Teaching Histories: Reflexivity, National Anxieties and the Neoliberal Turn

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Abstract

In 2013 former education secretary Michael Gove proposed changes to the history curriculum in England that sought to emphasise positive aspects of British history in an effort to fortify students' sense of national identity. His plans were met with widespread hostility and were subsequently rejected. Critics saw Gove's intended changes as a cynical attempt to use the teaching of history as a device for achieving political ends via the installation of paternalistic knowledge hierarchies consistent with neoliberal ideological imperatives. This article explores this claim and asks whether reflexivity can be used as a means of resisting political intrusions into spaces associated with the teaching and learning of history. After outlining the nuances of neoliberalism and reflexivity and the point at which these two phenomena intersect, this article will go on to argue for a greater degree of reflexivity in state sanctioned educational settings. With reference to the methodological approach of Michael J. Shapiro, this article concludes by offering practical suggestions as to how this aim can be achieved.

Introduction

When former Education Secretary, Michael Gove, first attempted to introduce changes to the history curriculum in England his proposals were met with widespread derision. These changes, outlined in a Government publication called *The National Curriculum in England: framework document for consultation* in February 2013, formed a framework that guided teachers to present history as a chronology of facts placing specific emphasis on positive aspects of British history (Department of Education, 2013: 165). This was viewed by critics as a step that would cause students to lose sight of reflexive epistemologies that inform understandings of how historical knowledge is produced, legitimised and reproduced (BBC, 2013). For many of those opposed to the changes, Gove's proposals appeared to be an Orwellian attempt to appropriate history as a means of cultivating nationalistic subjectivities. Concerns centred around the belief that this development would render students less capable of intercultural empathy and more likely to consent to ideological projects that rely on the existence of internal/external threat (BBC, 2013).

However, when the final version of the document outlining changes to the national curriculum was published in September 2013, alterations to the history programme demonstrated a change of emphasis that reflected the disapproval that greeted Gove's original proposals. Heavy revisions to the updated programme were slanted in favour of a much more reflexive approach to the teaching of history. The revised guidelines place a greater emphasis on teaching practices that grant students the scope to develop a broader understanding of how historical knowledge is produced (Department for Education, 2013: 219).

This moment of resistance serves as an indication that there is an appetite for a greater level of reflexivity in the teaching of history in English schools. And as the reverberations of neoliberalism (as elaborated below) continue to increase levels of national anxiety, via the amplification of perceptions that install 'cultural others' as a threat (Kapoor, 2013: 1032), this moment of resistance should be seized as an opportunity to interrupt the expansion of neoliberal logic. The new curriculum, active from September 2014, creates an authorised space in which the teaching of history can assist the development of empathetic subjectivities capable of seeing beyond racial binaries that are often prescribed within the mechanisms of neoliberal social frameworks.

With particular reference to the theoretical input of C. Wright Mills (1959) and the methodological approach of Michael J. Shapiro (2013), this article will draw upon the debates outlined above in order to explore how reflexivity and national anxiety connect with practices associated to the teaching and learning of history. This will facilitate the development of a discussion regarding the possible ramifications of devaluing reflexivity as an academic tool in English schools. The discussion will be framed in the context of pedagogical development within the sphere of neoliberal governance as a means of unpicking the tensions that manifest at the point of divergence between neoliberalism and reflexivity. References to reflexivity in this article are aligned to what C. Wright Mills termed the 'sociological imagination'. Mills asserts that the 'sociological imagination' presents its possessor with the capacity to consider social phenomena from a vantage point beyond the distortive trap of personal and structural milieu. From here epistemologies become transparent and social facts become open to sociological critique (1959: 5).

Racial neoliberalism: national anxiety as social cohesion

> The links between what happens overseas and what happens here have also always been there. Many of those who sought to do us harm in the past have been foreign nationals living in Britain or even British citizens who have returned from terrorist training camps in Pakistan or elsewhere around the world (David Cameron, 2014).

At the core of neoliberal philosophy is the "fundamental preference for the market over the state as a means of resolving problems and achieving human ends" (Crouch, 2013: 7) and over the last 35 years this basic idea has become the hegemonic mode of global political interaction (Harvey, 2005: 3). The assumption that underpins neoliberalism is that by shrinking the sphere of state responsibility at the same time as rigidly enforcing private property rights, populations become exposed to the regulatory will of the market. Once freed from the protective mechanisms of a state planned economy, citizens are supposed to become incentivised, self-reliant and competitive, thus releasing the suppressed innovative capacities of the individual and the dynamic potential of society (2005: 2).

