DISCOURSE OR MORAL ACTION? A CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERNISM

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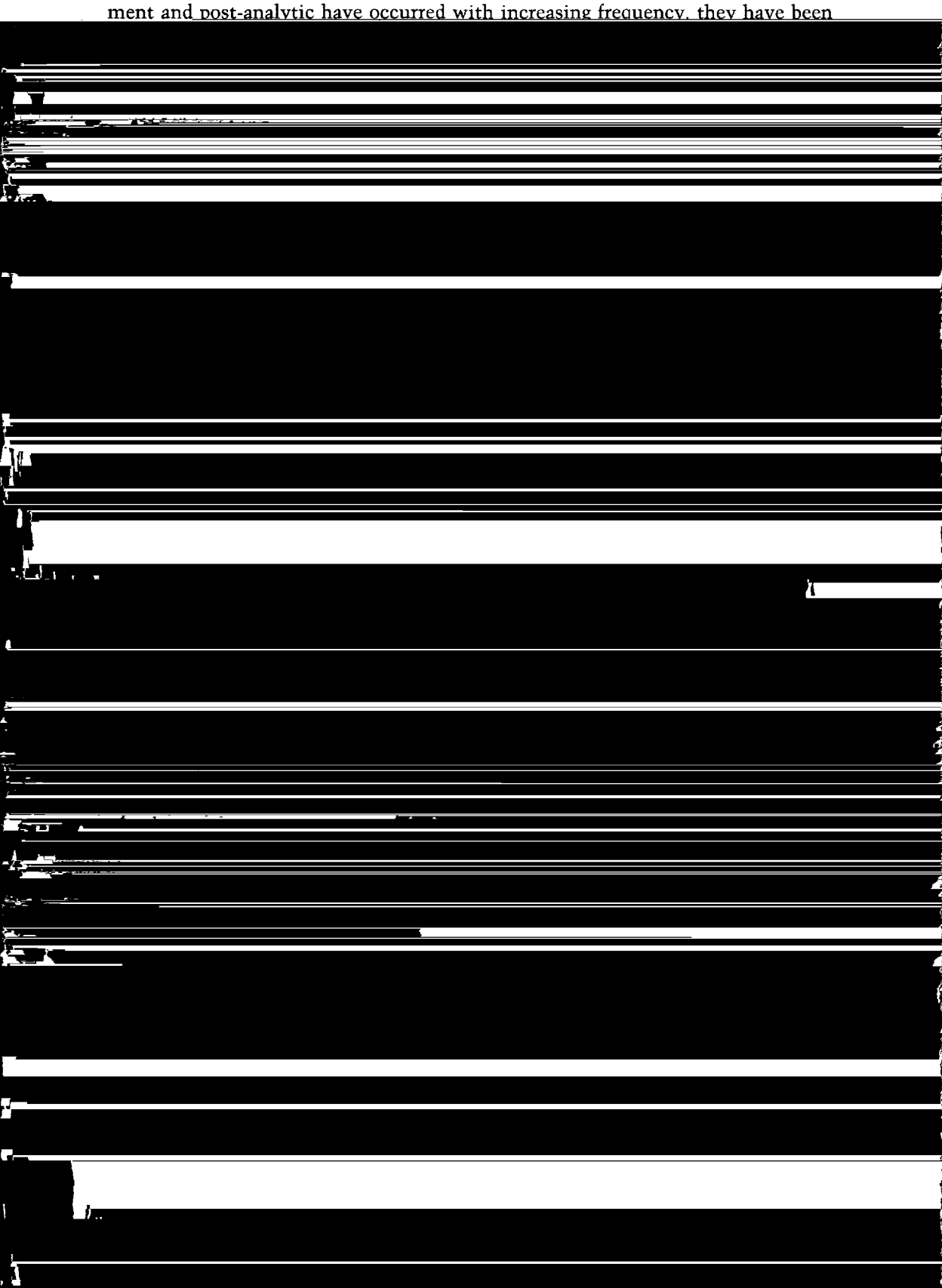
Postmodern analyses have appeared with increasing frequency over the last

difference as it builds solidarity, and that is able to formulate moral imperatives that may transcend particular circumstances.

This last point needs to be underscored. Children of color, the homeless and the urban underclass, the middle class, the rural poor, and the privileged of our society

ment and post-analytic have occurred with increasing frequency, they have been



With metanarratives and "universal" reason rejected, postmodern writers claim further that informed moral deliberation and action cannot operate on the terrain of a global project. Commitments to political revolutions, more gradualist cultural and

illusory, self-defeating, and oppressive. Instead, Foucault says that we must resist the centralizing tendencies of globalizing theories, substituting instead research into

about treating people as ends rather than means, emphasizing training rather than educational actions,[13] and about the ethics of personal interaction. Such questions and forms of critical analysis rely on an understanding of a body of literature removed from the immediate reality of Assertive Discipline as this is practiced in local

in more insightful or morally compelling ways. Again we see the central importance of language systems within postmodern analysis.

