THE CONDITIONS FOR SOLIDARITY

1. Introduction

1.1 Can We Make Progress?

the political situation globally is grim; environmental degradation, risk of ecological destabilisation, widening inequalities across nations and continents and within nations, disillusionment with respect to the possibility of rational social progress

we have the science and technology to feed everybody and to take the pressure off the biosphere

it would seem to be in almost everyone's interests to work towards a more equitable and efficient use of the globe's limited resources;

and yet millions starve, disparities increase and powerful players refuse to take action on ecological issues

it is in this context that this paper is located; within the debate, explicit or not, about the possibility of progress

there always have been conservatives who are sceptical about the possibility of progress, at least on this earth; who are suspicious of "reformers"; "tne poor will always be with us"; (for example see O'Leary and his concerns re "unintended consequences" of reform pressure)

in addition to the continuing apprehensions of conservatism there are plausible reasons for fresh questioning about the whole notion of planned social progress;

I will canvas some of these reasons, in summary form, but the prime focus of this essay is on one of these issues only, the possibility of solidarity; building the conditions for collaborative action for mutually recognised social progress

is it possible to identify guidelines or principles for personal practice which might help to steer the energies of reform minded progressivists towards building collaborative action towards mutual emancipation, a collaboration undistorted (in the ultimate case) oy coercive power relations; transcending the relativism of constructivist epistemologies

1.2 Post Modernism: Announcing the End of Progress

in the European intellectual tradition the concept of a collective striving towards social "progress" is commonly identified as commencing with the Enlightenment and has been identified as the period of modernism

undoubtedly there were social reformers struggling towards a vision of a better world before Francis Bacon and there have been before and since in many other cultural traditions; however, as the story goes, there was a wider acceptance of history as static or cyclic, prior to the great leap forward in technology which is identifiea with Bacon,

with these advances in technology (identified with Bacon) came related new possibilities for creating, storing and transferring "wealth" (reserve labour power); both developments may have led to the notion of planned social progress challenging older ideas of history as cyclic or static (ff indeed this was the case)

the announcement of post modernity is a claim to the effect that
modernity is dead, that the project of planned social progress
through collective action is also dead,

1.2.1 THE DEATH OF (THE ILLUSION OF) MODERNilY

the death of modernitv might be translated for AngloCeltics as the
waning of (the illusion of) the possibility of earthly progress

the death of (or the waning of the illusion of) modernity may be seen
reflected in:

. the cynicism of the rich and powerful who defend a global
regime in which the eartb is despoiled, the mass of people
are impoverished and sometimes starved and who resort to
God as a defence of their privilege

. the growth of various forms of religious fundamentalism and
nationalisms

. the rejection of "scientism" in Western society, es in the Green
movement, the animal rights movement, spiritual
movements,

. the decline of the socialist movement, notwithstanding the
continued vigour of the criticism of capitalism

1.2.2 REASONS FOR THE DEATH OF MODERNilY

the concept of planned collective progress is placed in doubt, partly
because it is not seen to have delivered (planned collective
progress); Bacon's inheritance has delivered undreamed of
comfort for the elites and undreamed of suffering for the rest
(40m at risk of dying of starvation as I write)

we could attribute the present set-backs to the damage done to the
socialist dream with the collapse of bureaucratic state socialism
in Eastern European and the ascendancy of US military
hegemony and of transnational capitalism in the economic
sphere;

being aware of the relations between power and knowledge we must
be aware of the possibilty that pessimism with respect to
progress has been created by interests which are allied in
various ways to the new rufers

however, we must also consider the possibility that the stalling of the
Enlightenment Project of planned, collective progress is due to
the ways in which it has been conceived and the strategies
through which it has been carried out;

in the terms of the common comfarison between technological
advance and social, cultura and political backwardness, have
there been flaws in our approach to the reform project?

must introduce a semantic question here; is the Enlightenment
Project properly identified with:

. the Cartesian dualities, the instrumental rationality and the
positivism with which it associated, or

. the broader notion of planned social progress

according to one account the failure/waning of progressivism is
associated with the reliance on a positivist epistemology,
Cartesian duality and instrumental rationality which were
integral to Enlightenment Project