Social policy in Britain has been shaped by the influence of neoliberalism since the election of Margret Thatcher in 1979. When Thatcher assumed power there was a public appetite for change. Industrial action was bringing many British industries to a standstill and public antipathy towards the political actions of organised labour

groups was high. This provided Thatcher with an opportunity to present collectivism as a threat to national stability and paved the way for her to cultivate public consent to the individualistic principals of neoliberalism (Tyler, 2013: 52). By severing the link between individuals and the collective principles that bound them to a planned economy, Thatcher redrafted the conditions of the social contract. As the centre point of sovereignty shifted from the state to the individual, this new atomistic model of citizenship called for the need to inscribe rigid boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion that committed citizens to the state via reference to duty as opposed to rights. In her 2013 publication *Revolting Subjects*, Imogen Tyler claims that this was the point at which the abjection of undesirable citizens became the primary mode of demonstrating where these boundaries lay and how they would be defended (2013: 53).

Under neoliberalism the shrinking of the state runs parallel to the lowering of regulation that impedes the flow of global trade. This allows unrestricted flows of goods and finance to become concentrated in areas of private enterprise, thus creating pockets of wealth capable of challenging the economic supremacy of national governments; a situation that diminishes governmental powers of influence. Critics of neoliberalism argue that, under these conditions, nation states become neutered forces that lack sufficient power to affect solutions to problems that become incubated by macro-economic structural conditions (Bauman, 2012: 64). As the power to influence global outcomes evaporates into the ether of global networks of economic power, modern governments are left facing a crisis of legitimacy (2012: 66). According to Nisha Kapoor, neoliberal governments attempt to negotiate this problem by creating the illusion of perpetual threat; thus legitimising their position by casting themselves as providers of security at the same time as manufacturing public consent to punitive measures deployed against unsuccessful neoliberal citizens (2013: 1043). Here the immigrant is presented as an internal/external threat to nationhood providing the state with a tangible device for generating centripetal pressures that facilitate neoliberal formations of social cohesion (Bauman, 2012: 66). In Britain today, the current government remains committed to the ideological imperatives of neoliberalism (Wiggan, 2012: 401). Agency is stringently underscored as the primary source of social problems; thus public attention remains focused on the actions of the individual as opposed to the mechanisms of the state (2012: 400). As capital flows are increasingly protected at the expense of labour rights, elite minorities emerge with the right to accumulate extreme wealth at the expense of economic security at the bottom of the labour market. The emergence of increasing economic insecurity is the source of intense public anxiety, but structural factors that contribute to this problem are not emphasised within the discourse of the Coalition (2012: 389). As the negative effects of macro-economic pressures accelerate, the state's need for a culpable agent to absorb the blame becomes more pressing. The immigrant, stripped of public sympathy via campaigns of abjection coordinated by the state and the media (Tyler, 2013: 85), becomes the perfect utility for maintaining neoliberal social cohesion (Bauman, 2012: 66). And it is here that enhanced perceptions of national superiority, as edified by the purposive assembly of national history, become useful to political actors.

The expanding logic of neoliberalism

According to Michael Foucault, subjective accounts of the self are imagined manifestations produced at the intersection between the subject and dominant political mechanisms that embody monopolies of power. He defines the aggregate of these ubiquitous mechanisms as a *dispositif*. Foucault elaborates that a *dispositif* is: "A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" (1980: 194). With these heterogeneous elements subsumed by the will of empowered authorities, this article argues that the potential to resist the logic implied within the span of a *dispositif* is contingent on the amplification of moments in which said logic is interrupted.

Mark Fisher claims that the reflexive impotence of British students contributes to the maintenance of a neoliberal *dispositif* (Fisher, 2009: 21), and he believes that these prevailing conditions allow neoliberal logic to occupy the horizons of the possible (2009: 8). Using the example of the music industry, Fisher illustrates how traditional zones of resistance to the ubiquity of politically constructed paradigms can become subsumed by dominant models of logic. Highlighting a trend which has seen the subversive potential of popular music become diluted by lyrical and cultural commitments that install capitalist structural frameworks as immovable realities of life, Fisher shows how the expansion of neoliberal reality can colonise subjectivity thus hijacking subjective and objective space in which resistance to the logic it advances can be contemplated (2009: 10). Ultimately, the subject becomes subordinated to a reality that is implied by logics that are sanctioned within structural mechanisms that reflect the will of power holders (2009: 54).

