'. In many ways it is also a 'profile' to be found in many popular (mass), party political (through the spectrum from Right to Left), Green, and religious discourses. There is much in this list that should cause concern. What is missing, however, is a sense that there can be productive, beneficial, enabling, or empowering possibilities in these tendencies or 'pressures'. This sort of litany serves, as Eckersley's final claim demonstrates, to close off the possibility of human agency in these various processes. Humans are reduced to beings who are acted upon, who react to processes, rather than beings who, in various contexts, initiate or contest such processes. Eckersley (1988) underscores this argument

¹ Eckersley is a Senior specialist, Strategic analysis, Resource Futures Program, CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology.

when he cites, in an introductory quote to *Casualties of Change*, Stephen Boyden's view of human agency:²

If a frog is placed in hot water it will make frantic efforts to escape; it is said, however, that if the animal is put into cold water, which is then slowly heated it may...be boiled to death without so much as a struggle.

Does this boiling frog principle apply to the human species in civilization? The evidence shows it does, on the level both of the individual and of society. (p.ii)

In supporting this construction of the species Eckersley (1992) suggests that, in a 'society that has become increasingly hostile to our well being' (p.4), we are able to see 'the worsening plight of young people, expressed in rising suicide rates, drug abuse and crime, and also more widely in their social conservatism, political apathy and materialism' (p.3).³ Moreover, in the 'cultural and social turmoil' which characterises 'Western civilisation in the 1990's', 'the young suffer most' as they 'face the difficult metamorphosis from child into adult, deciding who they are and what they believe, and accepting responsibility for their own lives. It is a transition best made in an environment that offers stability, security and some measure of certainty' (p.5).

Eckersley (1992) argues that this suffering is evidenced by: increased youth suicide rates, most pronounced in males between 15 and 24 years old (pp.5-6); drug (ab)use - with concern expressed about 'binge drinking' (as illicit drug use apparently declines) among young people (p.6); and 'increases' in violent crime (pp.6-7). For Eckersley these trends are well illustrated ('vividly described') by Graham Goodman in *The Bulletin*, and his account of a late night stroll through inner Sydney in the early 1990s:

It was as if William Hogarth's *Gin Lane* stretched for blocks. The streets were littered with drunks, some vomiting where they stood. The footpaths outside the hotels were strewn with broken glass. People argued with and hurled abuse at one another. Others with vacant eyes stood mumbling soundlessly to themselves, arms whirling like aimless windmills. Through the streets surged packs of feral teenagers with brutish faces and foul, mindless mouths (p.7).

² Boyden S., (1987) *Western Civilization in Biological Perspective*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

³ In an acknowledgment of the level of generalisation which characterises both his (cited) texts, Eckersley (1992) argues that, 'in relation to the culture of modern youth, I want to emphasise that I am describing the characteristics and qualities of a generation, not every individual member of it; nor in criticising some of those features am I levelling blame. Rather I see youth as the *miners canaries* of our society, acutely vulnerable to the peculiar hazards of our times' (p.5).

I am not familiar with Hogarth's *Gin Lane*⁴, but my sense is that such a scenario, while not *pleasant* or *nice*, could be characterised (in the service of various interests) as Dickensian (a century later), or as indicative of street life for the Larrikins in late 19th, early 20th century Sydney or Melbourne, or the 'Bodgies' of the 1950s, or the Punks of the 1970s, or many other groups and individuals in different time and space locales.⁵ *Street life* has historically offended the sensibilities of would be guardians of *morality* and *good order*, and provoked diverse attempts to intervene into, and regulate the behaviours and dispositions of young people on the street.⁶ This emphasis on good order often leads commentators, such as Eckersley (1992), to focus on 'delinquency' as being a defining 'characteristic and quality of a generation' (p.5).

In a move to further define the generational characteristics of contemporary populations of young Australians Eckersley (1992) cites various surveys conducted by Australia's Commission for the Future, advertising agencies and market researchers which claim that Australians in general are 'pessimistic, bewildered, cynical and insecure'. Moreover, this 'malaise', seen as a consequence of people feeling 'destabilised and powerless in the face of accelerating cultural, economic and technological change', has resulted in a 'people who are deeply alienated from the country's major institutions, especially government' (p.10). These concerns of the 'silent majority' are mirrored in similar surveys which identify young people as their demographic (p.10). A view which leads Eckersley (1992) to argue that: 'Behind the problems of youth suicide, alcohol and drug abuse and delinquency exists a constellation of psychological traits: alienation, anomie, frustration, confusion, hopelessness, impotence, loneliness. At the end of it all is a crippling lack of self esteem' (p.7).

These psychological traits are seen to manifest themselves not only in youth suicide, drug (ab)use and delinquency, but also in youth cultural production. Eckersley (1992) cites a review (again it comes from *The Bulletin*) of the Next Wave Festival, Melbourne's biennial youth arts festival, which seeks to argue that 'youth theatre, being responsive and immediate, acts as a societal alarm' (pp 11-12). The reviewer, using

⁴ Hogarth (1697-1764) was an English engraver and painter. He is noted for his series of engravings 'satirizing the vices and affectations of his age' (*Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition, 1986, p.729).

⁵ See, for instance, Howe 1978.

⁶ See, in this context, Bessant 1995, Finnane 1994, Tait 1994, White 1990, White 1994, White and Alder 1994.

this 'crisis warning' as a context, suggests that the 'outlook for our society is pretty damn bleak', for;

whether the authors have chosen to explore the past, present, or future, the message is the same - deprivation, violence, depression. Some hope and humour go into each Next Wave production but even the most positive of messages is intercut with fatalism. We get no sense of youth celebration, only a grim determination to survive. (p.12)

In a preamble to discussing the findings of the market research report, *Young Australians* (Mackay 1989), Eckersley (1992) suggests that modern industrial societies have failed to 'imbue people's lives with a sense of worth and meaning'. As a consequence, 'we appear to have entered an era of mass obsession, usually with ourselves: our appearance, our health and fitness, our work, our sex lives, our children's performance, our personal development' (p.14). In this environment, characterised by an 'absence of belief in much beyond ourselves', Eckersley (1992) seeks to identify 'young peoples cultural response to the ephemerality of today's world' (p.14). These responses are documented, argues Eckersley, in Mackay's report which *found* that; young Australians are 'fast trackers, accustomed to rapid change'; young people have a 'strong need to have fun', 'fun is the ultimate antidote to pessimism, anxiety, pressure and boredom'; young people are 'insatiable' in their quest for the 'latest, newest, fashion', yet their 'span of commitment is short and they have few enduring heroes, fashion or favourites'; young people are 'materialistic and indulged', the 'right brand names symbolise security and being loved'; young people have a strong need for 'security and belonging', a need often filled by 'peer groups' (pp 14-15). Summarising his reading of the Mackay report Eckersley (1992) constructs a view of Youth in Crisis, a view of a youth culture;

that may be meeting the needs of its members in terms of providing them with meaning and identity, but only just. It is...a culture that is barely holding together, certainly not enduring - a mass media culture marked by frenetic fashions and polarisation between self destructive recklessness and abandon, and a more insidiously debilitating cautiousness, social withdrawal and self-centredness. (p.15)

This understanding of Youth, and the sense of crisis which characterises this particular view, leads Eckersley to question whether;

the greatest wrong we are doing to our children is not the broken families or the scarcity of jobs (damaging though these are), but the creation of a culture that gives them nothing greater than themselves to believe in - no god, no king, no country - and no cause for hope or optimism. It is a culture whose main effect appears to be

demoralisation. Of course, for those young people without loving families and jobs, this demoralisation is all the greater, not least because of the importance of both to the process of cultural induction. (p.15)

'God, king and country' can be read as a literal, nostalgic hankering for some *golden past*, where religion, the crown, and nationalism purportedly provided a framework for individual and collective (national) identity. Or it could be read metaphorically as a desire for a centredness and locatedness in some common, agreed value system. Whichever reading is made this construction does, indeed, touch on certain theoretical, political and popular concerns about contemporary settings ('new times', Hall and Jacques 1990), and the Questions of Youth which emerge in these settings. These concerns structure various theoretical debates about the nature of modernity/postmodernity; the very idea (nature) of Self (Identity) in these settings; and the forms of theoretical and political practice which are possible in these times. A fundamental concern in this present discussion is the manner in which the discourse of Youth at-Risk comes to *mean* so powerfully, and how this *metanarrative* can be understood as representing a quest for certainty in the context of the return of uncertainty. Many of these issues, and the possibilities for engaging these concerns, both theoretically and politically, are central to the task of understanding the ways in which discourses of Risk are mobilised in diverse attempts to regulate certain populations of young people.