. models based on duality, instrumental rationality and
positivism get it wrong, because they deal with rational

      simplified humans, not as we are (fact/value; subjective/objective, etc) (see Feenberg's antinomies)

      . top down schemes, treat ordinary people as pawns rather than recognising them as making (their)stories

      . outcome (or vision) focussed planning compared to planning for decision-making capability

have there been weaknesses in our (progressivists in the European tra i? n) conce_ptio s of progress and strategies (ie dualisms, positivisms, rationalisms, etc)

or is it simply the case that the rich and powerful are presently too rich and powerful and that they would be only too pleased for the progressivists to meander off into new navel gazing; (shades of structural determinism - "the rich will always be with us"; biological determinism - "people are basically selfish")

or might it be a little of each?

can the Enlightenment Project be salvaged, shorn of its instrumental rationality, positivism and duality?

providing negative answers to these questions is to vote for hopelessness (for the deprived) and continued guiltless privilege (for those who can maintain it);

providing a positive answer must be based on more than hope;

the continuation of the progressivist project must be based on a careful analysis of both possibilities; must be based on a careful consideration of both the strategic issues (the relative power of conservative forces) but also the possibility that reformist practice has been self-defeating oecause of inherent misunderstandings and strategic mistakes

are there new patterns of reform practice that might lead to planned collective progress more effectively than previous reform practice

mention numbers of political traditions which are addressing the progressivist project but from beyond the dualisms and instrumental rationality and positivism (eg significant streams of feminism)

there are a lot of issues to be considered; some have been mentioned in passing (eg false dichotomies between structuralism vs voluntrism; questions about biological determinism and sociobiology; etc)

this paper is addressed to only one aspect: the conditions for solidarity

1.2.3 SoLIDARITY INTRINSICALLY PROBLEMATIC

a telling critique has been developed of older forms of political and reformist practice; (based in positivism, duality and instrumental rationality),

included in this critique is the claim that claims of solidarity are essentially suspect because of the close relations between kn?wledge ana power allied to the relativism of constructivist epistemology

clearest illustration of the challenge to assumptions of solidarity relate to the notion of "false consciousness" as an explanation for people taking a position that others (perhaps the progressivists) think is against their own interests

SOLIDARI1Y

understanding the thinking and motivations of people who do not
   act in (what is perceived by others as being) their best interests
   has been a frustration and a challenge to virtually all social
   reformers, industrially, politically, women's movement,
   environmental movement...

the notion of "false consciousness" has been commonly empoyed to
   explain why they did not understand the objective
   circumstances (so explain it to them again) or that they could
   not see that it was in their interests to join the struggle,
   although this was objectively the case; hence they are victims of
   enemy propaganda, or victims of false consciousness (class or
   gender);

among the strategies for responding to this problem has been the
   notion of precipitating (or at least welcoming) conflict in order
   to demonstrate where true class interests lie, Alinsky and ISO

this discourse of false consciousness has less currency today, for
   several reasons:

   . the notion of the objective facts has less currency owing to the
      discrediting of positivist theories of knowledge

   . it is increasingly clear that a discourse of "false consciousness"
      must have coercive overtones and implications and that
      reform practice based on coercion does not deliver equity,
      freedom and comfort because it constitutes new polarities
      and hierarchies to replace the old

however, for two broad reasons, the possibility has been flagged that
   any form of advocacy or coordination of social/politicafaction
   to press for reform goals, involves coercion; ideas which have
   been around for a while but thrown into sharp focus:

   . the advent of a (recursive) social constructivist epistemology
      underlines the challenge of relativism to communication
      and action

   . because in the light of contemporary theorising of language
      (post structuralism) and discourse a clearer picture has
      emerged of the relations of power to knowledge and
      communication and the possibility of coercion being
      inevitably linked to communication (esp Foucault)

2. The Relations of Power and Knowledge

the relations of between power and knowledge have been recognised
   as critical to social reform (or maintaining social order) for
   centuries; especially by elites

   . at its most simple it is about the access to knowledge;
      oppres ion as denial of cultural heritage or equal access to
      education, etc