In his consideration of the social conditions that contributed to the Holocaust, Zygmunt Bauman articulates how social consequences can gravely escalate if subjectivities become detached from the awareness of their connection to structural influences. Bauman describes the *dispositif* that facilitated the cultivation of widespread consent to the oppression and eventual execution of large swathes of the Jewish population in Nazi occupied Europe as cultivated by a "chorus of experts which assure [us] that human problems are matters of wrong policies" (1988: 480). For Bauman the Nazi *dispositif* was based on a logic that presumed the superiority of rationality over pre-modern modes of thought; a notion located within a linear model of history, in which reason eclipses superstition as part of the evolutionary process of society becoming 'civilised'. As this logic gradually dispersed into political ideology and social consciousness, society could be understood as an aggregate of populations that could be selectively cultivated or eliminated in order to achieve preferred evolutionary outcomes (Bauman, 1988: 480). This interpretation provides an insight into how the appropriation of history and the moulding of subjectivity, via the manufacture of knowledge hierarchies, can be deployed by the state as a means of covertly cultivating mass consent to political projects.

The nature of knowledge hierarchies will be developed below as we explore how political grammar is used to maintain and reproduce dominant discourses. This will allow us to highlight how intellectual and political technologies function to restrict the development of discourses that run counter to prioritised logics.

Discourse as the gatekeeper of knowledge production

Clare Hemmings' work on the political grammar of feminist theory offers insight into how dominant discourses become inscribed into public consciousness (2011). Hemmings' analysis of feminist theory highlights how discourse is actively and inadvertently used to construct narratives that confine knowledge production to narrow parameters that restrict synthesis (2011: 3). Hemmings illustrates how feminist theory has become separated into three prominent discourses that she terms: progress, loss and return. All three discourses inform the construction of narratives that position feminist subjectivities in opposition to each other. Hemmings argues that this creates a "cadre" mentality in which each group attempts to express the superiority of their position by discrediting the other (2011: 77), thus illustrating how knowledge hierarchies can become enshrined within educational institutions. These cyclical lines of debate persist due to the implied logic that each position is mutually exclusive as a consequence of fundamental ontological contradictions. This has the effect of reifying a chronology in which theory, archive and artefact become embedded in static relation to contesting perspectives. As each discourse battles for supremacy, the argument edifies the legitimacy of itself, restricting the potential for synthesis and the retelling of histories that run counter to established positions. The deeper the argument becomes ingrained into the consciousness of academia, the more legitimacy it acquires due to institutional reproduction. This situation promotes the exclusion of perspectives that operate beyond the inscribed boundaries of legitimate discussion (2011: 79).

Hemmings illustrates how the influence of dominant discourses can dictate and maintain knowledge hierarchies via the exclusion of knowledge that cannot be bolted neatly into established structures of debate. From here knowledge production is confined to a narrow tranch of legitimacy that is carved out via discourses established by dominant authorities. This demonstrates how reflexivity is an essential tool for those seeking to undermine restrictive discourses that are legitimised by logics extended within power structures (2011: 157). Essentially Hemmings shows us that the greater the degree of reflexivity in practice, the more transparent discourse becomes. And once a discourse fails to contain the scope of knowledge production, it can be dismantled.

Hemmings' treatment of discourse taps into a wider debate that identifies what is at stake at the core of this discussion. The argument for greater levels of reflexivity in pedagogy reduces down to an age old academic tension. At one pole paternalists defend knowledge hierarchies as the only means of avoiding the descent into an intellectual dystopia where knowledge loses relative value and the hope of intellectual orientation dissolves. The opposite pole is occupied by those who see the reflexive approach to knowledge production as integral to the evolution of epistemological technologies; an evolutionary process abetted by the attribution of value to a wider range of perspectives (Fuller, 2009: 45).

