

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Human Movement Profession— From Modernism to Postmodernism

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Introduction

For the past three centuries, *modernism* has provided the dominant versions of political, economic, and social practice of the Western civilization. At its center is the image of a coherent, rational “man” [*sic*] who, through positivistic science and technology, has sought to control Nature and constitute a totalizing and universal Truth. The roots of modernism are found in the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment (Harpham 1994).

[The Enlightenment’s] major intellectual impulses were critical, analytic, scientific, mechanistic, and anti-metaphysical. Epistemologically . . . the deductive reasoning characteristic of the seventeenth-century metaphysics . . . was replaced by empiricist deduction. Politically, the Enlightenment is usually associated with social contract theory, individualism, natural right theory, and the pursuit of self-interest, rather than the search for community or the justification of hierarchy. (Jay 1984, p. 30)

Under the Enlightenment’s philosophy the world has been dichotomized (e.g., the West and the East, humans and nature, science and metaphysics, mind and body). Moreover, within these pairs, there exists a hierarchy. One of the elements of each pair is considered superior to, and with automatic rights over, the other. Take, for instance, the duality West/East. Under a modernistic view based on Enlightenment philosophy, the West is considered to be civilized,

sophisticated, advanced; the East, is seen as wild, exotic, primitive. Hence, the West is given the right to conquer, to imperialize; the East is supposed to welcome, to yield. To all this, and in relation to all other sociopolitical structures, we must add one more piece to the modernistic puzzle: a system of market economics resulting in “an increasing monolithic world in which nearly everything . . . is subsumed under a worldly universal principle—the monolith is Capitalism and the principle is profit” (Brosio 1993, p. 473).

All this has been justified under the premise (and the promise) of unrelenting progress. Progress was to be achieved through two imperatives of the modern society: efficiency in organization and humanitarianism. On the one hand, aided by science and technology and at the expense of nature, “man” was to produce as much as possible; on the other hand, people were to recognize each other as equal in worth. These two modern imperatives, however, created an irreconcilable paradox: Efficiency of production requires a hierarchical organization, yet this type of organization is not egalitarian (Aron 1968).

There is another modern paradox: Success and happiness are left up to the individual, and yet, because of the mighty influence of powerful modern institutions such as schooling, the work place, and the mass media (Apple 1990; Parenti 1995), there is little sense of individual identity. Consequently, individual action has been rendered practically dormant. This situation has forced people into a twofold trap: (a) an uncritical faith and blind adherence to authority (be it political, religious, scientific, etc.) and (b) an almost total reliance on an economic system that artificially dictates consumer needs while producing and providing sources of personal identity and social connectedness (Fromm 1969). Under these circumstances, it is little wonder that individuals do not engage in political and civic-minded actions.

In the end, the modern order has been beneficial only for those at the top of the hierarchy (i.e., politicians and corporate tycoons who have taken advantage of their privileged position and grown extremely rich and ever more powerful). The rest of the people, in contrast, have sadly sunk into lower and lower levels of hopelessness in a world where crime, war, hunger, poverty, pandemics, environmental destruction, and so forth, have been the norm. As a result, “Many groups [of people] now share a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding even if it is not informed by shared circumstance” (bell hooks 1990, p. 27). These are clear signs of an acute global crisis, a crisis brought about by modern thought and action.

Nevertheless, the status of things is never quo. The dominant groups can be challenged and their power eroded. In this regard, and as a result of today's disenchantment with the "modern project," many people have begun to wish for a new era—an era in which equality, dignity, and hope, as well as a strong sense of identity and community are more the norm than the exception. Indeed, there seems to be evidence that we might have already started such a transition—a transition into the so-called postmodern era (e.g., Agger 1992a; Lyotard 1992; Seidman 1994).