Richard Rorty argues that our language inevitably alters what we have mistak-

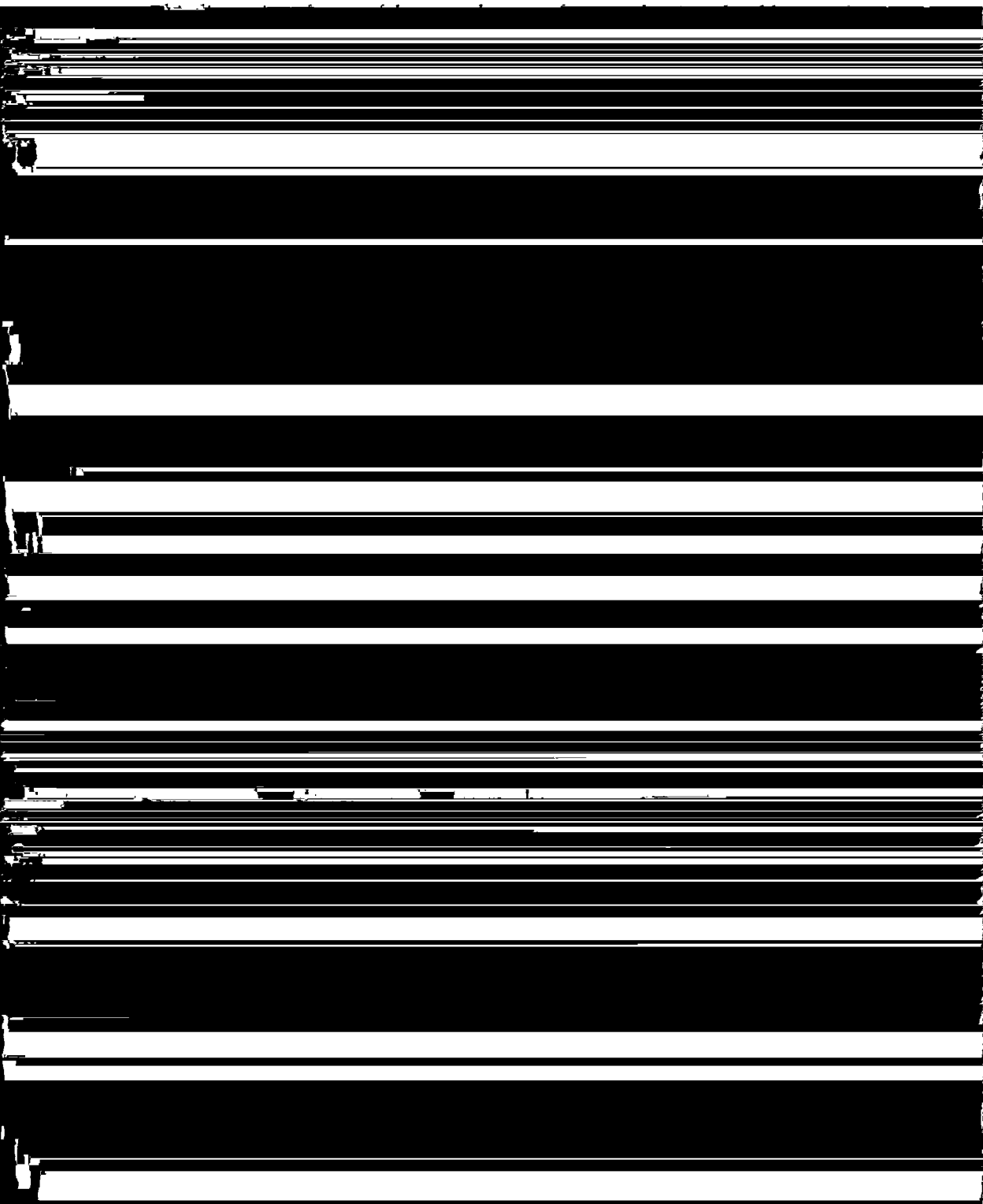
Anti-representationalism as a component of postmodern analysis rejects "the

If the underlying effect of our Western, cognitive machinery — political, philosophical, and

social difference succeed in alleviating campus racism while at the same time managing *not to undercut* the efforts of other social groups to win self-definition?"[30]

The recognition of differences that transcend the usual search for commonality, Ellsworth tells us, is a strength, not something to be overcome. Such a recognition made possible, for this class, the fact of interdependency even while difference was not only tolerated but celebrated and protected. The "affinity groups" that formed eventually engaged in interventions to combat racism on campus. One of the conclusions Ellsworth draws from this experience is that there are realities that are unknown and unknowable, because "the meaning of an individual's or group's experience is never self-evident or complete," and "no one affinity group could ever 'know' the experiences and knowledges of other affinity groups." Moreover, she adds, "social subjects who are split between the conscious and unconscious, and cut across by multiple, intersecting, and contradictory subject positions [cannot] ever

substitution of otherness for commonality promoted by Ellsworth, and generally celebrated by postmodern writers, makes the creation of coalitions seem quite difficult if not impossible. This difficulty is exacerbated by the postmodern rejection of "metanarrative" principles or commitments that transcend discourse and by the trends toward aestheticism and textualism already noted.



Postmodern, is centrally concerned with assessing distinct modes of research.[43] The

words, something very much like "the metaphysics of presence" that postmodernists reject. We agree that reality may be described in various ways, and may be more or

ily equally valuable. Yet postmodernism provides us with little moral guidance

[redacted]

The literature connecting education to larger social, historical, cultural, and

Yet for Kozol, as for us, language must be tied in some sense to an external reality. Moreover, our outrage at the conditions described by the author must be rooted in a moral condemnation of injustice and inequality. In the context of such social and moral evils, postmodern premises fostering insularity and narcissism for discourse, the particularity of knowledge claims based on aestheticism and textualism, and a lack of substantial moral imagination, do not serve us well. Such premises leave us without a clear direction to pursue in the alleviation of the inequalities Kozol describes. Racial, social class, and gender inequalities require concerted, collaborative actions involving global as well as local sensitivities; yet postmodernism leaves us silent in the face of such social realities.

alert us to the realities and consequences of marginalizing voices of "others," to the tendency for a technical, Western rationality to become hegemonic and oppressive, and to the need to become sensitive to the particular and the local. Yet the problems