Constructing Youth at-Risk

The Youth at-Risk literature is extensive.⁷ Swadener and Lubeck (1995), for instance, claim that in the US since 1989 over 2500 articles and conference papers have focussed on the issue of children, families and youth at-Risk. They further claim that the narrative of at-Risk structures 'countless' school district, State and Federal task forces which address the 'crisis' of America's Youth. As a construction of diverse forms of expert knowledge the narrative of Youth at-Risk is, potentially, encompassing of *all* Youth(ful) behaviours and dispositions. Indeed, the expert literature is unselfconsciously explicit on this very point. Ogden and Germinario (1988), for instance, in their attempt to identify 'high risk' student populations argue that: 'All

⁷The discussion which follows draws on my reading of a selection from this literature. In addition to the texts I cite see, Department of Education, Victoria (1996), Department of Employment, Education and Training,(1992), Education Department of south Australia (1976), Gross & Capuzzi (1993), Kushman & Kinney (1993), McWhirter & McWhirter (1993), Meggert (1993), Moore (1997), Nardini & Antes (1991), Palmo & Palmo (1993), and Robinson (1993).

children are at times students-at-risk' (p.xvii). Withers and Batten (1995) and Batten and Russell (1995), in extensive reviews of this literature, also point to this 'central' theme in at-Risk discourses. Mobilising a developmental psychology understanding of adolescence Withers and Batten (1995) argue that the psychological, physiological and 'social stresses and tensions' experienced during adolescence *mean* that 'all youths are in some sense at risk' (p.1).

This view that all young people are potentially at-Risk signals a historically novel development in attempts to regulate youth(ful) identities. At-Risk discourses constitute, in part, a historical continuity in the construction of certain youth(ful) populations in terms of *deviancy*, *delinquency*, and *deficit*. At-Risk discourses, however, provide a technique, and a narrative, for attempts to regulate the behaviours and dispositions of young people which is potentially 'endless' (Tait 1995, p.128). In Chapters Four and Six of this thesis I will examine Risk at the level of a metanarrative of a more fully 'reflexive modernity' (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994); and as a technique of government which promises the possibility of regulating youth(ful) identities under these conditions. Understood in this manner the historically novel character of at-Risk discourses becomes evident in that no youth(ful) relations, practices, behaviours and/or dispositions remain outside of the domain of these discourses. As Tait (1995) argues, 'nothing', in at-Risk discourses, 'remains beyond governmental intervention. Since "risk" can be legitimately found anywhere, there is therefore no one who is not at risk of *something*' (p.128, original emphasis).

It is important here to avoid any sense of total government by an all powerful State; a State which through its activities represses the possibility of full human potential in the name of social control.⁸ Rather, theories of government, as the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1991), construct government and regulation in terms of historically contingent attempts to 'make up' particular (ideal) types of youth(ful) identity (Rose and Miller 1992). Moreover, these attempts at regulation are not the sole province of a monologic State. Rather, government is structured by the diverse attempts of various experts and centres of expertise ('psy' scientists, teachers, (post) critical theorists and administrators, in courts, schools, universities and medical centres) to regulate the behaviours and dispositions of young people (Rose 1996a).

Risk: Costs and Benefits

Withers and Batten (1995) provide one avenue for entering the vast discursive terrain of Youth at-Risk. Their review of the at-Risk literature identifies two central and often

⁸ See Hunter's (1993) critique of Donald (1992) on these grounds.

'competing' concerns within at-Risk discourses. They identify, in the first instance, a 'humanistic intention' which structures the identification and intervention processes enabled by constructing Youth at-Risk. This intention is grounded in concerns about *harm, danger, care, and support*, for those young people who might be at-Risk. In the second instance an 'economic intention' legitimates these attempts to regulate youth(ful) identities. This intention foregrounds the *costs* and the *benefits* - to young people and families, but primarily to communities and the Nation - of identifying Risk factors and populations at-Risk, and of mobilising certain interventions on the basis of these identifications (pp.5-6). Withers and Batten (1995) suggest that these two intentions are not necessarily 'conflicting or contra-distinctive'. Rather, their review of the at-Risk literature suggests a 'competition for primacy' between these humanistic and economic concerns; a competition which can be identified in any number of interventionist programs which take as their object Youth-at-Risk.

One example of where these concerns appear to co-exist and compete in at-Risk discourses can be found in Fenwick English's (1988) foreword to Ogden and Germinario's (1988) *The at-risk student*. Here English suggests that occasionally it is necessary to 'explain *why* a book has been written. This one requires no such justification' (p.xiii, original emphasis). The problems that at-Risk students present for 'parents, teachers and school administrators' are self evident in statistics which English cites 'from news articles and editorials in the nation's press'. These US statistics suggest that: 'Student suicide has increased 140 percent; Teenage homicide increased 232 percent; Juvenile delinquency rates rose by 131 percent; The illegitimate birth rate increased by 141 percent' (p.xiii).⁹ Against this backdrop of Youth in Crisis, English highlights Nationwide calls 'for dealing with *at-risk students*', as a matter of urgency lest this '*most compelling agenda*' threatens 'America's position as a world economic power' (p.xiii, original emphasis).

The competing claims between a *humanitarian* concern for the treatment of disadvantaged or delinquent Youth, and the *economic costs* associated with the social problems which Youth at-Risk represent, also emerges in Ogden and Germinario's (1988) program for school based responses to the Crises of Students at-Risk. Ogden and Germinario (1988) identify Students at-Risk as those sections of the school population

⁹ English does not reference the sources of these statistics, or indicate the time frame in which these increases occurred, or provide definitions of concepts such as 'delinquency'. Further, there is no reference, in an academic text, to the possibilities of media sensationalism or manipulation in the reporting of these issues. They are self-evident. English is the chair of the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Cincinnati.

who demonstrate 'a lack of the necessary intellectual, emotional and/or social skills to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them' (p.xvii). Ogden and Germinario suggest that all children, at different times, could be conceived, in this sense, as being at-Risk. However it is those children who consistently display these *lacks* who constitute the 'high risk' school populations; the populations who 'become disenchanting, and ultimately openly or passively reject school' (p.xvii).

In order to maximise the schooling opportunities and outcomes for all students Ogden and Germinario (1988) argue that school administrators and educational experts need to identify, then 'control' and 'eliminate' the 'effects of those factors which limit the learning and potential of children' (p.xvii). This process of identification and intervention is justified on a number of grounds. Ogden and Germinario (1988) argue that the identification of the factors which place students at-Risk is an equity issue. 'Disaffected students', can, in this sense, be positioned in much the same way as the 'disabled child, the bilingual child, the gifted child'. That is, 'disaffected students' constitute an identifiable population, marked in this instance by deficit, which requires 'specialized programs to truly benefit from their educational experience' (p.xvii).

The second ground for mobilising processes for identifying at-Risk students concerns the sorts of (causal) relationships which can be constructed between a 'variety of social problems' and an 'inadequate education'. Here, Ogden and Germinario (1988) argue for a form of *cost-benefit* analysis which indicates that in the long term the 'cost of poor schooling may be significantly higher than the costs associated with good schooling'. For Ogden and Germinario, the *truth* of the matter is that a 'poorly educated person is more likely to require social welfare and institutional services and is increasingly more likely to be involved in the legal system as a result of criminal activities' (p.xvii).