Postmodern Delineations and Critical Theory

A general consensus has not yet been reached about what constitutes postmodernism. Some theorists believe that postmodernism is a radical break from modern habits, relations, and social practices that rejects traditional narratives and any other form of totalizing thought (Lyotard 1994). Yet, others hold the opinion that "postmodernism cannot be a simple rejection of modernity; rather, it involves a different modulation of its themes and categories" (Laclau 1988, p. 65). The debate still continues.

Most theorists, however, recognize that postmodernism is more than a mere chronological transition (say, from industrialism to post-industrialism). The shift from the modern to the postmodern encompasses cultural critique, political activism, praxis (Freire 1970). From a postmodern perspective, culture is no longer perceived as a process toward progress nor as a linear historical trajectory of humans toward some predetermined end. According to Agger (1992b), "postmodernism is a theory of cultural, intellectual, and societal discontinuity that rejects the linearism of the Enlightenment notions of progress" (p. 93). As such, postmodern culture seems to encompass various ways of social organization in which new forms of language, cultural assumptions and meanings, social movements, and power relations can emerge (Butler 1994).

Postmodern theorists have embraced two main ideas: That of subjectivity (i.e., the personal is political) and that of knowledge as power (Foucault 1980). In this vein, political and social activism and contestation are understood within a framework of civic competence and the admission of different moral affirmations. As such, identities, meanings, and relations are not seen as fixed and constant but, on the contrary, as "finite, locally determined language games, each with specific pragmatic criteria of appropriateness or valence"

(Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv). Similarly, knowledge and “reality” are perceived as governed by linguistic codes organized and categorized in particular ways that are beneficial to some and detrimental to others (Cherryholmes 1988; Vygotsky 1978). “One of the most basic themes of postmodern debate revolves around reality, or lack of reality or multiplicity or realities . . . in which previous modes of social analysis and political practice are called into question” (Lyon 1994, p. 7). Moreover, in order to be consistent with its own principles of critique and deconstruction (Derrida 1976), critical postmodern theory must have an internal method of self-interrogation in which assumptions of oppression and freedom are open to reformulation. Otherwise, postmodern theory would be no different from the modern ideology that it seeks to scrutinize.

Postmodernism, Critical Theory, and the Human Movement Profession

Postmodern theory and thought did not emerge in a vacuum. The basis for postmodern sociopolitico-cultural delineations can be found in critical theory. Critical theory, originally formulated in the 1930s by the founders of the Frankfurt School (i.e., Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer) and later extended by others (e.g., Habermas, Foucault, Fromm), has been variously characterized as a radical theory of cultural criticism that analyzes a number of social problems emerging from the Enlightenment. In order to develop workable models for a future better society, critical theorists examine “things, institutions, practices, and discourses [while seeking] an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production, one . . . whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established régimes of thought” (Foucault 1994, p. 40). Thus, more akin to moral philosophy than to predictive science, critical theory offers an alternative approach to understanding the ideologies behind modern social, cultural, economic, and political formations and assumptions (Ingram and Simon-Ingram 1991).

In this regard, those who believe that our society is undergoing a transition from modern to postmodern principles, will agree (a) that living, teaching, and learning in this new society will require new concepts, attitudes, and actions; (b) that institutions will need new schemes; and (c) that the means of knowledge production and the criteria for validating such knowledge will have to be reconceptualized in the sense that one no longer will be able to claim the ex-

clusive supremacy of one single canon or truth. All this has important implications for the professions.

In this book, the authors examine the transition from the modern to the postmodern as it affects the human movement profession, physical education, and sport. For the sake of clarity and practicality, we use the phrase “human movement profession” as an umbrella term that encompasses many professional groups (e.g., athletes, educators, coaches, sport administrators, recreation leaders, researchers) dedicated to the practice, pedagogy, and study of human movement and its related activities.

Our analysis of the profession of human movement is framed within critical postmodern theory. As the readers will see, the authors of this book display different versions and interpretations regarding critical postmodern theory. Yet, we believe that dissension and polivocality are legitimate—after all, they are within the spirit of postmodern critique. On the other hand, notwithstanding our different views, we have a common intention. We set out to delineate ideological and political markers to enable readers to see the profession, not in a vacuum, but as a political movement of sorts; a diverse collection of communities, and a forum for acceptance, equality, and freedom.