Speaking as an advocate of neoliberalism, Milton Friedman argues that a certain degree of paternalism is unavoidable in society as without authority there would be no means of inscribing the parameters of responsible behaviour. For Friedman the removal of paternal authority results in the disintegration of hierarchy, creating conditions conducive to anarchy. Friedman uses the example of restricting the liberty

of "madmen" as a necessary measure to protect the liberty of "responsible" members of society (2002: 33). In this form paternalism is used to create a hierarchy of responsible behaviours which effectively establishes a collective understanding of the boundaries of acceptable behaviours, thus providing a tangible platform on which "responsible" citizens can interact. However, Friedman concedes that paternalism directly infringes on the liberal principles that he advocates. He suggests that the most effective way of mitigating this undesirable outcome is for [us] to, "…put our faith, here and elsewhere, in a consensus reached by imperfect and biased men through free discussion and trial and error" (Friedman, 2002: 34). For Friedman this democratic mechanism acts as a necessary counterbalance to excessive paternalism.

Although Norberto Bobbio is politically opposed to Friedman, he agrees that the excesses of intellectual extremism need to be tempered. Bobbio notes that the fallibility of the utopian ideals that occupy the conflicting poles of socialism and liberalism helps to maintain a tension that is integral to social progress. He argues that whilst ideas are constantly challenged by those defending opposing poles, there is no opportunity for stasis due to the fact that developing arguments on each side alternatively establish salience thus generating intellectual momentum. According to Bobbio, the absolute dominance of one side over the other would lead to intellectual tyranny. Under these conditions, ideas that present a challenge to dominant ideologies become supressed and social progression grinds to a halt (2005: 85). The arguments extended by Friedman and Bobbio help us to make sense of the enduring tension that exists within the philosophical debate surrounding knowledge production. Both thinkers commit to the view that the public has a stake in the outcome of any debate about institutional forms of paternalism. If either form of knowledge production outlined by Fuller managed to assert absolute dominance over the other, it would result in an undesirable outcome: intellectual totalitarianism on the one hand, intellectual anarchy on the other.

Michael Gove's detractors saw his proposed curriculum changes as an attempt to tip the balance of historical knowledge production in favour of paternalism in an effort to numb reflexivity thus creating space for the ideological assembly of a national archive (BBC, 2013). The rejection of his proposals could be seen to signify the resistive tug of interpretivism. The amplification of this particular moment of resistance should be viewed as a means of interrupting a trajectory that threatened to narrow intellectual scope and not as the starting point for a campaign focused on achieving utopian ends. From here, reflexivity becomes a defence mechanism against educational traditions that seek to install authoritarian models of knowledge production. It also makes the reflexivity significant to the resistance of educational technologies conducive to the expansion of neoliberal logic.

Using the work of C. Wright Mills as a framework, the value of reflexivity in the process of historical research will be elaborated below via reference to specific epistemological problems that face researchers researching the past. This will facilitate an exploration into the relationship between epistemology and the reliable production of historical knowledge, thus providing scope for the consideration of how the understanding of this relationship informs pedagogies associated with history. Once the relevance of reflexive processes within academic disciplines concerned with the construction of history is established, the methodological approach of

Michael J. Shapiro will be considered as a possible route towards the practical implementation of reflexive practices in state sanctioned educational settings.

How reflexivity resists the appropriation and distortion of historical knowledge

C. Wright Mills' 1959 work, *The Sociological Imagination*, illustrates a number of key epistemological problems that researchers may encounter when attempting to research the past. One issue that Mills focuses on is the distortive influence that dominant narratives can have on the production and interpretation of historical data (1959: 144). National narratives provide a specific example of how historical constructions can be distorted as they are shaped by institutional authorities that harbour preferences about how national identity is portrayed and received. With historical data collected, compiled and interpreted under conditions of casual or strict institutional direction, it becomes difficult for researchers to produce or access data that does not conform to state sanctioned narratives (Ghosh, 2005: 28).

The relationship between dominant narratives and discourse presents researchers with a significant epistemological concern. As mentioned above, national narratives are inscribed by discourses that reflect the ideological interests of dominant political powers (Hall, 1997: 292). By using language as a means of creating knowledge, power holders have the capacity to become the gatekeepers of meaning; thus meaning can fluctuate in accordance with the epoch in which it is produced (Ghosh, 2005: 28). This means that the reliability of historical data may be limited by ideological frameworks established by political powers that occupy positions of authority at the time it is compiled or when secondary analysis is conducted.