In the third instance, Ogden and Germinario (1988) argue that schools are increasingly positioned, within various official and popular discourses, as being responsible for the 'teaching of essential life skills that were traditionally within the domain of family and church' (p.xviii). The need to identify those factors which place student involvement at-Risk is, in this context, set against a backdrop of changes in family structures wherein; 'parents of at least 40 percent of the children born this year will divorce. One in four girls will become pregnant at least once during her high school years. Only one in one thousand college freshmen [sic] women plans a career as a homemaker' (p.xviii). Finally, argue Ogden and Germinario (1988), this process of identification and intervention is justified by the *fact* that 'disaffected or at-risk students have potentially negative effects on the attitude, behaviour and achievement of other students' (p.xviii)

Risk Factors: Behaviours, Dispositions and Lifestyles

A report from the Panel on High-Risk Youth for the US Commission on Behavioural and Social Sciences and Education (National Research Council) (1993) also argues that Americans are 'alarmed' by the increases in the 'numbers of adolescents who engage in high risk behaviours', and/or who 'adopt "risky life-styles", lifestyles characterized by drug use, unprotected sexual behaviour, dropping out of school, delinquency and violence' (p.1). The Commission argues that these behaviours, of a population (adolescents) who 'naturally' experiment and 'take risks', 'compromise their health, endanger their lives, and limit their chances to achieve successful adult lives' (p.1). Colthart (1996) canvasses similar themes when he cites a Western Australian Government report on Youth Affairs which positions Youth as being at-Risk 'if their life circumstances threaten physical, psychological or emotional well-being and preclude or limit the normative developmental experiences necessary to achieve healthy adult functioning' (p.31). The 'major categories of risk factors' which jeopardise the achievement of, or transition to, 'healthy adult functioning' include;

failure to complete Year 10: unemployment or being in marginal or insecure employment: engagement in behaviour likely to bring one into the criminal justice system: engagement in unsafe health practices: and being subject to a family environment which fails to provide adequate safety and/or fails to convey a sense of self-worth. (pp.31-32)

A major concern for the legislators who authored this Government report is that population of young people 'who have multiple risk factors'. These at-Risk young people are often 'seriously troubled' and alienated from mainstream society' (p.32). The language of pathology, of being the victim of a disease, of *having* 'multiple risk factors' is very evident in this context. As Swadener (1995) argues, this discourse of Risk emerges in part, from 'epidemiological and public health' discourses. As a consequence metaphors such as 'immunization', 'innoculation', 'identification' 'intervention' and 'treatment' are prominent in the discursive field of Youth at-Risk.¹⁰ Colthart (1996), for instance, reports on a number of expert studies which argue that, *interventions* into the lives of at-Risk Youth which are structured by promoting participation in sport and recreation activities, display positive outcomes in terms of reducing 'delinquency', 'alienation', 'boredom', 'anti-social behaviour', and a 'sense of hopelessness'. At the same time these sorts of interventions, it is argued, lead to increases in 'self esteem', 'self

¹⁰This is a theme which I will return to in some detail in Chapter Six.

concept', 'social and interactional skills', and to the 'promotion of mental health and social adjustment' (p.32).¹¹

Aldis Putnins (1997) also rehearses an epidemiological discourse in his argument that tattoos are mark(er)s of Risk; one highly visible factor identifying populations of Youth at-Risk. Putnins (1997) argues that a number of studies have established a statistically valid (causal) relationship between 'having tattoos, increased risk-taking and anti social behaviours' (p.13).¹² A study of motorcycle fatalities in South Australia during 1984-85, for instance, found that 'all subjects investigated at autopsy' had tattoos (p.13). Research from the UK claimed a 'positive and statistically significant relationship between having tattoos and offending risk among adolescent and adult males' (p.13). Finally, a Victorian study of intravenous drug users in one prison setting found that; 97% of subjects had tattoos; 73% of these adult prisoners had been in Juvenile Justice Centres; and the average age at which these subjects got their first tattoo was 15.2 years (p.14).

Putnins (1997) argues that these sorts of statistics 'clearly' establish a number of *truths* about tattoos and at-Risk Youth. These include; the link between 'tattoos and offending is already evident in adolescence'; tattoos are 'often associated with group membership', where *risk taking* characteristics such as 'fierceness, brazenness and daring' are commonplace; tattoos are a 'marker for increased risk' in the sense that they project an image of delinquency which can lead to 'difficulty getting a job' thus 'restricting access to a constructive non-delinquent activity' (pp 13-15). Putnins acknowledges that while tattoos are 'associated with increased offending risk' they are not 'the major cause of juvenile delinquency'. His proposal to publicly fund tattoo removal for young people referred by agencies which 'deal with young offenders and other "at risk" youth' is identified as one of many possible interventions which should be available for 'treating' at-Risk Youth (p.15).¹³

¹¹ These claims appear frequently in that literature on at-Risk Youth which takes as its focus the structured participation in physical activities by populations of young people. See, for instance, Cheffers (1997), Collingwood (1997), Danish and Nellen (1997), Miller et al (1997), Pitter and Andrews (1997).

¹² Putnins is the Chief Clinical Psychologist for the Residential and Youth Services Division of the South Australian Department for Family and Community Services. His field of expertise is ethnopsychology and delinquency.

¹³ For a reply to Putnins (1997) see Peterson (1997) who argues against constructing Youth as a 'threat' in times of economic and social crisis. Particularly when the 'threat' is grounded in concerns about tattoos as markers of risk and delinquency.

Youth suicide is another (troubling) social phenomenon which can be conceived of as a public health issue. Constructed thus, youth suicide can be *understood* within a concern with the population of (potential) youth suicides, and the factors which might place members of this youth(ful) population at-Risk of suicide. Davidson and Linnoila (1991), for instance, outline the findings of an expert Working Party attached to the US Department of Health and Human Services, Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide, which was charged with clarifying 'the environmental, behavioural, socio-cultural, biological, and psychological factors which have been associated with an increased likelihood of suicide among young people' (p.xi). While Davidson and Linnoila (1991), acknowledge that available research made quantifiable estimates of relative risk a goal as yet unreachd' (p.xii), they, nevertheless, argue that there is a range of factors which are 'clearly linked to youth suicide' (p.xi). These include; substance abuse; psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, and borderline personality and affective disorders; 'parental loss and family disruption'; family 'traits', including 'genetic traits such as predisposition to affective illness'; 'low concentrations of the serotonin metabolite, 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid (5-HIAA), and the dopamine metabolite, homovanillic acid (HVA) in the cerebrospinal fluid'; homosexuality; having a relation with a suicide victim; impulsive and aggressive behaviour; previous attempts at suicide; 'rapid socio-cultural change'; media reports on suicides; and 'access to lethal methods, such as guns' (pp.xi-xii).

This summary of the Risk factors for Youth suicide draws on a variety of expert reports prepared for the Working Party which mobilised diverse forms of expertise in seeking to tell the truth of Youth at-Risk of suicide. The 'diversity of risk factors' which these reports identify suggest to Davidson and Linnoila (1991), that intervention and prevention strategies need to be 'targeted' *better*, via improvements in research design and 'surveillance systems', and changes in the flow of expertly produced knowledge *about* Youth suicide Risk factors to those who deal with Youth in various settings (pp.xii-xiii). This particular example also highlights how the mobilisation of Risk discourses provokes a process of expert identification of Risk factors; a process which promises a more *sophisticated, scientific, scholarly*, identification of those behaviours and (genetic pre)dispositions which place Youth at-Risk. This 'risk factor information' also serves an economic concern within governmental programs which target Youth at-Risk. As Davidson and Linnoila (1991) argue, this 'risk factor information' can be mobilised to 'better target interventions and prevention services': 'Limits on the distribution of resources for suicide prevention compel us to direct our efforts to those persons in greatest need and those most likely to benefit. Risk factor information fosters prudent allocation of resources among those programs intended to prevent youth suicide' (p.xiii).

This initial engagement with the Youth at-Risk literature not only foregrounds certain *humanistic* and *economic* concerns running through this discursive terrain. What also emerges is the dominance of a particular form of intellectually produced knowledge, and an associated view of the usefulness of this form of intellectual abstraction for apprehending the complexity of human being-in-the-world. It is an epistemology which foregrounds narratives of *scholarship*, *science*, and of *progress* towards *certainty* with regard to the truth of Youth at-Risk. There is a sense here that processes of intellectual abstraction about the factors which place Youth at-Risk are marked by processes of 'reflexivity' (Giddens 1990, 1991) which aim to *better* tell the truth of Youth in settings characterised by Crisis and Uncertainty. Running alongside this quest for certainty is a view of Youth itself as being marked by Uncertainty, Crisis and Transition. Youth here is about *becoming* (adult) rather than simply *being* (non adult).

Youth as Transition, as Becoming (Adult).

The discourse of Youth at-Risk mobilises a form of probabilistic thinking, about certain *preferred*, or *ideal* Adult futures and the present behaviours and dispositions of Youth. This sort of probabilistic thinking attempts to construct statistically *valid*, causal relationships between these different configurations of time and space; between these different constructions of Adolescent and Adult. Constructions of Youth at-Risk, and of the behaviours and dispositions (Risk factors) which place young people at-Risk, are, in this sense, constructions of 'intellectually trained' (Sharp 1985), new class Adults within various expert systems. These expert systems generate discourses which seek to tell the truth of Youth at-Risk. These truths concern the manner in which present behaviours and dispositions place desirable future outcomes at-Risk. The truth of Youth at-Risk is thus grounded in a narrative of Youth as becoming; as being a space of transition from Childhood to Adulthood.