With this intention, we analyze the origins and the processes of construction, regulation, distribution, and legitimating of the master narratives of the modern human movement discourse. We attempt to uncover how, by muddling our vision and creating false images of reality, these master narratives have embodied, and still do, particular epistemological and political views which benefit a few at the expense of many. We argue that these master narratives have been “largely drawn from cultural scripts written by white males whose work is often privileged as a model of high culture informed by an elite sensibility that sets it off from what is often dismissed as popular or mass culture” (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991, p. 58). These master narratives, we also argue, have been based on a world view that exults “continual progress of the sciences and of techniques, the rational division of industrial work, and the intensification of human labor and or human domination over nature” (Baudrillard 1987, p. 65–66).

Our quest for new professional grounds and possibilities forces us to ask critical questions with regards to our traditional roles and purposes in the field of human movement. Namely, What are the conflicts and crises facing our profession? How can our professional relations and meanings be constructed within a new realm of justice, freedom, and equity? What moral and liberating principles and

practices are needed to give our profession an identity of a collective, more encompassing self? How can we reinterpret, create, and utilize our professional knowledge? In what ways can we teach this new knowledge so that it becomes both emancipatory and liberating? What should the basis for our future professional actions be?

No doubt, the answers to these questions depend on one's historical, intellectual, and cultural position. In exploring new cultural, political, pedagogical, and scientific professional paths, a plurality of narratives and a polyphony of voices must be taken into account. Furthermore, we are conscious that our exploration must be exercised with caution. We recognize that all of us are affected by various ideological distortions and discourses. This is why this book has been divided into two parts.

In part I of this book (i.e., *The Human Movement Profession in the Postmodern Era: Critical Analyses*), the authors want to raise awareness about the limitations of modernism and the possibilities of postmodernism with regard to human movement, physical education, and sport. One of the central arguments here is that the profession of human movement is not isolated from broader social, political, and cultural contexts and histories, but, instead, it is very much related to, and affected by them. Historically this profession was born and has evolved within the frame of modernism and, therefore, it is still being influenced by the same powers, confined by the same institutions, affected by the same problems, and determined by the same ideological principles and values that have molded modern life. In turn, the human movement profession has shaped people's meanings and practices regarding physical activity. That is, the modern approach to human movement has influenced the ways people view their bodies, exercise, and create and use movement-related knowledge. We believe that these ways have generally suited the interests of dominant social, economic, and political groups while silencing and discriminating against those with less power. Therefore, in part I, we undertake to critique these conventional ways and to offer alternative ones.

Part II of this book (i.e., *Critiques of the Critical Postmodern Analyses of the Human Movement Profession*) contains commentaries on, and critiques about, the analyses presented in part I. The authors in part II act as checkers and balancers to the theories and actions proposed by the authors in the previous section. However, they do not limit their writing to mere commentaries and critiques. They, too, reveal their perspectives and bring to the forefront their ideological values and professional practices. In this regard, the

ideas presented in part II encompass a larger number of experiences and beliefs that, rather than to polarize, serve to expand our options for future praxis in human movement, physical education, and sport.

In one word, this book is an honest attempt to push our profession forward in a unifying manner, not in an antagonistic one. Our objective is not simply to unveil alternative perspectives and expand professional boundaries, *per se*, for doing so would place us in a position of authority which we do not wish to assume. On the contrary, we are aware that what we present here are just theories in the making that, notwithstanding, go beyond criticism and argumentation by offering what we believe to be valuable and viable ways for action and reflection. In so doing, we move into the sphere of praxis and adopt strong political stances that reflect our diverse struggles on different fronts within the profession. In this sense, the book reflects our strong commitment to delineating new borders, offering new hope, and creating a better future for us all.