   . but it is also about how we integrate such knowledge into our
      practice; about the world views, meaning systems through
      which we internalise such knowledge,

within the Marxist notion of ideology, false consciousness exists
   where people reject insights and practices which make sense in
   the context of a narrative based on their interests, structured
   around their stated problems and hopes;

perhaps a similar notion of false consciousness is evident in

femininist writings and practice

a blander version of "ideology" is used in Western sociology and political science: a perjorative view for the cultural world view associated with particular perspectives, recognised as a barrier to communication and subject to powerful promulgation (or demolition)

a similar meaning is captured in the use of the term hegemony by Gramschi; a recognition that there are common features of world view associated with particular loci in society; and that these are promulgated through the power structures of the state or through other power;

Gramschi argued for the creation of proletarian hegemony, a coherent set of cultural symbols and stories wbich attributed meanings to the world in a manner which is consistent with the politicaf aspirations of the peasants and the proletariat, and would be part of the political program of the Left

the issue is highlighted again through the concept of discourses of knowlecfge/power promulgated by Foucault;

Foucault is operating explicitly on the basis of the social construction of meaning (recursive), shorn of any positivist trappings;

it is about the power of words as signs to give meaing to my pain and to offer the prospect of my gaining greater control over the achievement of my nopes; where these words derive from a meaning system (an epistemology) that corresponds to someone else's experience and hopes, they may offer enticing and seductive images but very likely false if not based in my meaning system, likely instead to serve the interests of those who meaning systems I am using

the warnings of Foucault echo similar insights evident in many different settings (propaganda, brain washing, hegemony, and ideology) but they are perhaps more powerful and apparently more totalising because

. they are linked to the post structuralist emphasis on signs and the realisation of meaning in language

. and because they are linked to the relativist nihilism of social constructionism (recursive)

how shall the reformist address the reluctance of people to act in (what appears to be) their best interest if the formulation of "false consciousness" is not available to him/her; if all forms of advocacy are suspect

what are the conditions for action in solidarity; what are the principles of political and personal practice which will contribute to solidarity (replacing coercive and manipulative strategies)?

3. The Social Construction of Meaning

3.1 The Decline of Positivism

defined in terms of the existence of a singular truth and privileged procedures for revelation (principally various forms of scientific method or religious obedience)

there is a weak and a strong critique of positivism (check Quine?):

. perspectivist social constructionism

. recursive social constructionism

(the term perspectivism attributed to Ortega by O'Leary in Hunter and Ainlay)

the (weak) perspectival critique recognises that since we seen "the world" (or "reality") from different positions (eg we see each other from the outside cf our own inside view) then inevitably we have different worlds

but there is an assumption that there is still one reality out there; so techniques like careful listening, phenomenological rigour and methodological triangulation can still assist us m puttmg together a picture a model of the "real" world; the rational modelling of the real world (and its Ideal Types) is still a legitimate part of scientific progress towards true knowledge

Weber and Berger fall into this category I think

important to be aware of the residual strains of postivism in this perspectivism, notwithstanding its claims to the social cosntructionist and its criticisms of positivism

the strong critique is based on the impossibility of knowing a "real" world because of the intrinsic and inevitable recursiveness of knowledge systems (Godel, Wittgenstein, Hawking), (de Sassure and Derrida also)

warrants a separate essay, see ...

because of the ascendancy of technical and scientific, notions of scientific facticity imported from physics (or molecular biology) and have greatly influenced notions of epistemology in many diverse fields, including in relation to po1itics, personal and social action;

however, an epistemology structured around the facticity of hard science can have a hlghly charged political implications when applied at the personal and social fevel;

on the other hand, the kind of formulation which might flow from the social constructionist view, "stories which are useful" (usefulness (to someone to do something) replacing truth as the key criterion of validity), can be applied witnout pain in physics and molecular biology,

they thus provide a broader epistemological framework

3.2 *The Construction of Shared Meaning in Social Practice*

meaning is socially constructed (Wittgenstein)

the shared meanings of practical words (such as blue and tree), which we use to coordinate our daily practice, are created in collaborative action; in collaborative practice we agree upon the signs (the mutually defining signifier and signified) and develop our discourse; through collaboration, because otherwise we would not need to communicate, in practice because it is only throu$h practice that we (collectively) get worldly feedback and either agree that our use of the sign in question are compatible or that that the meanings are diverging