Such a view of Youth is to be found, for instance, in John Freeland's (1991, 1992, 1996) identification of those factors which place this transitional process at-Risk for certain populations of young people.¹⁴ Citing Coleman and Husen (1985), Freeland (1996)

¹⁴ Freeland's (1991) commissioned report for the Finn Review (1991) of *Young People's Participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training*, underpins much of the discussion in Chapter 7 of the Review; 'Participation in Education and Training by the Disadvantaged'. In that Chapter there is a special focus on the factors affecting the 'educational participation' of a 'sub-group of the 'at risk' population; a group who are 'classified as deeply disadvantaged'. Here, Aboriginal youth, young people from Non English Speaking Background (NESB), 'some' young women, homeless youth, long term unemployed young

constructs Youth as a 'stage of life between childhood and adulthood'. Childhood is identified with 'physiological immaturity, emotional and economic dependence and primary ties with parents and siblings'. Adulthood, in this view, is framed in terms of 'physiological maturity, emotional and economic autonomy, and by primary ties with the adult partner and children'. Youth, as a transitional process, involves attempts to resolve 'a range of questions relating to personal morality, sexuality, politics and economics, all of which contribute to one's personal identity' (p.7). Youth is thus a 'process of simultaneously "un-becoming" a child and becoming an adult'.

This particular construction of at-Risk and 'vulnerable' populations of young people rests on identifying and quantifying a range of factors which place at-Risk those 'teenagers' unable to 'effect' a 'secure transition to adulthood'. Freeland (1996) argues that Youth emerges as a transitional 'stage of life' in the context of post Second World War changes in the 'patterns of teenage participation in education and the labour market. For the 'vast majority' of young people who were *becoming* adult in the 1950s and 1960s, the 'transition to adult independence occurred after the completion of ten years of schooling and with a trouble free entry to the labour market' (p.7). The 'long term structural collapse of the teenage full-time labour market' since the 1960s has, argues Freeland (1996), 'severely dislocated' the process and experience of transition for all young people. This dislocation is, however, not 'uniform', and is marked by a complex of 'interrelated social divisions based on class, gender, race, ethnicity and region'. This 'combination of factors', Freeland (1996) suggests, places a 'significant proportion of teenagers at risk of not effecting a secure transition to adulthood' (p.7).

Freeland (1996) determines the 'proportion' of Youth at-Risk via an analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Labour Force statistics. Using these *official* figures Freeland identifies three categories which 'constitute those who can be classified as being at risk in the transition to adult autonomy';

- . those who are not in full-time education and who are unemployed;
- . those who are not in full-time education and who are not in the labour force; and
- . those who are not in full-time education and who are employed part-time (p.8).

For Freeland (1996) the populations of young people in the first two categories constitute Youth who are 'at grave risk in the transition to adulthood'. Young people in the third category are 'at some risk'. In August 1994 the population of 'at grave risk' young people 'numbered 128,700 (60,800 males and 67,900 females) or 10 percent of

people, young people in 'isolated communities', young offenders and disabled young people, are constructed as identifiable, distinct populations of Youth at-Risk (p.134).

the 15 to 19 year old population'. These figures are further broken down by Freeland to *show* that, '2.5 percent of 15 year olds, 7 percent of 16 year olds, 10 percent of 17 year old, 15 percent of 18 year olds and 16 percent of 19 year olds fell into this at grave risk category' (p.8). However Freeland (1996) argues that these figures tend to 'underestimate' the size of the *gravely* at-Risk population insofar as the numbers for the 15 to 17 year old group tend to ignore 'the reality that a significant proportion' of this age group are students 'who are not succeeding at school'. These Students at-Risk are, in this view, 'merely postponing their eventual transition to that at grave risk category' (p.8).

From a position on the Left (broadly defined) Freeland (1996) stresses the importance of seeing the problem of at-Risk Youth in 'structural' terms. That is, in terms of structural changes in labour markets, curriculum restructuring around notions of 'quality and relevance', structured training and entry level employment opportunities for Youth, and in terms of institutionally patterned relations of (dis)advantage in which class, gender, ethnicity, geography, and disability structure life options and choices (pp.9-11). Yet Freeland's (1996) construction of at-Risk Youth is an instance of Left theoretical practice which unproblematically rehearses the historical construction of disadvantaged (at-Risk) Youth in terms of *lack* and *deficit*. Disadvantaged, at *grave* Risk Youth, Freeland argues, 'have access to fewer cultural resources and life cycle opportunities' which they might mobilise in their 'search for solutions to the problems of identity and transition' (p.11). In this view the 'richer the socio-economic and socio-cultural resources the broader the array of phenomena included in the analysis and understanding, the wider the range of possible courses of action available to the individual and the cultural group' (p.11).

Constructing Youth at-Risk in terms of *deficit* provokes an interventionist, regulatory regime which takes as its object the transformation of the cultural resources of the Disadvantaged. My concerns with this unproblematised 'logic of transformation' (Walkerdine 1997) will be developed in the following Chapter. A further concern is the manner in which Youth is constructed as a process of transition, of *unbecoming* and *becoming*. Thinking youth(ful) identifies in this manner foregrounds the relational and institutional characteristics of Youth. There is an emphasis here on the '*relationship* between specific groups of young people and institutions', and between Childhood, Youth and Adulthood (Wyn and White, 1997, p.147, original emphasis) However the 'return of uncertainty' under the conditions of reflexive modernization (Beck 1992) 'challenges' the narrative of 'adulthood as a point of arrival' (Wyn and White, 1997, p.148). Uncertainties with regard to (un)employment, gender relations and relationships generally, class relations and the *nature* of Identity, 'undermine the taken-for-granted

meaning of adulthood' (p.148). If Adulthood is rendered problematic by these uncertainties so too is the notion of Youth as transition, and the discourse of Youth at-Risk of not 'effecting a secure transition to adulthood' (Freeland 1996). Further, the primary markers of this process of transition, the construction of notions of *dependence* and *independence*, fail to account for the *inter* dependent nature of human interactions. Indeed, narratives of Childhood as dependence, Adulthood as independence, 'embody', argue Wyn and White (1997), 'particular moral and political values which in the context of youth studies, tend to reinforce individualism and self interest' (p.150). Moreover, such constructions are gendered, with (hegemonic) Masculinity marked by *independence* and (emphasised) Femininity marked by *dependence* (Connell 1995).

In the last part of this Chapter I will move away from a direct engagement with discourses of Youth at-Risk. My intention is to examine the social, cultural and intellectual conditions which structure contemporary constructions of the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk) from the standpoint of postmodern Cultural Studies of Youth. In the discursive domain of *critical* Education Theory the processes of telling the truth of Youth have, during the last two decades, been heavily influenced by British Cultural Studies, and more recently by an articulation of postmodernism with Cultural Studies.¹⁵ Within this articulation concerns with telling the truth of Youth are structured, largely, around questions of the Self and the processes by which youth(ful) identities are formed and regulated. Moreover, within these discourses there are concerns with understanding contemporary settings as *postmodern*; as settings which, in a material and discursive (representational) sense, are situated in relation to an earlier or different phase (understanding) of modernity. Postmodern Cultural Studies of Youth argue that these changed material and discursive realities need to be understood in particular ways in order to understand processes of identity formation for contemporary populations of young people.

Youth as Postmodern Subjects Par Excellence

The case is very different for those who live postmodernism. For them, the denaturing of time means that they have no history. To live postmodernism is to live as schizophrenics are said to do, in a world of disconnected present moments that jostle one another but never form a continuous (much less logical) progression. The prior experiences of older people act as anchors that keep them from fully entering the postmodern stream of spliced contexts and discontinuous time. Young people, lacking these anchors and immersed in TV, are in a better position to know from direct experience what it is to have no sense of

¹⁵ The intellectual legacy of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) is a dominant influence in critical theories of Education.

history, to live in a world of simulacra, to see the human form as provisional. The case could be made that the people in this country who know most about how postmodernism *feels* (as distinct from how to envision or analyze it) are all under the age of sixteen (Hayles 1990, p.282 original emphasis)

Alien(s) in the Classroom

Bill Green and Chris Bigum's (1993) *Aliens in the Classroom* is a useful text for engaging with the sorts of issues (truths) which are produced when Postmodern Cultural Studies take Youth as their object. *Aliens* is an explicitly and avowedly 'provocative' piece of 'educational fiction', or 'thought experiment' (p.120). It aims to unsettle, or transform educational debates about what types of students are populating contemporary school settings. Green and Bigum express disappointment and dissatisfaction with much of what passes as debate about youth and schooling and education in various arenas in Australia at the present time. Because it is so explicitly provocative it opens up this debate to include issues and perceptions which are often excluded or marginalised in much of the *mainstream* discussions about retention rates, curriculum and schooling's connections to, and situation within, wider material and discursive relations and processes. Key organising concerns for Green and Bigum (1993), in this context, include:

Are schools now dealing with a student who is quite different to students of previous eras? A subordinate question is: Have schools and educational authorities developed curriculum rationales on what are essentially inadequate and obsolete assumptions about the nature of students. (p.119)¹⁶

In attempting to address these concerns Green and Bigum (1993) situate their 'educational fiction' within current debates about 'youth, media culture and postmodernism' (p.120). Within the space where these various discourses converge Green and Bigum engage with a variety of issues related to 'moral panics'; about 'youth-in-crisis'; about globalising processes within popular culture; about the emergence and proliferation of new information and communication technologies; and about the ways in which these 'technologically mediated' processes, practices and relations are 'implicated in the (re)generation of student identities and cultural forms' (p.120). In this space Green and Bigum argue that Youth should be seen as the 'subject *par excellence*

¹⁶ See also, Green 1993, Green, Fitzclarence and Bigum 1994, Bigum, Fitzclarence and Green 1994, and Fitzclarence, Green and Bigum 1995

of post modernism, especially in its techno-cultural inflection' (p.124 original emphasis).¹⁷

Postmodern Subject(ivities)

Green and Bigum's (1993) construction of contemporary populations of young people as postmodern subjects *par excellence* places in the foreground a variety of issues and concerns related to the new and emergent information technologies. These technologies include *hardware* and *software* such as: television, video, music recording and performance technologies, telephony, modems, fibre optic cable networks and satellites; and new multi media technologies which *promise* (portend) convergence in a tremendous range of digital technology applications. Foremost in many discussions about the promises, possibilities and problems of new technologies is the development of computing hardware and software which enables the modelling and penetration of *natural* and *social* complex systems (genetic engineering, economic modelling, reproductive technologies, Chaos science, global warming). Computer technologies also enable (on a global scale) the instantaneous and simultaneous generation, circulation, storage, and retrieval of vast quantities of information. Further, these technologies make possible the generating and sustaining of any number of virtual realities (worlds), and *simulations* of environments, relations and practices.¹⁸

Green and Bigum (1993) signal a number of important issues in locating young people's identity work in the context of this new 'techno-popular cultural' environment. They point to the 'speed' of development and proliferation of these new technologies; the

¹⁷ What is Postmodernism ? Generating a shared sense of what the postmodern might mean is an exercise which provokes frustration. Indeed, it could be argued that this problem of representation is both symptomatic and characteristic of the postmodern. The problem of representation, or the construction of shared meaning emerges as intellectuals, whose work, in part, is that of representation, problematise the practice (the very idea) of representing reality, of constructing or *fixing* (however provisionally) shared meanings about the *nature of reality*. The theoretical and political problematics which are structured by postmodernism will be more fully explored in Chapter Two, where I will argue that these movements render problematic the possibilities of theoretical and political engagement with at-Risk discourses. My engagement with theories of reflexive modernization, and governmentality also occurs in the intellectual spaces opened up by postmodern and poststructuralist discourses. For discussions on what the postmodern *is*, its relation to the modern, and critical commentary on the theoretical and political possibilities structured by these debates see Featherstone (1988), Frisby (1988), Gill (1991), Haraway (1985), Norris (1992) and Wexler (1987).

¹⁸ For a review of some of these issues, from perspectives which are immersed in these developments, see Rheingold (1984, 1991) and Kelly (1994)

ways in which the proliferation of these technologies is overlaid on existing historical practices, relations and processes; the ways in which these technologies might transform existing relations and practices, and the ways in which these technologies generate or structure new social relations and practices. These new information and communication technologies, and the 'techno-culture' which both generates them and is generated and (re)produced by them, are argued by Green and Bigum to be important markers of both postmodern culture and cultural postmodernism. It is under these changed and emergent conditions that Green and Bigum outline certain aspects of what they term a 'post modern subjectivity, one constructed directly out of technologically mediated social relations and practices and their psycho-symbolic codings' (p.131). They write of; 'computer obsessives', 'hackers and cyberpunks'; the TV 'couch potato' merged with remote control devices; 'normal' children and adults spending long periods of time at a keyboard, video control panel, or in front of the television (pp.134-135). In these circumstances Green and Bigum question the boundaries which 'we' construct to delineate 'machine' and 'organism', 'text' and 'context'. Citing Hayles (1990) they suggest that there is a need for 'new descriptions to account for the coupling of organism and cybernetic machine':

Physically intact, the player is nevertheless *already a cyborg* for he [sic] is joined to the computer by a continuous interplay between his neural system and the computer's circuitry. In this view, to have non detachable cybernetic implants is simply to reify the detachable connections that already bind humans to computers in thousands of video arcades and computer centres across the country (Hayles, 1990, p.277, cited in Green and Bigum 1993, p.133 original emphasis)

Distinctions should be drawn here between cultural postmodernism as a form of cultural representation or intellectual abstraction, and postmodern culture. Postmodern culture, it is argued, is marked by changed cultural and social practices and relations, processes and spaces. Cultural postmodernism, on the other hand, signifies changes in the modes of representing or abstracting material realities. Such representations are not transparent in that they do not refer to, or correspond in any unmediated or uncontested way to the processes, practices and relations they construct or represent. This is an important point to keep in the foreground in this discussion of Green and Bigum's (1993) construction of *Aliens in the classroom*. It is a point which Green and Bigum stress when they refer to their own thesis as a provocative 'education fiction or fantasy' (p.119), and which Bill Green (1993) expands on in a later context by arguing that the:

thesis has always been intended as provocative...a self conscious image or trope, a rhetorical figure that draws attention to itself and therefore hopefully all such descriptions-as-constructions. ('Youth' for

instance, or the new social, legal and psychological categories of the 'delinquent' and the 'adolescent', dating back in Australia to the 1950s.) I want to stress this matter of rhetoric and strategy: the 'aliens' thesis is a deliberately unstable formulation and in our usage it always has been. (pp.8-9)

It can be argued then, that *Aliens* as a construction is firmly grounded in a particular kind of intellectual practice and abstraction. More explicitly this intellectual position sees 'a particular value in engaging the new insights and images to be drawn from cultural postmodernism and new science' (Green and Bigum 1993 p.121). Further, Green and Bigum suggest that '[i]ncreasingly there would seem to be a general and extremely generative convergence between social theory and science fiction' (p.121). Here they cite the work of Hayles (1990) and Haraway (1991) as providing potentially progressive and challenging ways of understanding how what they refer to as 'techno-popular culture' is increasingly implicated in the formation of students/youth as postmodern subjects.

Moral Panics about Young Aliens.

Green and Bigum's (1993) intellectual and political mobilisation of Hayles' (1990) cultural postmodernism and Haraway's (1991) cyborg imagery is, however, problematic on a number of grounds. These concerns will be addressed in following sections. At this point I want to discuss the manner in which Green and Bigum construct a connection between the material and discursive developments they characterise as postmodern, and contemporary debates about schooling, youth culture, media culture and various 'moral panics' concerning the way in which these relations and practices are implicated in the 'development' or '(re)generation' of youth(ful) identities. In these contexts 'cyborg' and 'alien' imagery is, arguably, more successful in addressing the construction of difference *between* generations: a construction which rests, primarily, on the power of older generations to 'mean' in the spaces of Educational, Cultural, Economic and Social policy and commentary.