The distortive impact of operating within the confines of state sanctioned conventions is exemplified within the work of 19th century social researcher Charles Booth. In the process of categorising data Booth uses the term "savages" to arbitrarily depict "the lowest [social] class". Booth also presents a category in which "men" are incapable of work due to "mental, moral and physical reasons" and another in which "wives do not work" (LSE 2002). These three examples expose a use of language that reflects a Victorian discourse. The first draws on imperial binaries that install cultural others as "savages" akin to the lowest denomination of human existence; the second inscribes lines between deserving and underserving poor with reference to moral inadequacies as a cause of unemployment, and the third reinforces Victorian notions of male omnipotence in the public domain.

The constrictive forces of dominant narratives pose a significant epistemological problem for researchers as they attempt to produce reliable historical data. However, this does not signify a dead end for those attempting to research the past. Gurminder K. Bhambra argues for a decentralised approach to historical sociology that abandons western-centric models of global development (2011: 669). Bhambra proposes a methodological turn that assists the blurring of binary categories that place "civilised" and "uncivilised" societies in diametric relation to one another; a conceptual framework that reproduces historical constructions in which the west is cast as the source and the pinnacle of development. Bhambra suggests that by deconstructing established western-centric discourses, a less ideologically distorted construction of history is achievable (2011: 671).

For Mills, history is not a static entity; it is malleable and open to reconfiguration in the hands of contemporary treatment (1959: 145). As the cursor of knowledge regarding theory and method moves position over time, the reliability of historical data can be stunted by limitations associated with the epoch in which it is produced. Not only does this mean that static historical constructions can become outdated by the advance methodology; it can also lead to a situation in which modern theory is anachronistically imposed onto historical periods thus installing false conceptual processes at the heart of historical agency (1959: 163). These limitations can lead to problems regarding the viability of historical comparatives and the homogenisation of historical constructions respectively.

Anna Green uses the example of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory as a means of illustrating these particular epistemological problems (1999: 116). Wallerstein's much cited theory charts the development of the global economy over several centuries (2011). However Green highlights a number of criticisms raised by a variety of scholars who question some aspects of the methodology that underpins his work (Green, 1999: 116). Green argues that Wallerstein's theoretical framework is too rigid to incorporate anomalous data. Consequently anomalous data is disregarded, and this flattens his historical construction into a tailored model that fits neatly into his hypothetical template. Green argues that Wallerstein projects this theoretical framework onto each epoch and global formation he examines, thus creating a false impression of continuity over time and space (1999: 116). If, as Mills suggests, it is impossible for a researcher to completely emancipate themselves from their own milieu (1959: 6), then the distortion that occurs when historical data is viewed through a researcher's own theoretical lens is unavoidable. This raises the question of whether any historical data is free from the contamination of theoretical imposition, and without the existence of reliable data the value of historical research falls into doubt.

In an attempt to negotiate the problem of theoretical imposition Professor Michael J. Shapiro uses the writing process as a means of thinking rather than explaining. For Shapiro this is a crucial step away from rational behaviours that attempt to create understanding by arranging phenomena into synthetic categories. By utilising writing as method Shapiro has the scope to transcend perspectives that rely on the use of rigid theoretical lenses that have the capacity to refract data (2013: 31). Abandoning attempts to develop methods that seek to generate understanding via conformation to established patterns of knowledge production, Shapiro offers a methodological approach capable of generating historical knowledge that is not pressed into distortive theoretical frames (the methodological approach of Shapiro will be expanded upon below).

Throughout The Sociological Imagination, Mills refers to the constrictive nature of personal milieu and its potential to distort the findings of social research (1959: 4). This assertion is of particular relevance to research that relies on the testimony of participants as a means of producing historical knowledge. With subjectivity located within the boundaries of personal milieu, historical constructions could be seen as nothing more than projections of selfhood. This presents researchers with a sizable epistemological problem as, if Mills' assertion is correct, historical data is the sum of multiple subjective distortions rendering historical knowledge no more reliable than fiction (for an example of how subjective intrusion can distort data see Tim

Strangleman's work: *The nostalgia for permanence at work? The end of work and its commentators*).