the meanings of life orienting signs (words, symbols, icons, rituals, etc); signs which we "live by"; (words like life, God, humanity, freedom, truth, goodness and honesty) is created socially in collaborative social practice just as the meaning of daily doing orienting words is created in daily practice

which is not to say that such signs may not have different meanings for different people but the meanings will converge or diverge only when tested through social practice al)d shared worldly feedback and the internalisation of the consequences of such feedback by each individual

note also the ways in which some words and symbols are locked into a conflictual status, (essentially contested concepts of ?Gallie??) subject to claims from a variety of cultural and political perspectives and locked into a confused plurality (representing the fluid plurality of power across society); health as one such word

which is not to sax that individuals and groups cannot determine how they will use such symbols

3.3 Critical Theory

as the place where an epistemology of praxis is based (see Feennberg)

the stories I tell about my being in the world (my epistemology) are structured around my net "problematique', tne problems of my past experience and the hopes I have for my future

and that they are tested in practice and rejigged accordingly

not that I start with preexisting signs in relation to such experiences and hopes; but that in assigning and adjusting meanings within my system of signs, language, I give priority to fixing those signs (concepts, metaphors, theories) which give me understanding (meaning of) the bad things past and which promise me power over achieving the good things hoped for in the future;

these signs are not created by me alone; the stories I tell about my world are constituted by the signs which I have created collaboratively (with lots of other people in lots of different discourses)

if I do not have the signs I am in that degree unconscious see quote from Lacan ("But for Lacan, the unconscious exists in the failures of communication which the symbolic order involves."[1]); refer also to Friere; powerful influence on feminism

3.4 Relativist Nihilism, Post Modernism and the End of the Enlightenment Project

recognising the social construction of knowledge (recursive) opens the door to a relativist nihilism (not such a serious problem for the perspectivists): the possibility of collaborative action is proolematic because everyone has a different locus of knowing, there is no singular (or shared) truth about the world in which we act and no shared reference points (hopes and wants; goods and bads) about how we should act;

Critical Theory focusses our attention on the problematic as the orienting factor in constructing our meaning systems and on practice in providing the worldly feedback by which we reshape our meaning systems

Habermas responds to the relativist uncertainty suggesting that collaborative action may be based on free communication; in circumstances of free communication we may identify shared

1. Corinne Squire, *Significant differences: feminism in psychology,* Routledge: London and New York, 1989, p 101

hopes and wants, shared goods and bads (forming a basis for solidarity in action) and opens the way for negotiated collaboration where such reference points are nqt completely shared

the conditions for communicative freedom as he describes it are based on the lack of overt power imbalance; the way he describes it, it almost sounds as if there is a third person guaranteeing that the conditions for communicative freedom / competence are (or are not) present

if it depends of a "third person" it is a bit irrelevant as a basis for subject subject collaboration

if it doesn't depend on a "third person" the question is: what kind of tests can I apply as a subject in such a circumstance to guarantee to myself that the terms of this communication are not being subtley determined by power (mine or his/hers); that our judgement about communicative freedom is not coerced; he offers a set of criteria for determining that communicative freedom is in place; I am not sure that they are criteria that translate very clearly into patterns of political and reformist practice

Foucault argues that all discourse is structured by power relations; that the assumption of solidarity is always suspect; that there can be no guarantee of collaborative social action being emancipatory;

where material sanctions are equal, there may still be differences in vocabulary, style, fresentation, articulateness; even where material sources o power are balanced the risks of demagoguery are still there,

the different parties to such discussion use different meaning systems, the person who imposes his/her meanings onto the discussion coerces the other players (is this what Wittgenstein called language games?)

the signs that carry the interests of the more privileged are more likely to be available and to distort the communication; the interests of existing pow r are embedded in the apparently common or agreed meanmg

because of the relativist gap there is no way for these different meaning systems to be transcended

if collective emancipation through collaborative action (solidarity) is the goal, it is not in the interests of either party to have the discussion distorted by power imbalances (of a material or cultural kind)