This difference across the generations structures what Green and Bigum (1993) identify as Conservative 'moral panics' about what is to be *done* with or about contemporary youth(ful) populations. For many commentators 'today's youth' - and their peer cultural values, practices and relations and their uses and appropriations of new technologies - appear as *aliens*. The key to this particular use of alien imagery is Green and Bigum's argument that the spaces, relations and practices generated by or within techno-culture are 'natural environments' for rising generations, and are, in significant ways, different environments to those in which previous generations 'became somebody'(Wexler 1992). In this sense the *generation gap* can be seen to be not only *difference* structured by age,

but by immersion in, engagement with, and understanding of, this 'techno-culture'. For Green and Bigum (1993):

The unsettling glimpses of augmented children, children who exist somewhere in the space delineated by the *human*, the *post human* and the *alien* remind us that, although we share a common geo-physical space with the young, we may well find it difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to share in the many virtual spaces or worlds they inhabit in the digital ecosystem. (p.132, original emphasis)

Green and Bigum's (1993) explicitly provocative use of 'cyborg' and 'alien' imagery in this context makes possible the connections between the construction of generational difference and 'moral panics' about Youth in Crisis. This generation gap, this construction of difference between generations along a variety of 'normalising axes' (Tait 1993) - age vs youth, high culture vs popular culture, print based culture vs image (visual) based culture - is shown by Green and Bigum to be fundamental to many Conservative constructions of contemporary Youth in Crisis. These constructions of Youth in Crisis, these moral panics need to be;

understood as not just a direct response on the part of the dominant-cultural bloc to a perceived 'crisis' in the orderly processes of social and economic 'reproduction' but also, ironically, as capturing and re-articulating the reproduction thesis itself, along with its associated rhetorics and political strategies. What this has been realised in is a renewed emphasis on cultural production, specifically on the part of and in the interests of the Right and its constituencies. Central features of this cultural offensive have been sustained attacks on public schooling, literacy pedagogy, educational progressivism, contemporary youth, and popular culture. (Green and Bigum 1993, pp.125-126)¹⁹

This *deficiency* view of youth, and the associated mobilisation of at-Risk categories, has particular significance for any number of governmental initiatives (schooling, youth work, parenting advice, juvenile justice) directed at youth(ful) populations and assorted attempts at the formation of certain types of young person. This emphasis on deficiency in representations of youth(ful) populations in crisis, or at-Risk, constructs

¹⁹ As Giddens (1994 a) argues, Conservative is a problematic signifier in contemporary settings where Conservatism embraces Radicalism (in the form of markets), and Socialism appears as Conservative in reaction to these transformations. In this context Conservative Socialism also critiques the *debasement* of community, culture, and tradition which is structured by this commodified popular techno-culture. Willis (1990) addresses the problems this poses for Left political and intellectual practice which takes Youth as its object.

contemporary populations of young people, youth culture and techno-popular cultural forms as deficient or of less *weight, seriousness* or *importance* than prior generations of young people, cultural forms and peer cultural practices and relations. Green and Bigum (1993) illustrate this deficiency thesis in a number of ways. They cite Neil Postman's (1985) argument that, in the context of a cultural shift from a print based epistemology to a tele-visual based view of knowledge and meaning; 'we are getting sillier by the moment' (cited in Green and Bigum 1993, p.128). Further, they cite Allan Bloom's (1987) thesis concerning the decline of American cultural 'values', institutional decay and the dominance of a tele-visual popular culture. In Bloom's thesis the march of philosophical, scientific and political 'progress' culminates, at the end of the millennium, in an MTV generation characterised (*caricatured*) by:

A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joy of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbation fantasy. (Bloom, 1987, pp.74-75, cited in Green and Bigum 1993 p.129)

Aliens: a Problematic Representation

Green and Bigum's (1993) move to connect the emergence of a techno-cultural dimension to processes of identity formation to *conservative* moral panics about contemporary youth is an important insight. However, I would also want to argue that Left, *progressive* commentators are just as implicated in the struggle to tell the truth about contemporary populations of young people. Indeed, Lawrence Grossberg (1988) argues that it is appropriate; 'to think of youth as a field of diverse and contradictory practices, experiences, identities, and discourses. Moreover, at the present moment, youth is a battlefield on which adolescents, baby-boomers, parents, and new-rightists are struggling to control its meanings and powers' (p 126). This thesis is no less a construction, no less a political intervention into the discursive terrain of Youth than the various constructions and representations I draw on. My intent, however, is to make problematic the intellectual practices (of the Left and the 'new-rightists') which attempt to tell the truth about the Crisis of Youth (at-Risk). Part of this process must, in the tradition of *scholarly* work, involve an interrogation of the merits of particular forms of truth telling relative to the object (Youth at-Risk) at hand. Scott Lash (1994 b), in an engagement with the reflexive modernization theses of Beck (1992,1994) and Giddens (1994 b), signals his agreement with Giddens' (1994 c) contention that cultural theory does, indeed, 'rule the roost' in contemporary academic abstractions of various social and cultural processes and practices. For Lash this is a 'deplorable state of affairs as cultural theory is often useless in addressing issues of everyday life and politics'

(p.215). In this context the '*social* - theoretical interventions of Beck and Giddens must be warmly greeted' (p.215, original emphasis). Lash argues however, that this agreement does not indicate a blanket rejection or opposition to 'post-structuralism and cultural theory'. Rather, Lash argues that social theory, 'drawing selectively also on concepts from cultural analysis' is able to 'do a better job in understanding the cultural dimension, in our institutions and the sensibility of our private lives, than can the cultural theorists' (p.215).

Angela McRobbie (1994, 1996) raises similar concerns in a discussion about the ways in which the academic disciplinary boundaries which mark off Cultural Studies from Sociology impact on contemporary discussions about the Question(s) of Youth. McRobbie argues for a form of interdisciplinarity in an academic engagement with the lifeworlds of young people; a 'cultural sociology of youth' as she terms it. McRobbie (1994) acknowledges the limits and possibilities of contemporary work in both disciplines. However, she outlines certain silences in (postmodern) Cultural Studies of youth which limit the political and theoretical impact of these analyses of 'different, youthful, subjectivities'. McRobbie (1994) highlights the tendency for Cultural Studies of Youth to take as the objects of its analysis 'specific discourses', or 'specific texts', or the 'forms of mass media', and to neglect the diverse interactions of these 'various discourses', and the institutional and social processes which continue to structure young people's lifeworlds (p.180). McRobbie further argues that issues around 'the state and social control, questions of institutional practice and policy' are not foregrounded in contemporary Cultural Studies of Youth (p.185).

'During the 1980s,' argues McRobbie (1994), 'the focus on youth which had been such a visible characteristic of cultural studies in the 1970s' - particularly that work which emerged from the CCCS - fractured around 'a number of other interests which overlap with or touch on Youth without really acknowledging this fact' (p.182). McRobbie (1994) argues that this 'splintering' in the concepts of central interest in Cultural Studies saw the emergence of 'race, state and nation; sexuality and representation; education and ethnography; and more recently, postcoloniality and postmodernism', as the four themes of principal significance in Cultural Studies.²⁰ This development, argues

²⁰ Julie McLeod (1997) rehearses a similar argument, citing both McRobbie (1996) and Michelle Barrett (1992). McLeod cites Barrett's argument that recent theoretical work in the social sciences is marked by a movement away from a concern 'with [sociological and material] things.... towards a more cultural sensibility of the salience of words'. Barrett's argument is that this movement signals a 'preoccupation' with 'analysing processes of symbolization and representation - the field of "culture" - and attempts to

McRobbie (1994) occurred via the 'rejection of the primacy of the youth and social class couplet which had underpinned the development of "subcultural theory" '(p.181). In this context there has been little attention paid to rethinking Youth as a category or concept which might be useful in cultural inquiry (p.182).

McRobbie (1994) argues however, that Sociology continues to foreground the 'importance of institutional practices as key forces for shaping continuity and change' in the experiences of contemporary youth(ful) populations. This emphasis is something which McRobbie argues is 'largely absent' from Cultural Studies (p.178). The discussion thus far, which has foregrounded the ways in which Youth at-Risk discourses, in part, share a historical continuity with moral panics about Youth, demonstrates McRobbie's (1994) argument that 'youth remains a key point for social and political anxiety'. The construction of crises and moral panics about Youth at-Risk indicate, argues McRobbie, that: 'Issues around the state, social institutions and governmentality...are much too important to ignore' (pp.180-181).

It is in this context that I want to signal my departure from, or differences with, Green and Bigum's (1993) construction of contemporary youth/students as 'post modern subjects *par excellence*'. This is an ambivalent departure in a number of senses. Historically, what has, at various moments, been named as science 'fiction' has often portended a more concrete, grounded reality. Futures are uncertain, multiple, open ended and, in Giddens' (1991) term, waiting to be 'colonized'. They are 'colonized', in part, through the practices, processes and narratives of the present. Green and Bigum's *Aliens* is a 'thought experiment' of the present which is arguably, very much oriented to future forms of sociality and being. It foregrounds and gives prominence to emergent practices and spaces, suggesting that these emergent practices and spaces are significant in contemporary youth(ful) identity work. A chief concern is that this foregrounding of a particular emergent form of sociality has the effect of pushing into the background, both differences within the category of youth, and continuities in diverse attempts to regulate youth(ful) identities.

(post)Modern Youth(ful) Identities: Continuities of Class, Gender, Bodies, and Difference.

This examination of a particular construction of young people as 'young cyborgs', as 'strangers in a strange land', as 'aliens' has attempted to map the terrain that such postmodern representations mark out. Such a mapping could point to alternative

develop a better understanding of subjectivity., the psyche and the self' (Barrett, 1992, cited in McLeod, 1997, p.2)

movements across that terrain. These alternative movements will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. For now, though I want to foreshadow these movements by focussing on the ways in which these representations of young people's experience of postmodernity, display a tendency to discount the ways in which difference might structure any experience of the postmodern. My purpose here is not to celebrate difference, *per se*, but to suggest that (social) institutional relations and practices continue to differently structure the lived experience of youth(ful) populations, including the construction of those populations of young people most at-Risk under these conditions.