Mills suggests that by developing a deep understanding of how personal milieu connects to social structure, it is possible to mitigate the negative impact of subjectivity. With internal and external subjective productions of history largely reliant on simplified, homogenous constructions created in the image of each epoch's dominant social structures, awareness of the historical interaction between structure and agency become integral to the production of credible historical data (Mills, 1959: 149).

By placing emphasis on subjective voices that appear anomalous in relation to prominent social structures that dominate nostalgic productions of history, it becomes possible to unpick the veil of homogeneity that hides the diversity of historical phenomena (Crow, 2008: 21). Once a broad pool of subjective positions is established, a researcher is able to locate them within structural contexts developed via reference to quantitative historical data. By referring a series of subjective positions to structural conditions such as employment and housing trends, it is possible to evaluate the relative value of each source of data with a greater degree of reflexivity (Day, 2006: 63). Although this approach may not completely defuse problems that stem from unreliable subjective productions of history, it presents the researcher with the scope to discern the credibility of established subjective histories that may otherwise dictate a false starting point that confuses subsequent interpretations of trajectory.

This shows how reflexivity renders Gove's attempt to use the deliberate aggrandisement of Britain's positive role in history as a means of fortifying notions of national identity more visible. Through a reflexive lens, deliberate constructions of history can be viewed as purposive attempts to collate archives that abandon reliability in favour of developing subject models that align with the preferred ideological ends of the state. Mills' reflexivity challenges the legitimacy of models such as this by promoting practices that step away from the historical and biographical plateau that forms personal milieu, thus allowing students to assume a position from which the validity of prefabricated evidence can be evaluated more impartially.

All of the themes discussed above indicate that the reliability of historical data is dependent on reflexivity. The construction of history is an academic pursuit that is plagued by limitations. At a fundamental level, the presentation of knowledge is restricted to the limited scope of expression permitted by the language we use and, beyond that, our interpretations of reality are restricted by the limited scope of our senses, our identity and the gravitational pull of rationality. When researching the past, these limitations are amplified by the fact that historical data cannot be directly experienced by the researcher. If historical research were to bow to limitations, it would cease to hold any academic credence. As the construction of history is reliant on the interpretation of secondary data, the reliability of historical knowledge is only discernible to those with the capacity to evaluate epistemology. Reflexivity offers a lens through which this evaluation can be effectively achieved. By abandoning this analytical device, paternalistic knowledge hierarchies assume the power to discredit

the student's validity as a critic capable of apprehending dominant narratives, thus retaining legitimate knowledge as the exclusive property of empowered authorities.

Shapiro: The reflexive value of trans-disciplinary method

In his 2013 work *Studies in trans-disciplinary method: after the aesthetic turn*, Michael J. Shapiro argues for a methodological approach to knowledge production that violates historical boundaries which separate fields of human encounter. Shapiro demonstrates how straddling the boundaries that separate knowledge production (as validated by academic institutions) and the world of art can facilitate the development of porous subjectivities that are less resistant to phenomena occurring beyond the outer limits of personal milieu (2013: 142). From here, subjectivity becomes less vulnerable to manipulation via state direction.

Shapiro asserts that focusing on aesthetic subjects allows for the development of subjectivities capable of resisting subject models that are advanced by empowered authorities. By encouraging students to develop the capacity to reflexively critique both subject and object from beyond the confines of externally validated fields of legitimacy, the coercive properties of ubiquitous power structures are diminished. Once students are endowed with this cognitive apparatus they are better equipped to arrest political trajectories that are written into the code of any *dispositif* that is constructed under the radar of public consent (2013: 154). For Shapiro, giving academic credibility to the study of aesthetic subjects facilitates the dissolution of logics that limit the gaze of rational perception thus emancipating subjectivity from the temptation to view 'distant' subjects as two dimensional objects (2013: 142). Shapiro uses aesthetic subjects to illustrate how, "…the history of form is conjunctural rather than linear" (2013: 107) by drawing reference from cinema, literature and art. He achieves this by highlighting significant encounters in which the aesthetic subject exhibits the self as a configuration of history, present and potential futures folded into one moment. This is made possible by the fact that art is not restricted by the laws of the physical world;   hence phenomena that would otherwise be separated by linear perceptions of time are collapsed. This allows said phenomena to occur simultaneously, thus giving equal relevance to a single moment of thought or action. Referring to Ben Okri's novel *The Famished Road,* Shapiro demonstrates how the protagonist is realised as a subject configured as layers of time that contain personal and social histories (Shapiro 2013: 14). From here it becomes difficult to separate historical factors that contribute to the realisation of this particular present. Once the present is not treated as inevitable, reflexivity becomes more accessible and the connections between history, present and future become less abstract; thus the subjective capacity to conceptualise how political trajectories are reified is enhanced and subjects become better equipped to resist undeclared political currents (Shapiro 2013: 29).