Foucault doesn't require a third party to be present to make such a judgement, he offers it as a universal truth or at least risk;

Foucault's argument (in my view) makes a pretty convincing dent in Habermas' position although Foucault doesn't offer any alternative position; indeed this nihilism lies at the heart of the whole concept of the "post modern" (and the end of the Enlightenment Project (as progressivism))

3.4.1 WHAT **WAS/IS** THE ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT?

shall we understand the enlightenment project as collaborative struggle towards a better world or shall we understand it (more narrowly) as the application of instrumental rationality to human affairs

the latter and more narrow understanding involves postitivism, scientism and Cartesian dualities (offact/value, subject/object, mind/body, etc) and if this was the Enlightenment Project then let us welcome the era of the post modern (the he$emony of instrumental rationality threatened (if not yet buned) by the recognition of the social construction of meaning)

however, I would prefer to interpret the Enlightenment Project as being driven by a deeper intersubjective human rationality that transcends (or that could transcend) these dualisms

for this reason I reject the announcement of post modernity (as in the end of progressivism), but nevertheless we still have to deal with the doubt cast by Foucault on the possibility of intersubjective rationality and free, non-coercive solidarity

4. Intersubjective Rationality

the practical issue is: "How shall I act?" I am less interested in what some third party might determine in relation to my collaborative relations, than how I and my collaborators might carry ourselves to assure ourselves that we have a basis for solidarity for intersubjective rationality; that we have heard the warnings of Foucault and are confident of proceeding nonetheless

so we need to rework the issue of solidarity;

I start from the position that there is more to human interaction than relations of power,

the expression of power must involve one party treating the other part as an ooject; power is expressed only in the domain of subject: object relations,

what scope is there for action conceived rationally and carried out in a subject subject relation, through intersubjectivity, solidarity and love,

if communication (and hence solidarity) is to be achieved free of coercion, it must involve a movement towards common meanings; if meaning is constructed around past pains and future hopes (see ref to critical theory above) then achieving convergent meaning depends on a sharing of past pains and future ftopes

scenario: communication leads to empathy (a sense of (hypothesis of) identification); action in solidarity (action in common purpose) leads to worldly feedback which tests the assumption of identification;

. may lead to a convergent reshaping of meaning (and an expanding intersubjectivity) and conditions for trust, greater communication and more action

. or may lead to divergent meanings (breaking what proves to have been the illusion of identification and intersubjectivity)

in relation to this formulation the notion of identity and identification may be a key to grasping the possibilities for intersubjectivity, intersubJective rationality, solidarity free of coercion

what is identity? what is My sense of identity? identity concerns the

basic question of ontology, understanding my being-in-the-world; how I understana myself, how I make meanmg of my existence, who I am; it is the story I tell to mysel{ about Me, past present and future: explaining Myself, where I come from; who am now; where I am going (my expectations for Myself);

past present or future, it is a story which relates Me to the social relations and broader environment in which I have lived, live and will live

it is a story which is told within a meaning system; is limited to that meaning system although that system may be changed and with it my identity

My sense of identity contrasts with (and is dialectically related to) other peoples' stories about who I am, where I come from and their expectations about Me from here on

my identity (the story referred to above) is constructed in a soliloquy which I conduct about Me (and the relation between I and Me) and through external dialogues and interactions between I and others, about me and my development, my contexts and my futures

it is also derived from the cumulative and shared experiences of the communities to which I belong (which are part of me and I am part of; which mutually constitute me and them); communities with whom I take part in meaning affirming action; identity creating echos

4.1 Towards a Coherent Subjectivity

solidarity as expanding subjectivity (widening circles of intersubjectivity)

the first step towards intersubjectivity is some kind of coherent subjectivity in the person;

in objectifying myself (Me) I regard (look at) my body (including my "unconscious"); in varying degrees I am alienated from Me; in varying ways I am learning to listen to Me (to my body and to my unconscious); I am learning new signs and reshaped meanings of old signs (not just words; mcludes behaviours (eg suddenfy whistling) and identifiable moods: irritability, and sensations: pains, exhaustion); these signs reconstitute the story I tell myself about Me, my sense of identity

I watch me in action and note the worldly feedback; where I surprise myself, I ask why