Postmodern representations position young people as different, at the same time as they discount differences within the particular construction. Social relations and contexts are seen to be 'technologically mediated', yet there is no indication that these relations and contexts are also differentiated and mediated by gender, class, ethnicity, geography, sexuality, ability...; and that these institutionally structured relations and practices continue to regulate forms of identity within so-called 'digital ecosystems'. For instance, Wexler (1992), in his analysis of the ways in which identity is constructed for and by young people in the intense 'interactional economy' of schools, argues that against the backdrop of a 'seemingly shared mass youth culture', a youth culture (re)produced within a 'mass electronic image production apparatus'; 'what students struggle for in becoming somebody and how they engage that interactional life project during high school is different depending on where their school is located in the larger societal pattern of organised social differences and inequalities' (p.8).

Wexler (1992) is arguing here for the primacy of social class in the patterning of social identities. As he argues: 'The ideal and the route to becoming somebody in the *suburban white working class* is not the same as becoming somebody in a high school in a *professional middle class suburb*. Both are as different from *urban under class* among youths, as it is for their parents' (p.8 original emphasis). Yet within certain constructions of post modernity a globalised, informationalised techno-culture and its incredible circulation of image and commodified relations is often seen to transcend such 'old', 'modernist' boundaries as class, gender, time, place and body. Lindsay Fitzclarence (1993), for instance, suggests that, 'the media fuses life in different geographical areas and different social class locations. Or, as neatly put by one interviewee 'Kids from Lalor and Toorak live in the same worlds; they are linked by popular image culture' (p.18). Importantly, in the context of this discussion, Fitzclarence follows this claim with a cautionary note that if 'traditional class divisions now emerge out of different cultural circumstances...enduring class inequities remain manifest, and as such provoke the need for sober consideration' (p.18). 'Sober consideration' of these continuities

within changed social contexts would point to that fact that young people, as gendered, embodied individuals continue to live, work, play and go to school within particular geographical locales, particular configurations of time, space and place. Time, space, place and bodies continue to limit and place boundaries around their activities. Identity work continues to take place within contexts and relations embedded within particular, concrete, place based relationships. These relations continue to be structured and regulated within spaces which are institutionally (re)produced and dependent.²¹ Johanna Wyn and Rob White (1997), for instance, argue that a 'class analysis' must have a 'central place in any rethinking of youth' as a category which can continue to be useful in theoretical and political discourses. Class, gender and ethnic relations, 'as power relations', continue to 'frame the contours of youth experience and the shape of institutional and cultural processes' which attempt to regulate youth(ful) identities (p.148).

However, a number of postmodern Cultural Studies of Youth often ignore, or discount, the reality that most young people become somebody in family relations and practices marked by degrees of dependence. Young people are dependent on family location within a range of material conditions and patterns of relations. This is not to deny that dependence is struggled over, or that it is a shifting and evolving set of relations - most notably marked by age, but also by gender and ethnicity - or that this dependence is also mediated by relations and practices *external* to this so-called *private* space. Here (social) class, and young people's position in class structured relations of dependence, can be seen as a complex intersection of a variety of material forces and relationships such as; family relationships and background; educational background and opportunities; neighbourhood and community (the place where you live and, particularly for young people, the place where you develop, sustain and sever important social relations); (un)employment; income sources and levels and related consumption activities; work patterns inside and outside the *privacy* of families; and understandings of Self and Others, of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and ability which are constructed, contested and negotiated within these spaces and places. Thinking class in this way is an attempt to see both the enabling and constraining influence(s) of class in constructing a sense of self. It is an attempt to understand the limits and boundaries which social class continues to place on the everyday lives and experiences of embodied, gendered young people. As Wexler (1992) argues:

What I underline is how much the experience and meaning of everyday life - perhaps both cause and effect of achievement and

²¹This argument will be further developed in the following chapters.

income inequalities - are different. It is not simply a question of deficits or deprivations and advantages, but of different life worlds and dynamic organizational economies that generate and sustain diverse understandings and aspirations. (p 8)

What is also often missing from a number of postmodern accounts of young people's identity work is any notion that the self which these writers are (de)constructing is a gendered self. There is little acknowledgment of how the experiences of, and within, 'techno culture' may be differently felt and shaped by a positioning which is structured by, and through, gender.²² In Green and Bigum's (1993) representation of postmodern youth(ful) subjectivities, for instance, there is little accounting for how image (re)production and consumption are patterned and mediated by the gendered positioning of both the producers and the consumers (as producers of meaning) of these images. There is little explicit understanding of how the continuities and discontinuities in social relations may, in many important ways, be gendered and embodied.

Youth(ful) bodies of a particular type are privileged bodies. Certain bodies have always been privileged within particular historical and cultural milieux - Classical Greek bodily aesthetics and Rubenesque bodies are examples. One difference at this particular historical juncture - and it is a difference substantially implicated in young people's identity work - is the electronically enabled proliferation of these commodified, idealised, privileged, representations into many aspects of daily embodied existence. Another difference is that few actual bodies correspond to this representation. This pervasive and powerful image based construction of the ideal, privileged, objectified body - both female and male, although young female bodies are privileged, idealised and objectified above all others - is, however, experienced and made sense of in gendered, embodied intersubjective ways (Harrison 1995). Moreover, the diverse, institutionally structured attempts to regulate the harmful (risky) consequences of young people's immersion in this image saturated environment are, fundamentally, gendered projects which take as their objects populations of young women.²³

²²For a feminist reading of 'computer culture' see Sofia 1993. For a market research perspective on gendered differences in Internet use see Apple Report No. 2, 1997.

²³Schools based education programs about body image, self esteem, diets and eating disorders (constructed as risky practices, or as indicators of risk), emphasise the rational, cognitive *thinking* about bodies, the split between the mind and the body, of mind *over* matter almost (Kempley and Weber 1993, Ogden and Germinario 1988). Yet this *absent* bodied approach to understanding the identity work involved in the embodied, intersubjective encounters between gendered bodies and an image based culture appears to be spectacularly unsuccessful (Kirk 1993). However, this apparent failure of a critique

Where there is a tendency to construct young people as non gendered postmodern subjects there is also, seemingly, a move to confuse *new* forms of social relations for *all* forms of social relations. One instance concerns the so called *disembodied* relationships between the users of the Net - that vast computer enabled information and communication web that strangles the 'planet of noise' (Wark 1994) - a form of relationship within a new social space which is often seen as exemplifying the new identity work of postmodern subjects. For Green and Bigum (1993) 'cyberspace' is a term 'used to describe the vectorial space through which millions of computers are interconnected. In this space where little remains of context in the traditional, modernist sense, vast amounts of information are held in a kind of noisy fog of 1s and 0s' (p.133). As Green and Bigum (1993) point out - whilst failing to acknowledge that what they describe is a form of relation both subtly and explicitly differentiated by class, gender, and global economic processes (What percentage of the world's population does not have access to a telephone let alone a computer terminal?): 'Projected into this space are virtually anything from recipes, weather forecasts and stock prices to practical debates, religious ideas and sexual fantasies. More recently, academics have begun 'attending' conferences in cyberspace' (p.133).

I want to suggest that, in emphasising the apparent disembodiment of what have been called 'technologically mediated relations' (Sharp 1985) - that is, relations which do not rely on embodied co-presence, but which are mediated through technologies such as the written word, or telephony, or fibre optic cables - there is a tendency to make a number of *wrong* moves. For instance, there is a tendency to ignore, or discount, the fact that fundamentally any social relation is an embodied relation. In order to read or write these words, or to make a (mobile) phone call, or watch and make (no)sense of a video, or *surf* the Net requires that there is firstly a sentient, situated, gendered, embodied subject involved or implicated in these relations and practices. This is not to argue that this subject is whole, or complete, or unitary prior to these relations, or indeed transcends these relations. This point can be tellingly illustrated by reference to a Frances Dyson (1996) interview with Dr Sandy Stone, the director of the Advanced Communication

of these relations provokes further attempts to generate intellectually produced knowledge about the nature of these intersubjective encounters; as evidenced in feminist poststructuralist and postmodernist attempts to theorise the nature of subjectivity and of active readings of these texts by young people (see, for instance, Harrison 1995, Lupton 1994, Nava 1991, 1992, Walkerdine 1997). A range of issues arising from this reflexive generation of expert knowledge and the roles it plays in attempts to regulate youth(ful) identities will be explored in the following chapters.