Shapiro's methodological agenda seeks to circumvent political barriers that impede reflexive perspectives by emphasising the importance of plasticity (2013: 73). By referring to aesthetic subjects Shapiro is able to effectively demonstrate that time, space, subjectivity and discourse are mutable phenomena given rational form via the establishment of boundaries inscribed by authorities empowered to designate the parameters of legitimacy (2013:74). This approach connects to both Hemmings' view that revisiting historic material can assist challenges to mutually reinforcing

discourses that have become tethered to the reproduction of rigid models of history (2011: 176) and C. Wright Mills' assertion that history is malleable (1959: 145). All three academics subscribe to the idea that to treat historical data as a solid immutable entity is to submit the role of knowledge production to those occupying the highest echelons of authority. Essentially, retaining the notion of plasticity in the socio/historical construction of reality is integral to our capacity to autonomously engage with phenomena that configure the limits of our perception. Once our involvement in the configuration of these boundaries is established, it becomes possible to exert greater influence over the size and shape of the platform upon which the self is conceptualised (Shapiro, 2013: 142). For Shapiro, the use of aesthetic subjects allows for subjects to exercise reflexive capacities that are supressed within authorised zones of legitimacy and he sees this as integral to the maintenance of subjectivities capable of thinking beyond the confines of politically sanctioned logic (2013:72).

Shapiro's agenda offers a means by which those working within the education sector can encourage the development of reflexive subjectivities. By directing students towards the contemplation of aesthetic subjects as a means of exploring the infinite mutability of subjectivity, as realised under conditions of reality that are equally mutable, reflexivity will retain its legitimacy and the student's position as a valid critic of knowledge hierarchies will be insulated from external devaluation. The practical barriers that currently impede this potential trajectory could be negotiated by advancing the role of trans-disciplinary method in authorised educational spaces. By drawing sociology, history and the arts closer together, reflexivity becomes tangible, practicable and capable of challenging palimpsests that alienate subjects from understandings that reveal the conditions of their psychological confinement.

Conclusion

The devaluation of reflexive thinking patterns in the construction of historical knowledge assists the maintenance of a *dispositif* conducive to the development of subjectivities devoid of the capacity to understand competing trajectories. Under these conditions, the present manifests as inevitable and unmoveable and populations that commit to 'external' perspectives are perceived as a two dimensional threat to 'our' morally superior culture; a perspective edified by the purposive assembly of state sanctioned archive (Shapiro, 2013: 82). The rejection of Gove's paternalistic model of historical knowledge production indicates that some sections of the public are not willing to accept political advances that threaten to undermine the democratic balance of epistemological development. The fact that Gove's intentions elicited a reaction powerful enough to provoke the revision of his proposals suggests that the expanding ubiquity of neoliberal logic has hit a wall. As this failed attempt to dispense history in the form of factual pellets rebounds, the momentum switches in favour of the appeal for a greater degree of reflexivity in the teaching of history in schools. In order to take full advantage of this moment of resistance, this energy needs to be harnessed. If subjectivities were to become saturated by logic extended within knowledge hierarchies that reflect the tenets of neoliberal citizenship, there is a danger of reflexivity becoming an abstract concept and the capacity for subjects to arrest state sanctioned narratives becoming increasingly elusive (Shapiro, 2013: 154).

By arguing for greater emphasis on the role of reflexivity within practices associated with the teaching of history, the contact point between the intellectual commitments that informed the resistance to Gove's original proposals and the expanding ubiquity of neoliberal logic could be widened. New history curriculum guidelines offer a tangible and legitimised space in which students have room to develop thinking patterns capable of imagining a future beyond understandings of society that are based on categories of cultural difference. And if aesthetic works are revalued and introduced as academic devices used to explore how subjectivity informs agency and intersects with structure, the extended practice of reflexivity in schools becomes a realistic possibility.

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