Lacan argues for the decentred subject; he is challenging the unproblematic subject of liberal humanism who says what she/he thinks; does what s/he wants; the subject is fragmented and dispersed to the degree to which I am alienated from Me; where the various stories I tell and participate in (discourses) about Me are in conflict (see for an example of the liberal unproblematic subject, Harry Beran *The consent theory of political obligation* Croom Helm)

expanding subjectivity: starts with overcoming my alienation from myself; ironing out the conflicting stories I tell me about my self; developing and integrating my knowledge of myself (the object, Me) mto the autonomous non-discursive knowing and practice who is the subjective I; subjectifying (integrating) my body (including a capacity to respond on account of the various parts of my body, including my mind, including my

"unconscious") into my non-discursive knowing and my practice

4.1.1 INrUITIVE ACTION AND COHERENT SUBJECTIVITY

the seductions of instrumental rationality include the prospect that if we seek to integrate all the insights derived from all tbe partial models of the world we will produce a true model of the world which might correctly inform practice

Lyotard however, warns us against the totalising narrative, he points out that the greater the integration of the partial models and insights the the greater the dogmatism and the less the relationship to tne contingency of action;

the practice of instrumental rationality involves a decentred subject objectifying him/herself (and others) by "modelling" the objectified self facing the problems and choices in subject: object terms

within the terms of instrumental rationality, this involve the integration of a multiplicity of partiaf models; if this is not to be associated with increasing degrees of abstraction and irrelevance to the contingencies of the present choices, then the integration process must be highly detailed, (hence best done by computer perhaps)

it still is likely to fail to meet the test of Foucault because its essential duality is continued

a coherent subjective rationality might be based on intuitive and eclectic action, recognising the complexity of informed contingent choice,

cultivating intuitive choice *mar* be the most effective way of integrating the insights o a multiplicity of partial models in terms of the contingent details of the specific choices being faced; (it relies on the brain, a computer which is still cheaper, more flexible and more widely available than the Cray or the "Connection Machine")

intuitive action does not mean uninformed action; it is based on three sets of complex data, all of which need to be integrated, albeit subjectively

the first set is the knowledge I have of Me; the non-discursive self-knowledge that I have gained from previously watching, listening to, touching, discussing, reflecting on Me, my body my self (from my unconscious to my greying and receding hair)

the second set is the known detail which is specific to the contingent circumstances

the third set is the information as understood regarding the multiple partial insights into the dynamics of the circumstances

in the limiting case, authentic action is taken by the fully conscious non-discursive I, the integrated subject

truth inheres in a moment of correct practice (Adorno)

4.2 *Towards a Coherent Intersubjective Rationality*

let us n w al ply the same ideas to the creation of an intersubjective rationa1ity

communication and the supposition of shared identity; We tell converging stories about Us, about who We are; not the same story aoout each of us (as if we were identical clones) but we

SOLIDARITY

tell overlapping and compatible stories about us as a collectivity;

these stories are told within a system of meaning, in which priority (in terms of the relativity of meanings attributed to signs etc) is given to the best understanding we can achieve of our shared problems and the most illuminating insights into how we might gaining greater control over the means of achieving our hopes

we test the meanings which constitute these stories about ourselves through collaborative action in the world, action which addresses our problems; through worldly feedback we learn whether the stories we tell are affirmed (for each one of us) or slightly jarring and need to be gradually reworked (or are revealed as out and out false)

5. Intersubjectivity and the Conditions for Solidarity

what are the relations between solidarity and intersubjectivity?

the test of the older forms of political practice was how do you know that collaborative action is not coerced?

what kinds of political practice cultivate solidarity in action through intersubjectivity?

a political practice which values "personal growth" (the personal is political)

integrity in bureaucracies: resisting the pressures to play roles which fragment our subjectivity

values listening to each other; builds collaborative action in practice

valuing post-positivism epistemologies and ontologies

Freirian creation of meaning

recognition of cultural and spiritual aspects of political struggle and of solidarity; the collective creation and reshaping of meaning through spiritual and cultural practice

the social/structural significance of such spiritual / cultural meanings and the capacity to reshape them collectively

valuing the coherent conscious non-discursive subject