Technology Laboratory, University of Texas (Austin).²⁴ Dyson argues that Stone's 'transgendered self has become a model for cyberspace aspirants to "liquid identity"' (p.70). For Stone: 'Cyberspace is a space of subversion - and that is the space of transgender, which is one of the spaces of liquid identity; which is to say, manifesting that which breaks free of location technologies which are intended to create singular identities' (cited in Dyson 1996, p 71).

In this new space signifiers such as 'body', 'meet', 'place', and 'space' mean 'something quite different from our accustomed understanding' (p 71). BUGS (body units grounded in self) in (cyber)space problematise, for Stone, the notions of bodies, identities and gender. Yet, in what is a cautionary note to this potentially cyber hyperbole, Stone argues that: 'We forget about the body at our peril' (p 70). Moreover, from Dyson's standpoint:

We are dependent on our BUGS despite the heavy emphasis on endless deferral of the referent - of any kind of 'ground' - in post-structuralist and cyber theory. We are dependent because, as Stone insists again, we cannot escape our bodies: 'We are still referents, we still are here, we still live in bodies and ultimately we still have to fall back on the basic primitive...we do live at this time in bodies and those bodies are the object of political power'. (p 72)

Theoretically and politically it continues to be important to construct the *body*, and young people's embodied situation in various institutionally structured practices and relations as fundamental to any understanding of the diverse attempts to regulate their identities. Intellectual 'imaginings of social space' and social relations and social identities within these changed spaces are limited if they do not account for the real and continuous patterning of these spaces and relations by institutionally structured and regulated practices.²⁵

²⁴'Stone, originally a heterosexual man, chose to become a transgendered lesbian woman and now describes herself as a heterosexual woman' (Dyson 1996, p 70).

²⁵In an end note to a point that they make about the need for new descriptions to account for the coupling of organism and machine, *man* and machine, Green and Bigum (1993) gesture towards this issue by arguing that 'the masculinist bias of what is variously described as 'techno culture' and 'cyborg discourse' needs to be borne constantly in mind' (p.138). The reproduction of this masculinist discourse is particularly problematic with regard to the construction of Youth, given that Youth has historically been constructed as Masculine (Bessant and Evans 1997, Harrison 1995, Hudson 1984, McRobbie and Nava 1984)

Green (1993), however, argues that 'boundaries and distinctions', in general, will become 'more blurred' as social relations and practices emerge as being 'not simply technologically-mediated', but 'technological in their very nature' (p 10). Green suggests that there are both profound problems and possibilities for new forms of the social under such conditions. In grappling with the possibilities which might emerge Green returns to an engagement with Haraway's (1991) 'concept-image of the *cyborg*: the cybernetic organism, a particular meshing of human and machine' (p 10, original emphasis). Green (1993) argues that within what is 'irrevocably a complex technoscientific world', we need to think of identity as emerging from different human/technology relationships:

Rather than through 'interactivities' with other human beings, that is, we can contemplate the possibility and indeed the likelihood that 'socialization', however that is understood, will increasingly occur through 'human machine' interactions; and that, moreover, the boundaries between 'humans' and 'machines' will become increasingly blurred, as will boundaries and distinctions more generally. (pp 10-11)

In a very real material and discursive sense, 'boundaries', and 'distinctions' are often, in what Giddens' (1994 a) has called a 'post traditional social order', markers of difference which become elaborated and/or emphasised, rather than blurred. The political and identity projects that have emerged, and been structured around struggles over naming difference, suggest that we take seriously, and engage rhetorically, the positive and/or regressive potentialities which might (re)surface under these conditions. Theoretically and politically this means engaging with: The (re)emergence, in post cold war Europe in particular, but elsewhere as well (Rwanda, India, Kurdistan...) of ethnic and religious rivalries and violence: A (re)surfacing of a certain form of nationalism in conflict with multiculturalism (as 'unassimilated difference', Green and Bigum 1993). This nationalism is a politics of identification which Other's *Aliens, undesirables* and those outside of the *mainstream* through naming difference in particular, exclusory ways:²⁶ An eruption of a 'secular fundamentalism' in response to the emergence of a 'post traditional social order' in which traditional understandings of religion, ethnicity, the family, gender, bodies..., become things which have 'to be *decided about* rather than just taken for granted' (Giddens 1994 a, p.6, original emphasis). In this context Scott Lash (1994 a) suggests that while processes of reflexive modernization produce a very strong programme of 'individualization', writ large in Beck's (1992) 'I am I' (and 'I am I' precisely and fundamentally because I am not You or Other);

²⁶This form of politics was successfully mobilised by the Liberal (conservative) Party in the 1996 election for Australia's Federal parliament.

the unfolding process of modernization has not yielded the end-of-history convergence Fukuyama foresaw...towards the 'I' of market democracy. Instead we have witnessed at the same time - and perhaps more than ever - a revenge of the repressed 'We' of ethnic cleansing, of eastern German neo-Nazi skinheads and the nationalist fragmentation of the former USSR. (p 111)

It is in these terms that it is possible to understand the emergence of Australian MP Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party and the challenges it poses for social integration, and for possible Left and Right political responses to her concerns and those of her constituency. ²⁷ Kevin Robbins (1989) questions whether, under these conditions, 'national and nationalist identities can be transcended in favour of more meaningful identities or whether they will simply transform in regressive and alienating ways' (p 150). He cites Manuel Castells' bleak observation that: 'On the one hand, the space of power is being transformed into flows. On the other hand, the space of meaning is being reduced to microterritories of new tribal communities' (Castells 1983, p 4, cited in Robbins 1989, p 150).

The Dangers of Uncertainty.

In contemporary settings boundaries and borders are, at some levels, being blurred and transgressed. McRobbie (1993), for instance, sees postmodernism as 'embracing' the 'idea of difference and hybridity' which is generated 'within the tracks of the meta-communications networks of the new global order' (p.133). At other levels there are countertendencies to elaborate and re articulate boundaries (of Age, Class, Gender, Ethnicity, Nation) as immutable, *natural* markers of difference. It is in the context of these material and discursive realities that the processes which construct, as true, a Crisis of Youth (at-Risk) can be understood as 'dangerous' (Foucault 1983). Dangerous in the sense that the construction of this Crisis within contexts of Uncertainty provoke diverse, and increasingly sophisticated, processes of surveillance, identification and intervention. These processes target particular populations of young people (the

²⁷Hanson, as at early 1998, is an independent member of Australia's Federal Parliament. 'Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party' is her self titled, registered political party, established after her election as an independent in the 1996 election. With few articulated policies her concerns coalesce around notions that: Asian migrants are 'flooding' Australia and threatening to overwhelm Australia's Anglo-Celtic culture: Australia's indigenous population is not the most disadvantaged section of society, but rather enjoys privileges denied to non indigenous Australians: A cultural elite has foisted multiculturalism on 'mainstream' Australia, at the same time silencing debate on these issues under the banner of 'political correctness': Australia's economy is threatened by foreign ownership and economic rationalism.

Deviant, the Delinquent, the Disadvantaged, the at-Risk) in various attempts by experts and centres of expertise to regulate and manage the Uncertain in the name of Order and Certainty. For Zygmunt Bauman (1990 a) modernity's 'scandal of ambivalence' is a scandal which has structured powerful ongoing 'quests for order'. Moreover, Socialism, as the theoretical and political project of the Left, a project which casts its shadow across, and indeed structures, diverse discourses which take Youth as their object, has, historically, invested heavily in this quest for order. Bauman cites English socialist and novelist H G Wells, who argued that the hope of Socialism was 'a complete organization for all these human affairs that are of collective importance...In place of disorderly effort, each man doing what he pleases, the socialist wants organized effort, and a plan'. Moreover, the Socialist, according to Wells;

seeks to make a plan as one designs and lays out a garden, so that sweet and seemly things may grow, wide and beautiful vista open, and weeds and foulness disappear...what makes all its graciousness and beauty possible, is the scheme and the persistent intention, the watching and the waiting, the digging and burning, the weeder clips and the hoe. (Wells 1984, cited in Bauman 1990 a, p.34)

In the following Chapter I want explore what might be worthwhile intellectual work under material and discursive conditions which have meant a 'crisis for the left' (Hall 1988a, McRobbie 1993), a crisis which has profound consequences for any theoretical and/or political engagement with those discourses of Risk mobilised in diverse attempts to regulate, to order, youth(ful) populations and the forms of identity which mark of the Normal from the at-Risk.